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Monday, April 2, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 2, 2012

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP)
moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) formally recognize the responsibility of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces with regard to the contamination of the groundwater which is the source of drinking water for multiple homes in the residential area of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Valcartier, residential areas of the municipality of Shannon, and numerous public institutions, due to the use of chlorinated solvents for several decades, including trichloroethylene (TCE); (b) take over the efforts of the Shannon Citizens Committee to monitor filtration systems in place for those dealing with the contamination of drinking water, and include the Committee in any environmental efforts undertaken; and (c) commit to (i) notify all persons employed at CFB Valcartier or who have lived in the residential quarters of the Base for the years during which the contamination took place, (ii) quickly clean up the affected sites, (iii) compensate victims of TCE contamination.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in this House today to stand up for the rights of residents and former residents of the municipality of Shannon, who have been affected by the contamination of their drinking water with toxic chemicals coming from CFB Valcartier.

Of all the noxious chemicals that have flowed into the groundwater beneath Shannon, the one that has caused the most damage to people has been trichloroethylene, or TCE. TCE was used for years in the manufacture of munitions at Valcartier, and was dumped and buried on land belonging to the federal government. It made its way through the soil and into the groundwater.

This tragic history of contamination has drastically affected—and continues to affect—the lives of thousands of Canadian families and is still a very emotional topic in Quebec and elsewhere across the country.

[*English*]

Since 2007, the current and former citizens of the town of Shannon affected by the contamination of their drinking water by dangerous chemical substances have been trying to obtain justice for

themselves and their families through legal means. However, the government still refuses to listen. The situation has to change, and it has to change now.

The motion I am presenting today urges the government to finally admit the Crown's responsibility in this tragic affair, end the legal conflict opposing them to the Shannon citizens committee members by negotiating the fair settlement they deserve, and take concrete actions to rapidly decontaminate the affected sites on the Valcartier military base and in the town of Shannon.

[*Translation*]

The municipality of Shannon lies about 25 km north of Quebec City, along the banks of the Jacques-Cartier River. More than 5,000 people live there, many of them military personnel and their families. Part of the municipal lands form part of CFB Valcartier, and Shannon provides certain municipal services to people living on the base itself.

Today, almost 2,000 residents of Shannon live in the family housing area of the Valcartier base.

Shannon has the advantage of being located close to a major urban centre, Quebec City, while also having a natural setting with vast forests and the beautiful Jacques-Cartier River.

In earlier days, the municipality had considerable water resources and its water was of the highest quality. The water was so good that there was no piped water system; instead, the people of Shannon got their drinking water from individual wells tapping into the aquifer.

Unfortunately, life in this lovely town changed forever when TCE was discovered in the water.

TCE was used on the Valcartier military base beginning in the 1930s. It is an industrial degreaser and a highly volatile, powerful solvent used in manufacturing munitions, among other things. However, it is not the only substance of its kind that was used on the base. Over the past 70 years, the Government of Canada has used various chemicals in addition to TCE on the base for producing munitions, cleaning military equipment and maintaining combat vehicles and other vehicles, as well as in the research, development and production of a range of military equipment.

Private Members' Business

In addition to crown entities, a number of private companies, including SNC Technologies, also had facilities on the Valcartier military base, and they also used TCE during the contamination period. These toxic chemicals were typically buried in holes, pits or dumps on base property. Standards at the time were not what they are now. It did not take long for the chemicals to penetrate the ground and enter the groundwater.

Over the years, TCE and other chemicals were also spilled accidentally on the ground in various places, increasing the potential for soil and environmental contamination.

In 1997, contamination was discovered for the first time in groundwater supplying wells that were once used by SNC Technologies. The federal government was informed immediately, but the municipality of Shannon was not told about the contamination right away. The levels of TCE discovered in the water were apparently not high enough to alarm the authorities.

• (1110)

[*English*]

The citizens of Shannon would have to wait until December 2000 to finally be informed that the water they had been drinking and using every day had been contaminated with TCE.

TCE is a toxic substance that affects the central nervous system and is considered a probable carcinogenic by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. It has been linked to various types of cancer like brain cancer, stomach cancer and liver cancer. Prolonged exposure to TCE can also cause severe skin irritations, gastrointestinal problems and neurological symptoms like confusion, fatigue, euphoria and headaches.

The many citizens who had been suffering for years from unexplainable symptoms like the ones I just mentioned finally had an answer. They had been ingesting a very toxic, and likely carcinogenic, substance through their water without their knowledge.

[*Translation*]

In 2001, the Department of National Defence invested in the construction of a new water system linking 161 residents of Shannon to the Valcartier military base's system in an effort to buy some time until the situation could be cleared up. Then in 2004, the department agreed to fund an expansion of the water system, which was supposed to be temporary to begin with, to include more of the municipality's territory.

The water system is now being completely separated from CFB Valcartier's system. The latest investments came in 2009 to complete the work. While those much-needed government investments did help improve the quality of the water in Shannon, the situation is by no means resolved.

The new water system does not yet cover all of Shannon. Some residents are therefore still at risk of suffering serious health problems related to prolonged exposure to TCE, especially given that the decontamination process is still not complete and is moving forward at a snail's pace.

In addition, the government has never admitted the Crown's responsibility in this whole sad affair. Instead, it prefers to hide

behind the pretext that the standards that existed at the time were being met when toxic chemicals were being dumped in the ground at CFB Valcartier.

Lastly, the government has never compensated the victims of the TCE water contamination in a fair, equitable manner. The government refuses to even admit the possibility of any link between the presence of TCE in the water and the physical suffering manifested by many past and current residents of Shannon.

In an effort to obtain justice, a group known as the Shannon citizens committee launched a class action lawsuit against DND and SNC Technologies in 2007. The lawsuit covers about 3,000 concerned citizens and includes any civilian or soldier who has lived in Shannon since 1953 and whose person, property or family has been directly affected by TCE contamination of Shannon's water supply.

[*English*]

The class action lawsuit is requesting that the co-defendants finally admit their combined responsibility in the physically harmful consequences the victims of the contamination had to suffer; that the government admit it should have announced the contamination to the municipality of Shannon as soon as it found out and not three years later; that the government take concrete steps to stop the spread of the contamination, as well as steps to actively decontaminate the area as soon as possible; and, finally, that the co-defendants financially compensate the victims of the contamination and their families for their suffering and material losses due to the consequences brought on by the presence of TCE in the water of Shannon.

Even though the citizens committee started working on the lawsuit in 2007, the trial only started in January 2011 and finished in November of the same year. Now, we are waiting for Judge Godbout to render his verdict which could still take a few more months. However, it is not too late for the government to do what is right and act to correct the terrible wrongs committed against the present and former residents of Shannon affected by this tragic contamination.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

The motion I am moving today urges the government to make three commitments. First, the government must formally recognize the responsibility of the Department of National Defence with regard to the contamination of the groundwater in Shannon and in the residential area of Canadian Forces Base Valcartier. Then, it must take over the efforts to monitor filtration systems in place for those dealing with the contamination of drinking water and include the Shannon citizens committee in any new environmental efforts undertaken. Finally, it must commit to notify all persons who were employed at CFB Valcartier or who lived in the residential quarters of the base for the years during which the contamination took place, quickly clean up the affected sites, and compensate victims of TCE contamination. That is what the citizens committee has been urging the government to do for years, but to no avail.

Private Members' Business

This government has a moral obligation to do something about this whether it was directly responsible for the contamination or not. The Department of National Defence is cited as partially responsible for the contamination and must take action to try to provide restitution. This government has a bad habit of denying any responsibility and hiding behind lawyers. It should be more concerned with the health and well-being of all citizens in this country than with its image.

We must never forget that many of the victims of the TCE-contaminated water are soldiers, former soldiers and their families. They have made tremendous sacrifices and given their hearts and souls in service to their country.

[English]

I was raised in a military family. Both of my parents are still serving in the Canadian Forces. My aunts and uncles all served at some point in their life. My grandfather served in the Royal 22nd Regiment in Valcartier and fought in the Korean War. I know all about the sacrifices soldiers and their families make and the devotion it takes to serve this country like our military does so well.

Many victims of the contamination in Shannon have since been posted all across Canada and are still proudly serving their country. Others cannot because they are still suffering from illnesses relating to TCE exposure or, sadly, have died from it. I cannot understand why a government that is constantly bragging about how much it supports our military and veterans can ignore this terrible situation and refuse to give the victims the help they so rightly deserve.

[Translation]

It is absolutely unacceptable that this government refuses to take action to compensate Shannon's civilian population, which has also been seriously affected by the groundwater contamination. There are hundreds of heartbreaking stories of families torn apart by illness or the death of a loved one. For years, the people of Shannon have felt abandoned by their government, which is washing its hands of all responsibility. Nevertheless, it is not too late to do something about this.

While we are awaiting Justice Godbout's verdict, the government could still be negotiating a fair and equitable out-of-court settlement with the Shannon citizens committee.

[English]

I am asking every party in the House to support this motion so that the victims of the groundwater contamination in Shannon can finally have some justice from their government and live in an environment that is safe for them and their children.

[Translation]

The citizens of Shannon have been waiting far too long. The victims have been suffering far too long. It is time for the government to stop the unending legal proceedings. It is time for this government to stop shifting the blame. It is time for this government to acknowledge how much the victims have suffered as a result of Shannon's contaminated water and to try to do right by the victims.

[English]

It is time for the government to do the right thing for the citizens of Shannon.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate the hon. member for her family's military service in various capacities and at different times. We are proud that she is a member of this House and that she brings to bear her family's experience.

However, with regard to the issue underlying her motion, far from denying the facts, the Government of Canada has provided drinking water to the municipality of Shannon since TCE was discovered on Canadian Forces Base Valcartier and in the private wells in Shannon. In addition, the government has spent more than \$32 million to establish and maintain Shannon's drinking water system.

Would the hon. member not agree that the government has taken responsible measures to ensure that the citizens of these municipalities have access to drinking water?

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for his kind words. It is rather rare in this House to associate the NDP with military service. I am proof that my party also understands the needs of this segment of the Canadian population.

This may come as another surprise, but I believe that I could agree with some of my colleague's comments. In my speech, I pointed out the investments made by the government and how it has helped the people of Shannon, who appreciate what has been done.

However, the people and I are calling for more investments. Work remains to be done. There is still TCE in the water. The contamination is spreading and, as I mentioned, the limited amount of decontamination currently being carried out is moving at a snail's pace.

I am asking that the government show more goodwill in support of the well-being and the health of the citizens of Shannon.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague. My riding is very close to hers, near Shannon, and I am very much aware of this situation. I think the hon. member has proposed a very important motion this morning.

My question follows up on that of the hon. parliamentary secretary: does my colleague agree that access to clean drinking water is something that is absolutely essential to our society? Even in the third world, it is acknowledged that it is one of the most fundamental things. It is very fine of the government to have made investments in providing the people of Shannon with drinking water, and we thank them. It is a good thing. At the same time, having access to clean drinking water is basic.

Private Members' Business

In Shannon the rates of cancer and other health problems are much, much higher than average, and we want the government to recognize it has some responsibility for that. Investing in drinking water is very important, and in fact, it is truly essential. We want even more. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on this.

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent on the work she has done with me on behalf of the people of Shannon. Our investment of time and energy in this matter is greatly appreciated by these people, who were abandoned by their own representatives in this House for a long time. Other voices have been raised, from various parties, but never those of the true representatives of Shannon.

Access to potable water truly is a fundamental right. While people in the third world are fighting for this right, we see that here at home we are not able to make sure our own people have the same right, not even the military personnel who serve our country. Their own country is not able to guarantee access to a fundamental right: clean, safe drinking water—water that will not cause diseases and problems in the future.

In my opinion, the investments must continue, in order to ensure that the decontamination proceeds quickly. There are businesses waiting to locate on the grounds of the military base, and they will provide investment and employment, as the budget aims to achieve. This is a tremendously profitable investment for the people of the region. The people who have suffered the effects of TCE must also be recognized; they must have compensation and justice.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to address the motion being put forward by the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier because it concerns the health and well-being of Canadians, which is of central importance to the government.

This matter is also critical to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces because the Department of National Defence considers that safeguarding the health of its members, Canadians and their families is of paramount importance. Our members and their families are the key to our operational success, and their well-being remains one of the department's primary concerns.

As a result, the department assigns a high priority to its environmental programs, as I mentioned earlier when I asked my question. The department is committed to conducting its operations in a way that protects human health and the environment. This commitment is manifest in myriad environmental and occupational health and safety programs, protocols and frameworks in place throughout the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. All members of the House are well aware of the department's very high standards.

This commitment has also been clearly demonstrated in the way that the Department of National Defence responded to the 1997 discovery of trichloroethylene—also known as TCE, a solvent used to clean equipment—in the groundwater at CFB Valcartier.

Many elements of the motion we are discussing today are currently before the courts. As such, it would be inappropriate for us to discuss them in detail. Still, I do want to contest the idea implied

in this motion that the government has been remiss in dealing with the presence of TCE in the groundwater at Valcartier.

As soon as the presence of TCE was discovered, officials began carefully monitoring and managing the water supply so that those working and living on the base were assured of clean drinking water.

When TCE was also found in private wells in the nearby community of Shannon three years later, an unexpected and unwelcome discovery, the Department of National Defence and representatives of other departments having jurisdiction, such as Environment Canada and Health Canada, worked with their municipal and provincial counterparts and all other stakeholders.

They continue to work together to address the situation, and are exploring viable solutions to the environmental challenges in the area of the Valcartier garrison. This collaboration was institutionalized in 2001 when a consultation committee was founded, bringing together representatives from the federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as those from civil society groups, including: the Department of National Defence; Environment Canada; Health Canada; the Direction régionale de santé publique du Québec; the Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs du Québec; the Conseil régional de l'environnement; the Corporation du bassin de la Jacques-Cartier and the Comité du bassin de la rivière Saint-Charles; the City of Quebec; the Municipality of Shannon; the Regroupement des citoyens de Shannon—which the hon. member mentioned; and SNC Lavalin and the Société immobilière Valcartier inc., which are commercial landowners in the area with a role to play in mitigating the effects of the presence of TCE in the Valcartier regional groundwater.

The department has brought together all the interested parties, and continues to do so through the committee's twice-yearly meetings. Thus, extensive consultation is ongoing. During these regular meetings, stakeholders share information and discuss TCE-related issues as they all move together toward a solution to the challenges posed by the presence of this chemical.

The committee has helped foster trust and transparency between all parties involved, and has showed the department's good faith in addressing the matter at hand. The establishment of this consultation committee was just one of many measures implemented by the department in response to the discovery of TCE in Valcartier and Shannon.

In late 2001 and early 2002, the bond of trust developed by the committee proved invaluable as the department linked 161 homes in Shannon to the base's water system. This measure helped reassure the residents of Shannon that they would have access to the same clean drinking water enjoyed by their neighbours in the garrison.

● (1125)

I do not know whether the hon. member's family benefited from this initiative, but 161 families did.

Private Members' Business

Nevertheless, this initiative was only part of a broader effort that has seen the government spend nearly \$60 million to address the presence of TCE in the groundwater. This money has been used to conduct studies to better understand the regional groundwater flow, to monitor and sample the water on the base on a regular basis, to identify options that would reduce the presence of TCE in the groundwater, and, most importantly, to put in place new infrastructure related to the drinking water system.

The department continues to take seriously the welfare of our men and women in uniform and that of their families. The fact that significant sources of TCE lie off Crown-owned land complicates our efforts, but the department is ensuring that water for the Valcartier garrison continues to be drawn exclusively from wells that are closely monitored for the presence of TCE.

In fact, the Canadian Forces test the wells on the Valcartier base daily to ensure that the water meets federal and provincial standards. These daily tests are complemented by monthly analyses conducted by an independent lab. The department regularly shares the results of these tests with the City of Quebec, the Municipality of Shannon, and others.

In the meantime, the department—and indeed the government as a whole—has been diligent in seeking a lasting solution to the presence of TCE in the region's groundwater. We have performed several pilot tests and studies of various technologies aimed at removing the TCE in CFB Valcartier's groundwater. One technique, which pumps water containing TCE from the aquifer, treats it, and then returns the clean water back to the environment, has shown great promise, but is not being used yet. This 'pump and treat' approach will prove useful in mitigating the presence of TCE in CFB Valcartier's groundwater.

Ever since TCE was first found in the water around Valcartier, the government—and the Department of National Defence more specifically—has recognized the seriousness of the issue, has taken appropriate measures to deal with it, and has done so in an open and collaborative fashion.

All in all, the government has spent nearly \$60 million not only to improve the potable water supply at Valcartier and Shannon, but also to address the broader issues related to the presence of these chemical substances in the area's groundwater. It has ensured the safety of the garrison's water system, and it is currently investigating concrete ways in which to mitigate the effects of the TCE present in the groundwater under CFB Valcartier.

● (1130)

[*English*]

The government's legacy in this matter is one of responsibility and diligence as it works with other stakeholders to find a durable overall solution. The motion we are discussing today fails to take into account all of the excellent work already done by the government. More seriously, it seeks to raise matters of liability and compensation, both issues which are currently before the courts.

[*Translation*]

For these reasons, I cannot support this motion. We welcome the opportunity to debate this important issue, but we cannot support the motion. Nevertheless, we hope that in addition to supporting such

motions and initiating such debates, the hon. opposition member, with her personal experience of our military—both past and present—will be diligent and apprise her colleagues of the importance of the Canadian Forces and investing in their equipment, infrastructure and training.

We would also expect more NDP members to support the various initiatives that we are taking to support our Canadian Forces, which include measures to deal with the environmental challenges arising out of past actions.

● (1135)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House this morning to debate this issue.

I have been paying close attention to this issue for some time now for two reasons. First, as you know, since coming to Parliament, I have been trying to raise the profile of water quality issues in Canada. This motion squares well with my objective. Second, during the previous Parliament, this matter was raised a number of times by the then-member for Québec, Christiane Gagnon, who regularly asked questions about this issue in the House.

I would like to congratulate my NDP colleague on pursuing the debate on behalf of the people connected to the Valcartier base and Shannon. When I read the motion, I was not aware that the member comes from a family with a military tradition. I congratulate her for that.

The Liberal party will support this motion.

Ms. Carole Hughes: It is the right thing to do.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

I will list the reasons why we support this motion.

First, we stand by those who do not have access to drinking water, or at least to clean, uncontaminated water, in Canada and abroad. We stand by those, including first nations people, who have to deal with substandard drinking water, which can be hazardous to their health. We stand by those who fear that their health is at risk because they have drunk contaminated water.

If I may, I would like to talk about an incident that took place last fall in my riding, Lac-Saint-Louis, and on the West Island of Montreal in general.

We are used to having an ample supply of clean drinking water. We have two or three water treatment plants on the West Island. Like other places in Canada, we are very fortunate to have uninterrupted access to drinking water. Last fall, in October or November, the water treatment plant in Pointe-Claire had a problem. Leaves had accumulated at the water entrance, forcing the filtration system to work harder. This sounded the alarm, warning that the water entering the system was perhaps contaminated and that the filtration system was unable to treat the water. The Kirkland and Pointe-Claire municipalities had to deal with the problem immediately.

Private Members' Business

As I recall, it was a Friday night and the two municipalities had recruited volunteers to go door to door at 10 p.m. Someone came and knocked on our door in Kirkland at 10 p.m., telling us not to drink the water. It was not even a question of boiling water before drinking or using it; we were not supposed to drink it at all or even brush our teeth with it. The in-person warning was followed by two automated calls from the City of Montreal, from the Island of Montreal public health department, telling us to not drink the water.

It was shocking for us, because we had never been in such a situation. We wondered if we had brushed our teeth with contaminated water and if we were going to have digestive problems as a result.

This just goes to show just how little it takes to throw the public off balance and to raise fears about the possibility of contaminated drinking water.

I would like to point out, incidentally, that in the end, the water was fine and the City of Pointe-Claire took prudent action in an exemplary fashion in dealing with this public safety concern.

• (1140)

The people of the West Island know all about the threat of contaminated water. We stand in solidarity with the people of Shannon and the Valcartier base on this issue.

In passing, I would like to mention the issue of the international human right to water because it was raised in one of the questions my colleague was asked. I would like to point out that, this very morning, the very well known Kielburger brothers, Craig and Marc, published an op-ed in the *Vancouver Sun* urging the Government of Canada to support the international human right to water. I also learned that Marc Kielburger was a page in this House in the 1990s.

The second reason we support this motion is that we believe, in principle, that the federal government must focus more on the issue of water in Canada. We feel that the government is trying to distance itself from the issue by stating that water is a provincial jurisdiction and that it will leave it to the provinces. We believe that the opposite holds true. We believe that water is becoming more of a national priority and that the Conservative government must pay even more attention to it.

On the issue of jurisdiction over water in Canada, it is quite true that, for all intents and purposes, water is a provincial responsibility under the Canadian Constitution since it is a natural resource. However, a 2009 survey asked Canadians across the country who is responsible for water in Canada. Even though the Constitution states that, strictly speaking, water is a provincial responsibility, a large number of Canadians—I believe it was 42% of respondents from outside Quebec—responded that water was a federal jurisdiction. This shows the extent to which Canadians want the federal government to act firmly and quickly on water-related issues.

We could say that the province of Quebec jealously guards its jurisdiction over water. In fact, the Bloc Québécois often votes against initiatives in the House that would give the federal government a larger say in water issues. Every time, they tell us that it is because water is an exclusively provincial jurisdiction. However, this survey demonstrates that, even in Quebec, a province

that is very aware of jurisdictional issues, 77% of respondents believe that water is a shared responsibility.

The federal government must take action and become involved in water-related issues.

I hope this motion is part of this ongoing initiative to pressure the federal government to put more emphasis on water-related issues in Canada.

The third reason we believe that the government must pay attention to the spirit of this motion is that we believe in accountability. We believe that individuals and governments must take responsibility for the choices they make and the actions they take and must take their share of responsibility when those actions have adverse effects or consequences, in this case for the environment and for the health of Quebeckers.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in this House to speak to and support the motion of my highly esteemed colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

On the weekend, I worked with my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier on another matter she is very involved in, namely the issue of the private airport in Neuville, where there was a huge public demonstration. I commend the hon. member for attending. She gets a lot of public attention even though she sometimes does not get enough media attention. However, her constituents truly know how involved she is and that they have her ear. I am extremely proud to call her a colleague.

I have listened closely to the speeches that have been made since this motion was moved in this House, in particular the speech by the member opposite, who listed the measures the government has taken thus far in this matter. My first comment is that those things were the least the government could do to protect the citizens from the potential dangers of the contamination. Unfortunately, we could describe those measures as minimal and even below the threshold of minimal.

The fact is that thousands of people who have lived or worked in Shannon or on the base at Valcartier, those who still work there and those who felt threatened north of Val-Bélair, which is now part of Quebec City, have for years been living with a tragedy that affects the whole community.

I shall explain. In that part of the Quebec City region, north of the city and at quite a bit higher altitude than Quebec City, there is a very special way of life, with a great many areas where nature is still very wild and natural. It is an area where settlers came from many different places and included francophones, the Irish and others.

It was my privilege to live for a few months in Saint-Gabriel de Valcartier, very near the base, and I came to appreciate the ways in which this is a very distinct and special society. I mean that the way we use it in French, and not in the sense of an elite. It is a community with a very strong identity and one that is very proud of its connections. But what is important is that CFB Valcartier is one of the most significant major bases in all of Canada.

When we look at the history of CFB Valcartier, we must not forget that, as early as Canada's entry into the first world war, it was a hub for troop deployment, for training and for maintaining a large military presence in eastern Canada, which enabled Canada to go into action in various theatres of operations, both in war and in peacekeeping.

The reality is that not all the victims of this contamination live in Shannon or the immediate area. Thousands of Canadians have passed through Valcartier and now live all across the country, from British Columbia to Alberta to New Brunswick.

The case of Valcartier is not unique, either, because, sadly, we have also seen the Agent Orange problem at CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick, which unfortunately has shown that some past errors require the government to pay serious attention to comforting and supporting people and correcting these tragic errors, which were not necessarily made deliberately by the government. We recognize this, of course.

• (1150)

Beyond the measures taken by the government, the real issue is that the state still does not recognize its responsibility regarding the decontamination and is leaving it up to the citizens of Shannon to assume full responsibility for the whole process, including the stress of taking legal action.

So far, the bill for this action against the Department of National Defence and the various components of SNC-Lavalin totals \$4 million. That is a very serious issue. Given the regrettable legacy of the Valcartier base, it is completely wrong that this government, like its predecessors—because this is a very long-standing issue—is not assuming its primary responsibility. That responsibility is to check the facts and to tell citizens, armed forces members and civilian personnel that it accepts some responsibility and that it is demanding that the other parties involved also accept and recognize their responsibility. From there on, the government will be able to defuse this situation, which is very hard from a human standpoint on the people of Shannon and the surrounding area.

Of course, I fully realize that, from a legal perspective, when a legal opinion relating to court action has been provided, the argument can be made that the process must follow its course. The problem is that, morally, this can become a cover to avoid responsibility. Recognizing and assuming that responsibility in relation to the contamination would be a courageous move that would surely defuse the problem and bring some relief to the people affected. More importantly, it would signal the beginning of negotiations to reach an agreement that would benefit all parties.

Nobody wants a judge to decide what is best for the people of Shannon, for the government of this country. Nobody wants a solution imposed through a perfectly legitimate outside intervention, but one that could easily have been avoided. In my opinion, the real problem has to do with shifting that responsibility to a judge, instead of courageously assuming it. This is all the more regrettable because, in this specific case, people have been waiting for several decades.

I am going to give another example. The Prime Minister recognized the responsibility of the Government of Canada and he apologized to Canadian citizens of Japanese origin for their

internment during World War II. That was commendable, and it was the right thing to do. This is something that NDP members can easily recognize. In fact, I congratulate the government on this initiative.

To govern is not just to anticipate. It is also to assume responsibilities that are sometimes difficult. I call on the government, and particularly on all members of this House who have military bases in their ridings and whose constituents are serving as soldiers, sailors, aviators or civilian staff: we must really ensure that, for the benefit of the residents of Shannon, the government recognizes and assumes its responsibility regarding past actions. That will be the first step in arriving at a solution benefiting all parties.

• (1155)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of Louis-Saint-Laurent, the riding next to Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, I am pleased to support the people of Shannon in their fight for truth and justice.

The motion moved by my colleague is the first step the government must take to establish a new relationship of respect and trust with the residents of Shannon. I think adopting this motion is imperative, not just as a gesture of solidarity, but as a recognition of the then federal government's responsibility for the contamination of the groundwater in the municipality of Shannon and the Valcartier military base. Those communities need that recognition in order to get justice and to move forward.

We know that in 1997, the Department of National Defence detected TCE in the groundwater under CFB Valcartier and that, a few years later, that same toxin was found in the private wells of citizens of Shannon, the municipality next to the base.

To better understand the context of the motion, we have to go back a number of decades to a time when TCE, a toxic industrial solvent, was used on the military base. People used to dispose of the used solvent by simply burying it in the ground. TCE, or trichloroethylene, is a chemical that was used for many years for metal degreasing, as was the case on the military base, for dry cleaning and for extracting organic products. With the discovery of its toxicity, the chemical agent was gradually replaced with less dangerous products. Individuals are now prohibited from using TCE in the European Union.

TCE is thought to be a carcinogen that affects the central nervous system. Because of the way in which TCE was disposed of in the ground on the military base, the contaminated groundwater ended up in the wells and drinking water systems of thousands of residents. As a result, in recent years, Shannon has recorded specific health problems and a cancer rate five times the normal rate.

Private Members' Business

While time passes and the government refuses to take any responsibility for the TCE-contaminated groundwater at CFB Valcartier and in Shannon, the people in those communities continue to have physical and emotional health problems and continue to develop diseases such as cancer.

More than 350 residents have died from cancer linked to the TCE-contaminated wells in Shannon. In total, over 500 people have developed cancer in a town of barely 5,000 inhabitants. Moreover, as Marie-Paule Spieser, president of the Shannon Citizens Committee, said:

There is still a plume beneath our feet, six kilometres long and 600 metres wide, and thus, there is still a danger from gases. There is also a latency period between contact with this product and the onset of cancer.

Therefore, we can still expect an excessively high cancer rate in Shannon for many years to come. How many cancers, deaths and unfortunate events—the kind that destroy entire families—will it take for the government to act in solidarity and give tangible help to the people of Shannon who are paying with their lives for their decision to live in this town rather than another?

As my colleague's motion says, it is high time for the federal government to recognize its responsibility for contaminating the groundwater in Shannon by the Department of National Defence's disposal of TCE on its land. So far, the government has maintained its closed ears and mind, and this is unacceptable.

The scientific evidence in this matter is solid and clearly shows the causal link between TCE and the extremely high rates of cancer and other illnesses among current residents, as well as among those who once lived in the area but have since moved away. Worse yet, we know not only that the government does not want to admit its liability and compensate victims properly, but also that DND was aware of this practice and of the contamination as early as 1978, without taking any corrective measures.

A report seen on the program *Enquête* showed that the government has been aware of water contamination in Shannon and on the military base for 30 years. According to documents obtained under the Access to Information Act, the federal environment and defence departments were warned that waste water was being discharged into a lagoon connected to the groundwater. The people of Shannon drank that contaminated water for 22 years before discovering the contamination themselves, quite by chance, in 2000.

The NDP recognizes, of course, that this disastrous situation is not the fault of the current government. Still, as the representative of the Crown, the government is responsible for any situation on Canada's military bases, even if the cause goes back decades.

In 2007, because they were still fighting on their own to defend their rights and obtain justice, 3,000 people formed the Shannon Citizens Committee, which launched a class action suit against the government and SNC-Lavalin Group, which was also played a part in the contamination.

• (1200)

To date, the government has invested \$35.8 million to hook up part of the municipality of Shannon to a new water supply system. That is very good and we commend the government for this action.

However, as I mentioned earlier, access to drinking water is a fundamental human right. In short, the government has taken a very small step toward solving a big and ongoing health and contamination problem.

In the meantime, residents have had to pay out of their own pockets for wells and bottled water, not to mention the fact that their property values may also decline because their homes are built directly over a contaminated water table. Furthermore, the facts remain the same: the government stubbornly refuses to accept its responsibility. The Crown is not to blame because it does not acknowledge any link between the TCE contamination of the groundwater and the health problems of the residents of Shannon. This long and arduous legal battle, which has cost the group \$4 million, is not over yet. They are waiting for the decision that will be handed down by the summer or fall of 2012. While waiting for the outcome, the government could be gracious by immediately adopting the NDP motion.

These people have already had to deal with many health issues, not to mention financial troubles. They feel betrayed by the government that is supposed to protect them. The state has an obligation to provide services that are safe and meet certain standards, and it also has an obligation to take the necessary measures to resolve problematic health situations when it becomes aware that people are at risk. That clearly did not happen in this case.

The federal government must act on its acknowledgement of responsibility by implementing measures to support and compensate current and past residents of the municipality. It must monitor the filtration system currently being used by people dealing with contaminated drinking water. To ensure the participation of all stakeholders and complete transparency, the citizens committee should be included in this process and in any environmental efforts the government undertakes.

The government may not have acted deliberately, but it did play a part in creating the problem, and therefore it must ensure that every person who was employed on the base or lived in the residential quarters during the contamination period is notified and compensated appropriately on the same basis as current residents of Shannon.

To sum up, I urge the government to show some compassion and be fair to the people of Shannon who have been living with the terrible consequences of groundwater contamination for decades by supporting my colleague's motion.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise here today to support not only my hon. colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, but also the people of Shannon, of course, in their struggle for truth and justice.

The motion moved by my colleague represents a first step that the federal government must take towards building a new relationship of respect and trust with the people of Shannon. The adoption of this motion, which I believe is crucial, is more than a simple gesture of solidarity. It represents an acknowledgement of the responsibility of the federal government of the day for contaminating Shannon's groundwater. The community needs such an acknowledgement in order to obtain justice and move forward.

The Budget

As we all know, in 1997, the Department of National Defence began detecting TCE in the groundwater under CFB Valcartier. A few years later, the same toxic chemical was discovered in the private wells of the residents of Shannon, the municipality next to the base.

In order to better understand the context of the motion, we need to look a few decades further back, when TCE, a toxic industrial degreaser, was used on the military base for a range of purposes. After using it, people on the base disposed of it simply by burying it in the ground. TCE was used for quite some time to degrease metal, as was the case on the military base, as well as to dry clean clothes and extract organic products. After its toxicity was discovered, the chemical was gradually replaced by other less dangerous products. The European Union has banned its use by individuals. TCE—

• (1205)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The time for private members' business has now expired and the matter is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence. The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine will have eight minutes remaining when this matter returns before the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from March 30 consideration of the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to say, "Where was I?", but I know exactly where I was and the most important thing is that Canadians know where this budget stands and where they stand on the budget.

To begin the third hour of debate on the second day of debate, I will read for the record some of the tweets we have been getting in, some of the Facebook comments and the emails that have been coming in from across the country because this is a pretty fundamental exercise, which is why the NDP exists. The NDP exists to speak out for Canadian families from coast to coast to coast. That is what we did on Friday and that is what we are doing today. We are ensuring—

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Standing up for Canadian families. That is what we are doing.

Mr. Peter Julian: I thank my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and my other colleagues as well for their appreciative applause. Because I will be speaking, I should warn members, for a while, I hope they will be as enthusiastic a little while later.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: That's the job of the official opposition.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I know we will be going into question period a little later today so I would ask if you would give me a one-minute heads-up before we go into question period if I am

still standing, because, as we know, with colds and flus going round one never knows when the voice will give out.

I will reference some of the many comments that we have been getting on Twitter. I thank Canadians who have sent their comments in on Twitter and Facebook and who have been sending in emails to both NDP MPs and MPs from other parties. The fact is that Canadians have been consistently phoning their members of Parliament and letting them know their comments about the budget. All of those are a pretty important exercises because what we are seeing is Canadians speaking out.

I will reference a few of the tweets that NDP members have received over the past few hours on our twitter accounts and on Facebook. There is no doubt that Canadians have very strong opinions on this budget. I can tell members that, overwhelmingly, the comments that I have been receiving are negative. They are negative about the raising of the retirement age. Canadians feel keenly about the impact that will have on future seniors who will need to work two more years of their lives, many them in low-income situations. Canadians are also concerned about the job losses that will come out of this budget.

As I said on Friday, the title of the budget more properly should be "fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity", because that is what the government delivers and that is what Canadians have been speaking out against. They are speaking out against cuts in the public sector that will lead to even greater cuts in the private sector. At a time when the economy is weak and slowing, what the government has done is guaranteed that there will be fewer jobs in the Canadian economy over the next year.

As I also mentioned on Friday, the budget documents of the government say very clearly that unemployment will go up in 2012. What the government is acknowledging is that, as a result of the budget, unemployment will go up. I think the nickname we have given the budget, "the fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget", is very apt and Canadians are certainly seeing that.

Canadians are also speaking out against the cuts in environmental protection. They are speaking out against the cuts to food safety. They are speaking out against the cuts to transportation safety.

They are speaking out about a whole range of cuts to statistical organizations. The government seems to have a real fear of facts, a fear of statistics, a fear that the truth will come out. We have certainly seen that in the budget with cuts to eliminate some of the organizations that actually provide the statistical foundation for government decisions.

• (1210)

Instead of supporting statistical decisions and providing additional supports, the government is eliminating them. It is eliminating the voices and the facts. One cannot hide the facts. Canadians are perceiving that the government is proceeding in a mean-spirited way. Canadians are perceiving that what the government is doing in the budget is exactly the opposite of what it pretends to be doing. That is why there has been such a strong and negative reaction to the government's initiative and agenda.

The Budget

I will read a few of the tweets that have been received over the course of the last few days. Marionetta said the following on Twitter, “I am disabled. I am depending on OAS being there when I’m 65. What are disabled workers to do? Can’t get welfare”. That is a poignant comment by a disabled Canadian who sees that the government will be forcing her to work two years longer.

From Regina, Saskatchewan, I received a number of comments from mskapay stating, “Using the penny as a smokescreen for the cuts is very tacky, Mr. Prime Minister. The government is clearly moving toward two tier health care with this budget. I cannot afford health care if that’s what happens. Did this government forget that climate change is a reality in this budget? It’s the non-green budget of all time”. Those are all comments coming from Regina, Saskatchewan on Twitter.

From Calgary, Alberta, calgaryrabbit said, “I’d say sir that it isn’t that this government is out of touch but rather that they don’t care about Canadians. Only the 1%

From St. Andrews, New Brunswick, I received a tweet from another Canadian concerned about the government’s budgetary approach. It reads, “Those boomers whose OAS is unaffected still care about the younger generation, the environment, the CBC, health care, Katimavik, etc.”. That is a cry from New Brunswick saying that Canadians will not forget that.

From Ontario, Mr. Burbidge stated, “Canadians hitting volunteer agencies and services doing valuable community work. Not supporting the volunteer sector. He also said, “Child poverty is not addressed in this budget. The future is bleak for youth. Rich not treated equally to poor in this country. He went on to say, “The reduced Ministry of Environment staff will lead to environmental disaster as in the Ontario Walkerton situation. No savings of dollars at expense of the environment”.

I have another tweet from the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, the UBCIC, a very reputable organization in British Columbia. It reads, “gutting the fisheries act to enable megaprojects like Enbridge pipeline denies our grandchildren’s environmental inheritance”.

It is certainly is. My colleague from St. John’s East raises the fact that this is in the budget.

Anna Ferraa from Toronto, Ontario, stated, “It’s a less jobs, less growth, less prosperity budget”.

I think all of us, the 102 strong New Democrats in the House, say that is exactly what the government has done. It has provided fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity.

As everyone can hear, I am getting comments from coast to coast to coast. Mr. Cameron from Vancouver, B.C., stated, “The government broke its own promises by cuts to pensions, provinces and health care”.

SimiSara from British Columbia stated, “OAS age means more poverty for seniors who will have to work part-time. This budget rips away environmental security with things like deep cuts to Fisheries and Oceans Canada”.

Ms. Chen from British Columbia said, “The cuts to Citizenship and Immigration will hard hit new Canadians as well in this budget.

●(1215)

I have many more, but I want to pace the tweets, Facebook comments and emails. We want a balanced approach on the budget feedback we are getting from coast to coast to coast. The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is asking if I could just give him one more tweet.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I find them particularly engaging.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, they are engaging because Canadians are speaking out. They are baring their hearts and souls. This is important to them. One of the things we can encapsulate in all the comments is the hope that Canadians have. They understand this to be a dismal decade, one that, tragically, will probably continue until October 19, 2015.

Canadians believe that we will do better. They have hope for October 20, 2015, when this current government, with its broken promises, its mean-spirited budgets and ideological agenda, will be replaced by a government that Canadians can actually believe in. I find exceptional that hope continues right through this dismal, dark, divisive decade from 2006 to 2015.

My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour did ask for just one final tweet. Mr. Johnstone, from New Westminster, my hometown and former capital city of British Columbia, as well as the oldest city in western Canada, had this to say. I cannot quote it because some of the language expresses his frustration. He basically says the Conservatives just stole two years of his pension. We can imagine how Mr. Johnstone feels about that.

I am going to move on to some of the Facebook commentaries. I encourage Canadians who are concerned about the budget cuts, the job cuts and the forced additional two years of work for future seniors, to continue to post, to tweet, to write in and to phone our offices. If they have an NDP MP they should contact him or her directly. If they do not have an NDP MP, we are working on it, but they should make sure they contact the NDP member closest to them.

From Toronto, Anna, on Facebook, says:

This budget so clearly leaves my generation behind. I understand that the Conservatives are aware of the fact that youth voter turnout is low—so why would they care? One of my concerns with the budget has to do with the section on post-secondary education, and how there is absolutely nothing being done to address and alleviate the high costs of attending a post-secondary institution.

From Vancouver, another Canadian says he is disgusted with the cuts to the Chief Electoral Officer, who is supposed to be maintaining free and fair elections in this country.

The Budget

The cuts are to statistical agencies so that the facts are kept out of the public mind. The cuts are also to the organizations that oversee the government and provide impartial advice. The Chief Electoral Officer and the Auditor General of Canada are the kinds of organizations that have been attacked by the budget.

● (1220)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Talking out of both sides of the mouth.

Mr. Peter Julian: Absolutely.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: You can't say that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has the floor. I would ask all hon. members, including those sitting close to him, to give him the floor. It is not a conversation between hon. members, it is a conversation between the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster and the Chair.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek some clarification.

I sit in this House as an active member. From time to time, I have been known to use my outside voice and respond in a way that is not meant to be distracting. I know that if you or other members found me distracting you would say so. However, I did not know that, if even that was not the case, I would not be permitted to say things to myself that people near me might hear.

Perhaps you could clarify that for me. I do not want to infringe upon the rules of the House or in any way try your patience. I certainly want to do my best to adhere to whatever rules—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. In order to respond to the member, I would like to make two points. As this member knows, there are microphones in the chamber. For those who are sitting particularly close to the member who is speaking, the microphones pick up everything, so that is an issue for those sitting immediately closest to the member. When people are offering free advice and commentary to a member who is speaking, it often comes from the other side of the House.

I am just asking for co-operation from all hon. members. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster does have the floor. I would like the opportunity to hear everything that he has to say and would appreciate the co-operation of all members in that regard.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that the advice of the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is priceless. It is of great value to Canadians and to the House of Commons. He does a phenomenal job as deputy finance critic and as the member of Parliament for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. We all appreciate that he is in the House of Commons offering advice and speaking out on behalf of Canadians.

Moving now to some of the Facebook postings. First, we have one from Ms. Chen from British Columbia. As members may know, Burnaby—New Westminster has the highest concentration of Canadians of Taiwanese origin in the country. A member from the Taiwanese Canadian community says, "I strongly disagree with this budget, especially with the government's decision to eliminate

284,000 federal skilled workers' applications that have been waiting for 5 to 7 years."

Another, Ms. Sacca, says that she "...hates the cuts to the CBC, the National Film Board, and that cuts to culture are cuts in the voices of the people. It seems that this Conservative government does not like people expressing themselves on important issues."

Another comment from Ontario, "Is this what you call job creation?"

Another from Markdale, Ontario, "This budget provided nothing for youth. It does not address youth unemployment..." Youth unemployment is over 15%. It is absolutely tragic that it has gone that high. Unfortunately there is nothing in the budget that addresses youth unemployment. As we know, with this fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget, we are actually going to see a spike up in unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. I know my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River is listening attentively as the critic for post-secondary education. This Canadian, Mr. Walker, says, "It does not provide aid for the rising tuition for and debt from post-secondary education." I know the member is aware, as I am, of the importance of addressing it.

Another, Mr. Legault, says, "Canada's reputation as a compassionate country on the world stage took another hit... in this Conservative budget which slashes \$377.7 million in international development funding aimed at reducing poverty overseas."

Another, from Sault Ste. Marie, wrote, "Very sad, as a statement at home and in the world. They also shut down the National Council of Welfare because they do not want anyone reporting on how much poverty there really is. This is amazing, to think they will actually get away with this. First, the dissolution of Stats Canada, then an attack on organizations, both at home and internationally, that actually advocate on behalf of those at risk. Now substantial cuts to aid and the demise of the National Council on Welfare."

Mr. Speaker, if you are wondering why we are spending hours criticizing the mean-spirited decisions by the government, I think that particular Facebook posting shows to what extent Canadians feel the same way. The decisions are ideologically based. They are not based on the character and values that Canadians share.

The fact that the government is shutting down the National Council of Welfare, which provided key information to ensure that Canadians were aware of the extent of poverty in this country, is quite frankly shameful.

● (1225)

I would say we all think that Canadian families deserve better than that.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Budget

Mr. Peter Julian: I thank my colleagues for their applause. They have been working all weekend in their ridings. They have worked very hard over the last few weeks without taking a single day off. NDP MPs work very hard. It is amazing they have that much energy on a Monday afternoon. They are concerned. All of us are concerned about the impact on Canadian families. That is where we get our energy from. We know full well that Canadian families are concerned about the budget, which is why we are speaking out.

We have lots of Facebook postings. I will warn you right now, Mr. Speaker, in the interests of mixing things up, I will be coming back to the tweets and the Facebook comments later on.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I will remind you.

Mr. Peter Julian: The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour will remind me later on.

A constituent from Ontario said, “This budget cuts \$2 million from Elections Canada. I wonder why”.

That is a rhetorical question she is asking. She is saying that we know full well why the government is cutting Elections Canada. We just have to look at Elections Canada investigating the robocall scandal to know why the budget is punishing Elections Canada. She said, “This budget makes my heart feel very heavy”.

Moving on, another Facebook posting says, “So much news about services being cut for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. We seem to be moving backwards in the world, while we hear so much about exorbitant amounts being paid to sports figures and celebrities. I wonder how this budget will read in the history books”.

Another constituent commented, “Without accurate data, then who is to say there is a problem? It becomes speculation and opinion, which can be argued or dismissed as agenda. The social security that Canada offers its citizens is a jewel of civilized society worldwide. What power does government actually possess if service to its people disappears?”

Someone from Algoma University said, “Should charities lose their status for simply disagreeing with the government's agenda?”

A constituent from Vancouver said, “With this government and this Prime Minister's divide and conquer tactics, they are saying that they don't want to have Canada be united”.

Someone from a university in southern Ontario, in Guelph, said, “Our CBC is one of the things that makes us Canadian. We have to preserve it and not let this government bleed it to death”.

A constituent from Quebec said, “Private banks and businesses can be supported by taxpayers, but there is no money for the CBC”.

A New Brunswick constituent commented, “Just to put this in perspective, the cuts which the Conservative government would like to see even deeper, of \$115 million, are about equal to the estimated cost of just one new F-35 jet”.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: With or without the engine?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that would be without the engine. I would remind my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, part of the F-35 fiasco is that the F-35s would be delivered without

engines, which would almost be humorous if it were not so sad. After that the jet engines are put in, and following that, we have the maintenance costs.

Mr. Payne: Such a tale.

Mr. Peter Julian: I did raise this on Friday. I believe my colleague opposite wants me to raise it again.

● (1230)

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, on whom I rely and on whom I wish the government relied as well, even before these latest revelations said that the full cost of the F-35s would be over \$30 billion. Now it is somewhere between \$30 billion and \$40 billion. As my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour accurately pointed out, that includes bringing the planes here without the engines, putting the engines in, and then all of the maintenance costs after that.

A constituent, who I should mention is from a Conservative riding, thinks that perhaps \$40 billion for F-35s for an untendered contract is a bit excessive and perhaps we should be putting Canadian families first. Another constituent from a Conservative riding in southern Ontario—

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Moving right along.

Mr. Peter Julian: I thank my Conservative colleagues for encouraging me. There is nothing I like more than getting encouragement from the other side of the House. I appreciate their comments.

Mr. Chris Alexander: We can give you some facts too.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Facts would be really good.

Mr. Peter Julian: My colleague on the other side of the House said, and I think I can quote him accurately and it is parliamentary, “We can give you some facts”.

I want to mention the statistical organizations. I will put aside Facebook for just a moment. The issue of facts and the Conservative government is pretty profound. What is the government going to cut? What are the facts that it is going to cut in the budget?

The First Nations Statistical Institute is going to be eliminated. This organization produces facts on what is a crisis situation in many aboriginal communities. The Conservative government does not like the facts so it is going to cut its funding.

The National Council of Welfare produces information on poor Canadians. The Conservatives are going to axe the funding for this organization. They do not want to hear the facts.

Let us look at Statistics Canada, which unfortunately produces facts. The government does not seem to like facts too much. It is going to see an \$8.3 million cut for the current fiscal year, \$18.3 million the following year, and \$34 million the following year.

The Budget

When the Conservatives cut the First Nations Statistical Institute, when they cut the National Council of Welfare, when they gouge Statistics Canada to the point it can no longer produce facts, it is fair to say it is a fact-free government. It opposes the facts. The Conservatives do not want to hear the facts. They cannot live with the facts.

When a member opposite says that they will give us some facts, my question would be, where are they going to get the facts when they are killing all of the fact-finding organizations? Canadian families deserve better than that.

I will move on to another comment that is exactly in that vein. The budget eliminates funding for the National Council of Welfare, a government advisory body and the premier resource for information on poverty in Canada.

There is another posting which deals with this. It is from another Conservative riding, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. This constituent said, “This budget is absolutely appalling. Keep this government’s feet to the fire for having put in place more information suppression”.

• (1235)

I mentioned the elimination of those fact-finding bodies as something Canadians feel intensely about. They oppose the idea that the government should be in a fact-free zone, that the government should manufacture its own facts.

The facts come out of the PMO but they are not facts that come with any foundation. It is a fact-free zone and the government is eliminating the few agencies that actually produce facts which should be the basis on which a responsible government takes decisions.

A constituent in a Conservative-held riding commented, “What we are seeing is a government that is demonstrating divisive politics. Instead of talking about reality, they are refusing to actually follow that reality. Instead the reality is that many older people are struggling. They cannot afford to keep their homes, are working more than one job, cannot afford vacations, cannot afford to retire. Many in the older and middle-age generations fought and worked hard to make life better. It is the older working generation who fought for public health care, pensions, the 40-hour work week, paid vacations, weekends and more. It is the likes of the right wing, not the older and middle-age generations, that are ruining things for every generation. Let us retire in dignity, instead of the work until we drop philosophy of this government. It seems that we have forgotten why pensions were established in the first place: to ensure people did not have to work through their old age. They are a good thing, not something to play politics with. This is the Prime Minister’s budget. It is not my budget. Raising the age for OAS which will delay retirement for many people will also lessen the availability of some of the better paying jobs for young people. If they want to create jobs, they should give retirement incentives”.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: It used to be we did that in this country.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Great opportunities for young people.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Feed him some more lines.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, we are hearing more comments. I certainly encourage people to provide their comments. If they would like me to read them into the record, they could send them to me on Facebook or Twitter or send an email to an NDP MP. I must admit the vast majority of the comments we are getting are from Conservative-held ridings. People in Conservative ridings are saying they disagree with their Conservative MP. They may have sent this information to their Conservative MP as well, but very clearly they are saying they want to ensure the NDP brings forward these points of view, which is what we are doing. In the spirit of back and forth, that is members’ right and I would not discourage them from doing that. However, since the vast majority of comments I am reading are from Conservative ridings, it behooves those members to listen to Canadians who are speaking out. These Canadians who live in Conservative-held ridings are saying that they think Canadian families deserve better than the budget the Conservatives delivered. Canadian families deserve better. That is what they are saying.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: I thank my colleagues. My goodness, what an enthusiastic bunch of NDP MPs we have at the House of Commons, despite some of us struggling with colds and flu.

A constituent from Elliott Lake, Ontario said that the budget demonstrates that the Conservatives are out of touch with the priorities of most Canadians.

• (1240)

Here is another comment from Surrey, British Columbia: “Our tax dollars are not being properly spent on the needs of average families. This budget does not address problems with the increasing gap between rich and poor”.

A constituent of my colleague for New Westminster—Coquitlam says: “I’m very disappointed that this government has chosen to make needless changes to old age security that will punish our most vulnerable seniors. I’m also appalled that they’ve done it in a way that will impact on future generations”.

From Vancouver, Mr. Lahay writes: “Born late ’58. I’m fifty-three what about me?”

From a Liberal riding in Newfoundland and Labrador, Ms. Wade writes: “I was born in early 1958, but that doesn’t make it any less wrong! It’s wrong on many levels and wrong for us all.... [W]hat’s next, work and pay into it until we’re 90? Looks like they want their money and they hope we ‘expire’ before collecting. Shame on the [Prime Minister’s] government!”

Another comment from Facebook is this: “They’re cutting the pensions of my generation too”.

A person from British Columbia notes that “Attempting to force the northern pipeline through will cause larger concerns on the west coast. B.C. residents are unwilling to accept the risk of harm without proper environmental assessments”.

The Budget

As members know, we have seen fundamental cutbacks in environmental assessments throughout the course of this budgetary process.

From a Liberal riding in Kingston, Ontario, a constituent states: "I am so disappointed with what's going on with this Conservative government".

From Halifax, Nova Scotia, Mr. Chambers writes: "The Prime Minister is destroying what makes Canada unique in the world".

These are the comments that are coming in. I could go on just with the Facebook comments alone, because there are pages and pages of them. People are posting on Facebook across the country. They are saying that they want to be heard on this. That is why we are getting so many Canadians writing, phoning, emailing and faxing us. They are providing feedback that the government should have heeded prior to putting forward and tabling this budget.

Each Canadian here is important and their voices are very important. That is why we are raising them in the House of Commons because that is our job. The member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing is absolutely right that we raise the voices of these families across the country because we believe their voices should be heard in the House of Commons. That is why we do it.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: I heard a question from my colleague across the way, which I think was about how long I was going to speak. Well, obviously I have a cold and I do not know how long my voice will hold out, but in my party our tradition has been to speak out until the job is done—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: We feel very strongly that this fewer jobs, less growth, less prosperity budget needs to be exposed for what it is. Of course, it is not as if the government actually put front and centre what the impacts of the budget were. When we looked through it initially, we found that a lot of the figures were hidden, which is what we feared. Here I go back to the memo from the President of the Treasury Board a few weeks ago that basically directed civil servants to hide within the budget the actual cuts to services and jobs. That is something that was leaked to the press, which then exposed it. Not only would the government not put that information in the budget documents themselves but also not put it in the reports on plans and priorities that would come out in the month of May, thereby hiding from the Canadian public the truth about the budget.

• (1245)

After a couple of days of being able to go through the budget and rip it apart, we are actually seeing what the real impacts are. That is why we are raising these points in this House.

Just on the job front alone, the government's estimate of 19,000 job cuts in the budget has been exposed as not accurate. We are actually talking in both the public and private sectors now of a loss of over 50,000 jobs across this country. It is nothing short of irresponsible for the government to proceed with cuts in services and jobs that are then multiplied in the private sector. We are talking

about tens of thousands of jobs that would be lost right across the country. That is something that I can get into a bit later on.

However, the reality is that this fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget has a profound negative impact. That is why, as my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing raised, we are going to continue to speak out on the budget. Canadians are speaking out as well.

From the Halifax area, where there are three terrific NDP MPs, the members for Halifax, Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, and Sackville—Eastern Shore, a Mr. Roger says: "Make no mistake.... This budget is not about fiscal prudence or a healthy economy, this is an ideology-driven budget. It's hard to believe they have made Canada more regressive with respect to the environment. Meanwhile, they have slashed 19,000 jobs in public service at the same as saying they are trying to create jobs. Orwellian double-think?"

A person from Ontario says: "Why do believers in free market continue to feel that oil companies need subsidies from their own government? Somehow, I don't think that environmental assessments are going to stop the oil companies from taking their equipment and going home. Let them work on their own dimes and make sure that they are responsible to the environment and there are adequate environmental assessments".

Another Canadian says: "Sad to hear about Katimavik. As a participant, I was lucky enough to travel Canada as a full-time volunteer, working in community centres and for NGOs and gaining valuable life experience, strengthening communities, self-directed learning, sharing skills, environmental stewardship. That program taught me a lot about being a decent citizen".

Just hot off the press is another comment: "Has the Prime Minister been reading 1984 too much? This government is becoming very Orwellian when they start to suppress information and facts going to the public".

Obviously, when we raise the tweets and the Facebook postings, this indicates what is very clearly a trend right across the country: Canadians are concerned about what they are seeing in the budget.

As I mentioned earlier, I am going to be coming back to the tweets and Facebook comments a little later on. However, I also want to start reading out some of the emails that we have been getting from coast to coast from Canadians who believe, profoundly, that the government is simply doing the wrong thing in the budget.

• (1250)

My Conservative colleagues have asked if they can send in tweets and Facebook comments. I will just say again that if they want to send tweets or Facebook comments, we will certainly read them if we have time, but what we will say, and I want to be very clear about this, is that we will be putting Canadian families first.

Mr. Paul Calandra: He doesn't trust any of the other members to speak. Is that a problem? Is he the only one with a brain over there?

Mr. Peter Julian: If tweets, Facebook postings or emails come in from Canadian families, since we are putting Canadian families first, I will be reading those first before I read any of the concerns from my Conservative colleagues opposite.

The Budget

Mr. Paul Calandra: How many of you did they elect, Robert, 104 members? And only one of them can speak? So there are 103 bumps on a log. What an embarrassment.

Mr. Peter Julian: I will continue with some of the emails that we have received. I will read them by region because we have been getting them from across the country.

Because I mentioned B.C., the member opposite, who is from Ontario, seems less inclined to want to listen to the British Columbians who have written in to us, but what I would like to say is that British Columbian families are important and we hope that he would heed and listen to the British Columbian families that are—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would like to remind the hon. member from Burnaby—New Westminster that he is speaking to the Chair and I thought he asked me a question at that point. I know he has been on his feet awhile and he may have forgotten that point, but I would appreciate it if he were to direct his comments to the Chair.

I would also appreciate it if other hon. members would give respect to the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. He does have the floor. There will be questions and comments following his speech. I am sure he will be glad to answer them at that time.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I appreciate your clarifying that. I know that my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, certainly honours the rules and respects them very much and will certainly turn his attention to what you have said.

I just wanted to make the point that members opposite have been directing some fairly veiled and somewhat weighted comments toward him, which have been distracting him to some degree. Perhaps if those members wanted to have an opportunity to have the member for Burnaby—New Westminster say something, they would be comfortable tweeting @RobertNDP and I would be happy to—

• (1255)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. That is not a point of order.

The hon. parliamentary secretary on the same point of order.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, what we are saying on this side of the House is that the hon. member is basically admitting that the other 103 members of the NDP caucus actually have no voice and are not intelligent enough to speak on the budget. Therefore, we were hoping that he would actually give an opportunity to the other 103.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Before I go to the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, I would encourage all members to recognize that if they have a legitimate point of order, obviously the Chair will hear that, but the purpose of this is not to engage in a further debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has the floor.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, I think it is important to respond to the fact that the member opposite is suggesting that what my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, is doing is somehow not legitimate, that he is somehow infringing upon the rights of his colleagues in this caucus. I would suggest that it could not be further from the truth, because the member for Burnaby—New Westminster is standing up for Canadian families and showing them and talking to them about what is wrong with this budget, and good—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Be that as it may, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his intervention. I am certainly not distracted by the comments opposite. It actually gives me more energy when the government says, as it has in this budget, that ordinary families are not important, that seniors are not important, but what is important is its two priorities, building prisons and buying fighter jets. That is why we are speaking out for ordinary families here in the House of Commons.

I want to make another point in reaction to the comments of my Conservative colleague opposite who asked about my other colleagues, the other 103 members in the NDP caucus, which would make it 104 members. However, we are actually 102 at this point but we will be far beyond that after the next election. Any one us, the 102 women and men, who were elected to this Parliament, representing constituencies right across the country, could be making the same points that I am making to day. Any one of them could, and we will hear from them in the coming days.

However, every member of the NDP caucus is united in saying that this budget is a bad thing. We all say that the cuts to services are a repudiation of promises the Prime Minister made during the May 2 election campaign. We all say that the forced retirement age going up is a repudiation of solemn commitments that were made. We also say that the cuts in health care funding over the longer term is a repudiation of promises made. Every member of this 102-strong NDP official opposition caucus would be standing and saying that Canadian families deserve better than what the government has brought forward.

I appreciate my colleagues raising those points of order. That is democratic debate. We believe it is fundamentally important to raise points of order if there is something a member opposite finds objectionable. That is part of the debate and the public discourse, which I do not mind at all. What I do mind is when the government says that it will not follow the facts anymore, that it will eliminate those organizations that stand up independently for Canadians and produces facts that it disagrees with. That is not part of the democratic discourse, which is why we are standing in the House today. We are standing up for Canadian families who are writing in to us.

I will start in British Columbia and read some of the comments that we have been getting from across the country in reaction to the budget.

The Budget

I received comments from another constituent who lives in Burnaby, British Columbia. I am very proud of Burnaby and New Westminster, the two communities I represent in the House of Commons. My constituent says, "I oppose the severe cuts to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. We need good public media to keep Canada connected. The proposed cut of \$110 million represents the majority of the cost of providing CBC Radio and much more than the current budget for all of CBC's digital programming. This dramatic cut will damage our news, our culture and our digital economy".

The next one is from a person in New Westminster, B.C. I am taking the liberty of choosing a couple of constituents among the many Canadians who have written in. I guess it is my prerogative to put my constituents up first as we go across the country for what is essentially a roundup of opinion from ordinary Canadian families who see how the government, with its fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget has moved forward.

● (1300)

My constituent says, "keep saying that the burden on taxpayers to fund the OAS will be too great in the future".

We will come back to that a little later on because, as we know, both the government's own actuarial tables, which I have today and will be very pleased to share with members opposite, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that OAS would be viable in the long term.

She goes on to say, "Seniors are still contributing their fair share of taxes, income taxes, consumption taxes, HST, GST, PST, as well as taxes paid for gasoline, etc. There are a lot of elderly women living on very limited, fixed incomes". This Canadian is mentioning that we already have a lot of poverty among seniors in this country.

What the government is doing now is pitting one generation against another generation. Perhaps cutting out the less stealth fighter jets could be a start in cutbacks. We need to look at corporate tax cuts as well. Those are the things that will make a difference in having the kind of country we want to say. She adds, and this is very kind of her because she is a constituent, "I believe your voice makes a difference. I am proud that you are my MP". I am proud to have her as a constituent.

Another person in Vancouver, continuing our roundup in the Lower Mainland, writes, "In terms of dollars, protecting the environment is also taking a hit as part of overall spending cuts. Environment Canada will get cut by \$20 million in 2012-13, rising to \$88 million in 2014-15. Parks Canada gets a \$6 million cut this year, rising to \$29 million in 2014-15. The National Round Table on the Economy and the Environment has been scrapped, ostensibly because an expanded community of environmental stakeholders has demonstrated the capacity to provide analysis and policy advice to the government".

He puts that in quotation marks indicating he is skeptical about what the government is actually saying about how there will be analysis and policy advice going to the government. He goes on to say, "Unless they get funds from foreign radicals", apparently.

He goes on to say, "The National Round Table on the Economy and the Environment was one of the few federal voices that have

acknowledged the challenge of climate change in a series of reports while calling for action to reduce emissions, studying measures of doing so, such as carbon pricing, and making estimates of anticipated climate related damages to the Canadian economy in future years. Their contributions clearly were not welcome in the do not ask, do not tell Ottawa and will be missed".

I have more comments from a person in Duncan, British Columbia who says, "I am very upset about the retirement age going to 67. In the 2000s, when the market crashed, all my life savings were taken back to when I first started saving for retirement in the 1980s. How is the generation I belong to supposed to make any headway? I will never vote Conservative again for the rest of my life. I am hoping that if the NDP does form the next government, you will think about business as I believe that working together you can create the jobs that we all depend on. I have lost faith in this government that we have now".

I will move on to another Conservative riding on North Vancouver Island. What we will endeavour to do throughout this presentation is bring forward the voices of those Canadians who live in Conservative-held ridings for the moment and who want to have their voices heard on the floor of the House of Commons.

● (1305)

A Canadian woman writes, "My concern is the number of public service jobs that will be cut in this budget. Not only will this affect individual families but will also reduce the economic spinoff effects of workers with paycheques who purchase items in the community. This causes economic stagnation. The Prime Minister should understand this and develop policies to counteract or prevent job losses. How about keeping those jobs which provide essential services in our communities?"

That is a very good point. She is absolutely right. The rating agencies warned the government about doing this. The 50,000 or more job cuts in both the public and private sectors as a result of this budget will have a serious negative economic impact. The rating agencies, Fitch and Moody's, both warned the government against doing this.

There is no doubt that this will continue the vicious circle downward. The government acknowledged this in putting in its budget the fact that unemployment will go up as a result of this budget. It boggles my mind how it could do this but perhaps it is because I used to be a teacher and one needs to be precise as a financial administrator, as I was later on. However, when a government knows there will be fewer jobs, that the growth rate is being brought down and that it is ensuring less prosperity, why would it put on the front page of the budget document "Jobs, Growth and Prosperity"? It actually shows inside of the document that there will be fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity as a result of this budget.

The Budget

It would have been honest of the government to put that on the front cover. We will probably have to write over it so that it gives an accurate indication of what is in the budget. When the inside of the document contains statistics that show that unemployment will go up and prosperity will go down, why would it not come clean and just say that it will give fewer jobs to Canadians, 50,000 less as a result of this budget, and have less growth?

The reality is that Canada finished 130th in 2011 in economic growth worldwide, which means that 129 countries did better. That is a shocking statistic. That means that 129 governments knew what they were doing more than the Conservative government.

The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour just asked what countries finished ahead of us. I would love to share that with him but perhaps a little later as I want to continue reading the comments of Canadians from coast to coast because that is democracy and that is what we do. The comments are still streaming in. The fax machine is smoking and starting to break down because so many Canadians are writing in. Fortunately, with emails the computer can handle a higher volume and, as I mentioned, the tweets and postings on Facebook are still coming in.

The point the woman raised was a very important one. The government is provoking an even greater economic slowdown. That is what our concern is, among a number of concerns, about how irresponsible the government was with the budget that it tabled on Thursday.

I will now move on to the Prairies. These are important points that need to be raised. I will not read a ton of emails, as they are still coming in, but I have selected, out of the many we have received, those from Canadians in Conservative-held ridings who are speaking out.

● (1310)

A constituent in Calgary said, “At its worst, this new policy really is a massive insult to seniors. A cynic might even say that the statisticians have crunched the numbers and realized that a few hundred, or even a thousand, people may die between 65 and 67 while waiting for their pension, and they like that idea. Then Canada would not have to pay them pensions at all. It's like saying 'cross my heart and hope you die'. Nobody knows how long they will live, but it is odd to have a government betting on you delaying reaping benefits for all those years of your earnings to the point that maybe you won't be able to reap any benefits at all”.

The actuarial tables show, tragically, the rate of passing on between the ages of 65 and 67 does go up. It is true that as a result of the government's decision for future seniors, seniors who have worked all their lives to retire at 65 will either live in poverty from ages 65 to 67 because they have no other source of funding and cannot get their pension, or they may pass on. That is just the sad reality.

A constituent in Lacombe, Alberta said, “The budget points to the Prime Minister's great fear of anything that looks like work. I can agree with the Prime Minister that Canada may be financially better off than Greece; however, I would temper that joy with the reminder of how far behind we are of countries like Finland, Norway and other involved Nordic countries. We have fallen far behind. Those

who voted for the Prime Minister with expectations of the good fiscal management he suggested he possessed must be very disappointed when cutting spending rather than growing the Canadian economy is his answer for the Conservatives to continue to hold power”.

From the Conservative-held riding of Elmwood—Transcona in Manitoba, a constituent said, “I believe all Canadians need to know these statistics”. He is talking about the statistics that I raised on Friday. A number of Canadians have asked us to go over those statistics. A number of people who wrote in wanted to take note of what the 10 principal economic and fiscal failures of the Conservative government have been.

The constituent from Manitoba went on to say, “All Canadians need to know the statistics you mentioned and hope that this information is readily available to the public. My real concerns with the budget are that our democracy is under attack, and cutting funding to Elections Canada is even further proof to me that the Prime Minister doesn't seem to like impartial elections. If an election has to be held, it will be on his terms, driving people away from an interest in politics, driving people away from having an option of voting for their preference, snubbing their nose at election financing rules, threatening to sue anyone who challenges them about their integrity, and the list goes on and on. The ability of Elections Canada to fulfill all of their duties is extremely important and reducing that ability would be the start of the end of democracy in Canada as we have all come to know it, and has been seen by many around the world as an envy until now. When I hear this government's move on OAS, I take it as a signal from the Conservatives that there will be more low-paying, less full-time, less skilled jobs in the future that will be paying less income tax with no benefits, so be prepared for a survival of the fittest”.

Those are some comments from people in the prairie region of Canada. In all three cases, these comments come from Canadians living in Conservative-held ridings. Their points of view are important.

I am going to move on to Ontario. I started in British Columbia for obvious reasons. I am very proud to come from B.C. To start in British Columbia and work my way east seemed to be the logical way to proceed.

● (1315)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I can't believe you have got that far.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the encouragement from my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. I want to make sure I get the information out. That is important. It is what we do. At the same time, as the member indicates, I will have some time later on, since I am speaking for a while, to raise some of the other concerns that came up over the course of the weekend from Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Will you read that stuff later?

Mr. Peter Julian: I certainly will.

The Budget

Mr. Speaker, I will start with the riding of Prince Edward—Hastings, which is a Conservative-held riding, for the moment that is. The constituent said, “My biggest concern about this budget is for the CBC. The CBC is one of the best and largest creative forces in Canada and creativity requires pushing boundaries, trying new things and being brave”.

This person talks about the CBC as an institution. This person said, “I have learned so much about musicians in this country by listening to *Canada Live*. Imagine: live concerts recorded so you can hear what is going on in Cape Breton or Edmonton or Yellowknife. Then there's Tom Power, the morning show host on CBC Radio 2, a nice Newfoundland guy with a great sense of humour. How could the country not be in a good mood listening to something like that? Every day I listen to CBC radio I learn something else about this country. And talk about learning about this country, Rick Mercer every week shows us how good humoured and witty Canadians can be. I've been to the top of the CN Tower with Rick and Jann Arden”.

I saw that show. It was a great show. He went on to say, “I've watched Rick Hansen bungee jump off of a bridge over a waterfall and I've been prompted to think about some of the things that Rick Mercer says in his rants. Don't get me started about *22 Minutes*. It makes me proud to be from a country that spawns this kind of humour. Then there's the news service. I've tried watching private television shows but the level of insight, clarity and yes, even-handedness doesn't even come close. Programs like *Fifth Estate* and *Marketplace* affect things that happen in our everyday lives. Witness the program about the low standards of sanitation in Canadian hospitals. That kind of work takes money, time and high journalistic standards. The people at CBC have been through 1,000 cuts it seems. The staff always seems to rally. The creativity flags for a bit and then it bounces back. But you and I know an organization can't be put through that forever. The CBC is an institution. It is made up of people who know this country and who love this country. They have high standards and we should too”.

I applaud that constituent in Prince Edward—Hastings for writing in about the CBC.

A paramedic in Ontario, wrote, “I am a paramedic. I serve the public. That's my life, for the good and the bad. I carry sick people down multiple flights of stairs. I get their respiratory illnesses. I put my life in harm's way for Canadians so they may live longer and with less pain and agony. Do you have any idea what I do in an average day of work? I've been in the business for 21 years now. At the present age of 45, I dream of retirement and hopefully may be able to do so with my health still intact. Prime Minister, you have just made that dream slip further into the future, raising the retirement age to 67. So at the ripe age of 66 and 11 months, I will carry many people younger than I down several flights of stairs. I will get ill from them, with less ability to recuperate at that age, and will still put myself in harm's way. Many other public-based occupations of the same nature and some with less adverse outcomes, the police and fire and even prison guards, are the workers who can retire, but I'll work 42 years in my occupation, thanks to you. Before this last budget it was only 40 years. How can I express my gratitude with you?”

● (1320)

He says that ironically. This paramedic knows now that as a result of the government's actions he will be forced to work two years longer. This is the point we have been making all along. The government is forcing those in manual occupations to work longer. Whether they are paramedics, carpenters or manual labourers, they have given for years and years and years. They have given all they can and they are looking to that date when they can finally put their body into retirement and heal from years of manual work.

I was a manual labourer in a factory for a number of years. Those Canadians who work in a wide variety of occupations, as paramedics, manual labourers and carpenters, give all that they can. Now the government is telling them that they are going to have to work for two more years or live in poverty. That is absolutely unacceptable. Canadians deserve better than what the government has put forward in the budget. Canadian families deserve better. Those manual labourers who work with their back, arms and legs deserve better than what the government is forcing them to do in adding two extra years. They deserve better.

On behalf of the entire NDP caucus, we extend our greetings to the paramedics of this country who do such an admirable job. We know how difficult their job is. They certainly deserve better than to have the government tell them that they have to work two more years after a lifetime of giving to this country in protecting and saving Canadians.

I would like to talk a moment about firefighters and police officers.

An NDP bill was introduced six years ago a few months before the former Liberal government fell. Conservatives and New Democrats voted together to put in place a public safety officer compensation fund. In some cases compensation is paid to the families of police officers and firefighters when they die in the line of duty, but not in all cases. In fact, there are huge holes in the safety net for firefighters and police officers, as there are for many other Canadians as we have seen over the last few years the meanspirited cuts in a variety of areas. However, the bill was passed by Parliament. We have waited for six years for the Conservative government to do the right thing and bring in, at a small cost, a public safety officer compensation fund.

Police officers and firefighters from across the country came to the Hill on their own time to speak to members of Parliament. Everybody was anticipating that this year the government would finally act, after six years of inaction, and put in place a public safety officer compensation fund so when a firefighter or police officer died in the line of duty his or her family would be taken care of. That would be a very small way of thanking firefighters and police officers for putting their lives on the line every single day. However, we see again this year in the 2012 budget that the public safety officer compensation fund will not be brought forward by the government. We are appalled.

The Budget

I can commit to one thing, as our former leader, Jack Layton, committed to for many years and as our new leader, the member for Outremont, commits to as well. When we form government, we will bring in a public safety officer compensation fund so that the families of the firefighters and police officers are taken care of in the event that they die in the line of duty.

● (1325)

We send our greetings to firefighters, police officers and paramedics. Some people might say that it is a small thing and it does not matter. The Conservatives voted for this six years ago, but they really did not want to bring it into place. That creates uncertainty for our firefighters and police officers. We have heard so many horror stories from across the country. I have spoken with survivors of fallen firefighters and police officers who have had to sell their homes. The spouse has had to go back to work. The kids have had to quit school because we do not have a public safety officer compensation fund in place.

It defies belief that members of Parliament would vote for something and six years later still have done absolutely nothing about it. We will make sure that we get the job done. That is why we are in the House.

I will switch to a tweet that my colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has raised. It is from the Prime Minister's riding, from a Mr. Clarke who says, "You are speaking for me also". Another voice from another Canadian opposing the cuts, opposing what the government is doing in gutting retirement security and longer-term health care funding.

When we rise to speak in the House as New Democrats, we are speaking for a wide range of Canadians across the country, including that constituent of the Prime Minister.

I will move on to another email, this time from Ottawa, again from a Conservative-held riding. This individual writes, "Many of my neighbours and friends are newly minted graduates with their first jobs, working for the federal public service. They are now terrified that as they were so newly hired, they will also be first in line to be laid off as departments implement the cuts that this federal budget contains. At the same time, they are also worried that those whose retirement would have opened up jobs for them are now going to have to work longer in order to make up the OAS cuts. This budget does not seem to make any sense from a fiscal perspective. It only seems to make sense from a partisan, political perspective. It reduces \$5.2 billion from federal departments' funding. What will be the multiplier effects of this huge cut in government spending? It is not just employees of the federal government who will be affected by these job losses. There are all those who depend on the services and upon the fact that other people have those jobs. It makes more of us more precarious, which does nothing to restore confidence in the economy."

All of these Canadians are saying that Canadian families deserve better.

This message is from a Conservative-held riding in London North Centre. Messages are flooding in from Conservative-held ridings right across the country saying they disagree with their Conservative colleagues.

● (1330)

Some of my Conservative colleagues opposite are saying that they do not want to listen, but hopefully they will because this is extremely important. We have constituents writing in and saying that they disagree with the budget. Conservative MPs who are hearing from their constituents would be well advised to listen to the extremely valid concerns being raised.

This constituent from London North Centre starts off by saying, "Cut the jets, Mr. Prime Minister, cut the jets." I think this is in very clear reference to the F-35 fiasco.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Not the Winnipeg Jets?

Mr. Peter Julian: No, the individual is not talking about the Winnipeg Jets, a good hockey team with a good first year. It is the F-35 fiasco that we have been speaking about constantly. A budget of \$9 billion has bloated into a cost now somewhere between \$30 billion and perhaps \$40 billion. Nobody really knows.

This constituent of London North Centre says, "I am greatly concerned that the federal government has apparently, vindictively, decimated the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Thursday's budget has cut 10% of the CBC's operating budget. The CBC represents Canada's cultural sovereignty. It disseminates our voices, both at home and abroad. Note also the major cuts to Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board. All three institutions have been essential in developing our sense of identity and helping us pull together as a nation and yet remain distinct as many communities. They have helped us recognize, respect and celebrate difference, as well as the larger community. They allow us to enter the experience of the other." That is, other Canadians.

"And in this multicultural, multiracial community that Canada is at last becoming, that understanding, that feeling with the other is essential. For many folks, our telecommunications are a lifeline to the world. What is happening locally can go viral but as global can be brought into our homes and hearts. It grieves me that the Conservatives have reneged on their word." The MP from London West emailed the constituent several weeks ago, claiming that there would be no cuts to the CBC. The minister also promised no CBC cuts when radio host J Peachy asked him about it during his election campaigning in his own B.C. riding. Why were the intentions to slash and burn such honourable world-class institutions not even mentioned in the Speech from the Throne?

Now another from the London region, "The cuts to the CBC, the fast-tracking on environmental reviews and the changes to OAS are unnecessary and unfair. The budget is much more dangerous in what it does not do. There is no action on job creation. Canada faces unacceptably high levels of unemployment, under-employment and mis-employment, doing jobs other than those for which they were trained."

The Budget

This Canadian from the London area is absolutely right. The message also says, “As well, too many Canadians employed full time have jobs that are tenuous and often have inadequate or non-existent benefits and pension provisions. This government clearly expects Canadians to take a bigger role in planning for their own retirement but it fails to provide a job strategy that enables Canadians to do this. Canada’s net debt got 100% of the government’s attention in the budget, whereas our massive urban infrastructure deficit, estimated to be at least \$125 billion, got less attention than it deserves.”

When there is a \$125 billion infrastructure deficit and the government puts up \$150 million, we can only assume that is because the government does not understand the difference between millions and billions. Perhaps that is why the cost of the F-35s has grown so wildly. The \$150 million when we need \$125 billion means that we are not addressing 1% of the needs that are out there.

●(1335)

This infrastructure has deteriorated from one year to the next. We have seen cases where the infrastructure is not able to hold together any more. We have had problems with subways, highway overpasses and water treatment plants. The government is not even attempting in any serious way to address a serious infrastructure deficit. This Canadian is absolutely bang on.

The message goes on to say, “I personally make every effort to pay my mortgage as quickly as possible to save on interest payments. I do not do this at the expense of ongoing maintenance and repairs to my home.” That is a very apt comment. People cannot address the issue of the mortgage if the house is crumbling. A \$125 billion infrastructure deficit treated with \$150 million funding is not sustainability. It is paying lip service to a serious problem across the country. I can say right now Canadian families deserve much better than what they are getting.

I agree with my colleague with Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. I do not know if the members heard his point. He said that, as far as we and so many Canadians are concerned, 2015 cannot come soon enough.

I would like to continue with the writer’s comments because they are very important. The message continues, “It does me little good to pay off my mortgage early if I end up with a rundown and unsafe hovel. Canada is not only our home but our business. Badly neglected highways, bridges and tunnels not only make Canada less beautiful and less safe, but lower our productivity and decrease our attractiveness to investment. This government’s so-called economic action plan was a rushed response to public demand for job action in the face of a deep recession. It was necessary, but it was also inadequately implemented and prematurely terminated. A long-term commitment, 10 to 20 years, from a Canadian government to fix decaying infrastructure and to expand new projects would give clear signals to private sector employers, and clear signals to young adults to seek training and middle-aged workers to retrain in the construction trades. This initiative would also directly help many companies that lament the growing shortage of skilled tradespeople. Finally, government-led action to reinvigorate our engineering, construction and manufacturing sectors not only provides good jobs

directly but many additional spinoff jobs in most other sectors of the economy.”

I cannot agree more.

We mentioned the appalling record of the government in manufacturing jobs. In 1976, Canada started keeping manufacturing statistics. At the time, I was wearing bell-bottoms and was in high school. I am not sure where you were, Mr. Speaker. I am sure you were doing something equally valuable. The government’s record today is that we now have fewer manufacturing jobs in Canada than we have ever had since 1976.

●(1340)

I would like to go to Nepean-Carleton since we are staying in the Ottawa region. A constituent in this Conservative-held riding say this: “OAS will leave me pretty much in the same boat. Not been working and contributing to CPP due to raising children and then due to a disability, I am a person that will need the OAS. My long-term disability through a private insurer will come to an end at age 65. I don’t qualify for Ontario disability benefits. I just heard on CBC that I said to contact the nearest NDP MP. My MP is a Conservative. My question is about the delay of CPP. Currently I am receiving long-term disability benefits until I reach 65 but I didn’t qualify for CPP disability. Now I won’t be eligible for CPP until 67. How am I supposed to live two years with very little income? How many others will be in my situation? Thanks to the NDP for allowing me to reach out to someone other than my own MP”.

I am going to move on with other comments from people in Ontario. It is extremely important to share these comments and to raise the voices of Canadians in the House of Commons, as my colleagues would agree.

A constituent in the Conservative-held riding of London West, an area where are getting a lot of comments from as well as the Ottawa region, says the following: “The recent budget brought forth by the Conservative government is deplorable. As a young person in this country, I see many hard-working people my age struggling just to get by. So what is the solution for this problem? The Conservative government’s answer is to hand us a fiscal crisis of epic proportions, a crisis that was brought on by many years of corporate welfare and unfair oil subsidies, and then they sent it into overdrive with this budget. Not only will my generation have to clean up the environmental and economic damage left behind from this government, we will have to clean it up with few jobs”.

The Budget

Again, that is another Canadian from a Conservative-held riding who obviously disagrees with the budget. He continues: “My generation has been completely ignored by this government and in this budget from wonderful programs such as Katimavik being shut down to the complete and utter lack of any sort of tangible solution for rising youth unemployment. This government has failed to look out for the future of this country, something MPs are elected to do”.

We on this side of the House agree with him: we believe that MPs should be elected to look out for the future of the country.

He went on to say that “The Conservative government seems to think that youth do not care about what affects them. We do care. We care about trees and the environment. We care about the poor and the sick. We care about our elderly. We care about our future. Our generation holds true to the real Canadian values of caring for one another, something we learned from the same storybooks that Conservative MPs read as kids. When will Conservative MPs take a stand for what is right and fair for everyone and stop filling their friends' pocketbooks for the sake of re-election?”

I want to repeat the first couple of sentences of that paragraph because they are profound. This young person from London, Ontario says that young people in this country do care. They care about the environment, the poor, the sick, the elderly and the future. His generation holds true to the real Canadian values of caring for one another.

We in the NDP agree with this young Canadian. We support him. We think Canadian families deserve better than what they have received from the Conservative government.

● (1345)

It is very poignant to hear these comments from younger and older Canadians, from Canadians from coast to coast to coast. There is no way I can read all of them into the record. They are flooding in from every part of this country and mainly from Conservative-held ridings. It is a pent-up concern. They listened closely to their Conservative candidates prior to the last election on May 2 and heard them promising not to gut health care funding, retirement security or any of those services. Many of them, as we have heard, voted Conservative the last time, but are not going to be voting Conservative next time because of the broken promises by the government, as manifested in this fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget.

I am going to move on to a family from Stoney Creek, Ontario, which, as we know, is in the Hamilton region. They write the following: “Our family is very discouraged with the budget news coming out of Ottawa. The idea that the loss of 20,000 public sector jobs is either wise or necessary is absurd, and this while continuing massive corporate tax cuts”.

Mr. Webber just tweeted in, thanking the NDP caucus for bringing forward young people's issues to the House of Commons, saying: “We need more representatives in the House like the NDP MPs”. We thank Mr. Webber.

I want to move on to Windsor, Ontario. This is an NDP-held riding. I am not going to ask our colleagues opposite to listen to it necessarily, but the comments I will cite are from another Canadian. Maybe I am old-fashioned, but I think that members of Parliament

should be listening to Canadians from all across the country, from every part of our land. There should not be first-class Canadians and second-class Canadians: Every Canadian should be a first-class Canadian and every Canadian should be treated with dignity and respect.

From Windsor there is the comment: “In this new budget, they are going after our pensions. I would like to know how we as Canadians can stop it. It is an utter disgrace”.

From the Essex-Windsor area, there is another comment. I am not going to mention this person's name, for obvious reasons, and will withhold it. The person starts by saying—

Mr. Robert Chisholm: A Conservative MP.

Mr. Peter Julian: No, it someone who is directly impacted. The person stated: “I write this message in disappointment after hearing about the federal budget delivered yesterday. As a Canadian who crosses the border daily for work, I dread the thought of what crossing will be like with less customs officers to service our border crossings”.

She went on to mention that a member of her family had actually applied to become a customs officer and was notified last week that due to a lack of resources and other operational circumstances, the interview had been postponed. She notes that “As you can imagine, the news of budget cuts and attrition has only hampered the possibility of having a job. As you know, my family, in particular my in-laws, are Windsorites that were and would like to be committed to public service. I think the budget only brings bad news to our city”.

● (1350)

I have another quick one I would like to read. They are coming in as fast as we can read them. I think I will need to take a little more time after question period, if that is okay because there are just so many of these flooding in. They are coming in on twitter, Facebook and by email. Do members think we should read them into the record?

An hon. member: Absolutely.

An hon. member: This is democracy in action.

Mr. Peter Julian: This person starts off by saying, “I'd like to thank you so much for fully explaining the Conservative government's deficiencies in so many areas. Like you, and the NDP caucus, I look forward to 2015 when we can vote them out of office. But most of all, I would like to thank you for doing so much to improve the health of Canadians. Myself, and many people I know, get a bad feeling in the pit of our stomachs every time we hear a Conservative MP speak. However, today, I feel very well. Keep up the good work”.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]*

As I mentioned earlier, I began with British Columbia. I do not know whether I will be able to finish reading the comments received yesterday and this morning before question period. However, I know that you will inform me when I have one minute left, which will give me a chance to summarize briefly before we move on to question period, and I will be pleased to continue afterwards. Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate your patience and your attention.

I am now going to read some comments received by Canadians from Quebec. I will begin with the comment of a man from the South Shore region who said: “They claim to want to stimulate the economy with this budget. I fail to see how cuts to culture, the CBC, the National Film Board and Telefilm can stimulate the economy, when it has been proven that every dollar invested in culture brings in much more. I fail to see why the government would make cuts to the CBC, except for the fact that it represents a threat to the current government. The CBC carries out an essential mission for the fragile unity of this country and its numerous remote areas. The CBC is unifying, intelligent and innovative. It costs \$34 per Canadian. Canada ranks 16th out of the 18 OECD members for state television funding, so no one can argue that we are not getting our money’s worth”.

That is indeed the case. The CBC is truly a gem for Canadians across the country. Actually, this is something I did not even know. Perhaps my colleagues who sit on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage knew it, but I did not know that Canada ranks 16th among the 18 OECD members. It is therefore even more important than this person from the South Shore thought.

Another Quebecker had this to say: “I think there is too much for oil companies and not enough for the environment. For example, the cuts to weather research in the far north, and to culture. The cuts affecting the CBC are probably an act of pure revenge. As for retirement age, that is a low blow.”

Let us now look at some of the comments received from the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, where we have two really good members, two incredible members. Citizens from that northern region of Quebec said: “People are very concerned about the fact that the government is raising the retirement age from 65 to 67. For some, an additional two years is too much. They do not know whether they will be financially and physically able to reach retirement age.”

That is a second comment.

The third comment is from someone living in the Mauricie region, where we again have two great members in the ridings of Trois-Rivières and Berthier-Maskinongé. These members do an extraordinary job.

John had this to say: “I find that the Conservative government showed a lack of sensitivity towards its public servants by keeping them in the dark.”

Then, we have Guy, from the Mauricie region, who said: “They are cutting services and subsidizing oil companies.”

I will continue after question period because we have a lot to say and many people from across the country have sent us their comments.

● (1355)

A man from the Charlevoix region, which is represented by a very good NDP member, writes: “I am 64 years old and, because of health problems, I can no longer work full time. Part-time work is my only option. I did try after that to go around to seasonal employers in my area, but it was too late; the season had already started.”

This situation shows that changes to the OAS are taking away employment insurance from people who are entitled to it, which is really shameful in a country such as Canada. The Prime Minister can go ahead and pat himself on the back for his majority. He is not listening and he does not see the real problems being faced by Canadians.

We do see the real problems that Canadians are facing. We see that this budget will cut services that Canadian families deserve. We are saying that Canadian families deserve better than this budget.

● (1400)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I regret that I must interrupt the member for Burnaby—New Westminster on his point in order to move to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SPORTS

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many families in my riding of Richmond Hill are involved in sport and fitness activities. Whether it is soccer, hockey, gymnastics, baseball or any other sport, our government recognizes the importance of these activities in building healthy and strong communities.

Our government stood up for Richmond Hill families when we brought in the children’s fitness tax credit to help parents offset the cost of these programs. We stood up for families when investing in recreational activities and facilities, such as the new artificial field at Crosby Park and the rehabilitation of Elgin Barrow Arena.

Our government continues our support for healthy active living through investments in ParticipACTION, Special Olympics and Own the Podium programs.

This week, as sports groups, like the Richmond Hill Stars, wrap up their season and others, like the Richmond Hill Soccer Club and the Richmond Hill Phoenix Baseball Club, get ready to launch their summer sessions, let us salute all families and sport and fitness activities in Richmond Hill and across the country.

*Statements by Members***JUNO AWARDS**

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, excellence in Canadian musical expression was on display this past weekend in the capital region as it played host to the 2012 Juno Awards. I am certain I speak for my colleagues in recognizing the nominees and congratulating the winners, including veterans Feist and Terri Clark, as well as new-found favourites Dan Mangan and Lindi Ortega to name a few.

Through their creative passions, Canadians come to know themselves and make who we are open to the world. Whether singing in French, English or Urdu, these Canadian ambassadors have shown us why it is important that we support and stabilize Canadian arts and culture in the cultural community.

The legacy left by Pierre Juneau, the award's namesake and a native son of Verdun in my riding, is a forward-thinking cultural vision that saw culture as a pillar of our society. His vision of Canada with its own distinctive voice lives on in those who practise at art everyday. Judging by the crowds, I would say that Canadians have added their voices to our celebrated storytellers.

Let us, as members of this House and of government, commit to investing in our artists and allow them to continue the vision that Pierre Juneau believed in. Why? Because it is good to be Canadian.

* * *

HOCKEYVILLE

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, West Kelowna is one of our country's newest municipalities. When it entered the Kraft Hockeyville contest, it did so as an underdog, a new municipality without previous decades to establish an identity as a hockey town. The organizing committee was undeterred and worked incredibly hard to put on a first-rate Hockeyville campaign and the citizens of West Kelowna came together in a way like never before. That is what is important for a new municipality.

This past Saturday, we learned, somewhat earlier than expected, that we could congratulate the township of Stirling-Rawdon in winning Kraft Hockeyville for 2012. Faced with the early arrival of this news, what would become of the West Kelowna Hockeyville celebration on Saturday evening? Would anyone show up? However, something amazing happened. The premier arrived, the mayors, the MLAS and, most important, the thousands of citizens from West Kelowna literally jammed the rafters. West Kelowna may not have won Hockeyville 2012 but it did achieve a sense of community pride that is far more important.

I send a special thanks out to organizers Adam and Andrew for making believers of all of us.

* * *

[Translation]

MEMBER FOR PAPINEAU

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday night the political arena moved to the boxing arena—a metaphor that reminds us of the sometimes merciless struggle of political life.

The Conservatives, true to their nature, were confident and attacked their adversary even before the fight began. Their combatant was impetuous, their confidence unshakeable.

The fight began with a solid attack from the man in blue, whose only strategy seemed to be to score a knockout. However, he failed to take account of the Liberal's ability to stand up to repeated blows and come back even stronger.

Like the Liberal spirit, the hon. member for Papineau showed his constancy, patience and perseverance. He came back strongly and showed everyone that brute force, intimidation and a simple strategy may count for something, but training, technique and resilience will always triumph in the end.

Congratulations to my friend and colleague from Papineau. Let this fight be a sign that Liberal strength is returning.

* * *

●(1405)
[English]

HOCKEYVILLE

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the sport of hockey is one of the cornerstones of our Canadian heritage, and nowhere is it more evident than in our small villages and towns.

I am proud to represent a riding where there have been many successes related to the great game of hockey. This year alone my own community of Centre Hastings won an unprecedented three Ontario minor hockey championships. The village of Stirling-Rawdon added one more to build upon its many past successes.

Only last week I stood here and congratulated the towns of Stirling-Rawdon and Bancroft in my riding on making it to the top 15 communities in the 2012 Kraft Hockeyville competition, with Stirling-Rawdon going on to make it to the top five.

Led by organizers like Cindy Brandt and a great team of volunteers, they continued to demonstrate their community's astonishing spirit and passion for the game of hockey. While applauding all who participated, I am now absolutely thrilled to congratulate Stirling-Rawdon on the announcement Saturday evening that it had won the Hockeyville competition.

I ask my colleagues in Parliament and all Canadians to join me in congratulating Stirling-Rawdon on being named Hockeyville Canada and representing the ultimate in community spirit and love for the great game of hockey.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our health care system is sick. Recently, I had first-hand experience with our inadequate health care system. I went to the Granby hospital with my spouse, who had a persistent cough following a bout of flu. In a waiting room meant for 50 people, there were just 10 or so patients waiting to see a doctor. We waited over five and a half hours to see a doctor, who eventually diagnosed pneumonia.

Statements by Members

In its budget, the Conservative government is going ahead with plans to cut health transfers to the provinces and territories despite the fact that Quebecers and Canadians are asking it to commit to providing stable funding for health care. Given the government's misguided approach, what will happen to the aging Canadian population?

* * *

[English]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the seventh anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II.

During his papacy, he had a profound impact on people of all faiths and cultures all over the world, who continue to admire and revere him.

Many remember that Pope John Paul II was strongly committed to building understanding between the Catholic church and other faiths. His efforts, whether through his historic visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome or his meetings with the Dalai Lama, are seen as having opened new avenues for positive dialogue.

He played a vital role in inspiring Eastern Europe to resist Communist tyranny, which contributed to the success of the democratic transformation of that region.

As we know, blessed John Paul II is now on the road to sainthood. I would like to take this opportunity to remember the tremendous contributions that he made to the world and to the promotion of values that we as Canadians cherish.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week it came to light that the member for Toronto—Danforth had complained that a sitting judge had an anti-criminal bias.

Rather than realizing what an absolutely ridiculous stance that is and apologizing to Canadians, the member doubled down and said that it was our Conservative government that should apologize.

We have nothing to apologize for. We will not stand for a hug-a-thug rhetoric coming from that party. That is why Canadians gave us a strong mandate to continue our work to crack down and keep our streets and communities safe.

I call on the leader of the NDP to discipline that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

* * *

OLD AGE SECURITY

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only crisis for OAS is the one the Conservatives have chosen to create.

A review of Canada's retirement income system by pension experts of the OECD had this to say:

Canada does not face major challenges of financial sustainability with its public pension schemes....Long-term projections show that public retirement-income provision is financially sustainable.

A report from Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, also agrees that OAS is easily sustainable

Prior to the May 2011 election, our leader Jack Layton and I announced the New Democrats' retirement security for seniors plan. During that election, the New Democrats were clear on pensions. In fact, our very first platform plank was on pensions and increasing the GIS to raise seniors out of poverty.

One would think that if the Prime Minister was considering forcing Canadians to work two extra years before retiring, he just might mention it in an election campaign, unless of course he believed it would cost his party votes.

* * *

● (1410)

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that human trafficking is a despicable crime and that anyone who profits from the modern-day slave trade should face serious consequences.

In recognition of this crime, I recently introduced Bill C-310. Our crown attorneys desperately need this tool in order to prosecute human traffickers wherever they commit their crimes. Unfortunately, last Friday NDP members deliberately delayed the passage of Bill C-310. They deliberately threw it to the bottom of the order paper.

This has become a pattern that is very disturbing. When we look at the record, NDP members have already voted against tougher penalties for child predators, against tougher penalties for child kidnappers and against ending house arrest for serious crimes such as sexual assault.

Last Friday the only muscle that was shown was against the innocent victims of this horrendous crime.

* * *

[Translation]

SEAL HUNT

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this year's seal hunt on the Magdalen Islands is a historic event. In an unforgettable collaborative project with hunters from the Magdalen Islands, the Micmac people of the Gesgapegiag First Nation have been able to rediscover traditional knowledge that had been lost for centuries.

Although their ancestors helped teach non-aboriginals to hunt for harp seals, the Micmac had this part of their culture taken away from them when the reserve system was created. Some 200 years later, the people of the Magdalen Islands were very moved to be able to return the favour and share their expertise on the pack ice.

Accompanied by an Inuit colleague from Nunavut, the Micmac conducted a harvest based on their traditions, combining respect for the animal and nature.

This event marks a new willingness to develop co-operation, dialogue and friendship between the communities of the Magdalen Islands and Gesgapegiag. We can only applaud the courage of the people who organized the event, which was an opportunity for growth between the founding peoples of this country.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

Canada's economic action plan highlighted that we will be introducing new ways to further assist Canadians claiming EI to find jobs and help get them back to work.

The opposition is fear-mongering that these changes will force Canadians to uproot and move away to find jobs. This is simply not true.

In fact, we are increasing our efforts to ensure Canadians are made aware of the jobs available in their local areas, as well as providing incentives for taking all available work in their local community.

Our government recognizes that Canadians want to work. We are working to provide families with the tools they need to find gainful and meaningful employment in their communities.

* * *

THRILLA ON THE HILLA

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

Two men in the ring, 800 in the stands;
One wrote a cheque with his mouth, he couldn't cash with his hands.

The Tory Nation was cocky, they came out in full force;
But like the F-35 contract, they had backed the wrong horse.

Liberals must be defeated, that's known Tory credo;
They had nothing to hide, you could tell by the Speedo.

Brazeau came out hard and brought the Tories to their feet;
But in less than a minute, he looked pretty well beat.

The red onslaught of punches could not be contained;
Like those Tory attack ads, stinging and sustained.

The bombs came from everywhere, our boy pummelled and pounded;
It looked like the senator thought he was surrounded.

He was dazed and confused, the ref twice stopped the fight;
He got hit with so many lefts, he was begging for a right.

In less than six minutes it was all over and done;
A TKO victory, the good guys had won.

Statements by Members

The Tories were devastated by this jaw-dropping blow;
Ezra's microphone went silent, his mouth stuffed with crow.

But the Tories aren't finished, they'll want a rematch I'm betting;
They'll find someone tougher, maybe Marjory LeBreton.

* * *

● (1415)

MEMBERS' BUDGETS

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Board of Internal Economy's decision to find approximately 7% in savings from members' office budgets. It is important that members look for ways where we can save taxpayers' money.

Unfortunately, I have to question the comments of my hon. colleague from the NDP who said that it was "a big mistake to trim the MPs' budgets even the little bit they did because that could mean the difference between another staff position and serving people in the constituency".

Last year that member spent over \$42,000 on his accommodations, per diem expenses, hospitality, events and advertising. That is on top of his travel expenses which exceeded \$162,000.

When asked to find approximately \$21,000 in savings, I have to ask why the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre would not find savings in his own expenses rather than possibly firing a member of his staff.

* * *

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is no laughing matter: with their Bill C-11 on copyright, the Conservatives are once again showing their total disregard for artists and the arts. If the Conservatives would open their eyes and actually look, they would see that arts and culture constitute a major driver of our economy.

Instead of supporting artists, the Conservatives are creating obstacles for them. Bill C-11 will deprive small record companies, musicians and small businesses of \$21 million a year. What is most pathetic is that no one on the other side appears to be looking for a solution to the problem they have created with this bill.

It is not a big deal for the Conservatives because their strategy is always to give preference to big business, whether the subject is oil sands or culture. The NDP will not let them get away with it. Artists can rely on our support. In contrast to the Conservatives, we are here to defend creative artists.

* * *

[English]

AUTISM

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is World Autism Awareness Day. It also marks 14 years since my son, Jaden, was diagnosed with autism.

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This is a responsible budget for responsible management. It reduces the tax burden, and that is what stimulates the economy. We will stay the course. My colleague can talk about statistics all he wants, but one thing is clear: since we adopted this approach in 2009, 610,000 net new jobs have been created in Canada, 90% of which are full time. The facts speak for themselves. We are on the right track.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, 700,000 more Canadians are out of work today than before the recession. If the members opposite doubt that, they just have to ask the workers at Aveos, the workers at Brunswick Mines, the workers at Electro-Motive, the workers at Mabe. The government's answer is an insult to every one of them.

Things are getting worse. According to its own budget, unemployment will rise next year and our GDP growth rate will fall below the Americans'.

Why has the government put forth a budget that moves Canada backwards? Why did it not choose to move Canada's families forward in this budget?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was hoping that the weekend would afford the members opposite an opportunity to read the budget, but it is apparent from the questions we are getting that they have not had an opportunity to read about the hiring credit for small business to encourage more than 500,000 small business owners to hire more people; to read about the youth employment strategy to assist more young people to gain work experience in the workforce and to join the workforce on a full-time basis; the opportunities for aboriginal youth that are in the budget; the opportunities fund to help persons with disabilities, young people and older people all across the country.

Why have they not read—

• (1425)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

* * *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Minister of Finance could explain to us why, when he was in Toronto on Friday, he took the opportunity to single out the Province of Ontario, accusing it of mismanaging its finances precisely at a time when it is the responsibility of the Minister of Finance to be speaking for all of Canada?

When are you going to speak for all of Canada and not just for the Conservatives?

The Speaker: I would just remind the hon. member for Toronto Centre to address questions through the Chair and not directly.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that delivers on a jobs plan for all of Canada. I can understand why the leader of the third party is avoiding that subject. This is not his kind of budget; this is a budget that does not increase taxes. When he was premier of the Province of Ontario he increased taxes 22 different ways.

This is a budget that sets us on a track to a balanced budget, to eliminate the deficit in three years. When he was premier of the Province of Ontario, he set record level deficits.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question remains. The minister who just spoke is the same one who described the Premier of Ontario as the small man of Confederation. We are still seeing the same divisive spirit.

I will ask my question, which is very clear, once again: why attack one province and not others, such as British Columbia, Quebec or New Brunswick? Why is he attacking only Ontario? Why is he attacking the Ontario government like that?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand why the leader of the third party has a hard time hearing criticism about poor fiscal management, since we all know his track record. Our plan, however, will open up new economic opportunities through new free trade agreements. When he was the Ontario premier, the member fiercely opposed NAFTA. Our economic action plan focuses on job creation. We have already created over 600,000 net new jobs. When he was premier, the unemployment rate—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this small-mindedness and mean-spiritedness has not left the government for one second with respect to what has taken place.

I would like to ask the minister one final question. One other comment the Minister of Finance made was that old age security was not a pension but a social program. I would like to ask the minister about another social program, the special allowance for the Prime Minister that comes, not out of any pension contribution, but out of general revenues. I would like to ask the minister, is the Prime Minister going to raise the age of that special allowance to age 67?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this budget is clear. It sets us on a course that ensures that the retirement allowances of parliamentarians will be brought into line with those of the private sector. That means that as parliamentarians we will be asked to make contributions equal to those of the taxpayer. That is fair to the taxpayer. That is what is required.

Oral Questions

Certainly, when there was an opportunity to deal with these issues in the past, the Prime Minister, of course, turned down the opportunity to receive an enriched pension of the past that was offered to him by the previous Liberal government when he once again became a member of Parliament. That is in contrast to the leader opposite who, when he was in Ontario, took a big payout from the Ontario government when he retired.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have tabled a mean-spirited budget. They missed a golden opportunity to help Canadians get working again. They cut off infrastructure. They introduced no plan for jobs and no plan for growth. In fact, the budget planned for unemployment to go up and for American growth to outstrip Canada's.

My question for the government and for the minister, whoever has the courage to answer, is why has the government tabled an economically irresponsible budget?

• (1430)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try to summon the courage to respond to the question from the member opposite.

I can assure the member that if he wants to review this interesting book, it is 498 pages long, the largest of our seven budgets. In it he will see, in table 3.0 on page 50, expenditures of more \$3 billion over the next three years to support jobs and growth in Canada. That is because we are trying to strike the balance between getting to a balanced budget in the medium term and supporting jobs—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to respond with a size joke, so let me just say that the budget fails to address the real issues facing Canadians and they are upset.

The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters have said that the changes to research tax credits will harm capital intensive manufacturers. The Public Service Alliance of Canada has said that reckless Conservative cuts will leave many Canadians without the vital services they rely upon. According to economists, the budget may mean pink slips for as many as 72,000 Canadians.

Why has the government put forward such a—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, it is just the opposite. We are looking at the longer term. We are looking all the way up to 2020 and beyond, to make sure that we have a solid fiscal track for our country.

Our country is in one of the best positions in the entire world. We are leading the advanced economies in the economic recovery. We are leading in job creation. We have a brilliant future. The budget will help ensure that this future is brilliant, not just for the next year or two but for the next decade and beyond.

PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the past, we have opposed Conservative budgets because they have been mean-spirited and not got the job done for Canadians, especially Canadians who are worried about their retirement.

Provinces are saying that the cuts to OAS will negatively impact the GIS, veterans' benefits, aboriginal benefits and even survivors' allowances. It will be harder for Canadians to prepare for their retirement, forcing many to turn to cash-strapped provinces for support.

Why is the Prime Minister forcing permanent cuts onto a retirement program that he knows is sustainable?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is acting responsibly through the budget. We are doing that because we are looking out for future generations of Canadians. We want to ensure that every Canadian has the opportunity to access these social programs in the future, and that includes OAS. That is why we are taking this bold move to make sure that future generations of Canadians are protected and can receive these opportunities and these benefits, unlike the NDP that does not have the foresight to think ahead.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, playing games with misleading numbers is not fooling anyone. Economists and experts agree with the NDP that attacking retirement security is not the answer. It is clear that even many middle-class families will not now be able to look forward to workplace pensions. The provinces and experts all agree with New Democrats that improving the CPP and QPP is the way to go. It is affordable and accessible to almost everyone.

Instead of slashing retirement security, why will the Conservatives not listen to sound advice and strengthen public pensions?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ with my colleague on the opposite side.

Just so that we are clear, Jack Mintz has stated:

We do have a major issue down the road dealing with demographic pressures.... Hats off to Canada. We worry about this, as opposed to the United States, which has unfunded liabilities coming through their ears. So I think it's going to be good that the government's willing to address these issues.

We are looking ahead to the long-term prosperity of this country. I encourage the NDP to do the same.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH***[Translation]*

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, increasing old age security eligibility also means that seniors will have to wait until they are 67 to get their guaranteed income supplement.

They really need that supplement. Lower-income seniors will have to turn to social assistance, which is funded by none other than the provinces. Again, it will be the provinces that will have to pay for the Conservatives' bad choices.

My question is simple: do the Conservatives have a plan to help the provinces absorb these additional costs?

• (1435)

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually, we do. This government had the foresight to make sure that we were protecting seniors, because we value their contribution to Canada. That is why, when we increase from 65 years to 67—which is a long way out, giving people across the country 17 years to prepare for this—we will be compensating the provinces to make sure they can provide the social services seniors need.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not going to help the provinces. In any event, experts maintain that the old age security program is sustainable, but this government says it is not. Of course, it will be tempting to take money out of pensions and put it somewhere else.

The government has no money for seniors, but it has money for gifts for profitable corporations. It has no money for seniors, but it has money for F-35s, whose costs keep escalating. Is the government compromising access to retirement at 65 for 65 F-35s?

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour explain the logic behind these choices? She should stop coming up with bogus numbers. They do not hold up against the studies done by the Government of Canada's chief actuary and the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will go back to the simple math once again. Today there are four people for every one senior to support OAS; in 2030, that will be two to one. The cost of OAS today is about \$36 billion; that will escalate to \$108 billion in the future.

This government is acting responsibly to make sure that future generations of Canadians will have access to OAS and other essential services. I would encourage the NDP to support the budget so that those people will be protected.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary knows that OAS is sustainable. All Canadians know that the Conservatives hid their plans to cut OAS during the last election, the same thing that they did to health care. Not only does the budget unilaterally cut health care transfers; it also cuts Health Canada by over \$300 million.

All in all, the Conservatives have failed to show leadership on health care and have remained silent on critical issues like pharmacare and the accountability of health care dollars.

Will the Conservatives reverse their reckless cuts to Health Canada?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition's claims that health transfers would be cut is absolutely false. Clearly, the opposition is unable to do its math; in fact, federal transfers for health care will increase faster than provincial spending.

Last week's budget confirmed that our government will transfer record amounts of health transfers to the provinces and territories, climbing to approximately \$40 billion by the end of the decade.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's math is wrong. The government is ignoring inflation and population increases.

The Conservatives cannot escape. The Prime Minister broke his promise on health care, and cash-strapped provinces will have to pay the price. Experts, including the Parliamentary Budget Officer, agree that the Conservative formula will cost provinces over \$30 billion. There is no getting away from that.

Will the government finally listen to Canadians and provinces and reverse its decision to download billions of new costs to the provinces?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week's budget was good news for Canada in health care. The member does not have to just take my word for it. Some words of expression of support for the budget have come from the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Rx&D, the Rick Hansen Foundation, Canada's universities, and the Mood Disorder Society.

The list goes on, yet NDP members are saying they will not support any of this record level of spending on health care.

* * *

*[Translation]***SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2012 budget has announced \$67 million to refocus the National Research Council.

Oral Questions

According to the Minister of State for Science and Technology, the NRC will become a 1-800 one-stop service to provide solutions to all business problems.

Does the Minister of State for Science and Technology think that, by transforming the NRC into a Business Depot, he will encourage innovation in Canada? Will the \$67 million finally flush the best and the brightest down the drain and out of Canada?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this budget is a golden opportunity to focus on efficiency and results. I would simply like to remind my hon. colleague that the Industrial Research Assistance Program will see its funding doubled. This is good news for small and medium-sized businesses. The Quebec junior chamber of commerce and Canada's independent entrepreneurs are welcoming these measures. These are targeted investments that will create jobs and encourage economic growth for Canada.

* * *

● (1440)

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government's arrogance is unbelievable. Last week, in committee, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister suggested that Elections Canada was responsible for the leaked information on the investigation into electoral fraud. His colleagues said that 800 complaints across Canada was no big deal. What is more, in February, this Conservative government blocked a recommendation by Elections Canada, which wanted to have more access to the political parties' financial documents after elections.

Elections Canada wants to protect our democracy. Why is this government constantly attacking Elections Canada?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition brought a motion before the House a few weeks ago. The government has been clear that we support that motion and we will act on that motion.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a government that claims it has nothing to hide on the election fraud scandal, Conservative members at committee last week spent a lot of time attacking the competence of Elections Canada. The member for Peterborough even baselessly accused Elections Canada of leaking details of its investigation.

Why is the government cutting \$7.5 million from the budget of Elections Canada right when it is conducting its biggest investigation ever?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the chairman of Elections Canada has indicated clearly that he has the resources he needs to do his job. What we are very impressed with, though, is that Elections Canada has stepped forward as part of a government-wide effort to work to ensure that we have a balanced budget so that Canada's fiscal position remains strong. He indicated he was prepared to make savings on behalf of his organization, and we commend him for making that effort.

It is a good model for all arms of government that everyone is doing their part in this effort to help balance the budget to ensure Canada remains in a strong fiscal position for years to come.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the Auditor General will deliver a scathing report on the Conservatives' handling of the F-35 procurement. A former assistant deputy minister of defence has called it the most disastrous hijacking of a procurement process one could ever make. Evidently the Auditor General agrees. Meanwhile, the Conservative government continues to fantasize that it will be able to buy these jets cheaply.

Will the minister tell Canadians that the Conservative government has seriously botched this procurement before the Auditor General does it for him tomorrow?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Vaughan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has been a partner in the joint strike fighter program for the past 15 years, started by the Liberal government of the day. We have not signed a contract for a purchase and have the flexibility we need to purchase the aircraft in the years when it will be most affordable. Ultimately, we will replace Canada's aging CF-18 aircraft and will do so within our allocated budget.

It would be totally inappropriate for me to comment on the Auditor General's report, which we welcome tomorrow.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a new report from the Pentagon shows how much the Conservatives underestimated the cost of procuring F-35s. Canada could easily pay more than \$100 million per plane, and full production has been pushed back by two years.

On Thursday, I asked the minister a clear question and got the usual prattle. I would like to try again. The minister only has to come up with a number. He does not have to complicate things. How many F-35s is Canada currently able to purchase with its \$9 billion budget?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will ensure that the replacements for the CF-18s will in fact meet our needs. To this end, Canada has been a partner in the joint strike fighter program for the past 15 years. We have not as yet signed a contract to purchase any aircraft and we will ensure we will have the right aircraft for the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Oral Questions

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from that response I cannot tell whether the minister is unable or simply unwilling to do the math, but let me put it this way. In last week's budget, the government said Canada will "acquire an affordable replacement for Canada's aging CF-18". Recent reports coming out of the U.S. show the price of each F-35 to be well in excess of \$100 million each and rising. New Democrats know that the only way to get an affordable replacement for our CF-18 is through an open tender. The government has to date refused to hold such a competition.

Does the minister actually consider over \$100 million per plane to be affordable for Canadians?

• (1445)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, Canada remains in the joint strike fighter program and has been so for some 15 years.

We will, in essence, make the decisions at the appropriate time in the best interest of our Royal Canadian Air Force, and of course Canadians generally.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has now been two months since 14-year-old Burton Winters went missing, and the contradictions from the government keep on multiplying.

A report from Major-General Vance states:

It should be noted that the 444 Sqn Griffons in Goose Bay do not have a mandate to maintain a SAR readiness posture...nor do they have a mandate to maintain a "Ready 12" response time.

However, the Canadian Forces website states that their secondary role is to maintain a 12-hour search and rescue standby.

Which is it? When will Canadians get clear answers about the state of our search and rescue system?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly there is no denying that it is a real tragedy that young Burton Winters lost his life.

However, let us be clear: the Canadian Forces respond each and every time as quickly as possible. We have the largest geographic area in the world in terms of our search and rescue responsibility. We saw just last week, off the coast of Nova Scotia, heroic efforts made by members of our SAR tech teams. We have seen this repeatedly throughout the country and throughout our SAR history.

Each and every time, they do their very best to save lives and they are very successful at it.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's spin is not going to bring back Burton Winters or prevent future tragedies.

There are serious problems with Canada's search and rescue, and this minister has presented nothing but empty excuses. First bad weather, then imaginary protocols, and finally broken equipment were to blame, when all along it seems to be a question of misplaced priorities.

When will the government commit to a full and independent inquiry to find out what happened to Burton Winters and to investigate the state of Canadian search and rescue?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Forces constantly look at protocols, look at updates, look at placement of equipment around the country, and all of the aspersions that the hon. member has cast on the word of the Canadian Forces really do not do him or his party justice.

These are brave men and women who do their level best each and every time. The primary responsibility for ground search and rescue, as the member knows full well, rests with the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in this case. We were there to assist.

There were weather issues; there were issues of maintenance. We continue to work with the provinces and territories to respond each and every time, as quickly as possible.

* * *

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after months of consulting entrepreneurs across the country, the Minister of Finance tabled an economic action plan that meets the needs of Canadian entrepreneurs such as those in my riding, London West.

Can the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism tell the House about the measures that the government is taking to support entrepreneurs, who create wealth and jobs in all parts of Canada?

[English]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his French and also for the work he is doing with business entrepreneurs in his riding. I congratulate him.

[Translation]

I would like to say that we have brought down a budget that is good for consumers, good for entrepreneurs and good for Canadians. The \$1,000 hiring credit for small businesses will enable them to keep creating jobs and wealth in Canada. The "Cutting Red Tape" report will enable businesses to focus on what they do best: creating jobs.

This is a good budget, and we are proud of it.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives will stop at nothing to give their big oil lobbyist friends what they want.

Oral Questions

The northern gateway pipeline hearings are already under way, and thousands of Canadians are engaging with the democratic process by registering. They want to testify about how this project is going to impact their communities. However, the Conservatives are pulling the old bait and switch. They are cutting the review short. The minister is turning the northern gateway review into a sham.

Why does he not just come clean and tell us the exact date he plans to rubber-stamp this approval?

• (1450)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP, our government is focused on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Unfortunately, major economic projects in Canada are currently subject to long delays in the regulatory process. We made it clear that we want to reform that. We want to improve it.

We are not going to weaken any of the environmental protections, but it is reasonable to expect that these projects can be approved in a timely fashion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, responsible resource development is based on environmental assessments that respect constitutional rights. Only a full consultation will allow everyone to benefit from major projects. The Conservatives want to set Canada back decades. I know that this is the perfect recipe for years of legal disputes and battles. This approach is irresponsible.

Why is the government giving up on its legal obligations and ramming through these ill-conceived changes?

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our process will focus on four major areas to streamline the review process itself. We will make the review process more predictable and timely. We will reduce duplication and regulatory burden. We will strengthen environmental protection and we will enhance consultations with the aboriginal peoples.

Why are the member and his party opposite so opposed to timely reviews, protecting the environment and consulting with aboriginal Canadians?

* * *

PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hidden in the budget, the Conservatives dismantled a key part of their own Federal Accountability Act. After spending \$1 million a year on the Public Appointments Commission, they have ditched any hope of merit-based appointments. Six years later, are they still mad that Gwyn Morgan did not get the nod from committee?

The Conservatives said that they had come here to change Ottawa but it is Ottawa that has changed them. Why did they break their promise, waste millions and embrace Liberal style patronage appointments? Why did they do that?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2012 is our plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. We are eliminating the Public Appointments Commission. Our government has significantly strengthened the public appointments system, including advertising appointments and conducting open selection processes for leadership and full-time positions. Appointments will continue to be made based on merit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder people are becoming increasingly cynical when they hear such answers.

Millions of dollars were wasted and, today, the government is abolishing a phoney commission that has not been used for many years. Today, we are saying goodbye to a transparent appointment process and welcoming new partisan appointments. The Conservatives have broken yet another promise. Merit is no longer important. Now, we have to rely on their good judgment. After all, the Conservatives already know who contributed to their election war chest.

Is that why they now want to abolish the Public Appointments Commission?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, we tried to appoint a public appointments commissioner but it was the opposition that chose to play partisan games and prevented that appointment from happening. Despite this, we have made the public appointments process more open, transparent and equitable. Job positions are now posted online for everyone to see and appointments will continue to be made based on merit.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has eliminated the Canadian Environmental Network and the national round table, muzzled scientists, gutted Environment Canada and eliminated the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences. Now it aims to quash dissent from environmental charities and seize control of the research agenda at universities.

Does the Prime Minister think that it is appropriate in a democracy to eliminate the accountability that independent science brings and to silence dissent?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this budget demonstrates the Government of Canada's full commitment to a strong environmental agenda even as we take significant action to address fiscal issues and the deficit. We have renewed funding for a number of key environmental programs, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Species at Risk Act. We have renewed funding to clean up Lake Simcoe and Lake Winnipeg.

Under this budget, EC continues to have all of the resources it needs to protect the Canadian environment.

• (1455)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of the Environment said, of the Round Table on the Environment and the Economy:

It was created before the Internet, when there were few such sources of domestic, independent research and analysis on sustainable development. That is simply no longer the case. There are now any number of organizations and university based services that provide those services.

Very well. Could the minister name these organizations and services?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite correct in at least part of her quotation. I have expressed our government's appreciation and thanks to the round table for its service over the decades, but it was created a quarter century ago at a time, as my colleague reminded us, when there were very few and limited resources of policy advice on the environment and, in particular, those with regard to the environment and the economy.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for decades, Canadians paid the same rate across Canada to use a pay phone but then, just a few years ago, the charges doubled.

Seniors, low income and rural Canadians who do not have access to wireless services rely on pay phones to communicate.

Now, Bell is asking the government to allow it to increase the fees once again and again it wants to double them.

If this increase is accepted, the Conservatives' meagre GIS increase to seniors will be eaten by just one call a day.

Will the government finally stand up for consumers and reject this proposal?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has taken unprecedented measures to ensure that all Canadians have access to quality services. Moreover, just two or three weeks ago, with the spectrum auction, we ensured that all Canadians will have access to quality wireless services, at a reasonable cost, wherever they may be in Canada.

I encourage the NDP to support the government's future initiatives to ensure that quality service is available in every region of the country.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the giant telephone companies want to double the cost of using public telephones.

Pay phones are used mainly by low-income people and seniors, and those are the people who will feel the full weight of this increase.

Will the minister work with us to prevent this unjustified increase, or will he stand once again with his friends, the telecom giants?

Why do the Conservatives never stand up for low-income Canadians, the people who cannot afford cell phones, decent housing or food on their tables? On this issue, it seems no one is going to answer the call for the Conservatives.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the CRTC is responsible for the regulations. We all know it is independent of the government. Measures have been put in place by the government, however, including the community broadband programs and the spectrum auction announced a few weeks ago, with the goal of ensuring that all Canadians have access to high-quality, well-priced services, wherever they live.

Therefore, I encourage the hon. member to support the government in taking the necessary measures to ensure that these goals are reached.

* * *

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and thankful that my constituent, Henk Tepper, was released from detention in Lebanon over the weekend and is now home in New Brunswick. I know first-hand how anxious and hopeful his family and home town were as they anticipated his return.

I want to thank the minister responsible for consular affairs and her team of dedicated officials for their tireless efforts to bring Henk home.

Could the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs, Americas and Consular Affairs please provide the House with an update on the efforts in Mr. Tepper's case?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in turn, I applaud my colleague for his unwavering and sincere care for Mr. Tepper and his family through this past difficult year. He truly is a credit to his riding.

I, too, am pleased that Mr. Henk Tepper has been released from detention and is safely home in Canada. Canadian officials worked very hard to help secure Mr. Tepper's release through diplomatic channels with dozens of representations to Lebanese officials. The Government of Canada also thanks our partners in Lebanon for their co-operation and responsiveness.

*Oral Questions***SEARCH AND RESCUE**

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for months, the government has been told that the amalgamation of the maritime rescue sub-centres in St. John's and Quebec with Halifax and Trenton is wrong.

Now, Jason Hamilton, a former employee of the rescue centre in Halifax has written to the Minister of National Defence saying, "I consider these cuts to be irresponsible and dangerous. I hold you personally responsible for the repercussions if this amalgamation is allowed to continue".

Will the Minister of National Defence reverse this dangerous decision before there are losses of lives?

• (1500)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think what my colleague is not getting is that this change does not affect the availability of search and rescue resources. They will be out there where they are needed to do their business. In fact, we think they will be able to respond better because all of the people making the decisions will be jointly working in the same location. We think it is a positive change and we are continuing on with it.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have appointed three unilingual anglophones to the Immigration and Refugee Board in Montreal and Ottawa. Not only is this an insult to francophones, but according to *La Presse*, these members have a claim acceptance rate that is 50% lower than that of their colleagues.

Is this just coincidence? Is this because they have a poor understanding of the files, or are these board members obeying the government's instructions to stop legitimate refugees from entering the country?

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the IRB judges go through a very rigorous process. It is arm's-length, merit based and administered by professional, highly trained civil servants.

If the member is looking for numbers, there are currently 32 members in the refugee protection division; 21 are bilingual, 9 are unilingual French and 2 are unilingual English.

If the member is asking us to dispose of nine unilingual French speaking judges in Quebec, I would ask her to explain why to the House of Commons.

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Finance tabled Canada's economic action plan 2012, a plan for jobs, growth and long-term

prosperity. With Canada's economic plan 2012, we are working to secure Canada's economic successes now and for future generations.

Could the hard-working Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification please update the House on how our government's plan will help grow western Canada's economy?

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for Kelowna—Lake Country for giving me the opportunity to highlight one of the many great items in our economic action plan for 2012.

My department, WD, will soon be unveiling the details on the western innovation program. It will be known as WINN. WINN will provide financial support to small and medium enterprises in western Canada and it will assist them in bringing their innovative ideas to market.

Our government is focused and we are focused on what matters to Canadians. Our economic action plan 2012 will continue to get the job done in building a stronger west.

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WELFARE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are cutting the National Council of Welfare, the most important source of information on poverty and welfare income in Canada.

Instead of solving the problem of poverty, the Conservatives are turning a blind eye, refusing to do anything about it. Most recently, the council advised that it would take less money to solve poverty than the government is spending to manage the symptoms.

Does the government not realize how important this information is? Why does it continually want to hide the facts?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way to fight poverty is to ensure Canadians have a job, which is exactly what budget 2012 is doing.

With respect to the National Council of Welfare, we are putting our policy resources to best use and reducing duplication. Examples of high profile organizations, not for profit organizations that focus on this area are Campaign 2000 or Canada Without Poverty.

We are focused on ensuring that we reduce duplication and that we are effective, but we also want to ensure that everyone understands that we are focused on poverty. We want to ensure that individuals in the country are well served but, most important, we want to ensure Canadians have a job.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Neuville, unscrupulous private developers are using the fact that airport construction falls under federal jurisdiction to avoid complying with the environmental protection, public health and safety, and land use laws of Neuville, the Portneuf RCM and Quebec.

Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities ensure that all planned airfields and airports are subject to provincial and municipal environmental, safety and land use regulations so that this type of situation does not happen again in Neuville—

• (1505)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the role of the federal transport minister is to ensure the development of a safe air transportation industry. We will not intervene in this matter because safety is not at issue. Furthermore, if the mayor was so opposed to the project, he would never have signed an agreement with the developer. We will continue to look at options for the future.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the revised bylaws of the Board of Internal Economy adopted by the board on November 21 and December 5, 2011, and repealing the earlier version.

[Translation]

The revised bylaws went into effect on April 1, 2012. They are now available on the Parliament of Canada website.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 12 petitions.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities in relation to the main estimates for 2012-13.

[English]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to its study of chapter 1, Financial Management and Control and Risk Management, of the 2011 Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

PETITIONS

ABORTION

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise on behalf of my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country.

In reference to the definition of a “human being”, a child does not become a human being until the moment of complete birth, contrary to 21st century medical evidence.

The petitioners call upon Parliament and the House of Commons to confirm that every human being is recognized under Canadian law as “human” by amending section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present petitions on behalf of some of my constituents who are tired of waiting for buses, being stuck in traffic jams and not being able to get to doctors' appointments or do groceries because there is no proper fast, reliable and affordable public transit system in Canada.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to enact a Canadian public transit strategy that: seeks to provide a permanent investment plan to support public transit; establishes federal funding mechanisms for public transit; works together with all levels of government to provide sustainable, predictable, long-term and adequate funding; and establishes accountability measures to ensure that all governments work together to increase access to public transit.

Routine Proceedings

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from concerned Canadians from across the country who want to draw the attention of the government to the tens of thousands of chemicals that have been used in industrial processes and the production of consumer goods, many of which are carcinogenic in nature. They call upon the government to appoint a royal commission on the environment and health to examine all aspects of the environmental and health impacts of industrial activity in Canada, and the application of the precautionary principle to protect public health and the environment from uncertain risk.

ABORTION

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituents concerned about Canada's 400 year old definition of "human being", which says that a child does not become a human being until the moment of complete birth, contrary to 21st century medical evidence. Parliament has a solemn duty to reject any law that states that some human beings are not human.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the House of Commons to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as human.

• (1510)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago the Minister of Public Safety stated in the House that anyone who stood against the government's lawful access legislation was standing with child pornographers.

I have a petition here from the good people of my riding of Davenport in Toronto who beg to differ with the minister. They have grave concerns about the lawful access legislation, in particular, the part in the legislation that would require telecommunications companies to collect and store personal information about their users and hand that over at the request of law enforcement without a warrant.

With a lot of pride in my constituents, I humbly place the petition before the House.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition regarding CCSVI. Thirty thousand treatments have been undertaken in 60 countries, while Canada has failed to begin clinical trials. The U.S. is already undertaking three FDA approved clinical trials. The U.K. encourages robust clinical trials, with outcomes that include clinical and quality of life outcomes.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Minister of Health to consult experts actively engaged in the diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI to undertake phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis in multiple centres across Canada and to require follow-up care.

[Translation]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by people from Gatineau and

Ottawa in support of Bill C-232, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals), moved by the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

This bill would repeal the existing provisions of the Criminal code relating to animal cruelty, which are found in the part of the Criminal Code dealing with property, in recognition that animals can also feel pain.

These amendments would provide more protection for wild or stray animals than is possible under the current legislation. They would also help to close the loopholes that too often allow those who mistreat animals to escape punishment.

And to all those who took part in my little Facebook competition to name my newest cat, let me say that her name is now Bugzoo. Welcome, Bugzoo.

[English]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to bring forward a petition from constituents and others in the province of Manitoba, asking for the government to enforce the Air Canada Public Participation Act. They are asking that it enforce the clause 6.1 (d) which reads, "...provisions requiring the Corporation to maintain operational and overhaul centres in the City of Winnipeg, the Montreal Urban Community and the City of Mississauga".

What they are calling for, in essence, is for the Government of Canada to hold Air Canada accountable to the act, thereby saving thousands of jobs across the country.

CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I rose and made a statement about the Q104 Halifax contest, the "Male is in the Czech". This petition is actually about the "Male is in the Czech, win a mail order bride from the Mighty Q" contest.

The petitioners point out that sexism is everywhere in our media. While we are often trying to combat sexism, homophobia and racism, there are few measures for people to try to combat this in advertising, television and radio. Therefore, the petitioners are asking the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council to bring forward stronger enforcement of its standards, in particular clause 3 about sex role stereotyping. This would help to make sure that contests like the "Male is in the Czech" would not be brought forward and that we could actually combat these kinds of prevailing sexist attitudes against women in today's media.

The petitioners and I look forward to a response from the minister.

ELECTRO-MOTIVE DIESEL

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today. The first is from the community of London, and former workers of Electro-Motive Diesel.

The petitioners want the Parliament of Canada to know that Caterpillar illegally removed production equipment from the EMD plant in London, against the collective agreement. It forced a lockout on December 30, 2011 and demanded that the workers take in excess of a 50% reduction in wages and benefits and accept a reduced and insecure pension plan. All of this despite the fact that these workers had made Electro-Motive Diesel a very profitable company. In fact, productivity had increased by 20% and profits were up by billions over last year.

The petitioners want the Parliament of Canada to investigate the conditions of sale of Electro-Motive Diesel to Caterpillar and to immediately enforce any and all appropriate penalties should there be violations under the Investment Canada Act. I might add that it is essential that we strengthen the Investment Canada Act so that families across the country do not suffer as the EMD workers did.

● (1515)

PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is in regard to the June 2011 motion that I brought to the House, calling on the government to take action against the rising poverty levels of Canadian seniors. The motion called on the government to take immediate steps to increase the guaranteed income supplement sufficiently to raise all seniors out of poverty. The motion passed unanimously in the House; however, no action—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I am going to have to stop the member there. I know there are still several members who wish to present petitions. We are running out of time, and we are supposed to just provide a brief summary for the petitions that we are presenting.

In order to be able to accommodate everyone still standing, I will move on to the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF NATURE

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you will recall the great fire that happened in this place many years ago. We had to move location, to what is now the Canadian Museum of Nature. Sadly, the Canadian Museum of Nature is now refusing to reclaim the park that was there before the renovation. The petitioners in my constituency of Ottawa Centre want the NCC to make sure that the Museum of Nature removes the parking lot and restores the park to its natural presence. The petitioners are asking that the government request the NCC to bring the park back to the Canadian Museum of Nature.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present petitions on behalf of many in the Greater Toronto Area and specifically the city of Toronto, who are calling upon the government to enact a Canada public transit strategy which would seek to provide permanent investment in public transit.

Routine Proceedings

I know that my constituents in Scarborough—Rouge River are reliant upon surface-level buses only. They do not have any other access to public transit and would really like an investment to be made by the government to create a national public transit strategy. Canada is the only OECD country that does not have a national public transit strategy. It is estimated that within the next five years there will be an \$18 billion gap in transit infrastructure needs.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition signed by over 2,000 people from the municipality of L'Ancienne-Lorette, in my riding.

These residents are protesting the closing of the Canada Post office in their municipality. They are worried about losing their local service. That is why they have mobilized, and why several thousand of them got together—the people who signed this petition, and who number over 2,000 individuals, as I said—to let the decision-makers in this House know that their penny-pinching must not be allowed to affect people's local services.

Therefore, I am very pleased to present this petition on behalf of the people of L'Ancienne-Lorette.

[English]

MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY ACT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two petitions from my riding.

The first petition is about cycling safety and is in support of a private member's bill introduced by my colleague from Trinity—Spadina. It pertains to the death of a young woman, Jenna Morrison, who died in my riding on November 7, 2011.

The petition is in support of a regulation in the Motor Vehicle Safety Act which would require side guards for large trucks and trailers to prevent collisions with cyclists. The lack of side guards accounts for about 20% of all cycling deaths in Canada. The petitioners are asking that the Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standards be harmonized with the ECE, European regulation 73, which requires side guards on all trucks and trailers in Europe. They are calling for a similar regulation here in Canada.

● (1520)

TIBET

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition also pertains to my riding, which is home to the largest community of Tibetans in Canada. The petitioners are calling on the Prime Minister to make a public statement of concern about the recent self-immolations and indiscriminate violence against Tibetans that have been occurring this year. They are urging the government to call on the Chinese government to exercise restraint and withdraw troops from Tibetan areas.

Routine Proceedings

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition is on the importance of the marine rescue coordination centre in St. John's. These petitioners are concerned about the 600 people whose lives are saved each year through the efforts of the marine rescue coordination centre in St. John's. They do not want it closed. They fear that lives will be lost. The understanding of the local area, people and dialects is extremely important and they want this decision reversed.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table an important petition today on behalf of over 100 members of the United Church of Canada Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. These petitioners are very concerned with the government's increasingly frequent decisions to deny visitor visas for people who come to Canada, including as part of development work. Members of the United Church conference travelled to their international development mission in Zambia and, as part of that, were to host 10 Zambians here for educational and cultural purposes. These visas were denied.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to implement measures to ensure Canada continues to be globally engaged and responsive in its role of peacekeeping and international development.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition calling for a national public transit strategy.

As members know, the riding of Vaudreuil—Soulanges has experienced strong growth over the past 15 years. There are pressing public transit needs.

The petitioners point out that Canada is the only member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development that does not have a national public transit strategy and that the needs are pressing.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present two petitions.

The first one deals with electoral fraud. The petitioners are from the Ottawa region. They demand that the Prime Minister set up an independent investigation to get to the truth about who did what during the last election and find the person or persons responsible.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am also presenting a petition on behalf of residents of Nelson, Rossland and Victoria, British Columbia who are calling on the government to cease and desist from taking a position on the Enbridge project in advance of the conclusion of the assessment. They ask for a full and fair assessment, a commitment that has already been violated by the egregious destruction of environmental protection in the 2012 budget.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 460 and 461.

[*Text*]

Question No. 460—**Hon. Irwin Cotler:**

With regard to the government's policy on seeking clemency for Canadians sentenced to death abroad: (a) under what circumstances will the government seek clemency; (b) when was the current policy adopted; (c) who proposed the current policy; and (d) how was it adopted?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), a Canadian citizen facing the prospect of the death penalty, or an authorized representative acting on his or her behalf, may apply to the Government of Canada for clemency intervention. Requests for clemency are assessed on a case-by-case basis using criteria based on Canadian values and international standards. A non-exhaustive list of criteria that may be taken into consideration is posted on the website of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada: http://www.voyage.gc.ca/documents/clemency_clemence-eng.asp.

In response to (b), (c), and (d), as has been previously reported, the Government of Canada adopted and has applied the current clemency policy since July 2009.

Question No. 461—**Hon. Irwin Cotler:**

With respect to prosecutions for hate speech under sections 318 and 319 of the Criminal Code: (a) from January 1, 2002, to February 15, 2012, how many such requests for prosecution has the Attorney General received; (b) how many of these requests were acted upon; (c) how many prosecutions were commenced, and in which years; and (d) what are the Attorney General's criteria for assessing cases under these sections?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, PPSC, was created on December 12, 2006. The PPSC is responsible for prosecuting offences under federal jurisdiction. With respect to most Criminal Code offences, including hate speech, the PPSC is responsible for prosecuting these only in the three northern territories.

The PPSC has not received any requests for hate speech prosecutions under sections 318 and 319 of the Criminal Code since its creation.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 463 and 465 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Points of Order

[Text]

Question No. 463—**Ms. Mylène Freeman:**

What is the total amount of government funding allocated to the constituency of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel between fiscal year 2007-2008 and the last fiscal year, broken down by: (a) department or agency; (b) initiative or program; (c) year; (d) amount; and (e) recipient?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 465—**Mr. Sean Casey:**

With regard to websites accessed on the personal departmental desktop computers, laptop computers, mobile phones, tablet computers, or other internet-enabled devices issued to the Minister of Justice and to the Minister of Public Safety: (a) what are the URLs of all websites accessed on said devices between 12:01 a.m. on February 1, 2012, and 12:01 a.m. on February 14, 2012 (all dates and times inclusive), listed by ministry; and (b) at what times were those websites accessed, listed by ministry?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, you interrupted the statement that was being presented by the member for Mississauga—Brampton South. As there is some confusion, I am asking for some indication from the Chair as to how you intend to handle this.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that last week the member for Toronto—Danforth had raised a point of order with regard to the statement, again presented by the same member on the government side, in terms of the nature of the statement being a personal attack on him, which is a violation of the long-standing tradition of this House and any number of Houses in the Westminster system and, more specifically, it is in violation of the rulings of your predecessor, Mr. Milliken in the last Parliament where he ruled that personal attacks against other members during the course of an S. O. 31 statement is improper.

We are not clear, Mr. Speaker, whether in fact, by cutting her off today, you were expressing your intent as to your ruling or when we might expect a determination from you on the point of order that was raised by the member for Toronto—Danforth last week.

● (1525)

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not believe that citing somebody's record, philosophical stance, policy stance or facts that are a matter of record is an attack on an individual.

It is something that gentleman has authored. He wrote a report that was cited in court. The Court of Appeal dismissed his report as methodologically unsound and tainted by ideology. I think that is fair game to cite here in the chamber.

If that gentleman is no longer proud of his stance, if he no longer feels as though he was correct in the report that he authored or if he or his party is somehow embarrassed by his position, then perhaps he could stand and apologize.

The Speaker: I appreciate the member for Windsor—Tecumseh raising this. I was here in the previous Parliament when my predecessor attempted to bring some kind of cohesive parameters as to what would be acceptable during S. O. 31s.

Members are granted a great deal of latitude on the type of things they are allowed to talk about during their statements. Some guidelines have existed and some have been enforced at various times and some have not been. For the House, especially in this Parliament, what may help members is, if they are referencing a particular individual, that the bar would be higher during S. O. 31s than it might be during question period or during the normal course of debate.

As my predecessor mentioned, statements by members is a time of the day when it is impossible for a member who has been referenced to respond. This is different from question period and it is different from other types of debate so, as previous Speakers have done, the Chair will look at a few things, such the nature of the words being used, as well as the reaction that it provokes. Members are free to take issue with statements or positions that other members have expressed and can talk about their own personal views on that or what the party might think in terms of ideas. However, when they are going to touch on these things in a very personal way, they need to choose their words very carefully and the tone and the reaction will be examined by the Chair.

I hope that helps. I do not think there is a formula. I do not think we can write down a mathematical equation as to what will be ruled or out of order but if all members took it upon themselves, if they are going to make reference to other members to highlight what it was that was said, that it not be done in a personal way, the House would appreciate it and then it would be easier for the Chair to determine what the nature is.

I am prepared to go back and look more closely at what the member for Mississauga—Brampton South said during her S. O. 31. As I heard it, it certainly did provoke a reaction and it seemed to assign some kind of motive to the member's alleged comments. I will go back and look at it if she feels she should not have been cut off. However, at the time it did seem to be causing quite a lot of disruption and it did seem to me to be worth stepping in to move on to the next one. I will come back to the House if necessary on that particular one.

I hope that answers the member for Windsor—Tecumseh's question in a more general format.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I would ask you, in particular when you are looking at today's statement, to take into account the statement that was made last Thursday. How can a member possibly call someone a hug-a-thug and say that is about his philosophical underpinnings or about a policy issue? It is not. It is a personal attack. It is name-calling at its basest level. Therefore, I would ask you to look at both the statements, not just the one today.

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that the gentleman was a hug-a-thug. I said that his philosophy was one of hug-a-thug—

The Budget

The Speaker: Order, please. I will look at both statements and come back to the House if necessary on that.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue into what is now the fifth hour of debate in this important budget discussion. One of my colleagues from across the way asked how much longer I intended to speak. I will just answer this way. The budget is 500 pages. Canadians are tweeting and posting on Facebook,. They are sending in emails, and faxing their comments. The NDP will speak as long it takes to get the message across that the budget hurts ordinary working families, that the budget hurts Canadians families and that Canadian families deserve better.

During question period, we had all kinds of Canadians who seem to be excited. The more they find out what is in the budget, the more Canadians seem to be galvanized to respond.

It is interesting to note that the feedback we are getting from Canadians from coast to coast to coast is, above all, from Conservative ridings, ridings that have elected a Conservative MP in the past and ridings that are represented by Conservative MPs. I find that very interesting, the opportunity the NDP is giving those Canadians to make their voices heard in Parliament. I am very pleased that Canadians in those Conservative-held ridings are exercising their democratic right to have their views brought forward before the House of Commons.

I will begin by reading some of the tweets that have come forward in the last few minutes, since question period was just a little over an hour ago. I have a tweet from a gentleman saying, “Demographic graph shows the cutoff for OAS cuts falls just after the baby boom late 1950s birthrate bump. Cynical if this by design”.

We heard on CBC's *The Current* this morning that, “Myth of ratio workers to support retirees was debunked. Should look at actual hours worked today and tomorrow. The U.S. took much longer to address an OAS-like issue. The Conservative Party is too reactive. Knew about the demographics since the 1960s and have put together a knee-jerk poor plan”.

When Suzanne Legault testified at committee she said, “They should not be subject to cuts already dealing with stretched resources. Canadians have a right to know”.

I have another tweet from lifelike telling the NDP, “We appreciate your efforts on behalf of Canadians for sharing the feedback in the House of Commons”.

We certainly appreciate the tweets and the Facebook postings that are coming on.

Another persons writes, “Since when do we accommodate poverty as opposed to try to prevent it?”

Another comment reads, “The finance minister is the last person who should be criticizing Ontario provincial finances. How very unhelpful to national unity. Ontario is 38% of Canadian GDP”.

Another person tweets, “My feedback regarding budget is the short time period Canadians have been given to adjust to the new age for OAS and many will suffer”.

Another comment from Ottawa reads, “The government should stop demonizing anyone who raises the issue of taxation. Revenue generation through income tax is a valid measure”.

Another tweet said that they like my glasses. I thank them for that.

From Ottawa again, it reads, “Governments should be working to decrease the growing gap between richest and poorest Canadians. Tax grid should be more progressive”.

That is a very important point. As we know, under the government, Canada is now experiencing record levels of income and equality, with a small proportion of Canadians now earning most of the income pie.

Another comment reads, “The CBC is such an integral part of the Canadian fabric from sea to sea to sea that anything done to weaken it would harm us all”.

Another comment from Ottawa reads, “How can the public service function effectively with constant turnover in uncertainty? What institutional memory will be left after the losses?”

Another comment reads, “Cuts should not be made to officers of Parliament. Why is the Prime Minister's Office's noise machine not setting an example in cutting its wasteful budget?”

What those comments refer to is the fact that the budget of the Prime Minister's Office has gone up more substantially than any other component of the budget over the last few years. It has been massive increase.

● (1530)

Obviously, Canadians are reacting to that as they have in the past with the fighter jets and the prisons agenda. Canadians are saying that building new prisons and buying costly fighter jets and the F-35 fiasco should not be priorities. The priorities should be making sure that services work for people.

Another constituent commented, “To me the budget is going to take me out of a comfortable retirement. Because of the environmental changes and the gutting in environment, of course my health will suffer”. Another constituent commented, “I am reminded of the hypocrisy of former Reform Party MPs opting back in after criticizing the pension plan”.

The comments go on and on. I do not want to devote all of my time to reading tweets but they are coming in one after the other. They are coming in faster than I can read them out.

The Budget

Canadians seem very galvanized. They have been following the budget debate. They heard what the Conservatives promised last May 2. The Conservatives promised not to attack health care or retirement security. They promised to maintain services. They also promised to be fiscally prudent and responsible and then we see what the results have been in this budget.

In December in Victoria the finance ministers imposed what over time will be a significant cut in health care transfers. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has evaluated those cuts at over \$30 billion, at a time when Canadians need health care. The government is not taking any of the responsible approaches on health care that we have talked about in the House and as our former leader Jack Layton and our new leader, the member for Outremont, have mentioned. None of those things have been brought to bear.

We have talked about expanding home care, which would reduce the cost of acute care beds. Often seniors who are unable to stay in their home without the provision for home care end up in acute care beds at a cost of many thousands of dollars more than it would be if we simply provided home care in the first place.

We have also talked about the bulk purchasing of medication. That has worked in other countries in bringing down the cost of drugs. Because of the long-term patent protection that is given for pharmaceutical drugs, Canadians are paying far more than they should be paying for pharmaceutical drugs.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: And don't forget CETA.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has mentioned, the concern around CETA is that the situation will be even worse.

These are fundamental problems that absolutely need to be addressed. These are problems that cannot be addressed unless there is a government that is concerned and cares about health care.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: When are we going to get that government?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, we are going to get that government on October 20, 2015.

The Canadians who are writing to us, tweeting and posting on Facebook are reacting to the broken promise around health care. They are also reacting to the broken promise around retirement security.

We have had a chance thus far to raise a number of times the importance of the OAS and the overall pension plan in Canada and how Canadians feel strongly about that. Over the course of the last few hours and as we enter what will soon be the sixth hour of debate, I have raised the concerns of Canadians from coast to coast to coast around retirement security.

• (1535)

Canadians are reacting to that the same way they are reacting to the broken promise around how the health care transfers have been gutted and reduced over time without the kinds of measures that we have been talking about, such as putting in a valid fiscal framework for health care transfers and health care costs. They have seen retirement security gutted. There are the cuts to a wide range of

services that we saw in the budget on Thursday night, whether it be food safety, transportation safety, or environmental assessments. I will get into that in more detail later on. We are talking about wide and deep cuts which in many cases will eliminate completely some of the services Canadians enjoy. In some cases it will eliminate completely the source of information. This has been a recurring theme.

The First Nations Statistical Institute was gutted, killed by the government. The Nation Council of Welfare was killed by the government. StatsCan was seriously gutted. All of these organizations supply facts to the Canadian public and the Canadian government. In each case the government is saying that it does not want and cannot handle the facts. It wants to invent its own facts. It does not want Canada's modern economy to function on a fact basis. It wants it to function in some kind of weird ideological fact-free zone. Canadians have seen those cuts as well and are reacting.

Canadians are seeing cuts in jobs, some 19,700 in the public sector and add to that the cuts in the private sector. There is a multiplier effect. I came here from the private sector. I know that cuts in the public sector lead to larger cuts in the private sector. That is a basic fact. There are members opposite who would like to function in a fact-free zone, but that is just the reality. We are talking about tens of thousands of jobs that will be hemorrhaged—there is no other way to put it—over the next few months. Under this budget, which we call the “fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget”, actually admits that the unemployment rate is going to climb.

It is hard to believe that a government would put on the front page of a document that it knows creates fewer jobs, that it knows creates less growth, that it knows creates less prosperity and say that it is going to pretend exactly the opposite. That is what the government did on Thursday.

What is wonderful about Canadians is that they see through all that. The government provided its arguments on Thursday night. Canadians were willing to listen to the finance minister's speech. They were willing to look at the budget, as we all were. Then they saw what was in it. That is why we are being deluged by comments from Canadians from coast to coast to coast. They want their comments put forward in the House of Commons. A continued recurring theme of what they are saying is that Canadian families deserve better than this budget.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that the NDP MPs continue to be so energetic and dynamic after over five hours of budget debate. When I see the energy they bring to representing their constituencies, I can say that it gives me energy.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

They do a good job as members of Parliament. I have seen many groups, but the NDP class of 2011 is the best ever elected to the House of Commons. It is true. It is an extraordinary group.

The Budget

[English]

I want to read some of the faxes and emails that are coming in now. We have some particularly relevant comments from constituents from NDP ridings and from the ridings of other parties. I am trying to bring forward the points of view that are expressed from Conservative-held ridings because we are getting more and more. As I mentioned earlier, the fax machine in the lobby must be smoking from all the faxes that are coming in. These are from Conservative-held ridings. When Canadians are living in ridings which at least for the moment are held by Conservatives, it is very important to bring those views forward.

The first is from Kelowna—Lake Country which is a Conservative-held riding in the interior of British Columbia. This individual said, “The finance minister is using half-truths to justify his changes to OAS. For example, with regard to demographics, it is true that there will be fewer workers per retiree in 2030. However, the ratio of workers to seniors alone does not determine the burden on workers, but is only one-half of the equation. The dependency ratio, or DR, is a measure of burden on the labour force defined by Statistics Canada as the population age 15 to 64 of supporting services for children and youth”. Those are individuals age 0 to 14 and seniors age 65 and over. She continued, “The dependency ratio will be 64% in 2031. It was 70% in 1961”. That dependency ratio in 1961 was higher than the dependency ratio will be in 2031. She said, “It did not break the bank then. It will not break the bank in 2031”.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the wonderful pages of the House of Commons. They are the ones giving me water and Kleenexes and anything else that I need. They deserve our appreciation. Normally we do not get the opportunity to thank the pages for their terrific work, but I think I can take a moment of my time to do that today. We are all aware of the important work the pages do and they do it so discreetly. They are giving me Kleenexes, water and everything else. They do a fantastic job.

The pages are a symbol of the younger generation that we need to be looking out for. We need to make sure programs are in place for younger Canadians. We need to make sure we are addressing issues of chronic unemployment with younger Canadians. We need to ensure that their quality of life is similar to what previous generations enjoyed. On behalf of the official opposition NDP caucus, 102 members strong, that is a commitment we make. It is a commitment we will keep on October 20, 2015 when we form the government of this country.

I will get back to what the constituent from Kelowna—Lake Country, currently a Conservative-held riding, said. She said, “The dependency ratio in Canada is the lowest in the G7. The minister claimed that France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. are all moving to increase their eligibility age for retirement. That is true. However, among the G7 countries, France, Germany, Japan and Italy are bringing their age of eligibility up to 65.” Not 67, but 65. “The U.S.A. made the decision in 1983, started implementation in 2003 and will complete the process by 2025”. That is 20 years later.

• (1545)

She then continues, “Among the 30 OECD countries, eight will have a retirement age under 65 and 15 will have a retirement age of

65.” This is very important, and I thank her for bringing this forward —“.

Let us review those numbers: there are eight under 65 and 15 at 65. Only seven, including Canada, will have an age above 65.

She says, “I believe there is a need to challenge the government on substantial grounds.” This individual is from Kelowna, British Columbia.

This is fascinating. The government's pretext around raising the retirement age is that all countries are doing it. We heard the Minister of Finance raise that idea in the budget speech as if this is something that everybody is doing. It is true that the retirement age was raised, but it was to 65, not above 65.

We are talking about virtually every single one of the OECD countries, Canada being one of a handful of exceptions. In almost every one of the OECD countries, the retirement age is 65 or under. We believe that is what the retirement age in Canada should be. Canadians deserve to have standards at least as good as those in the other countries in the OECD. That is what we had at 65; we do not have that at 67, and I thank the constituent for bringing that issue to our attention.

I would like to move on to another Conservative riding. This is from Vancouver Island. This letter says, “This budget is a reflection of the government's agenda towards the total elimination of CPP, the old age pension and the guaranteed income supplement. We pensioners need an honest answer from this government, because for sure our budgets are going to be affected again. We are asking for an answer from this government.”

This is a constituent in a Conservative-held riding who is raising concerns about the way the government has implemented it and how the government is attacking seniors.

We look at what the government promised prior to May 2. Prior to May 2, had the Prime Minister or the Conservative Party candidates said, “Elect us and we will make serious cuts in the longer term in health care transfers so that our health care system a decade from now will be worse off than it is now”, what would have been the result?

Had the Conservatives come forward and said, “We will actually gut retirement security, cut back on OAS and go the opposite of the way that most industrialized countries are going” and had they said they would force everybody to work until they are 67, regardless of their circumstances, and that people would either live in poverty, as they would have no source of income, or keep working, even if they were a manual labourer or a carpenter, what would have been the result?

It is a particularly mean-spirited attempt by the Conservatives to say to people who are manual labourers, as I was and as so many Canadians are, that it does not matter if their bodies give out; they have to keep working because the Conservatives say so. They want to buy their fancy F-35 fighter jets no matter what the cost, and they want to build those fancy prisons despite the fact that the crime rate has fallen. If they had come forward and said that prior to May 2, I wonder what the results would have been.

The Budget

●(1550)

What if the Conservatives had come forward prior to May 2 and said that they were going to gut services, cut back on all those services that Canadian families depend on, gut food safety, transportation safety, slash environmental assessments, make sure there is no funding for social housing, and, as one Canadian wrote and as I mentioned earlier today, deal with the \$125 billion infrastructure deficit by providing \$150 million towards it? Is that not ridiculous? That is like saying I want to buy a new car, but I only have \$30. I just cannot do it if I offer only a one-thousandth of what is needed, but that is what the Conservatives did in this budget. Rather than say we have a substantial infrastructure deficit with deteriorating infrastructure across the country and address that, they offer a few pennies, a token, to deal with a massive \$125 billion deficit. What would have happened if they had come forward on May 2 making that pledge as well?

I ask those questions because we all know the results. If the government had come clean on its agenda prior to May 2, the NDP would have been over there governing this country and the Conservatives would be in opposition. Canadians would not have stood for that agenda. Canadian families deserve better.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Conservatives could not come clean before May 2 and therefore did not talk about this agenda at all. They covered it up because they knew they would not have been elected had they come clean with what they were intending to do: impose their ideology on the whole country, cut back on facts and making them as little available as possible, imposing instead, to my mind, a wrong-headed ideology.

An hon. member: We saw that in Davos.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, we certainly saw that in Davos.

I think that is why there has been such a substantial push-back from the Canadian public over the course of the last three days. That is why our fax machine is smoking; it is because it is working so hard. It is why emails are coming in fast and furious and the Blackberrys are hot. Tweets and Facebook postings are coming in fast and furious. A Parliament that is welcoming to new technology should, of course, be incorporating comments received by Twitter and Facebook. There are a bunch of comments coming in from a variety of sources, and I will move on to some them.

I want to read another email from Burlington, Ontario, a Conservative riding. This constituent writes, "I live in a riding held by Conservatives. Harper"—

The Speaker: Order—

Mr. Merv Tweed: He named the Prime Minister; Peter, shame.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Brandon—Souris is absolutely right, and I apologize. I have been translating, but sometimes one needs to keep a step ahead so that one uses appropriate Parliamentary language when reading emails.

I will continue with the email: "The government's budget does not include reductions in the atrocious cost of the Senate. What's needed in the 2012 budget is a start on abolishing the Senate."

Jack Layton, the former leader of the NDP, called for a freezing of appointments to the Senate so that through the years there would be a gradual diminishing of people in the Senate. However, the Prime Minister has ignored this and has filled every vacancy with Conservative supporters.

The email continues, "Abolish the Senate as it serves no useful purpose. It costs many dollars, but the benefit is zero. I live in a riding held by the Conservatives."

Another tweet has just come in, and I thank the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for monitoring Twitter and Facebook so that we can get up-to-the-minute updates.

●(1555)

Here is another comment to the NDP: "Thank you. It's hard to admit, but I'm really afraid for my generation's future, and just hearing someone talk about it is comforting." We thank that young Canadian for writing in.

Here's another, from the Ontario riding of Leeds—Grenville.

This individual, Mr. Irwin, says, "I was watching the debate in the House today in regard to the budget. I would just like to state that I'm very glad to see you listening to Canadians in regard to their concerns over this extraordinarily shallow budget from the Conservatives. I am unfortunately not in an NDP riding. I am in the riding of Leeds—Grenville, which is a Conservative riding in Ontario. I am a student in university with ever-increasing tuition and rising debt. I am not sure if I can afford to even complete my degree. Thank you for standing up for Canadians today. I appreciate it very much, and keep up the good work."

We thank Mr. Irwin for writing in and letting us know his views as a young Canadian who will be impacted by the budget.

We get these responses from young Canadians time and time again. Young Canadians have a profound belief in the future of our country. They believe in the environment. They believe government plays an important part in ensuring that families are protected, in ensuring that the economy works well, in ensuring that there is access to post-secondary education, because that not only provides for a better future for those families but also provides a better future for all of us in this country.

I am particularly gratified with the number of young Canadians who are tweeting and posting on Facebook and sending in emails and their comments. They believe in Canada; they do not believe in the budget, but they believe in Canada and in the future of our country. They believe that together we can build that better Canada that we all aspire to. They believe that Canadian families deserve better than the budget that was given to them by the Conservative government.

I will move on to Kitchener, another Conservative-held riding. Here a lady has written to say, "I heard your response to the federal budget and want you to know I agree completely with your opposition to this plan to dismantle our social safety net."

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"I am recently retired, having worked for a social agency most of my life. I am very upset about the proposal to destroy the universality of old age security. This plan totally ignores that a number of studies have made it clear that OAS is a very sustainable program. By delaying OAS until age 67, many of the most vulnerable seniors will also be deprived of the GIS supplement.

"It is ludicrous to assume that ordinary people can save sufficient money to fund their own retirement. With the massive layoffs in the manufacturing sector, many people are having difficulty with surviving, and savings are just a dream. Moreover, it seems patently unfair to expect that in the current precarious financial climate, ordinary people are put at the mercy of the stock market to attempt to grow any savings.

"The glaring lack in this budget is any attempt to reform the Canada pension plan in order to make it a sustainable solution for all the people for whom the private sector has failed to provide any pension security. Instead of attempting to drive divisions between those who have earned pensions and those who are deprived of pensions, a reasonable government would attempt to provide security for everyone.

"I am also very concerned about the plan to make deep cuts into the public service. I live in Kitchener, Ontario, and we have a federal women's prison in our area. In spite of the expected influx of more prisoners thanks to the omnibus bill, cuts to the staff will inevitably cause serious destruction of programs that now attempt to address some of the serious problems that led to the incarceration of the prisoners.

"I am also concerned that staff cuts in other federal programs will cause serious delays in such programs as the delivery of unemployment benefits.

• (1600)

"Another area that causes me concern is the cuts to regulations that protect me from contaminated food.

"The proposed streamlining of environmental reviews, coupled with the attack on environmental organizations who would challenge such plans as the Gateway pipeline seem to me to be another way to suppress dissent to this government.

"Speaking of suppression, I was upset but not surprised, that after raising some very serious indication of organized voter suppression tactics in more than 200 ridings in our last federal election, Elections Canada has had serious cuts to their budget. Thank you for voicing the concerns of ordinary people whom this government seems happy to treat with contemptuous disregard".

We thank her for writing in.

This is absolutely the issue we are talking about. The OAS cuts also lead to commensurate GIS cuts. What we are talking about is an overall cutback to the whole foundation of retirement security. As so many people are writing in to say, this is simply unacceptable. It is a real concern to many Canadians. Fundamentally, what I think these Canadians are saying as well is that we are going to see far more seniors living in poverty.

We had a previous letter indicating already that in most OECD countries, almost all of them or three-quarters of them in fact, the retirement age is actually 65 or under. Canada is one of those few countries that is so regressive with its own seniors, so lacking in respect for the contributions seniors have made to the country, that what the current government is actually doing in this budget is upping the retirement age from 65 to 67. That is a real shame because Canadian families deserve better than that. They really do.

I would like to move on now to another Conservative riding. It is no secret that what we are trying to do is to make the case against this budget step by step, brick by brick, by raising constituents' concerns in ridings that are represented by Conservative MPs. I do not think anything could be clearer than to have all of these letters, tweets and Facebook comments flooding in, all of which address Conservative members of Parliament. In all cases, they are saying, "My Conservative MP is not representing me if he or she votes for this budget". I think that is a very important thing to underscore, that what we are doing through the course of this debate is establishing the case that, effectively, Canadians living in Conservative ridings are making their voices known.

If I were a Conservative MP, with a bad budget like this that will guarantee fewer jobs, less growth, less prosperity, I would think twice and say, "Hold on. My constituents are reacting. They are reacting to all of the various components of this agenda. Maybe I have to think twice". Perhaps we will see, over the course of the debate, Conservative MPs standing and saying, "I'm going to represent my constituents. I'm going to vote against this budget because this budget is not good for families in my riding and not good for the country".

Maybe we will see that. As we read out these letters coming from across the country from Conservative-held ridings, maybe we will see Conservative MPs standing and saying, "We're going to vote for what's good for the country. We're voting against this budget. We're going to vote for a budget that actually creates jobs".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1605)

Mr. Peter Julian: One might say that is absurd and that a Conservative MP would never do that. However, when we think back, a few years ago no one would have said there would be 102 strong NDP MPs representing constituents right across this country from coast to coast to coast. It was not impossible because we believed that we could get things done and represent our constituents strongly.

When I started out, I was down in that far corner. There were only 19 of us back in 2004, but with Jack Layton we continued to progress. We moved across and then moved up. Now we are the official opposition and are poised to form government on October 20, 2015. People always said that would be impossible and I say nothing is impossible when one has fundamental Canadian values and when one strongly represents constituents.

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I do not believe it is impossible that some Conservatives on the other side will wake up after having read the budget and say they will not vote for it because it is bad for Canada and bad for Canadian families. Instead, they will vote for retirement security, for the type of retirement age that almost all OECD countries have, and they will vote for the types of things that the NDP brings forward, including sustainable, long-term funding for health care and services. They will vote against this budget and for something better. I do not believe that is impossible. I am hopeful that through the course of this debate, as we read letter after letter from constituents in Conservative-held ridings, that we will see the Conservatives waking up. We will see it one day. We will see members on the other side smile. The penny will drop, even if they are doing away with it, which we certainly support doing, but the penny will drop and they will say this is a penny-wise and pound foolish budget and they are not going to vote for it. We will see that and that is my hope in the coming days.

I will move on to another resident of a Conservative-held riding in London West. This constituent is writing to the NDP MP next door, the member of Parliament for London—Fanshawe, who is an extraordinary seniors and pension critic.

She says, “I know I am not a resident of your riding, but my Conservative MP never seems to respond with anything but platitudes. I know you are doing the best you can for our community, so I wanted to tell you what this budget means for me.

“I am a 50-year-old, unemployed single female. Finding a job is tough and this budget has nothing in it to help me and soon there won't even be anyone left to answer the phone. I am running out of blood pressure medication because I have no benefits, which wouldn't matter if I had a pharmacare program, but I saw nothing for me in the budget on that. I do, however, fall into the age category of the first few years' worth of senior citizens who will lose two years of OAS payments. I have been told my whole working life that while there was no pool of money, I was paying for the people who are retiring now and that younger people would be paying for me, and so on, this while my savings have been eaten up trying to find stable employment.

“For me, this budget is a recipe for poverty, but the Chief Electoral Officer was the only officer of Parliament to face immediate funding cuts. It was a corrupt decision, cynical beyond belief.

“I did notice that while the Conservatives claimed to be in favour of smaller government, the cabinet is huge, at 38, and there were no announced cuts to that burgeoning group nor to the Prime Minister's Office. I have seen money and tax breaks flung at corporations who then leave the country with them, leaving broken communities in their wake. I see valuable resources being depleted and value added offshore and these policies are anathema to job creation. This budget ignores these issues. A hold on yet another tax cut does nothing to reverse the effect of a financial crisis that was created by the tax cuts that went before.

“First nations people are being treated horribly, and women are being ignored and yet, apparently, there is no end of money available to purchase jets, with no public process or even proper bidding procedures being followed. I guess I shouldn't be shocked by the government that couldn't even see its way clear to bringing a flag

down to half mast when our soldiers died would not take care of the ones that returned home”.

● (1610)

That was from a woman in London West in Ontario, whom we thank for writing such heartfelt comments about the future of this country. We are going to make sure this country is run the way we would like it to be. We are not going to forget her, that is for sure.

I would like to move on to a letter from a constituent in another Conservative-held riding, Ottawa—Orléans. Here is another person writing in a very heartfelt way.

He states that, “I, too, have a Conservative MP, and just got a pamphlet about tax saving tips on the same day his government announced they will be laying off thousands of public servants. Many will be this MP's constituents.

“The problem with the excuse of people living longer as a reason to attack future OAS recipients is that the more well off a person is, the longer they can expect to live, and the poorer a person is, the shorter they will live. These are facts that are supported by Statistics Canada. All the Conservatives have done is ensure low-wage workers are available to take unglamorous jobs a few years longer. Some will never retire anyway, but now that number is guaranteed to increase.

“This budget is a disgrace. It has money for venture capitalists and further erodes good-paying jobs in our communities. If the Prime Minister wants to play Dragons' Den games, I encourage him to resign from his current job and show us what a brilliant, trained economist he is with his own money.

“Keep on speaking the truth in Parliament, we are watching and cheering”.

The comments from these Canadians, showing their courage and their vision of how this country ought to be and their profound belief that this country can be better, that those Canadian values can continue despite how meanspirited this budget is, encourage all of us in the official opposition NDP caucus to keep doing our work, to keep standing up for Canadians and to keep fighting for that day when we can have a progressive government in power in this country. That is what keeps us going and drives us forward.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Julian: I cannot believe the energy of my colleagues. They are an amazing group of people.

I am going to move on now to another constituent in another Conservative-held riding, London North Centre. Again, this person does not feel well-represented by their local MP and has written to an NDP MP to pass on the information, and says:

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“I watched the federal budget today and I am very worried. I find the cuts particularly worrisome as they can result in damage that cannot be undone. Changes to the OAS and CPP could perhaps be addressed by future governments. The degradation of the environment and the slow dismantling of our culture and democratic safeguards are not so easily fixed.

“Except for the fossil fuel industry, I see no programs in support of job creation. Meanwhile, those who do benefit represent only one segment of the Canadian population while ignoring the rest. This segment, not surprisingly, lives where the Conservatives have their greatest political strength.

“Instead of job creation, I see job losses, both in the public sector and in the private sector where the new loosening of restrictions on cross-border shopping will have a tremendous impact. Coincidentally, the areas most affected will probably be Ontario and Quebec where the Conservatives do not have their best showing.

“There seems to be no focus or plan to this budget. There is no real nation-wide job creation incentive with only a possible debt reduction component. It ignores the concerns of Canadians about the debt, unemployment and widening income gap. Some budget cuts seem to be based more on ideology than economics, and they prove to be more expensive in the end”.

● (1615)

That is from a constituent in the Conservative-held riding of London North Centre.

This tweet is directed to the member of Parliament for Sarnia—Lambton from a constituent saying “Don’t vote for this budget”.

We are starting to get constituents tweeting directly to Conservative members of Parliament. We certainly encourage that. People have been hearing the debate over the last day or two. They are saying they do not want their Conservative MPs to vote for this budget because of its attacks on retirement security, what it does to health care transfers, the gutting of services in so many different areas, the gutting of environmental protections and the tens of thousands of lost jobs.

Given the energy that Canadians have, and the time and effort that they are putting in to make sure their reactions are heard on the floor of the House of Commons, we certainly encourage folks to write to their Conservative member of Parliament, to tweet, post on Facebook, send emails or give them a call.

I know many seniors have been contacting their Conservative MPs in the last few weeks, since the Prime Minister went to Davos, Switzerland and announced in front of the world’s billionaires that he was going to gut retirement security.

We think that these tweets are very important steps. Preferably, they should copy their local NDP MP in their region. That helps us to know what they are sending on to their Conservative MP.

Very clearly, there is a good, healthy reaction from Canadians from coast to coast. We certainly encourage them to speak out. That is how we make Canada stronger, by Canadians who speak out and make their concerns known.

We on this side of the House believe firmly in a democratic framework. We believe firmly that there is a place for all Canadians to express their points of view, and that is on the floor of the House of Commons. That is why these members of Parliament are here today. After hours, they are still full of vim and vigour, spit and polish, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. I am not sure how many other metaphors I can use. However, they are just great and energetic. They believe that Canadian families deserve much better than this budget.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: I would like to move on to another Conservative-held riding. That is the riding of Perth—Wellington.

If you do not mind, Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to continue. Thank you for being very gracious. I certainly appreciate you giving me the opportunity to speak.

This is from a young person. We have all been very excited by the young people who are letting their opinions be known. He says, “First of all, I want to say that I’m surprised and encouraged by your allowing Canadians direct participation in our government”. He is speaking of the NDP. “It’s important that the opinions of Canadians are heard publicly. As a young person in the Perth—Wellington riding, I do not believe my MP would be willing to voice my opinion”. That is too bad, but hopefully maybe next time they’ll have an NDP MP in his riding.

Specifically on the budget, he says, “More than the specific elements of the budget, I am concerned that the government continues to proceed, all the while refusing to analyze the potential impacts or benefits of their policies. They ignore expert opinions and scientists, and seem to forgo investigations of costs”.

● (1620)

An hon. member: They don’t just ignore them, they shut them down.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes. He continues, “They seem to refuse to release the real information into public hands and instead play with the numbers to suggest their policies are the correct ones. As an example, the OAS changes. I have heard the numbers from the Conservatives many times. OAS costs were \$38 billion in 2010, but will be \$108 billion in 2030.”

This young person picks up on what no Conservative has picked up on in the House. He states, “The problem with this is that it is comparing apples to oranges, 2010 dollars versus 2030 dollars.” Mr. Speaker, this has been a bone of contention for some time. I really thank the writer for raising this because this is extremely important. We have been raising in the House for months, since the election of May 2, this idea that somehow we can compare current dollars to constant dollars. We have to make sure that we are comparing the constant dollar value of something.

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If I have time later on this afternoon, if I am permitted to keep on speaking, I will address this issue of constant dollars and how it actually plays out in some of the trade agreements we have signed. We have heard the government say that it has signed all of these trade agreements to actually further exports. We have done a little research. It turns out that, in so many cases, in constant dollars our exports to those markets actually fall after we sign the trade agreements.

However, because the government does not seem to want to understand the distinction between constant dollars, those which have the same value over time, that are inflation adjusted, and current dollars which are completely different and which in 2012 are worth something completely different than in 1912, there is a fundamental difference. Everyone seems to understand that but the government. It consistently uses current dollars to try to justify some of its policies when very clearly what we are experiencing in the case of some of these trade agreements is a fall in exports, not a rise.

The writer understood this. He says, "The problem with this is that it is comparing apples to oranges, 2010 dollars versus 2030 dollars. When you correct the figures, the real comparison should be \$38 billion in 2010 and \$69 billion in 2030, not nearly the same."

He goes on to state, "I also took extreme offence at the finance minister badmouthing our province yet again on the world stage." He is talking about the comments about Ontario. "As a representative of Canada and its provinces, it carries particular weight to investors when our own representative speaks badly of us. He should apologize."

He further states, "Once again, he is misrepresenting the facts during his statements. He has ignored the Drummond Report, which lays much of the blame for Ontario's fiscal situation on the federal government and suggests that Ontario is mismanaging its spending. Ontario actually spends less per capita than any other province. Canadians are intelligent. We should be allowed to have the facts of the situation and be able to judge policies based on these facts. By not doing so, our intelligence is being insulted. If their policies are as good as they are promoted to be, then those judgments should be possible."

I thank the writer for sending in his comments.

An hon. member: We should applaud him.

Mr. Peter Julian: Absolutely. We should applaud him because that is terrific.

An hon. member: It is democracy in action.

• (1625)

Mr. Peter Julian: Democracy in action. I find difficult to grasp this very simple idea that Canadians understand that constant dollars and current dollars are two very different things and yet the government continually messes up on the difference between inflation adjusted dollars and non-inflation adjusted dollars.

• (1630)

We had a couple of breakthroughs in the Scarborough region. Two wonderful members from Scarborough have taken their places in Parliament. I cannot comment that one of them might be in the House now, and the other not. I would like to compliment the two

members for Scarborough who are terrific members of Parliament. They are part of the class of 2011.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I need to rise at this point briefly as 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 Etobicoke North, the Environment; the hon. member for Beaches—East York, National Defence.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, Burnaby is known as the social democratic republic of Burnaby. New Westminster is the oldest city in western Canada, the first capital city of British Columbia and the home of the New Westminster Senior Salmonbellies, who are to lacrosse what the Montreal Canadiens are to hockey, having won the Mann Cup 24 straight times. I am proud of the riding of Burnaby—New Westminster.

I was referring earlier to the member of Parliament for Scarborough—Rouge River and the member for Scarborough Southwest. They are the dynamic duo from Scarborough and are making a great contribution to our country and to the House of Commons.

A constituent from Scarborough Southwest writes, "Thanks for the opportunity to share some reactions to the budget. Here are a few off the top of my head. There are crafty ways of making a budget appear harmless while seriously beginning to erode some of the principles that Canada is built on. This is disconcerting, to say the least. What I am most worried about are the steps they have taken to plow ahead with projects without the same environmental studies and safeguards. I am deeply offended by their disregard of our precious environment for the sake of bigger, faster profits. I also have issues with their cuts to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. CBC Radio is hugely important to me and is the thing that most makes me feel connected to my fellow Canadians across the country. There are other things that I'm beginning to learn about, but am not yet familiar with."

That is why we are engaging in this debate, so that Canadians can be aware of what is in the budget and what the ramifications will be of the Conservative government acting in such an irresponsible and ideologically rigid way. For this constituent and so many other Canadians like him, we are endeavouring to make sure the details of the budget come out.

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He continues, “I am a self-employed carpenter. I have been doing this for 24 years. Although my line of work is famous for people working for cash and not declaring much of their income, I have never done this. I work hard and make around \$40,000 a year. I felt good about paying my income tax and collecting GST and now HST for the government. But I have to tell you that this budget and this government's priorities make me feel cynical about taxes for the first time. I will continue to declare all my income and do my share to help maintain the things I value so much, like our health care and pensions. But I will be doing it a bit grudgingly. I really feel that this majority government's values do not line up with me. I truly hope that you and your fellow NDP members will do everything you can to hold this government accountable for the ways that they are trying to dismantle and rearrange the Canada that I have been a proud citizen of.” He adds, for the member for Scarborough Southwest, “I didn't tell you at the time how happy I was that you won the seat for the NDP in our Scarborough Southwest. I just wish that other members were as progressive.”

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

I am going to continue to read comments received just since question period.

A man from the south end of Montreal says, “I am a veteran, and the cuts affecting veterans in the budget will hurt us a lot, particularly since we already have to constantly fight for benefits and care.”

This is from a veteran, someone who fought for our country. That person is of course critical of the cuts that were announced. We are not talking about minor cuts, but about service reductions in every possible area. There are also significant cuts to services to veterans that should not be made.

The NDP feels it is extremely important that veterans be treated with the respect they deserve. The budget is 500 pages long in English and 564 pages long in French. On page 284 of the English version, there is a reference to the Department of Veterans Affairs. This year, the budget of that department will be reduced by \$36.1 million. That is incredible. Next year, in 2013-14, there will be a cut of \$49.2 million. This is going to affect Jay and many other veterans across the country. In 2014-15, we are talking about reductions of \$66.7 million. Over a three-year period, the budget of Veterans Affairs Canada will be drastically reduced three times.

The NDP thinks that this is critically important. We are talking about \$155 million over three years. The government is telling veterans that they will have to make do with a shortfall of \$155 million over the next three years.

Those who have visited veterans hospitals have witnessed the erosion of services. Of course, the staff does its best. In my riding, we have the George Derby Centre. People who work in that field care about their work. The impact of previous cuts have already been felt, even before the government came up with these new ones totalling \$155 million.

We, on this side of the House, feel that veterans deserve the government's full respect. They should be treated with respect, and the services provided to them should not be cut. We think that our

country is really a reflection of how veterans are treated. We believe that these cuts are ill-conceived. They are ideologically driven and they show a total lack of respect for veterans. Veterans deserve better than major cuts to their services.

Someone else just sent us this in English:

[*English*]

He said, “Great job in the House.” He also said that Facebook and Twitter are great ways to show the NDP is a party for the people.

[*Translation*]

That is a good comment from another young Canadian and I thank him.

I now have a comment from another Quebec riding, an NDP riding. We have two good members in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, namely in the ridings of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, and Jonquière—Alma. They work hard and they work well.

This weekend, these two members were at the Alma aluminum plant, where 800 families are locked out because of the actions taken by Rio Tinto Alcan. We know these workers want to go back to work. The Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region is renowned for the quality of the work done at the aluminum plant. A foreign company just took over Alcan, which has become Rio Tinto Alcan. It is now forcing workers, who have devoted their lives and souls to the company, to accept all sorts of concessions.

On Saturday, 7,000 people marched in the streets of Alma in solidarity with the workers of Rio Tinto Alcan. Some NDP members were also present. Together, we are showing our solidarity with the workers of Rio Tinto Alcan, and our support in their fight against the company.

A man wrote the following to the only Conservative member in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region: “In Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the presence of a public broadcaster is not just precious, it is essential. Since the radio and television stations of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean are already greatly limited by financial means that force them to operate with minimal human resources, I do not think that they could undergo additional budget cuts without the quality of their services being seriously affected, and that is not to mention the loss of jobs that could result from such cuts.”

This person goes on to tell the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean this: “As you surely know, the economy of our region has already been seriously weakened by the never-ending forestry crisis and other uncertainties, such as the labour dispute at the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminum plant in Alma, which has been directly affecting some 800 families since the beginning of the year. Thank you for maintaining CBC's budget in its entirety.”

That person is asking the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean to vote against the budget, as we have already seen with other Conservative members, including the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

We must vote against these cuts to the CBC, and we must support the interests of the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region and of all Canadians. These people are saying no to the federal budget because Canadian families deserve better.

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• (1640)

[English]

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am looking for clarification from the Chair on the process of this debate. I am not a rookie any more, but there is still a lot to learn about parliamentary procedure no matter how long one has been in the House.

I have been very engaged in listening to the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, who, I might add, has been in the this House serving the people of B.C. for about eight years now. I know that the debate is on topic and on point to the budget. I think he has done a very good job laying out an intelligent and reasoned argument about why the Conservative budget is leaving Canadians behind. I understand how the budget debate works in the sense that he is talking about what is in the budget and as there is a lot in the budget, there is a lot to talk about.

However, my point of order relates to the time limit on debate. I have been listening for quite some time and I notice that my friend from Burnaby—New Westminster appears to have gone beyond the time limits that I am used to seeing in a debate like this.

This is not a criticism of the member's speech, but I wonder what that means in terms of how long a speech can actually be. I am interested in what the member has to say, but I am worried about him actually losing time and being cut off before he is done.

• (1645)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine is rising on the same point of order.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order, even though I am really sorry to interrupt my distinguished colleague for Burnaby—New Westminster. He has shown that he does incredible work in the House. I also noticed that he works very hard to present clear arguments to make the government accountable.

Recently, I found on the Internet, more specifically on the site of the Journals Branch of the House of Commons, a document entitled: *Time Limits on Debates and Lengths of Speeches*. This document refers to section 84(7) of chapter 10 of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.

It supports the point raised by the hon. member for Halifax. I am going to quote it in English because I do not have the French version in front of me.

[English]

(7) No Member, except the Minister of Finance, the Member speaking first on behalf of the Opposition, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, shall speak for more than twenty minutes at a time in the Budget Debate.

[Translation]

Therefore, if I am not mistaken, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster is the first opposition member to rise in this debate. In fact, he is replying to the Minister of Finance.

In this case, I do think he has more than the usual 20 minutes. As I understand it, he may talk as long as he wishes. It is my opinion, Mr.

Speaker, that this question needs a ruling. I do not think 20 minutes is enough. I think the Standing Orders—

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I will respond to the two points of order.

I think the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine answered his own question. In the budget debate, the Minister of Finance has unlimited time, as does the first speaker after, which is typically the finance critic from the official opposition. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has unlimited time.

I would ask all members to note two things. First, points of order are important in this place and the process of raising points of order ought not be abused. Second, if any member has questions about procedure or the rules of the House, the appropriate process is to ask at their desk in the lobby or to approach the table. Asking for clarification of the rules is in itself not a point of order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for clarifying that. I am very happy to be back, and I appreciated the points of order just the same. It was great to have that moment because, as I am saying, even as we speak, more and more comments are flooding in. I believe the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour will be passing me his BlackBerry in just a moment.

Here is another question from a young Canadian, “If the Conservatives are so concerned about the budget and deficit, why did they create the deficit in the first place?” I think that is a very interesting question.

I have comment from a gentleman in southern Ontario who says, “Thanks to the NDP for being my voice in Parliament re: the budget. My member of Parliament, a Conservative, doesn't seem to care, unfortunately.” I am hopeful that will change through the course of this budget debate.

I do not know about other members but I am feeling more energetic than ever with the support of my NDP colleagues in the House of Commons.

I will continue to read into the record the comments from Canadian families from coast to coast to coast. This comment comes from someone in northern Ontario, “The current budget is a disaster and will deepen the recession that Canada is barely able to get out of. As we're becoming aware, Canadians are becoming aware, we did not elect this government.”

That is a very key point. That individual is raising a concern about the issue of robocalls in the last federal election campaign. Of course, it has been part of the discussions we in this House have been having over the course of the last few weeks. Canadians have become more aware of how the election campaign was interfered with, which I think is fair to say since Elections Canada is investigating. Obviously, the comment from that Canadian that the budget is a disaster because it will deepen the recession is a valid point.

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Coming into the budget itself, we had already lost 50,000 full-time jobs since September. Even though the Conservatives like to throw out these very imaginative and creative numbers, we on this side of the House prefer to stick to facts, which is why we support the work of the First Nations Statistical Institute, the National Council of Welfare and Statistics Canada. The first two have been completely destroyed. Their heads have been cut off by the budget. The third is barely hanging on, with severe ongoing cuts.

However, we believe in sticking to the facts and the facts are that, since prior to the last recession back in May 2008, the Conservatives have barely managed to create 200,000 jobs at a time when the labour force grew by 500,000. We were well behind almost 300,000 jobs, certainly 250,000 jobs short of what needed to be created just to keep our heads above water.

Then came September through to February, which were catastrophic months for 50,000 Canadian families that lost their breadwinners. People went to work and were told that there was no more work. They no longer had incomes. They had that sickening thought, as they walked through the door to talk to their family, that the family would need to cut back and that they would have difficulty keeping a roof over their heads. They will need to cut back on medication for their parents perhaps, or maybe shoes for the kids, or maybe that summer camp they dreamed of for years for their youngest. That happened 50,000 times over the course of the fall and then we hit this budget.

● (1650)

The Canadian who just wrote to us understands completely that we will lose another 50,000 or more jobs, not just the jobs that were killed by this fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget, but by the multiplier effect in the private sector. We are talking about 50,000 more Canadian families that will lose a breadwinner.

This is the most important point I would like to emphasize. As I am reading these letters into the record and bringing forward these comments from Canadians, we are understanding the wisdom and profound knowledge of the Canadian people. Canadians understand the economy. They understand that when we slice, hack and go at it like ideological Vikings breaking open the shop rather than proceeding in a responsible way, there are consequences, and that is what has happened here.

After the failure of the government to address, in any meaningful way, the recession, being almost 300,000 jobs short, after the failure we saw this fall with the factory closures across this country, dozens of factories and plants closed with tens of thousands of jobs lost, for the government at this time to hack, slash and kill 20,000 public sector jobs and 30,000 or 40,000 more private sector jobs, though we probably will not find out the real figures until tomorrow, is profoundly irresponsible.

On this side of the House, the NDP MPs believe in the solid knowledge, understanding and wisdom of the Canadian people. Canadians understand what the government is doing and they do not like it. Canadians understand the negative impacts of this budget and they do not like it. They understand the increasing inequality and they do not like it. They want the kind of country where people are not left behind and everyone matters, where democratic institutions function, where Elections Canada is not hurt as a result of taking

action because of potential illegal activities in the last election campaign but that it is actually given the resources to do its work to uncover the truth, and where statistical organizations actually produce real studies because they have the financing to do so and, in that way, we can track what the real quality of life is for first nations people in our country, and what is really happening with those who are at the bottom level of income, the poorest of the poor in our country.

That is what Canadians believe in and that is what we are seeing in case after case as I read these letters. Canadians understand the difference between current dollars and constant dollars. They understand that this country is not going in the direction they want it to go in. They understand that they were given promises that have been promptly broken by the government. They also understand that there is hope on the horizon because, on October 20, 2015, there will be a new sunrise in this country with the election of the first NDP government in Canadian history.

I am just warming up and starting to get my stride. I do not know how late we are going tonight, but I am perfectly willing to keep reading Canadians' comments into the record.

I will now go to northern Quebec now. An individual wrote to the finance minister and said the following, "Dear Mr. Finance Minister:

"Cutting public services and jobs is not the only way to reduce the deficit. In fact, austerity budgets could increase unemployment and push Canada into another recession, which, in turn, could reduce government revenues and make it more difficult to achieve a balanced budget. Your government often points to Greece as a reason to reduce government deficits and debt but Greece also provides a warning about what happens to an economy when deep austerity measures are adopted. Consider alternatives to cutbacks that could harm the Canadian economy to say nothing of the many public service workers and many Canadians who depend on their services".

I would like to thank this individual for writing in on that basis. She is absolutely right.

● (1655)

An interesting and important point that we can make in this debate is that the countries that are in difficulty, Greece and Ireland, are actually the countries that have the lowest corporate tax rates. The idea that driving corporate tax rates down as far as they can go is somehow good for the economy, Greece and Ireland are two examples to the contrary. They have the lowest corporate tax rates in Europe and we can see where it led them.

I will move on to Atlantic Canada. We have some fantastic Atlantic Canadian members of Parliament.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Who are they, Peter?

The Budget

Mr. Peter Julian: I am being asked to say who they are but all Atlantic Canadian members of Parliament are fantastic. However, there are six who are particularly distinguishing in the work they have done in Parliament: the members of Parliament for St. John's East, St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Halifax, Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Sackville—Eastern Shore and Acadie—Bathurst. Those six MPs are the strongest of the strong among Atlantic Canadian members of Parliament.

Coincidentally, coming in just in the last few minutes are some comments from Atlantic Canadians, which I think mixes very well with the strong representation they have in Atlantic Canada. I have comments from Halifax, which read, "Corporate tax cuts, more prisons and 65 F-35 fighters bombers are no response to the needs of average Canadians. How about eliminating subsidies to big oil giants? How about closing the loopholes on corporations that hide profits offshore and give Revenue Canada the e tools human resources they need to properly investigate the billions of tax dollars corporations cleverly hide from the purview of Revenue Canada. Canadians need adequate responses to child care, health care and education as well as pensions, and a meaningful investment in green energy sources".

That is wisdom from Atlantic Canada. We thank the person for writing in. Obviously the concern is around the prison agenda at a time when the crime rate is falling and the massive boondoggle, the F-35 fiasco. Members will recall when the government promised it would not cost more than \$9 billion to replace the CF-18s. Now we are at somewhere between \$30 billion and \$40 billion and counting. The government just does not seem to have at any point any willingness to put the brakes on and say that it needs to start over on it.

The Conservatives are telling future seniors that they will need to pay for the government's boondoggle, its fiasco, rather than stopping the purchase, which is what a prudent NDP government would do. We would stop it. It will cost \$30 billion or \$40 billion. We would put the brakes on and start over. The government should tender the contract and ensure there is careful cost accounting so we are not spending \$40 billion for something that was committed to at \$9 billion.

Since we have not formed a federal government yet, members might ask how we can talk about financial accounting at the federal level. The Department of Finance publishes annual returns, which are called the fiscal period returns. It calculates how good governments of all stripes are at budget forecasting, how they balance their budgets and how they pay down debt. It has been doing that for 20 years. It is hardly a hotbed of social democrats, which I think members will agree with me on that, but for 20 years, year after year, it has compared NDP governments, Conservative governments and Liberal governments. Of course, Liberal governments have not been so good on the budgetary management side, so they tend to be off with the Parti Québécois and the Socreds.

• (1700)

The second-place award for the last 20 years for fiscal management goes to the Conservative Party.

For 20 years, without fail, year after year, NDP governments have been the best at forecasting balanced budgets, balancing the budgets and paying down debt.

If I were the one saying so, I could imagine some skepticism from the Conservatives across the aisle, but the fact is their own federal Ministry of Finance is saying that. I think that tells them if they want to up their game, they should act more like New Democrats. That is what they need to do.

Let us move on to some more comments. I am going to talk about an eight-year-old girl in the Halifax region. I believe her name is Madeline.

We have been talking a lot about the wisdom of Canadians. We have been talking about the wisdom of young Canadians who have been writing in. They understand we cannot compare apples and oranges, constant dollars and current dollars. We have been talking about the wisdom of senior Canadians and those who are nearly seniors who understand that the OAS is sustainable in its present form, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer says, as the government's own actuarial tables say. That wisdom we are getting is from a wide variety of Canadians.

Here is wisdom from an eight-year-old girl in Halifax, Nova Scotia, an eight-year-old Canadian who understands what budgets are all about. She said, "Why doesn't the Prime Minister know if he doesn't use the budget to look after the environment, we will end up just like the people in *WALL-E*?" *WALL-E* is a film about the environment. It is a great film. This eight-year-old girl in Halifax, Nova Scotia understands that we have to take care of the environment or we will end up with severe environmental degradation and catastrophe.

We say to Madeline that she can trust us to make sure that, as of October 20, 2015, we are going to take care of the environment. She can trust us in pushing back on these meanspirited cuts to the environment ministry and the removal of environmental assessments. Madeline is absolutely right. We have to look after the environment. We pledge to do so.

I sure hope that the Prime Minister's Office incorporates Madeline's comments in the next briefing note that comes out. We see that eight-year-olds understand the importance of the environment. If the government does not seem to understand the importance of environmental assessments and protecting the environment, perhaps the Prime Minister should visit a class of eight-year-olds and find out from them how important the environment is to them and how important the future of the country is to them.

I am going to move from Halifax, Nova Scotia to another favourite part of our land, the great city of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, which has two fantastic members of Parliament.

Mr. Murphy, who is from St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, said, "The increase in the duty free allowance only serves to show Canadians the government's arrogance. I wish somebody could explain how the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister intend to grow our economy with this regressive move to encourage people to go across the border to buy goods".

The Budget

● (1705)

I have some more comments from Atlantic Canadians. A lot of Atlantic Canadians have been writing in and tweeting. My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour may have another tweet to tell me about.

I mentioned Nova Scotia. We heard Madeline's comments and a number of others. We have mentioned Newfoundland and Labrador. I also have a comment from someone from Prince Edward Island and a comment from someone from New Brunswick.

Ms. Hunt, who is from Prince Edward Island, said, "I am a re-elected town councillor in Prince Edward Island. This budget is an extremely harsh budget, favouring big business but attacking the poor, the disadvantaged and seniors. The OAS attacks target poor seniors and youth. Please speak up for Canadians, including Katimavik youth", and I will certainly be doing that in a moment. She said, "I feel like we are now becoming the 51st state of the U.S.A."

Another young person, Ms. Henry, is from Fredericton, New Brunswick, which is another Conservative-held riding. We have been endeavouring to raise concerns that are coming from Conservative-held ridings from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Scott Andrews: We are smiling over here.

Mr. Peter Julian: I thank the member across the way for his compliments.

Ms. Henry said, "Thanks for standing up in the House and opposing the disastrous Conservative budget. As a full-time student working three jobs to pay for my education, I am disappointed that the budget offers no help for students. Increasing tuition fees mean that post-secondary education is becoming less and less accessible to young people in Canada. I see my friends dropping out of university because they cannot afford to continue. We have a student debt crisis, and instead of ensuring that all young people have a fair chance, the Conservatives seem intent on creating a system where only the rich can get an education, and that is shameful. As a young person, I am outraged that the Conservatives are trying to justify their cuts to old age security by claiming to be helping young people. We are the ones who cannot find jobs now because of their mismanagement of the economy. It is my generation that will have to retire later and live in poverty in our retirement. Many seniors who have worked their whole lives are already being forced to live in poverty in retirement. Cutting OAS and throwing more seniors into poverty is bad for seniors and it is bad for youth".

These are the voices of Canadians from across the country. There is another tweet coming in. I certainly encourage Canadians to continue tweeting or posting on Facebook.

This is a request from a constituent in Brandon—Souris, which is a Conservative-held riding in Manitoba. That individual has asked the member for Brandon—Souris to cross the floor and vote against the budget and join the NDP. We think that is very good advice.

An hon. member: Do not stop now.

Mr. Peter Julian: We will not be stopping. That is for sure.

These are some of the comments that have been raised. There are tons more coming in. Before I turn to other things, I want to mention some of the concerns that have been raised around one program in particular. There is a truckload of comments coming in on a variety of issues. I have addressed the OAS concerns, the cuts to services, environmental assessments. Comments are coming in from all over. Canadians are speaking out. They are very concerned. Some comments are coming in regarding one program in particular, since we have been talking about youth.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

This is about the Katimavik program.

Many Canadians have said they do not agree with the government about old age pensions or about the budget cuts, especially with regard to services. Of course, a number of Canadians have also mentioned the Katimavik program. I would like to spend a few moments, since I have a good deal of time to talk today, discussing the budget cuts that affect Katimavik, because many Canadians are worried. I will begin in Quebec.

First, I have an email from Sherbrooke that says, "I have not yet had time to read the Conservative budget, but I saw that they have made cuts to the Katimavik social program. It is a very useful program for youth development in our Canadian communities." This young Canadian objects to the cuts.

Now we go to Rimouski, where a woman writes, "I worked for Katimavik as a coordinator in Rimouski, Trois-Pistoles and Mont-Joli. I saw how much this program helped young Canadians grow and develop and how much it gave to the host communities. I was the coordinator the first year of the program in the Lower St. Lawrence region, and I am proud of what the young people did in our city, by volunteering with a number of non-profit organizations."

They are saying we must support organizations that can do a lot with scarce resources. On the subject of Katimavik, once more, there has been great response from the people of Canada.

Next we come to Ville d'Anjou. I would like to thank the hon. member for Anjou and Rivière des Prairies for his presence and his work in the House.

The Budget

The woman wrote the following to her member of Parliament: “I live in Ville d'Anjou. First, I must admit that I know very little about politics because I am only 22. I am writing about the abolition of the Katimavik program, which was made official in today's budget. [She wrote last Thursday.] I am both sad and upset that this program has been abolished. I had the opportunity to take part in it in 2009-10. At the time, I was dithering. I had to choose between various college programs, but I had no idea of what I wanted to do. Therefore, I decided to participate in the Katimavik program. It gave me an understanding of the world and of what the citizenship means. I developed a new confidence and I learned to opt for the simple life. I also had the opportunity to see how much Canadian communities have to offer and, of course, I was able to learn English, a language in which I was deficient despite taking courses in high school and in CEGEP. After coming back home at the end of the program, I completed my education in social sciences, since Katimavik had helped me find my way. I also continued to do volunteer work in my neighbourhood, particularly with young people. In fact, this experience confirmed my choice of career. It is with nostalgia that I think back to Katimavik, program that I feel should be compulsory. During the election campaign, when my friends would show little interest in politics at the provincial or national level, I made a point of explaining its importance, because it was taught to me at Katimavik.”

● (1715)

That is another very important point. Young people are writing from all regions of the country. They are saying that the Katimavik program is important. They are also saying that, since this program is so useful to Canadians, the government should not have abolished it in the budget.

We fully agree with these young people. We believe that Canadian families deserve better than cuts to the Katimavik program, which is a program designed for young people. They deserve better.

Here is another young voice from Quebec, in the riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue: “I am a resident of Val-d'Or and I am writing to express my concern over the abolition of the Canadian volunteer program Katimavik. As you know, the minister tabled his budget on March 23, 2012, and we learned in it that the program would no longer be subsidized. However, I firmly believe that they [the government] did not do their homework. How can the Conservative government deprive young adults aged 16 to 21 of their right to explore their culture and nation, particularly since the program is so useful to communities that have a great need for it? The young people who enrol in the program will not silence the party, on the contrary. They all work for not-for-profit corporations that provide a direct service to the most underprivileged, whether it be soup kitchens, centres for people with disabilities, or schools in disadvantaged areas. These young people have a direct impact on the community and on the people they meet. I myself participated in the program [it is still Mr. Gauthier from Val-d'Or talking] in 2008-09, and I swear on the Bible that this experience changed my life. I learned to live in a group, to share and to not worry about my small problems. I learned that there are people who have much greater needs than I do. Do you not think that this experience has a more positive impact on young people who, at 16, learn the real values in life? Instead of realizing the importance of this program for the years to come, the government prefers to keep young people in their

communities and prevent them from discovering the essence of Canada and meeting its great and welcoming population. [This is really a message of hope.] I realize that one email is not going to change the world. However, if I managed to pique your curiosity about the Katimavik program, I will have done my share. Thirty thousand young people have already been part of the adventure and a few thousand are currently helping hundreds of communities coast to coast. Unfortunately, the group that was supposed to leave in July to lend a helping hand has been cancelled. Think of the thousands of young people who were waiting to leave and who, because of the Prime Minister, will not be of any help to our communities. If you have a few minutes, I invite you to visit the website. You should take a look at it. I do not think that a subsidy of a few hundred thousand dollars to train our youth should have been cut.”

That was another message about Katimavik. I am skipping some because there are many more. Still, I will try to read a few, because I think I have enough time.

● (1720)

[English]

This is from a British Columbian. He says, “It has recently come to my attention that the federal government will cut funding to essential youth development programs. One of these is Katimavik. If you are not aware, Katimavik is a national youth volunteer program focused on fostering personal development in young Canadians through voluntary community work, training and group interaction. It is a cultural exchange between communities in Canada and youth from the rest of Canada. I am an alumni of the Katimavik program. I was stationed in Steinbach, Manitoba and Chisasibi in Northern Quebec. I have seen amazing growth and development as a result of my involvement in these communities in Canada. This program establishes strong links between small communities and the rest of Canada. It also offers community partners a great economic return. According to the social and economic impact study of the Katimavik program 2006, Katimavik has a positive economic return for the community partners. Each \$1 expenditure by Katimavik generates an average return of \$2.20.”

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He says, “If not for this program, I would not have grown to be an engaged citizen, nor come to understand this great country. Before this program, I never really understood my role in Canada. I immigrated to Canada when I was six years old. I never really felt I was Canadian, or even really understood what that meant. However, after the program, and interacting with these people outside Vancouver, I understood that Canada is a wonderfully culturally diverse place, and respecting and sharing that diversity is what it meant to be Canadian to me. I believe cutting this program would be a devastating blow to the future of Canada. This program has developed me, and each year 1,100 other youth, to be engaged in local communities and lives. It has also developed my professional and social skills. At this point in time in the economy it is difficult for youth to acquire work without previous experience. This causes a vicious circle of inexperienced youth not being hired and youth not being able to gain experience to be hired. According to Statistics Canada, the youth unemployment rate has been skyrocketing. If it were not for Katimavik, I would not have decided to study at Simon Fraser University. I can make a career out of interacting with our global, national and local communities. Before the program I was just a confused and aimless student. But now, I have direction.”

This is just another example of young Canadians writing in and saying to the government that it should not be cutting Katimavik and other programs in the budget. Canadian families and Canadian youth deserve better than what it has put forward in the budget.

We have comments from Kenora, another Conservative riding. The writer says, “We have had the privilege of having Katimavik volunteers in our community for the past three years. We have worked with over 60 youth from across the country. We are an Ojibway anglophone community with many not-for-profit organizations that have been able to enhance their staffing at no cost. Youth volunteers have assisted the Out of the Cold shelter, the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre, the Salvation Army Thrift Store, the Chamber of Commerce, the Kwayaciiwin Education Resources, Cedar Bay Recreation Centre and Wawatay Native Communications Society, to name but a few. The youth have had a tremendous opportunity to learn about the culture of the settler nations of Canada, French and English, as they live and learn as a team for the term of six months. In Sioux Lookout, they have also been introduced to aboriginal culture and have learned from first nations people the history, struggles and hope for the future. The program gives youth the opportunity to learn about our great country and that there is an additional benefit to the communities that host these young people. I understand that the budget is about \$15 million a year. In the grand scheme of things, that does not seem to be out of line for the benefit created. Please fight to keep this valuable program operating.”

• (1725)

In all these cases, we see a government that is prepared to spend, with the maintenance contracts, somewhere around \$40 billion for the F-35s, for 65 fighter jets. We can do the calculation. We are talking about well over \$0.5 billion for each of the fighter jets. The Conservatives are saying that because of that they have to cut pensions, services and health care. They have to cut out whole programs and statistical agencies that provide facts, to which the government seems very adverse.

We are saying that is not the way it ought to be, that does not reflect fundamental Canadian values. Canadians want to work with each other and help each other. That is one thing that Katimavik does. I have another comment from a Conservative riding in New Brunswick. It states, “As someone who has had many friends and family members participate in Katimavik throughout the years, I am concerned about this government's recent decision to de-fund this invaluable program. With youth unemployment at record levels under this government, the federal government must do everything it can to address this growing crisis. The opportunity that Katimavik provides to young people across Canada is just one of the many ways the federal government could work to address this issue. I urge Conservatives to reverse their position.”

Tweets are coming to Conservative members of Parliament. Folks are now posting on Facebook sites and sending in emails. They are saying to Conservative members of Parliament, “You've got to change the way you're going. This budget is not good for Canada”.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The member for Bourassa is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster is telling us about the positive tweets, but I would like him to also share the ones that say he is wasting our money and should sit down so we can have a real debate.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We are just into a question of debate. I do not really think it is a point of order.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member has long experience in the House of Commons. He knows there are some Liberal members of Parliament who would like the NDP to stop so that the Conservatives can take the floor. It astounds me, because the reality is the Liberals get a few minutes of debate but the Conservatives get most of the debating time.

I have not had a single email, a single Twitter, a single posting on Facebook asking that the Conservatives take over debate in the House of Commons, as they have done by using taxpayers' money to send ministers across the country to say inaccurate things about the budget. Canadians are telling me to stand in the House and speak for them. They are telling me to make sure Canadians know what is in the budget and why they deserve better.

The Budget

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for ruling on the matter. It is much appreciated. I would ask, Mr. Speaker, if you could give me a five-minute signal and a one-minute signal when we come up to 6:30 p. m. That would be much appreciated, because I want to make some concluding remarks. I said earlier that I wanted to speak for a while, but I have been energized by some of the comments coming from the House of Commons and the many Canadians who are asking for their voices to be heard on the floor of the House of Commons. I am perfectly happy to keep on speaking.

I will now move on to a young woman named Alexandra, who lives on the West Island in Montreal.

She says, in a bit of a humourous way, “Thanks to the Prime Minister for cutting the program that taught me the most life skills, taught me more than any school ever did, gave me the opportunities I have now, and let me live some of the most incredible experiences. Yes, [Prime Minister], you are really looking out for Canada's youth and future generations.”

It is an outstanding comment, and she is obviously concerned about what the Prime Minister is doing to that program.

This is from a gentleman in Vancouver South, another Conservative riding. We are endeavouring to have the views of Canadians living in Conservative ridings brought to the floor of the House of Commons.

This person says, “I know first-hand how good the program Katimavik has been for the youth of this country over the past many years. In addition to a major loss for the country, one of the offices for the program is located in the city of New Westminster, which would mean a loss of jobs in that community. New Westminster has hosted a number of Katimavik projects over the years that have benefited our community.

“I'm not sure also if he asked the President of Treasury Board if the Minister of Canadian Heritage will stand up for Katimavik. I'm not sure also if he has asked the President of Treasury Board to fundraise for the summits that took place in his riding a few years back. Who can forget the fake lake they created?”

We cannot forget the fake lake. We cannot forget the fake citizenship ceremony with fake new citizens. We cannot forget the fake job figures that are brought forward to the House of Commons every day. We just cannot forget all that fakery. I imagine, as a result of the budget, there is going to be more of that, because the government is going to cut all of the statistical agencies that provide the facts on which the government should be proceeding in public policy. The government is simply not doing it.

• (1735)

The next one is from the wonderful riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Who's the MP there?

Mr. Peter Julian: The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is a terrific individual and good friend of mine. I cannot mention his name, though.

This individual from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour says, “I would like to voice my dismay at the news that funding for Katimavik will be cut.

“The Katimavik program provides this nation's youth with the opportunities and experiences to make better choices to improve their lives and to support their future physical and mental health in positive ways that they may not have access to otherwise. Katimavik is instrumental in building the character and competence of our youth to become the kind of Canadian citizens we need for our future.”

This is another voice of wise Canadians.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: What a great statement.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: What a speech.

An hon. member: It just captured it, didn't it?

Mr. Peter Julian: It did. It was brilliant.

I am now going back to Kenora—Rainy River, another Conservative-held riding. These Canadians are writing or tweeting us, posting on Facebook or writing in emails. They are faxing and phoning NDP MPs and saying, “Please stand up for us in the House of Commons. Please represent us, because our MPs won't do that. This budget is not good”.

This is another letter from Kenora—Rainy River.

It says, “I want to register my strong protest about the Conservative government's elimination in the recent budget of a very positive program for young people in Canada. Katimavik volunteers have visiting Sioux Lookout for the past three years under a program where they learn cultural diversity and civic engagement. In fact, Sioux Lookout has a history with Katimavik dating back to the late 1970s.

“I have had the privilege of supervising the work placements of many of these young people at the Salvation Army thrift store. We are all volunteers at the Sally Ann. We are all working to better our community and our cross-cultural relations. We support recycling, reducing and reusing, and the Katimavik youth have been active in helping us pursue our mandate. We have appreciated the enthusiasm and excitement these youth have shown for Sioux Lookout. We have also learned about their commitment to a better country, their interesting community, aboriginal issues, and their idealistic goal of striving to save the planet.

“These are kids 17 to 21 years of age who earn \$2 a day for six months of tireless volunteering, often seven days a week in communities like ours. They are frequently trying to make up their minds about what to do with their lives, and the Katimavik experience helps shape those decisions.

“This is a significant program for youth. It broadens their knowledge of Canada and of our French-English-first nations heritage. It prepares them to join the workforce by giving them valuable work, life and leadership skills while fostering community development.

The Budget

“The Conservatives have been whittling away at Katimavik for years. When my son experienced Katimavik in 2007, it was a nine-month program, with three months spent in three different communities, and it always included a French experience. Katimavikers then earned \$3 a day. For those kids who completed the program, there was a \$1,000 survivor's bonus. They were proud kids who received that cheque.

“Now it is a six-month program—two times three months—and the kids have to pay to apply and pay to join. Long gone is the final thank-you cheque.

“Surely this program cannot be a big-ticket item for the government, yet it's a priceless experience for both the participants and the communities lucky enough to enjoy their presence. Last year more than half a million hours of community work were performed by Katimavik youth, but that is down from three-quarters of a million hours the year before because the government keeps slashing the number of participating communities. I am distressed to see the direction we are heading under a Conservative majority, where successful and inexpensive programs for youth are eradicated mid-term.

“Katimavik was just entering the third year of a funding agreement whose term ends in March 2013. The government will undoubtedly incur costs to cancel housing rental agreements, vehicle leases, staff contracts, etc.

● (1740)

“It's hard not to think this is a vindictive move by the Conservatives, who view Katimavik as some other initiative, no matter that it has benefited 30,000 young people since its inception, and assisted numerous communities like Sioux Lookout across Canada.

“This is a valuable program for youth. It makes no sense to eliminate it. What kind of message are we giving our young people when we cut important opportunities for them like this while we increase our spending on prisons by the millions?”

That was a comment from Ms. Mombourquette from Sioux Lookout. I thank Ms. Mombourquette for writing in about Katimavik.

I will continue on.

A constituent from south Vancouver writes, “I'm devastated to learn that as part the 2012 federal budget, our Conservative government has cancelled Katimavik. This is a program that invests in Canadian youth and changes lives for the better. Since 1977 this program has allowed more than 30,000 young Canadians to get involved in more than 2,000 communities across the country.

I am one of those 30,000. My daughter was supposed to be one as well; she was to leave in July for six months. Such a tragic waste of such a valuable program.”

This is from the British Columbia Southern Interior: “It is a hidden economic cost to cut Katimavik. I worked for Katimavik for several years. Now I volunteer with the local Katimavik program. The Katimavik project provides over 5,000 hours of volunteer support to local charities. It strengthens the capacities of these non-

profits to serve the community. As local organizations jointly collaborate their support with the Katimavik program, they discover new ways of working together and of jointly serving their community.

“I've seen first-hand how this program fosters resilience and builds the leadership skills of thousands of young people, enabling them to prosper into adulthood. They go home recognizing their personal responsibility in building sustainable communities and valuing active participation in the community. Many participants carry on their community leadership throughout their lifetime.

“It's not uncommon to hear participants say, 'It has changed my life.' ”

I heard that four times this evening when current Katimavik volunteers in the Katimavik Guelph project heard that the 41st Parliament is planning to deny this kind of leadership experience to Canadian youth and community organizations in our communities and across Canada in the future.

“For the past 35 years, 30,000 Canadian youth have made a difference in communities across Canada. It is not uncommon to hear participants say, 'It has changed my life.' They leave the program with increased confidence, ready to go into the workforce or go back to school, passionate about pursuing a new-found goal.

“For those whose lives have been filled with challenges beyond their control, it gives them a chance to realize and harness their strengths. For those who've had more resources growing up, it broadens their understanding of the privileges they've had and the challenges many families have on a daily basis. At a time when civic engagement and voter turnout are at an all-time low, when youth unemployment rates are double the national average, this is clearly the worst time to cut Katimavik.

“Katimavik's ability to promote and instill long-term social responsibility and civic involvement and to provide job skills for our young people is needed more than ever before. I hope for the sake of tomorrow's youth that you can emulate the leadership skills of these young people and take the necessary action to reverse the government's decision.”

That is another Canadian voice.

This is from Edmonton, Alberta, yet another Conservative-held riding. We are giving those Canadians a voice on the floor of the House of Commons.

This lady writes, “I'm writing in response to the funding cuts to Katimavik just announced in the federal budget. I can't believe the government would be so short-sighted and narrow-minded as to wipe out a program that clearly offers nothing but good for Canadian youth.

“A country's longevity lies in the strength of its younger generations. Volunteering and exchanges build resilient, compassionate, intelligent adults who have a better understanding of their world and the people in it. It is ludicrous to assume that Canada does not benefit from youth who can see beyond their own bubble.

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•(1745)

“Cutting funding to Katimavik shows a clear disdain for a program that promotes values fundamental to a healthy society. I am ashamed to be governed by a Parliament that fails to see the necessity of volunteers and young people. I would appreciate it if you could make it clear to those in Ottawa that this move is not sitting well with students here in Edmonton, Alberta”.

From the heart of a Conservative riding, here is another Canadian who is speaking out and saying she does not accept the cuts in the Conservative budget.

I'll move on to Toronto. To the member of Parliament for Davenport, an exceptional member of Parliament, a constituent of his states that, “I am writing you as a concerned constituent in your riding regarding the recent decision to remove government funding for the youth program Katimavik in March 2013. In short, I feel this is a poor divestment from Canadian youth and I would like to see the decision challenged”.

He goes on to talk about his experience with Katimavik as a volunteer project leader and resource person and says, “These experiences have given me a clear understanding of the values of the program that has shaped up to 1,000 youth per year since the early 1980s. Here are a few concise points on the values and importance of the Katimavik program.

“The program enforces Canadian values such as diversity appreciation, civic engagement and healthy living. The program unifies Canadians from various provinces who share their experiences, reducing the notion of regionalism in our country. The program benefits 7 to 14 social service organizations in about a hundred communities across Canada with full-time volunteers throughout the year. The program builds the skill sets and confidence of Canadian youth to work in social sectors.

“I personally continue to work in the youth engagement and human rights field. I am only one of the many examples.

“According to my unofficial calculations, the program costs \$2 million a year and generates more than \$12 million in volunteer work revenue.

“The program allows for stronger connections in Canada by exposing young Canadians to three different regions of Canada outside their home community. The program contributes to creating safer spaces for female and lesbian, gay, transsexual, transgender and queer Canadian youth by promoting egalitarian values in group living and connecting with social services of various communities focused on women's and LGBTTQ rights.

“I will happily discuss with you my thoughts in more detail if you would like to hear about the program as a whole”.

There again, from Davenport, Toronto, are concerns about Katimavik.

I will go to someone from LaSalle—Émard, who writes: “Please include me among those who find the government's decision in the budget to end funding to Katimavik as lacking in insight and judgment. From all accounts, Katimavik offers young Canadians an opportunity to see other parts of Canada while engaging in

worthwhile community service. I understand many participants want to work in the non-profit sector, thereby improving the lives of less fortunate Canadians. At a time when youth unemployment is very high and many young people are looking for direction and meaning in their future, this move seems especially incomprehensible. I urge you to lend your voice to those asking the government to reconsider the decision”.

•(1750)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I will continue, of course. He who hesitates is lost.

[*English*]

I have one more to read. Even as we speak on the floor of this House of Commons, Canadians are flooding our email inboxes and fax machines and are making phone calls, so it is hard to keep abreast of the numerous Canadians across this country who are asking us to speak out on their behalf.

I was thinking I would move on to another issue, but I just have a fresh pile of emails and tweets and postings from Facebook, and I will have to come back to them.

However, the last one I am going to read from this older pile is from someone in the B.C. southern interior. This person says the following: “I participated in Katimavik in 1979. It was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. I fondly remember the good times and the bad, learning from each other as we connected with fellow Canadians from all provinces. This program helped me immeasurably develop and mature and transition from high school into the greater beyond. It opened doors, working side by side with people from the small communities with whom we lived and gained experience from.

“The loss of this program is a blow to all Canadians. This kind of endeavour keeps Canadians engaged and helps them to become productive citizens. There should be more programs such as Katimavik, not less. It's a sad day indeed for all Canadians.

“I had hoped to send my children on this learning adventure, to share with them the majesty of our great country, even for low-income families. How short-sighted is this decision to cancel Katimavik? Consider my kids, who may now hang around on street corners, perhaps getting involved with seedier individuals, as there are few opportunities for them to experience something other than a low-income family existence. I wonder how much this costs Canadians in the long run, how many of our kids will end up on drugs or involved in crime as there are only low-paying jobs awaiting them, if they are lucky, or who have no concept of what Canada is like.

“Isn't it ironic that this government is willing to spend billions more on building prisons and funding crime instead of enriching the lives of our kids? Shameful, myopic and stupid. That's really what this kind of decision exemplifies”.

We thank very much the writer of this letter from British Columbia for raising that point.

The Budget

The letters talk about connecting with fellow Canadians in all provinces. That is what we do in the NDP caucus. We have Canadians from every part of this country, from every part of this land, working together.

However, the government does not share this same perception of Canada as a united country. We see in this budget what will be a dismal and dark and divisive decade if we go through to 2015. We have seen how the government tries to divide one generation against another. We have seen how the government divides one region from another region, one community from another community. This is how the Prime Minister functions, by dividing Canadians. Katimavik brings Canadians together. Perhaps that is why the government is trying to axe it, because it provides a unity that the government does not want to encourage. The government wants to encourage division and to pit one Canadian against another.

On this half of the House, in the official opposition, we say that what Canadians want is unity. Canadians want to work together. We want an end to this kind of divisive politics. That is why we are going to be fighting to save the kinds of programs that bring Canadians together, because Canadian families deserve better.

Mr. Speaker, I said earlier today that the Conservative MPs would start to see the light, that they would start to smile and we would see the light bulbs going on.

As we have been criticizing this budget, I am seeing now that there has been some movement. Maybe it is because of the tweets that they are getting from constituents. Maybe it is because of the emails and the phone calls they are getting from seniors and future seniors.

• (1755)

I do not know, but I am certainly feeling the love from the other side. That can only mean they are starting to understand why Canadians are reacting so negatively to the budget. I get the sense that the Conservatives are starting to understand why these cuts hurt Canadians.

Certainly it is a good thing that in the course of debate and through these many emails, tweets, the postings on Facebook and the very heartfelt letters from Canadians right across this country, we are touching or reaching Conservative members of Parliament. That makes it all worthwhile to be collecting these comments from Canadians from coast to coast. We are going to continue to work, because if we can have Conservative MPs stand up for their constituents and this country and vote against this budget, that would be a very good thing. We certainly hope that happens.

I have a bunch of new emails and comments that have arrived even while I have been speaking. The wonder of modern technology is that now people can have their word brought forward on the floor of the House of Commons. So many people are doing that, and so many are younger Canadians. This is what has been most inspiring about the last couple of days of this debate. It is young Canadians who are speaking out; it is young Canadians who are tweeting and urging their Conservative members of Parliament to vote against the budget.

It is young Canadians who are expressing their hopes and dreams not only about their own futures and those of their classmates,

friends and families, but more importantly also the future of their communities, their provinces, their regions and the country. That is what we are finding so inspiring about this, the words of inspiration coming from young Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

I am going to continue. We have a message from a constituent in another Conservative riding, Lennox and Addington, who writes the following: “I live in a Conservative riding, Lennox and Addington. I am disgusted by the latest budget. I do not believe that my member of Parliament has any intent or any ability to represent me and fight for what I want to see in the federal budget.

“There are many areas of concern, including the cuts to the old age security, as well as cuts to the public service, Elections Canada, and the emphasis on jails and fighter jets. I have a 15-year-old son, and I am very concerned about his ability to make a decent living in the future. There seems to be no focus on jobs unless they have to do with exploiting the oil sands in Alberta.

“Please continue to fight on our behalf and let the Conservatives know that most Canadians can see through their flimsy speaking points and their attempt to distract us with the elimination of the penny”.

Those were very apt comments from another Canadian in another Conservative-held riding, who is concerned about the cuts to the OAS, the public service, Elections Canada and, the most important recurring theme, the emphasis on jails and fighter jets. We have heard about the latter when we have talked about cuts to services, and cuts to youth programs and cuts to pensions.

Canadians can add things up. They are saying this about the astronomical cost of the F-35 fiasco, which started at \$9 billion and has now escalated to somewhere around \$40 billion. No one on that side can tell us what it is going to cost, although we have certainly been asking. They cannot for the simple reason—

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Without an engine.

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, that would be with the engine, eventually. The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is right to point out that the F-35s are delivered without engines.

• (1800)

However, all costs included, nobody on the government side of the House has been able to stand and say that it will be \$42 billion or \$50 billion or whatever it will be. They cannot for the simple reasons that the government never tendered the contract and that the costs are changing daily. It has been a boondoggle and poorly managed. Every day there are new additional costs. Even if somebody stood up today and said that it will cost \$50 billion for the F-35s, tomorrow it could be \$51 billion. We do not know.

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However, Canadians are making that connection between the government's willingness to spend tens of billions of dollars on the fighter jets; the government's willingness to spend, according to one fiscal analysis that was done on the prison system, \$19 billion; and that it is willing to splurge in the most irresponsible, fiscally imprudent way possible, tens of billions of dollars on its pet projects but yet is unwilling to fund retirement security, health care, services Canadian families depend on, food and transportation safety, protection of our environment and programs for youth that this country has at a time when we have high levels of youth unemployment .

An hon. member: Canadian families deserve better.

Mr. Peter Julian: Canadian families certainly do deserve better. I would have thought, after seven hours of debate, that my colleagues would have been tired but they are as energetic in the House of Commons as they are defending their constituents. What an amazing team.

As we go into the eighth hour of debate, Canadians are providing the debate. It is Canadians from coast to coast who are faxing, emailing, tweeting and posting on Facebook. It is Canadians who are saying that this debate needs to be engaged. It is Canadians saying that they have heard about the budget and now they want to have their word on this budget. What makes this debate fascinating is that it is generated by the Canadian people. It is generated by younger and older Canadians, by Canadians who are raising their families and have finished raising their families, and by Canadians who are single and in large families. The pinnacle of democratic debate on the floor of the House of Commons is when ordinary Canadian families can have their voices expressed here in the House of Commons as they are doing today.

I will move on to a woman from North York in the Toronto area. She says, "Thank you for mentioning the blue collar workers such as carpenters, construction workers, painters, et cetera, in the budget debate. My husband is a letter carrier for Canada Post and his knees are damaged and his body almost broken. He will be lucky if he can make it until he is 60, never mind 67. He will be able to retire at 65 but I worry about the generation behind him who will not be able to. Keep fighting for all of us Canadians".

I would like to thank all the letter carriers and all those who work for Canada Post who get our mail delivered everyday for their devotion.

• (1805)

That is exactly the point we are making with OAS. This is not some kind of academic exercise where we simply raise the age from 65 to 67 and everybody falls into place. This is an attack on manual professions. This is an attack on letter carriers, carpenters, people who work in restaurants and service industries, people who have given their lives with their legs, their backs, their arms and their necks. It is different for an individual who is lawyer or is working in a white collar profession. It is not as punishing on the body. I am not suggesting that white collar workers do not work as hard. I am suggesting that it is a different kind of work.

However, for blue collar workers, those are the kinds of workers who will be most impacted by this callous raising of the retirement

age because they simply will not be able to put two more years into their profession, which means that they will end up in dire poverty.

As I mentioned previously, we are talking about a quadrupling of the poverty rate among Canadian seniors in the next few years. We talked about a dismal, dark, divisive decade under these Conservatives. It would become even worse if they were ever returned to power in 2015, because all of these divisive, dour changes that they are making to push our quality of life down, except for the wealthiest of Canadians, will have a greater and greater impact.

To tell Canadians who work in the manual professions that somehow it does not matter, that they should have their bodies give two more years, is showing enormous disrespect for the manual professions in this country. Those Canadians have already given and they are entitled to have a respectful retirement at the age of 65. We are standing up in the House because we are saying that those manual workers in Canada deserve better than what they are getting from the government.

I have another tweet that reads, "I find myself extremely frustrated that this Conservative government has so little regard for the poorest of Canadians".

I have a woman who comments, "I am very concerned about several items that have emerged in the budget. Changes to environmental assessment process: Any changes on the environment assessment process should be based on the desire to ensure the utmost protection of the environment to sustain the Canadian population. Protection of our environment is protection of people and jobs across the country. This should be the focus on any changes to assessment processes, not on time, but prior to making this assessment or in the interest of speeding up project deliveries. The risks are far greater than any measurable advantage of quicker industrial development".

Her second concern is about the changes to the CRA and charitable organizations. She says, "Any government in Canada should welcome and encourage public engagement in political processes and in political dialogue. In political pursuits that are non-partisan in nature there should be no question or concern. An engaged, informed and active citizenry means a government that is responsive to the needs of all its members. I am very concerned that these efforts will have a chill effect on the ability for organizations to engage citizens on matters that are political but not partisan".

She goes on to say, "Thank you for asking for and reading in the House our concerns". We thank her for sending that in.

Next we have a young Canadian who writes in from Guelph, Ontario. He says, "I am from Guelph, although I am currently on an internship in Costa Rica. I have been here since mid-January and have watched the political turmoil from abroad with great interest. I am not in the habit of writing MPs. However, I hope you will relay these sentiments in the House in some fashion.

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“The new budget has made me sick. I do not recognize Canada as my home any more. As a participant in the Canada world youth program, I understand the importance of programs like Katimavik for the youth of Canada. I think that cutting its funding is disgraceful and will leave the youth of this country further behind, coupled with rising tuition fees, limited job prospects and fewer government grants, it is amazing kids don't just give up.

● (1810)

“On cuts to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, to the National Film Board and to Telefilm, I am a photographer and it is almost next to impossible to survive in Canada in the arts. In fact, I am in Costa Rica right now because there are more options in Central America than in Canada. However, it is compounded by the fact that those organizations have produced content that is edgy, controversial and not always pro-government. The cuts symbolize nothing less than a partisan attack on government-funded companies and the message is clear: disagree with us and you lose your funding.

“The 19,000 public sector employees who lost their jobs while there is redundancy in the public service. I think massive layoffs like this was a poorly thought out idea, especially considering how friendly this budget is for private sector employers. Canada has a long tradition of public service and for good reason. This spits in the face of that tradition.

“I am a 23-year old with a political science degree who is finding work in Canada to be a difficult thing to come by. I think policy-makers need to understand that this budget does not reflect the will of the people and opposition members must make that clear”.

I will move right on to another Conservative-held riding. It is quite gratifying to all of us that most of these letters that have come in more recently are from Conservative-held ridings. We are hearing the constituents of the Conservatives themselves standing up and saying that the government needs to read the budget and to understand the impacts. However, most important, these constituents are telling their Conservative members of Parliament that they should be voting against the budget because Canadian families deserve better than what the Conservatives have put forward.

This woman writes, “I live in a Conservative riding in Ottawa, Ontario, that's Ottawa West—Nepean. I am 29 years old. I have a two-year-old daughter. My father is retired, having worked over 35 years for the city. My mother is self-employed and in ill health. I'm the first generation in my family to have attained a university education for which I finally paid for in full in 2010. I pay taxes. I vote. I have a mortgage. I shop locally and support our economy.

“I believe in the vibrancy I see in our communities and in the public institutions that make this country safe and great, but I am greatly disturbed at the direction this government is taking our country. The budget is yet another tool that will erode the great things our predecessors have accomplished.

“The government has not proven that OAS is unsustainable in its current form. They have not listened to the respected economists who have said that while there will be an additional draw on OAS it will be temporary. They have not listened to the 70% or 80% of Canadians who have said in numerous polls that they are opposed to this change. This is a manufactured crisis by a government that treats

its own constituents with contempt and other members of Parliament with disrespect.

“Today's younger workers say that those under age 54 will pay doubly for OAS”.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas on a point of order.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening carefully to this debate for some time.

The previous occupant of the chair said that if we had procedural or other questions we should consult the desk in the lobby. That is what I did. Still, we would like you to give us some of your wisdom as speaker. Far from wanting to interrupt my colleague, because I think his comments are very relevant, I would ask you to look at Standing Order 84(4) of the House of Commons, where, concerning the budget debate, we read:

On the second of the said days, if a subamendment be under consideration at fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government business in such sitting, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and forthwith put the question on the said subamendment.

The subamendment has not been moved, and I would like a clarification. Will you permit my hon. colleague to continue until 6:30 p.m.? What will happen to the adjournment proceedings that follow?

● (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas for his intervention.

[*English*]

As he cited correctly from the Standing Orders, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster continues to have the floor as is accorded to him. Since there is yet to be an amendment to the motion, there cannot be a subamendment.

We will allow the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster to continue at his discretion. He will know that we are coming to the end of the time allotted for government orders for the day.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas, who does such fine work here in the House. He is one of the new members who are bringing great energy to the House, even when he rises on points of order. I would like to commend him.

The Budget

[English]

I want to continue with the comments from this constituent who is from yet another Conservative-held riding. I would like to thank particularly the Canadians who currently live in Conservative-held ridings for their tweets, Facebook postings, emails, faxes and phone calls. They really help us understand what Canadians in Conservative-held ridings are thinking. They are very concerned about this budget, understandably. They are concerned that they were promised other things prior to May 2. It is certainly sinking in for constituents in Conservative-held ridings that they were promised that health care funding would continue, retirement security would continue, and services would continue, that things would not be messed up. Now they are seeing that the government is messing up on all of the commitments it made. Understandably, constituents in Conservative-held ridings are raising those things.

The next one is from Ottawa West—Nepean, the riding of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This constituent states, “This is a manufactured crisis by a government that treats its own constituents with contempt and other members of Parliament with disrespect. Today’s younger workers say those under age 54 will pay doubly for OAS. We all fund this program with our tax dollars, but today’s youth will be held off from benefiting from OAS for two additional years when they begin to access OAS by approximately 2030. The Conservative government has protected the interests of its key voter base today, while ensuring another government, federal or provincial, will be left to deal with the fallout for future generations. Compounding this problem is the fact that the boomer impact on OAS will wane in the early 2030s. This change to OAS makes absolutely no sense.”

Mr. Speaker, I asked the previous chair occupant to give me an indication at five minutes and one minute before the 6:30 p.m. adjournment. I would not want to overstep that time, unless there was unanimous consent to do that, in which case, with all the emails, tweets and postings on Facebook we are getting, it looks as though I could go all night. Just with comments from Conservative-held ridings I could probably go all night. They are flooding in. People are concerned about OAS and cutbacks in services. They are concerned about losing their jobs. We are being flooded with comments. If we did go all night, I would have a chance to read a lot more of the comments.

The constituent from Ottawa West—Nepean went on to say, “This change to OAS makes absolutely no sense. No plans are noted for those who, for whatever reason, cannot work past age 65, some even past age 60. This purposeful neglect is outrageous. I am sure you can perceive the intergenerational tension this will bring even in this email. Studies and surveys have noted that today’s youth do not have much knowledge of what a good workplace pension means. Canadians across the board struggle to provide for family basics, like food, child care and school supplies, meet financial obligations like student loans and mortgages and save for retirement. Instead of manufacturing crises of sustainability and misrepresenting the financial facts of OAS, the government should focus on taking real action to help Canadians secure their retirement income. No investment is to be made in the environment. Subsidies for the most damaging industries will continue. In another portion of the budget, the government intends to address the contentious issue of

federal public servants’ compensation and pensions. One MP in particular was interviewed on an Ottawa radio station within minutes of the budget speech wrapping up. He said that the 4,800 jobs that would be lost in Ottawa in some form or another was nothing.”

• (1820)

We will find out tomorrow to what extent the national capital region is gutted by this budget because we will have a more accurate assessment of exactly how many tens of thousands of jobs have been lost here. A member of Parliament said that it is nothing, that these employees are nothing.

The individual from Ottawa West—Nepean said, “This is contempt at its worst. I am very worried about what future direction this contempt and disregard will take. The government’s actions in this contempt cannot continue. I feel a responsibility to contribute in whatever way I can to ensure this does not continue so that the Canada I know and love and choose to live in and support remains for my daughter. Thank you for representing Canadians in the House today.”

Here is another tweet that is hot off the press. I am not sure I can say that about tweets, but I will in this case. Mr. Slepchik said that in solidarity with the NDP, he is staying at work until I am done speaking. He said, “Stand up for public servants, pensions and Katimavik with budget 2012”.

This next comment is from someone in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, which I know my colleague from Dartmouth—Coal Harbour feels very strongly about. This person said, “Today’s budget breaks numerous Conservative promises. During the 2011 election, that party promised to leave the pensions of Canadian seniors in tact. Today’s budget does a number of things, but what it does not do is preserve pensions. This budget kills 19,200 jobs directly, which will have a cascading effect on the Canadian economy of killing a further tens of thousands of jobs by lost spending in the local marketplace by the 19,200 federal employees whose jobs were killed in the budget. The budget maintains unnecessary tax cuts for big corporations, and while the tax cuts go into their pockets, middle-class Canadians like me get a massive tax cut of \$2.09 a month, and a loaf of bread costs \$2.29.”

This individual from Dartmouth is absolutely right. As study after study has shown, what has happened with corporate tax cuts is cash hoarding. Some \$583 billion is being hoarded by Canada’s companies, which is why with these tax cuts there are such severe job losses as we have experienced over the last few months. This is another individual pronouncing against the budget.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Speaker, I am trying to rush a bit, because I know as I am speaking there are more and more emails in our inboxes. More faxes are coming in. More tweets are coming in. There are more postings on Facebook. The comments just keep coming in. I am trying to rush a bit to get as much in as I can in the course of the next few minutes, unless of course we get unanimous consent to continue, but I have a sense the whip will not be willing to do that.

This comment is from someone from Vancouver Island North, another Conservative-held riding. The constituent said, "My concern is the number of public service jobs that will be cut in the budget. Not only will this affect individual families, this will cause economic stagnation".

An individual from the Toronto region said, "I am stunned by the imposed 10% reduction in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's budget. I appreciate the service so acutely and can only imagine what it would be for those who do not live in an urban and resource bountiful region. I listen to it; I read it online; I watch it on TV. The CBC is my primary source of information and one that I count on for a sensible and honest relaying of news. I believe that the government is trying to cut the CBC down at the knees, as well as honest journalistic criticism. Secondly, I am appalled by the short-sighted dismantling of the round table on the environment and the economy. Certainly there are environmentalists who are capable of assessing the global and national state of the environment. We are sadly tied to an economic engine that must be fuelled and this round table would have served to do just that in the sustainable way that we desperately need."

• (1825)

The person from Toronto continues, "I am shocked and fighting a profound sadness at feeling so powerless in the face of this Conservative government who seemingly trounce everything that I am proud of about this country. I have a baby girl and it's hard not to take the budget much more personally. We are no longer the international bastions of environmentalist action, free speech or plain politics, things I have been proud of since I was a young teen, things that I normally would have been looking forward to sharing with my daughter, not mention the question of whether or not she will have clean water to drink and maple trees to tap in northern Ontario.

"Please don't read this letter as simply one citizen's pining for joyful memories of childhood; this is about the state of global health and survival. It's simple truth and we all have to play our part. Thank you for reading my email and, hopefully, hearing a plea for change as we fight together against this country's demise".

Another email from Toronto states, "In the grand scheme of things, I think there are a lot of reasons why these are significant cuts. I am talking about the staggering cuts to the operating budget of the CBC". The writer goes on to say that "Austerity budgets do little but hurt those who are already so vulnerable".

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken for a while today and I intend fully to continue speaking on this issue tomorrow, if my voice permits, because we are raising fundamental issues.

The budget is a real betrayal of commitments that were made by the Prime Minister and the government in the last election campaign. This is not what Canadians voted for.

What we are seeing from the emails that we are getting and the tweets and the Facebook postings from Canadians from coast to coast to coast is a real concern about the direction of this country. Canadians are saying that the budget is wrong in denying the commitments that were solemnly made in the last election campaign when the Prime Minister looked Canadians in the eyes and said, "I will not gut health care. I will not gut retirement security. I will maintain services." He was making a solemn commitment. That commitment has been broken. Canadians feel that. Many of the letters and tweets and Facebook postings and emails that we have read today demonstrate to what extent Canadians feel betrayed by the budget.

We will continue to do what New Democrats have always done in this House of Commons: We will continue to speak up for Canadian families. We will speak up because that has been our role since the very first days the first two labour MPs back in the 1920s sat down in that corner and forced a minority government to bring in old age pensions. It was considered a radical idea at the time, but those two voices, those two labour MPs, led to the first step in what was a fundamental transformation.

Tomorrow, I will tell members about what the CCF MPs did when they were seven in the House, and then 12, and then 15. I am hoping members will anticipate that conversation tomorrow.

Today, with 102 voices in Parliament, we are standing up to say no to the budget because Canadian families deserve better than what the budget would do for them.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1830)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last December 7 I asked the government why it was failing our country and the world by abdicating global leadership on the world's most pressing environmental issue, climate change.

Adjournment Proceedings

The first response received was an attack on the Liberal Party for signing on to Kyoto. However, the Minister of the Environment told the *Huffington Post* that Kyoto was a good idea for its time. How can it be a good idea and also considered a blunder? Obviously, it cannot. Kyoto was indeed a good idea in its time, and the rest of the world thinks it remains a good idea. Only the government thinks otherwise.

Then there was a second attack for not supporting a sector-by-sector approach to climate change. While the parliamentary secretary continues, in her words, to implore me to get on board with her government's sector-by-sector approach, let me be very clear: there is no climate change plan, just final stages of writing new regulations for coal-fired electricity and mere beginning consultations with the oil sands, cement, gas and steel industries.

I will not be party to the government's negligence on climate change, nor to a delay tactic. Moreover, I will not ignore the plight of the countries most vulnerable to climate change: Bangladesh, the Maldives, Sudan, et cetera.

I have recently returned from speaking at an international climate conference in Bangladesh for parliamentarians from over 20 countries. I have since been asked to be on the steering committee for a new international network, Parliamentarians for Climate Justice. Just last week, the United Nations Development Programme asked if I would attend the first meeting for the advisory group of parliamentarians for disaster risk reduction.

In Bangladesh rising sea levels threaten farmland and water supply, despite the fact that its population of 160 million emits less greenhouse gas than Manhattan. In the future, a one-metre sea level rise will submerge one-fifth of the land mass and displace 20 million people. Most distressingly, children on the streets of Bangladesh talk about the taste of climate change. It is salty, they explain, because salt water is already inundating water supplies.

Perhaps the parliamentary secretary might share whether she has ever visited Bangladesh or any other of the countries most vulnerable to climate change to see first-hand what they are experiencing—for example, threatened energy, food, health, livelihoods, water and total human security.

At our last late show the parliamentary secretary made the accusation that while I often talk of supporting scientists and the need for climate adaptation, the Liberal Party voted against the government's budget. The Liberal Party did vote against the past budget because it had major flaws, as does this budget.

To be clear, I take every opportunity in this House to defend science and scientists. We need scientific excellence. We need to ensure that Environment Canada's programs and scientists are fully funded, to develop a scientific integrity policy, to protect the department's scientific findings from being altered, distorted or suppressed. In fact, my Motion No. 321 asked for all these items. Will the parliamentary secretary support it?

When it comes to climate adaptation, I had the privilege of consulting to the adaptation and impacts research group, AIRG, at Environment Canada on the human health impacts of climate change and adaptation. I also served on the intergovernmental panel on climate change for two reports. AIRG undertook internationally

renowned research, and many of its scientists shared in the 2007 Nobel Prize on climate change.

It is the government that is slashing the budget of Environment Canada and shutting down adaptation and impacts research.

• (1835)

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is committed to working together to address climate change in a way that is fair, effective and comprehensive and allows us to continue to create jobs here in Canada. We believe that a new agreement with legally binding commitments for all major emitters represents the path forward. The Durban platform builds on our work at Copenhagen and Cancun.

Our government has taken action since 2006 to make real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The Liberal Party, by contrast, has lost the right to speak about environmental leadership.

The Liberals signed the Kyoto protocol in 1997, but they had no real plan. Eddie Goldenberg, one of former prime minister Jean Chrétien's top aides, later revealed that the Liberals went ahead with the Kyoto protocol on climate change even though they knew there was a good chance Canada would not meet its goals for pollution reduction. The Liberals ratified the Kyoto protocol in 2002, but there was still no plan to implement it. As the member for Kings—Hants pointed out at the time, “there was no long-term planning”.

Nine years of inaction later, the former Liberal leader summed up what his party had accomplished on climate change declaring, “We didn't get it done”. The Liberals certainly did not get it done. During those Liberal years of inaction, greenhouse gas emissions went up, not down.

Under Kyoto, Canada was facing radical and irresponsible choices if we wanted to avoid punishing multi-billion dollar penalties. To meet the targets under Kyoto for 2012, we would have to either remove every car, truck, ATV, tractor, ambulance, police car and vehicle of every kind from Canadian roads, or close down the entire farming and agricultural sector and cut heat to every home, office, hospital, factory and building in Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

What would have been the cost of taking this type of radical and irresponsible action? The loss of thousands of jobs or the transfer of \$14 billion from Canadian taxpayers to other countries. This figure is the equivalent of \$1,600 from every Canadian family with no impact on emissions or any benefit to the environment.

Our Conservative government remains committed to reducing Canada's greenhouse gas emissions by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020, and we are making good progress.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals had a plan that could have got us 80% of the way to meeting Kyoto. The government ended that plan. It has now reduced the targets by 90% and it can only get us 25% of its target.

For many of the world's poorest countries, climate change is not an academic debate but a pressing reality faced every day. Malawi, where most people live in rural areas and earn less than \$1,000 a year, is most susceptible to droughts, which will become more frequent and intense. Vietnam is most threatened by rising sea levels. Up to 16% of its land area, 35% of its people and 35% of its gross domestic product could be hard hit.

We must refocus the climate change debate on humanity, human rights, climate justice and the personal rather than the anonymous, faceless, other.

Will the government see or will it wilfully ignore the world's poorest nations which are disproportionately affected by climate change?

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, here is what the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development had to say in 2005 about the Liberal government's inaction regarding the environment:

When it comes to protecting the environment, bold announcements are made and then often forgotten as soon as the confetti hits the ground. The federal government seems to have trouble crossing the finish line.

In contrast to the Liberals, our Conservative government remembers its commitments. We have a comprehensive plan to meet our target of reducing greenhouse gases by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020. Nationally, we are already a quarter of the way to reaching our 2020 target.

● (1840)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am using this time to talk about issues relating to the F-35 procurement. I am seeking clarity as there is considerable dissonance between the minister's talking points and what experts have been saying on the F-35. I will use this time to set out in a very broad way the wide gulf between the experts and the government and offer the government an opportunity to close that gap for us.

Tomorrow is the much anticipated Auditor General's spring report. It will review the government's conduct with respect to this procurement and its commitment to the F-35. This is timely as we have long awaited some clarity on this procurement initiative. Perhaps the government will use this evening as an opportunity to provide that clarity before the AG does.

Six weeks after issuing the statement of operational requirements for the CF-18 replacement, the government announced that 65 F-35s

would be purchased for \$16 billion. The first problem here is that a process which experts say would normally take about two years was done in a fraction of that time, just six weeks.

The next issue is cost. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's independent analysis has concluded that the F-35s will cost at least \$30 billion, nearly twice as much as the government's estimate. Despite this, the minister has repeatedly said that by selecting the F-35 Canadian soldiers are getting "the best equipment at the best price".

On March 2, after a meeting with the F-35 partners, the minister repeated his well used talking points claiming that "good progress" was being made. However, a week later, we learned that the head of the Pentagon's F-35 program had told the associate minister that production slowdowns would further increase the cost of each plane. The question arises: Why did the minister not share this information with Canadians?

Briefing notes dating back to last September indicate that while the government was saying that all was well with the program, it was privately concerned about price, production and the transparency of the program. A day after the Pentagon's top weapons buyer called the F-35 production plan an "acquisition malpractice", the minister stood up to reaffirm commitment to the program.

The government has repeatedly said that it selected the F-35 because it alone meets the mandatory requirements. On numerous occasions the minister called the F-35 "the best and only aircraft that meets the needs of Canada's armed forces". Last week, I received a document he had signed that said the same thing. However, on that same day the CBC revealed evidence indicating that this statement was not accurate.

How can we reconcile what the government is telling us with expert analysis when the information it gives us is so glaringly different from what everyone else is saying?

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House this evening to reply to the question posed by the hon. member for Beaches—East York regarding this important issue.

Before putting forward a few points in reply, it is absolutely essential that I distinguish three issues with regard to fighter jet aircraft required by the Royal Canadian Air Force to perform tasks that all members agree are important for Canada.

First, there is the issue of the lifespan of the CF-18s, which is running out as we speak but has been extended for the rest of this decade, we are told, due to the expertise of our engineers, pilots and aviators.

Adjournment Proceedings

I invite the hon. member in his subsequent statements to make it clear for the people of Canada and this House that the NDP supports a replacement for this aircraft. By merely citing the voices of experts, some of whom are absolutely against procuring fighter jet aircraft for this country at all, the NDP is taking an ambiguous position on that issue. I think that is of concern to Canadians.

Second, there is the issue of a development program on which Canada embarked 15 years ago and that now includes nine allied nations to develop a next-generation joint strike fighter, now known as the F-35. That is a development program. Let us be very clear to this House and the people of Canada: we are not yet in procurement mode. We are not yet signing contracts for an aircraft. We are developing an aircraft for Canada and other allies because we think the technology represented by this aircraft will be superior to other available options.

Third, there is the question of purchase, contracts and procurement, which the hon. member has mentioned. It is very important that we distinguish and discuss all three.

I would like to leave the first question with the hon. member. We need to hear back from the NDP on that issue.

On the issue of the development program, let me reassure the hon. member that this is an effort to build a state-of-the-art fighter. It is an effort to work in partnership with allies, with countries that did the hardest work with us in Libya, Afghanistan and Kosovo, like the United States and the United Kingdom, but also with Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway. This effort will develop an absolutely superior piece of technology that will perform in the air, fulfill the missions Canada asks of its air force and bring our pilots back safely.

The program is not only on track to develop this aircraft; it is ahead of the test schedule for flights and flight hours. Canada continues to work with all of its partners to make sure this project moves ahead. We are encouraged by the recent statement by the United States that its total purchase of 2,443 aircraft will not be reduced. It is a fact that flies in the face of the kinds of arguments and innuendoes that our colleagues on the other side have put forward both here in this House and in comments to the media. Allies remain committed to this development program.

We intend to purchase the least expensive variant. We remain confident that we will see the F-35 delivered, and there will be benefits for Canada. Almost 70 companies in six provinces across this country have, as a result of our participation in the MOU, received orders for \$435 million to date, an amount that is well in excess of the investment Canada has made to be part of the development program.

In future, our companies may have access to billions of dollars' worth of subcontracts. For that reason, we remain committed to this development program as well as to the replacement of the CF-18s at the end of their useful lives, within a budget that we have set. We have been clear about it every step.

● (1845)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, it seems daily that I, along with my colleagues, have risen in this House to ask the minister questions about this file. From the shadow of a mountain of evidence, including testimony from the F-35 program managers, the minister has denied what has been obvious to all of us for a long time.

This is a troubled program. Development program it may be, but based fundamentally on a miscalculation, according to the program manager. It threatens to cost Canadian taxpayers untold billions. It threatens to leave our air force with an operational gap. It is our effort to reconcile the mountain of evidence, including testimony that shows the F-35 is a troubled program. Most troubling in all of this has been the absence of openness and transparency from the government. Its conduct on this file has been a terrible disservice to our system of government.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the really troubled position in this whole debate over the F-35, and much of it has been unnecessary, is the policy of the NDP on this issue. It is still not clear, from the member's opening statement or from his subsequent statement, whether the NDP wants to see the CF-18 replaced by a cutting-edge piece of technology that would perform the missions of the future and bring our pilots home safely.

Our commitment to the F-35 was made following a thorough analysis of current and perceived roles and core missions. We have a responsibility to provide our pilots with the highest level of mission success. We are committed to exercising the prudent good stewardship of taxpayer funds through a procurement process and to ensuring that the equipment we ultimately acquire, in accordance with the highest standards of transparency for which this country is renowned, will be on budget and will meet mission requirements and bring our pilots home safely.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:50 p.m.)

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