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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the spring 2012 report of the Auditor General of Canada. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's 2011 annual report.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-411, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (occupational disease registry).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce a bill that was tabled in the previous Parliament by Tony Martin, my former colleague from Sault Ste. Marie, who we all know was one of the hardest working MPs this House has ever seen.

I thank my colleague from Jonquière—Alma for seconding the bill.

The bill would require employers to report information about all accidents, occupational disease and other hazardous occurrences known by the employer to the Minister of Labour. It would also require the minister to maintain a registry containing all of that information and to make the information available to employees and potential employees for examination.

As I speak, I am drawn to the memory of my friend, Julius Hava, and his courageous battle with mesothelioma stemming from a workplace carcinogen.

He is not alone. We need only look at Elliot Lake. Every April 28, more names of deceased workers are added to the miners' memorial monument due to occupational diseases.

The measures laid out in the bill would be very important going forward for workers. I hope members on all sides of the House will see the merit in the bill and help move the chains forward on an issue of significant importance to many Canadians.

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

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OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-412, An Act to amend the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act (poverty reduction).

She said: Madam Speaker, as the official opposition critic for international co-operation, I am pleased to introduce an act to amend the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act, seconded by the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

My bill seeks to ensure that Canada meets the international target for donor countries of spending the equivalent of 0.7% of GNI on official overseas development assistance.

New Democrats believe that Canada can and should do more to help the world's poorest countries and people. In fact, the NDP official opposition is the only party in Canada that remains committed to former prime minister Lester B. Pearson's aspirations of dedicating 0.7% of our gross national income to development funding.

In our 2011 platform, we called for an immediate increase of \$500 million to Canada's ODA envelope, followed by a practical plan to reach the 0.7% over time.

For the NDP, this is not just an election issue. In 2005, our late leader, Jack Layton, was presented with a rare opportunity to rewrite a Liberal government budget. Jack cancelled billions of dollars in corporate tax cuts and invested the funds in priority areas, including a major boost to Canada's ODA.

Routine Proceedings

When we consider that the 0.7% goal was originally set by former Liberal prime minister Lester B. Pearson and that the Conservatives believe in a robust foreign aid system, I hope my bill might find support from all corners of the House.

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

* * *

●(1010)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-413, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (judicial discretion).

He said: Madam Speaker, this is a fairly straightforward bill to amend the Criminal Code. It is a provision that first appeared in the English criminal justice system.

Given the role that the government has played in increasingly dumping more mandatory minimums on to our judicial system, it is a way of moving back to what should be the case in this country, which is allowing each conviction and sentencing to be dealt with on the facts before the court at the time. What England did was to give to its judiciary the discretion to override mandatory minimums in appropriate cases, and that is what this private member's bill would do.

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

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CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-414, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals).

He said: Madam Speaker, this private member's bill deals with an issue that is scandalous in that it was not put into law many years ago. This bill, in a somewhat different form, has been through this House twice and then stopped, once by prorogation and another time by the Senate.

The bill is quite straightforward. It is to address the reality that our criminal law dealing with animal cruelty has not been changed for over 100 years. This bill would bring us into the 21st century where other countries, which I would argue from a criminal justice standpoint are not nearly as advanced as Canada is, have moved on this issue.

The bill would do two basic things. It first recognizes that animals are sentient beings as opposed to a piece of wood or a piece of furniture, which is the way the Criminal Code currently treats them. The other thing that it would do has a very clear consequence. The number of convictions for animal cruelty would increase dramatically under the Criminal Code. We have estimates that only one in a thousand cases of animal cruelty can result in convictions under the Criminal Code, and this would address that issue.

It is a bill that I have worked on for a very long time and this is the third time I have had it as a private member's bill. It has been before this House for well over a decade and still has not become law.

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

PETITIONS

PENSIONS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a petition calling on the government to maintain funding for OAS and to make the requisite investments in the guaranteed income supplement to lift every senior out of poverty.

These petitioners know all too well that the OAS is affordable and that the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the OECD have indicated that OAS is well funded. They also understand that the government's arguments citing that people are living longer ignores the fact that those living the longest are the most well-to-do and that lower income Canadians do not share the benefit.

Finally, the petitioners understand that these changes will affect future generations who are being piled upon by the government that is only interested in immediate results, not those of our children and our grandchildren.

Most of these signatures are from the great city of Elliot Lake.

●(1015)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Madam Speaker, a couple of weeks ago, the Minister of Public Safety stood in this House and told Canadians that if they were against the Conservatives' lawful access legislation, then they were for and stood with child pornographers. The very good people of my riding in Davenport in Toronto beg to differ.

Many have signed this petition I am presenting today because they have deep concerns about major parts of this legislation. The bill compels telecommunications companies to collect and store personal information about users and hand over this information to law enforcement agencies without a warrant.

Upholding civil liberties, including the right to privacy, is the bedrock on which liberal democracies have been built.

The folks in my riding who have signed this petition wish to add their names to the well over 80,000 people who have signed a similar petition on OpenMedia.ca. I am honoured to be able to present this petition on their behalf in this House today.

THE ENVIRONMENT

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

The first petition is signed by residents of Salt Spring Island within my riding who seek to bring the attention of the government, ironically, to the recommendations of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. They point out that the round table was created under the previous prime minister, the right hon. Brian Mulroney, and that it put forward estimates of the costs to our economy of ignoring the climate crisis.

This information, I wish to point out for the Minister of the Environment, is completely inaccessible on the Internet and is only developed through a multi-stakeholder process involving industry leadership, environmental groups, first nations and trade unions. There is no replacement for the national round table and its recommendations are brought forward by the petitioners calling for urgent action on the climate crisis. They lament the decision in the budget to kill the agency.

The second petition is from residents of Victoria, Duncan, Lasqueti Island, Hornby, Thetis Island, as well as Toronto calling on the Government of Canada to act urgently to bring into place a climate change plan to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. The petitioners are also very much focused on the need to have a full, fair and transparent inquiry into the proposed pipeline across northern British Columbia to supertankers, which the petitioners believe are inherently unsafe in the northern waters of British Columbia.

VETERANS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to present two petitions on behalf of my constituents and others across the country.

The first petition is in regard to veterans. On April 9, we will be commemorating the 95th anniversary of Vimy Ridge. While we honour first world war veterans, tragically we have forgotten about modern-day veterans, the young men and women who have answered their country's call, provided service and ensured our freedom.

The petitioners want the Government of Canada to recognize the service of post-Korean veterans and to honour its commitment to ensure they have the benefits and supports they need. In addition to that, the petitioners call upon the House of Commons to conduct a full and honest debate on the future of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the services and benefits provided to our veterans and peacekeepers. They call upon the government to respect the will of Parliament and immediately implement any motions or legislation that would allow veterans to have the same services, including veterans hospitals, as their predecessors.

POVERTY

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, the second petition is in regard to poverty. As we all know, poverty affects about 10% of Canadians and disproportionately affects aboriginal people, recent immigrants and seniors.

The petitioners call upon the government to enact swift passage of my colleague's private member's bill, an act to eliminate poverty in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very honoured to rise here today to present a petition on behalf of the people of L'Avenir, one of the municipalities in my riding. The people of L'Avenir are worried about the reduction of services at their post office. They all—or nearly all—signed this petition calling on the government to maintain services and to ensure continuity of service at the post office in the municipality of L'Avenir.

Having a post office is not a luxury. This service should be provided in all municipalities. It is very important in rural environments.

These people have banded together and signed the petition. The mayor of L'Avenir is working very hard to get a meeting with Canada Post in order to ensure that there are adequate services.

The petitioners are calling on the minister to take concrete measures to ensure that rural post offices stay where they are and that services are not reduced.

• (1020)

[English]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am proud to present yet another petition from residents mostly of Newfoundland and Labrador. These residents of Canada have grave concerns regarding the changes that are being made to the marine rescue coordination centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. In fact, it is being closed.

The petitioners urge the government to acknowledge and understand that this closure will put lives at risk. Six hundred people per year are saved as a result of the work of this centre. It is responsible for 900,000 square kilometres of ocean and nearly 30,000 kilometres of coastline. The centre is staffed with a group of people who are very knowledgeable of the coastline, of weather and water conditions, and of the people themselves and the dialects they speak. It is important to them that this centre not be closed.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*The Budget***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from April 2 consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the members of the NDP caucus, an extraordinary caucus of very energetic and dynamic people who do a fine job of representing their constituents.

[English]

I am very happy to continue the budget debate. We are now in the eighth or ninth hour. I should warn the House that I will be speaking for a little while, probably into the 12th or 13th hour.

Madam Speaker, if you could give me a heads up five minutes before and then one minute before we go into statements by members, it would be much appreciated.

The NDP caucus has been absolutely floored by the reaction from the public. Tweets continue to come in from across the country. There are postings on Facebook from coast to coast to coast. Emails are pouring into our offices. There are many phone calls. Canadians seem galvanized by this budget debate. They want to hear what other Canadians have to say about the budget. That is what is exciting about Canadian democracy. Canadians are actually getting their chance to put forward their comments on the floor of the House of Commons.

Yesterday there were some very poignant comments from across the country. Madeline, an eight-year-old girl from Nova Scotia, talked about the importance of preserving the environment for future generations. That eight-year-old girl, who understands the importance of the environment, sent a very powerful message to the Conservative government that the environment is not something to be messed with, that the environment is something to be preserved for future generations. That is the kind of wisdom we are getting from Canadians from coast to coast to coast. It is an exciting time when Canadians can pass on their concerns around the budget through the NDP members of Parliament from coast to coast to coast.

What was remarkable yesterday was the number of comments pouring in from ridings held by Conservative members of Parliament. Canadians in those ridings deserve to be represented. That is why they are sending tweets and emails, posting on Facebook, and phoning our offices. All of these are important.

I will continue to speak today through to statements by members to raise the messages that have come to all of the 102 NDP MPs in the House of Commons. I will just flag for my Liberal colleagues that at approximately 4:30 I will be sitting down to allow a couple of Liberals to speak to the budget.

I should say that Conservative ministers have been going all across the country on the taxpayer's dime making all kinds of announcements and saying what I believe to a great extent are

untruths about the budget. I would like to make it clear that I will not be sitting down to permit Conservative MPs to raise what I would call their budgetary poison in the House of Commons. We will be raising the concerns of Canadian families all day today in the House. Toward the end, I will be sitting down to permit my Liberal colleagues to say a few words as well. We believe profoundly that this budget of fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity is not in the interests of Canada. We believe Canadian families deserve better.

I would like to start with a comment from a Canadian from Surrey, British Columbia. I represent Burnaby—New Westminster. Right across the Fraser River is the city of Surrey, British Columbia. Members will find this to be a very heartfelt message from somebody who has always voted Conservative. Mr. McKay, from Surrey, British Columbia, encapsulates for us the essence of this budgetary debate we are engaged in, that we are standing up for Canadian families and bringing forth the points of view from various parts of the country.

● (1025)

As I mentioned yesterday, these comments are coming from eight-year-old Canadians and eighty-year-old Canadians. They are coming from Canadians from the west coast to the east coast and northern Canada. They are coming from Canadians of all walks of life. I remember the poignant comments from people in the manual professions who feel personally attacked by the government's attempt to raise the retirement age when in so many cases their bodies have given all that they can. Through all of those comments we are seeing some movement and consensus.

From Mr. McKay, a Conservative voter from Surrey, British Columbia, we get a sense of how Canadians are reacting to this budget. He said:

I will start by saying you are doing a great job, as I watched you today Monday April the 2nd 2012 on the parliamentary channel here in Surrey B.C.... I have been a long-standing voter for the Conservatives for quite a lot of years now.... I am 60 years of age and I am on disability. I have never been so upset as I am now with this Government of Canada. When they play with people's lives as they are doing by cutting jobs, playing with the pension plan, it is heartbreaking to a lot of people, but when they start cutting funding for [our] youth in this Country [it] is totally sickening. If they would put more funds towards helping [our] youth of today we would not need so many jails to house them. I hope you and your party members keep up the pressure and get this changed before there is severe damage done to our great country. Like I said before, I have been a voter for the Conservatives for years now. But people do and can change [their] way of thinking. I have been talking to a lot of people and friends my age and we are all thinking of changing the way we think about our government of the day. Even though I have never voted NDP, I just might start thinking of changing my mind. So thank you for your time. Please, you and the NDP keep up the good work you are all doing towards this issue.

The Budget

I would like to thank Mr. McKay for his honesty. Mr. McKay represents so many Conservative voters who feel betrayed by the government. Mr. McKay could be a national symbol for his honesty and for saying that people can change the way they think when they analyze events. He is an inspiration to many people who may have voted Conservative in the past. Canadians see what has happened in this budget, which is a breaking of solemn commitments that were made by the government and the Prime Minister at a time when the nation went to the polls on May 2, 2011. Members will recall that the Prime Minister looked Canadians in the eye and said, "I will not diminish health care transfers. I will not interfere with retirement security. In fact, I will maintain it and enhance it. I will not cut services to families". He said that while looking right into the eyes of Canadians.

In that old-fashioned Canadian way, Canadians from coast to coast to coast are known for their honesty and keeping their word. That handshake means we are making a commitment. What the Prime Minister did prior to May 2, in fact what all of his candidates across the country did as well, was make that solemn commitment to the people of Canada to not cut health care, to not cut retirement security and to not cut services. That was the commitment that was made. It was a commitment we all witnessed from coast to coast to coast. Mr. McKay and so many other people felt that the Prime Minister was being honest in making that commitment. The Mr. McKays of Canada said that they were going to vote Conservative because the Conservatives will not cut health care, retirement security or services.

● (1030)

We fast forward to March 28, 2012, when the Prime Minister and every single Conservative member of Parliament broke every single one of those commitments by cutting health care to the point that the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates we are losing \$30 billion in health care that needs to be there in the coming years. These cuts are not done through intelligent ways of adjusting the health care system, increasing home care or looking at bulk purchasing of pharmaceutical products, but by cutting back on those essential services for Canadian families.

In the budget we see the forced raising of the retirement age from 65 to 67 at a time when we know, and we have been getting letters and emails to this effect, that Canadians, particularly in the manual professions, who have worked to the age of 65 simply cannot give any more. Those who are unable to work from 65 to 67 will live in dire poverty for those two years.

We see in the budget systematic cuts to services Canadian families depend on, cuts to food safety, transportation safety and the environmental protections that Canadians feel so strongly about. We see nothing that deals with the myriad of crises that Canadian families are facing: records levels of debt, lower incomes, as the government has made most Canadian families poorer and poorer through the erosion of real wages, and the incredible and ongoing employment crisis. We have seen 50,000 lost jobs up until March 28 and will see another 50,000 or 60,000 lost jobs as a result of this budget.

Canadians who witnessed those commitments and who voted because they believed that the Prime Minister would keep those commitments are feeling betrayed by this budget.

The Mr. McKays of this land are now rising up and saying "Enough is enough. This government has broken its commitments". Mr. McKay says, "I have never been so upset as I am now with this Government of Canada when they play with people's lives, as they are doing by cutting jobs and playing with the pension plan. This is heartbreaking."

The Mr. McKays are sending a very powerful message. We are saying that we understand and we are communicating that message on the floor of the House of Commons. Canadian families deserve better than what the government did.

I would like to move on now to a message from another Conservative riding, the Halton riding in Oakville, Ontario. We will be doing this throughout the course of the day because as Mr. McKay has so clearly said, people can change. Those who have been strong supporters of the Conservative Party can change when they read the budget and understand what the government is doing and how mean-spirited the government is.

We believe Conservative MPs can change. They have been getting emails, twitters and Facebook postings, saying, "This is a bad budget for Canada. This is a bad budget for our area. On behalf of the constituents of your riding, you should be voting against this." We are reading into the record so many comments from Conservative-held ridings because Conservative members should be listening to their constituents.

Mr. McDonnell writes:

I happened to catch some of today's budget debate on CPAC and wanted to take a moment to thank you for your passionate work. As a self-described centrist, I don't always agree with NDP policy, but found your arguments very compelling today. I particularly agree with your opposition to raising the retirement age to 67. I am 39 and really hadn't given this issue much thought until I heard you present your case. I've worked in the distribution side of the flooring industry for 17 years. I am not an installer, but many of my customers and friends are. Many flooring installers walk with limps at 45 years old, let alone 67.

● (1035)

They literally spend their workdays on their knees and it takes a toll on their bodies. Most of them are too busy working to get involved in politics. I'll definitely take the time to bring this to their attention. Believe me, just because flooring industry workers look at the floor when we walk into a room doesn't mean we're shy. I always love to hear a compliment on a job well done and always try to thank others for one well done today. The NDP's chances of forming government are greatly bolstered with members like your caucus who all work together with experienced members working as mentors to the younger members of your caucus.

We thank Mr. McDonnell for his heartfelt comments. We are standing up for floor installers and all those in the manual professions who are adversely impacted by the government's mean-spirited push to raise OAS eligibility from 65 to 67. As Mr. McDonnell says, many flooring installers walk with limps at 45 years old. The government is saying it does not matter, whether one is a flooring installer, a carpenter or a manual worker, it does not matter how much their bodies are giving, it is going to force them to work two more years. We say Canadian families deserve better than that. We are going to stand up for them.

The Budget

I would like to pay tribute to my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who is doing a fabulous job as deputy finance critic. He is in the House all the time and is a phenomenal part of our caucus. He just went out to that overcharged fax machine that has smoke coming out of it because there are so many faxes pouring in from Canadians. They are coming from Canadians like Mr. McDonnell, the floor installer, and like Mr. McKay, the former Conservative voter who is now changing his mind because he sees this budget as so profoundly mean-spirited. All the NDP MPs have encouraged people to send in their tweets. When my colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, sees a choice one he points it out. Along with emails or faxes, these messages are from Canadians who want their points of view expressed. That is what we are endeavouring to do.

These are not the Prime Minister's Office talking points. They are not recycled. If I were sitting down right now we would be hearing from a lot of Conservatives and they would all be saying the same thing from the Prime Minister's talking notes. On this side of the House, we are saying real Canadians need to be heard. The floor installers need to be heard, those on disability who have always voted Conservative who feel betrayed by the budget need to be heard. Their comments are the most important thing to hear on the floor of the House of Commons today.

I would like to pass this one on. It is from another Conservative-held riding, Langley, British Columbia. Mr. Brennand says when he sees NDP members performing in the House he is extremely proud to say that he knows NDP MPs like all of us. He wants everyone to know that the Canadian people are becoming more aware of how mean-spirited the current government is. He says the Conservative Party seems to be every bit as reactionary as many people said before they formed government. Mr. Brennand also says to keep up the work and not to let the government rest comfortably with a budget that is so bad for Canadian people. We certainly appreciate his comments.

• (1040)

This individual, Ms. Burrell, has written in from the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, a very beautiful part of our country.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: How far down the valley? We will find out whether it is a Conservative riding or a Liberal riding.

Mr. Peter Julian: My colleague asks whether it is a Conservative or a Liberal riding. I think the Annapolis Valley is in a Liberal riding. Ms. Burrell says:

As a volunteer at the local food bank, I regularly see the huge amount of volunteer support that is needed to help impoverished members of our local community deal with the fact that their basic needs greatly exceed the amount of funds they receive, often through holding numerous part time minimum wage jobs. I understand there is nothing in the budget to address the need for good paying regular employment. Having worked for a brief time at a local blueberry farm picking blueberries for commercial purposes, I was shocked at the number of seniors who needed to supplement their limited incomes with such hard work. The amount of money received after hours of hard labour is usually well below the minimum wage. The exhaustion from the work by the seniors was obvious, as they struggled to meet a reasonable quota for their labours as the day wore on. If the OAS qualification is increased to 67, I fear how much more stress there will be on the bodies of the seniors who already are barely able to make ends meet without having their joints and backs give out totally. The budget needs to address the concerns of the vulnerable; it does not, and instead continues to feed the corporations' tax reduction, which even business leaders agree has no clear relationship to job creation.

I can think of no more eloquent testimony to the fact that Canadian families deserve better than what the government is putting forward in this budget.

Ms. Burrell is pointing out what we are hearing from so many people in the manual professions: that this attack on old age security will provoke incredible hardship among seniors who are already struggling to make ends meet and who have to go to local blueberry farms in order to put food on their tables. We are not talking about people who are wealthy and who are vacationing in the Bahamas.

We are talking about real, live Canadian seniors, people who work with their bodies. The government is now forcing them to work two more years or live in poverty. What a choice they are being given. What an appalling, inappropriate use of government resources which says that seniors will be forced to make a choice. It is double Jeopardy. The seniors can either live in poverty, eat cat food, and if they are lucky keep a roof over their head, or they can go work at a blueberry farm to get through to the age of 67.

If people are wondering why NDP MPs bring so much passion to this debate and question period, whether we are younger or older, and why we bring such passion to this issue of raising the retirement age two years, it is because of the kinds of comments we are getting. People understand what the impacts are. They understand that what is being done with the government's irresponsible actions, forcing seniors out into the blueberry fields, is absolutely, totally unacceptable.

We have been steadfastly raising these concerns on the floor of the House of Commons because Canadians deserve to be listened to by the government. They deserve better than what the government has in store for them.

• (1045)

I am going to move on to more comments that have been received. I have some other comments I will make a little later on. Following along, this is from the riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, which is represented by the NDP House leader, a fabulous MP who works very hard. What this Canadian, Patricia, says from Windsor—Tecumseh is the following:

“Rest assured; I will take your reply to my retired friends and neighbours, who also share my concerns over the OAS, some of us being single or divorced with only our own pensions and savings to survive on. In discussions, some have mentioned that the government is worried not so much as to the actual monthly pension cheque but the cost of prescriptions to the 65 and over group that is pushing up the cost of the OAS. I can certainly understand that. I currently buy my own prescription coverage and am aware of the cost of a few medications, even with partial coverage. Where to lay the blame in this case? Is it with the government, pharmaceutical companies, or doctors? I guess we'll leave that in the hands of our elected officials. Thank goodness my elected official is the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.”

The Budget

This is yet another senior Canadian who is raising concerns about the issue of OAS and how the government has handled it. Yes, when we raise the question of pharmacare and pharmaceutical costs, the reality is that it is the fastest-rising component of our health care system. The government is not dealing with it adequately, not putting in place the measures that would actually bring the cost of prescription drugs down. Our former leader, Jack Layton, said for years and the current leader, the member for Outremont, has also said that what we need is bulk purchasing of medications. That lowers the cost. It has been done in other industrialized countries. It lowers the cost of medication. It relieves the stress and pressure of the cost of medication on the health care system.

The government has not done that. It has enlarged patent protection, which has increased profits. The pharmaceutical industry is the most profitable industry sector in North America, but at what cost? There are huge profits on the one hand, and then on the other hand, there are Canadian seniors who try to scrape together the money to buy the medication they need. As my colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, mentioned yesterday, with the CETA agreement that is being negotiated, the costs and pressures on our health care system are going to expand exponentially. We are talking about many billions of dollars more that taxpayers will have to pay for the same products. All of it goes to what is excess profit. It is not being used for future research. It is being spent on marketing. When the Patricias of this country step forward to say this is a real concern, the government should be listening.

I will move on now to a constituent in yet another Conservative-held riding. This is another constituent of a Conservative MP, who is writing to the NDP because she believes her views will not be represented. She starts off by saying, “The NDP is doing a fantastic job in the House. Please keep it up. You’re giving voice to so many Canadians who thought they had no voice”.

She has attached a letter that she hopes I will find the time to read in the House of Commons. We certainly feel that this time is important, and I am going to take the time to read her letter from Calgary, Alberta. We want to hear it, absolutely. The member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung is absolutely correct that we want to make those views known on the floor of the House of Commons.

• (1050)

Some Conservatives have suggested I should just sit down and let them talk, let the Conservatives talk all day with their Prime Minister’s Office’s talking points. We are saying no way. We are going to bring those points of view of Canadians to the floor of the House of Commons.

So, the letter starts:

“I would like to make it known to all members of Parliament that, as an Albertan, I do not subscribe to the policies and ideologies of this government. I know, as a constituent in Calgary, my opinion on the recent budget would not be voiced if this opportunity was not given to me by the NDP. As an Albertan, I resent the assumption of the Conservative government that we all support an agenda that would be detrimental to our environment and to the future of our children. I believe there are many green alternatives to the one taken by this government that seems to favour big oil.

“The budget priorities of the Conservatives will lead to reckless development of the oil sands by foreign companies, such as PetroChina, with little regard to health and environmental damage.

“In addition, this valuable resource will be sent outside Canada, as will associated jobs that could have been created in the refining industry.

“It is obvious that this government is only interested in short-term financial gains for those who financially support their electoral campaigns.

“Budgetary cuts to environmental programs and the muzzling of scientists also illustrate this government’s disregard for the future of Canada and of our children. Climate change is a great concern for many Canadians, and this government has blatantly ignored and, indeed, hampered action by not only its own departments but by concerned environmental groups, which it has attempted to demonize by grossly overfunding their oversight.

“I am extremely worried about the future of my children in such an environment of government disregard for democracy, the environment, fairness and truth. The Conservative budget only serves to deepen my concern.

“Thank you for this opportunity to voice my concerns. I have many more concerns about this government, but not enough time, as a hard-working Albertan, to list them all.”

We say to this constituent that we share her concern.

As the fabulous member for Edmonton—Strathcona just whispered behind me, and I think it is worth saying into the record, many Albertans share the view of this constituent.

Also, many Albertans admire the work of the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, who has been a tireless voice in this House of Commons for the people of Alberta, speaking up each and every day.

Moving on, we have another comment from an individual from the province of Quebec. That individual says:

“I would like to send my support to you in the NDP in how you’re defending a vision of Canada based on the concept that the economy must be in service to people and not the people in service to the economy. So many elements of this budget exemplify a belief that Canadian citizens must serve the economy; for example, the finance minister’s and the government’s changes to the immigration policy, suggesting that Conservatives are content to build Canada’s society based predominantly on someone’s perceived ability to fill a job vacancy rather than the previous and more global set of criteria used to allow the 200,000 people waiting in the backlog to apply and be given a positive response to their request to come to Canada.

“Let’s not even talk about how inefficient it is to be basing this policy on assumptions about the workforce and job market when we know how quickly this scenario changes. It sounds to me that the finance minister is acting like an employment agency and not thinking in the larger social scale of building our society.

The Budget

“The NDP understands something that the Conservatives also know is true, but Conservatives have made the ideological choice to ignore, and that is that greater and greater income disparity hurts our community and, after all, this is what we are: a country, yes, but a community first and foremost.

“Please continue to defend a vision of Canada that I believe even most supporters of the Conservatives would be found to adhere to. We are a community. We need to work in a way that balances the needs and strengths of one region with the others. I do not see evidence of this in the Conservative budget at all, and I thank the NDP for standing to defend a fair vision of our country.”

We thank her, as well, for her comment.

•(1055)

Moving right along, this is from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. My colleague, the fabulous member for Newton—North Delta, is applauding and of course we like to hear from our folks at home. It is a very important thing when we hear from home, and that is why when I kicked off debate I read into the record a number of comments from my constituents in Burnaby—New Westminster. We feel very acutely the responsibility of representing our constituents. Today, yesterday and Friday, we have been representing our constituents solidly in the NDP but also, perhaps a bit sadly but because of necessity, we have been representing the constituents of many Conservative members of Parliament, who may not be bringing these views forward. We are ensuring their views are known.

This gentleman lives in another Conservative riding, and here again we are hearing a comment from a constituent of a Conservative member of Parliament. He says:

“I live in a very Conservative riding. Unfortunately, as nothing has been done for unemployed and underemployed deaf citizens, I find that I can't support the budget. The budget emphasizes jobs, but for whom? Certainly not for deaf or disabled Canadians. The unemployment rate for deaf citizens hovers around 60%. While the defence minister goes riding around free in a helicopter, deaf Canadians are frustrated with an economy which places the emphasis on money more than people.

“Why can't we have an economy that puts people first? The budget here obviously promotes greed. Certainly we need a balanced budget but it must make huge allowances for people in need and not just push environmentally ruinous pipelines through British Columbia, the province I know and love.

“The Prime Minister may be an economist, but he certainly is not a people's man. He does not understand that we all live on this earth only once. Why punish people with this horrific budget? I hope that he will go back to school and get some sensitivity training.”

I would like to say thanks in American Sign Language. That is how we say thanks for sending in his very important message from the deaf community in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

I am going to move on to somebody from Scarborough in Toronto. This individual writes to her NDP MP. She says:

“The OAS cut is a big mistake. It won't be long before there will be means testing and only the very poorest may get anything. What we need is a national housing

program now. Our cities are now unaffordable for people coming up, younger people, immigrants and such.”

And she thanks her local NDP MP for having the opportunity to speak out on the budget.

I am going to move to a few other comments we have received around the issue of the Katimavik program being cut. That is something that a lot of younger Canadians in particular are giving voice to. It is important that we provide their voice in the House of Commons.

The first is from the riding of Ottawa Centre, which is represented by a dynamic NDP MP whose riding includes this House of Commons.

•(1100)

Ms. Sullivan says the following: “I was fortunate enough to participate in a Katimavik leadership program in 2005-2006. It was an incredible experience, one that I can say without hesitation shaped the person that I am today. I learned many things while in Katimavik, not the least of which are confidence, tolerance and responsibility. I am completely opposed to cutting funding for Katimavik. It would be a tragedy to lose this program that has benefited countless Canadians and hundreds of communities across the country”.

Here are some other comments, this time from Ms. Dorner in Maberly, Ontario: “Thank you for speaking up to defend the Katimavik program. I'm sure that my own member of Parliament, who is Conservative, does not represent my views on the government's wish to scrap the program. I can tell you that experiences in Katimavik are very broadening experiences. I not only spent time in three different parts of the country, but I met and befriended many people from all backgrounds and walks of life. I was able to do worthwhile community service work while gaining work skills and generally developed a much better understanding and appreciation of the country as a whole. Thanks to my Katimavik experience, I was able to learn to communicate well in French, a skill I now use daily in my work in a federal crown corporation. More recently, two of my children have been Katimavik participants, with similar positive results. For the sake of our young people and for unity in our country, keep the Katimavik program alive”.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, here is another from Ville-Émard, Quebec: “I'm writing you because I hope that you will fight to continue the Katimavik program. I never personally had the opportunity to participate in it since I went to university straight from high school, but I had looked into it and always regretted never taking that chance to participate. Please stand up for Katimavik. These kinds of programs can have a huge lasting impact, not just on the participants, but on the lives of those they touch in the communities they visit and on future generations. We need more proud and patriotic Canadians”.

The Budget

Here is another letter on Katimavik from the Morse and Bernard family in the riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, which reads: “I have learned today that youth accepted into Katimavik for July 2012 have had their places in Katimavik revoked, pulled away, by this government. This affects my 17 and soon-to-be 18-year-old daughter who was elated to be accepted into the program, which we had encouraged her to apply to. I am writing to ask for your assistance in persuading the Conservative government to reconsider its decision. I would prefer to have Katimavik remain funded as a whole. In particular, I think it is quite unfair not to permit those youth already accepted into the program to complete their session. I believe it is prejudicial to those youth already accepted for them to not be able to follow through with their plans. The government's decision effectively sets them behind their peers and is patently unfair as a result”.

We certainly will continue to be the voice of that parent who wrote to us and of all the other families across the country.

I will continue with another comment from Ms. Sullivan from Toronto, who says the following: “I would like to add my voice to the calls in support of the Katimavik program. I was a Katimavik participant in 2004. The program gave me an opportunity that I would otherwise never have had to travel across the country and experience life in the different communities I stayed in. I also gained valuable work experiences, made friends from all over the country and my French improved greatly. I think that Katimavik is a valuable program for this nation's youth and I sincerely hope that it can continue to be funded so that future generations of young people can continue to have the opportunities that I had”.

From the great riding of Edmonton—Strathcona, Ms. Mercier, writes to her member of Parliament: “I have never written a letter to a member of Parliament. This will be my first, and I have to say that I am proud to live in the one Alberta NDP riding”.

As the member for Newton—North Delta said, there will certainly be a lot more than one after the next election campaign.

Ms. Mercier continues, “I want to express my extreme anger that the program Katimavik has been eliminated in the latest budget. It's a clear political move on the part of Conservatives, as I'm sure you're already aware, as was the 10% cut from the CBC budget. It's heartbreaking to know that this is, in part, a result of not enough people getting out and voting. I truly believe that if more people made the effort to vote we would not have a Conservative government. What a sad day for Canadians”.

●(1105)

My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has just passed me another. This is a very thoughtful comment from the riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl, which has an excellent NDP MP of course. In it, Ms. Bowering writes: “First, a little bit about myself. I'm an 18-year old Memorial University student from Mount Pearl, Newfoundland-Labrador. I recently participated in Katimavik and I wanted to share my views about the recent abrupt decision to eliminate the program. I'm not going to scream, to yell or to put the blame on anybody. The fact is, plain and simple, that youth apathy is a problem in Canada. Less and less youth have bothered turning out to vote in elections, 36% in the 2008 election. Yet here we stand as a nation moving backwards. Cutting the Katimavik program is a giant

leap backwards. Youth have less and less to do with politics. Political parties are simply failing to connect to the young electorate. What better way to distance themselves further from youth as a general rule than by cutting a program that we as youth are generally passionate about. “Get a life” is Katimavik's slogan, “Dégage”, for our fine francophone population, and I was accepted fresh out of high school to the July-December 2011 program. I made friends. I learned to develop an opinion, to voice it and to listen to other's opinions in both official languages. It was difficult. Most times it was difficult. Fun, but hard work. But that's just life, isn't it, a challenge”.

Ms. Bowering asks, “Why wouldn't we want competent, developed youth ready to join our workforce, eager to voice their opinions, to fight for what's right? That's what I see here, the youth reaping the benefits of Katimavik and using what they learn in order to fight for what they believe in. We stand side by side with those who were perhaps too young to apply in previous years. We stand in solidarity with all of the organizations which Katimavik youth touched, with those community members whose lives were impacted by our presence. We stand together with all of the alumni, the project leaders, the support leaders, the coordinators and staff that helped shape Katimavik and shape the youth of our country, of our Canada. Cutting Katimavik is a mistake. Katimavik was Canada's leading youth volunteer service program and I fully believe that it should continue to be”.

For this student in Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador, we know that her MP and the entire 102 member NDP caucus is onto it. We will certainly continue to push for Katimavik to continue and for opportunities for youth. Given what this budget has done to Canada's youth, we say clearly that Canada's youth deserve better than what the government has done.

As members can see, as fast as my colleague next door gives me these notes, they continue to pour in from across the country. We will certainly endeavour to read as many as we can into the record because these are the heartfelt feelings and thoughts of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

We now have one from Kaslo, British Columbia, in the riding of B.C. Southern Interior, which has elected a fantastic member of Parliament since 2006. I cannot mention his name, but he is one heck of an MP.

The Budget

From Kaslo, British Columbia, we hear the following: “I know that you listened to the budget with a similar sense of concern as we did in Kaslo, British Columbia. There are so many things to be concerned about. The most immediate one that comes to mind at this point is the cutting of the funds to Katimavik. I was leader with Katimavik, a district coordinator, and in the last two years a sponsor for Katimavik. I was so impressed that these young people were given the opportunity to learn about volunteerism, to learn about Canada, to learn about themselves, all the while that they helped communities in ways we could never afford to pay people to do. To me, this was a real education for youth. What a sad day to see the program cut. I wrote to the Prime Minister, but I wanted you to know as well”, referring to the member for the British Columbia Southern Interior.

There is a second one from a Mrs. Keenan from the British Columbia Southern Interior, who writes: “I am resident of Caswell. I know firsthand how important and valuable Katimavik is in the lives of its volunteers and in the communities in which they reside. Here in Caswell volunteers once offered services to JVH School, the Caswell Youth Centre, the Perriwinkle Children's Centre, the fire department, the Lang Cultural Centre, to the Caswell Historical Society, and the North Kootenay Lake Community Services. Likewise, groups in Nelson and Castlegar were present in similar organizations. I hope and believe there is still time to reverse the government's bad decision. I urge you all to speak up for Katimavik and trust that we will once again see the benefits of it here in the Kootenays”.

•(1110)

To this constituent, I say yes, that we will continue to speak up about Katimavik on the floor of this House of Commons. I am going to continue because the messages keep flooding in.

Here is another one from the region of Halifax. This constituent, Ms. Glover, writes to the great member for Halifax and says, “I am writing you from Halifax. Since the announcement of a new federal budget, I have been thinking a lot about the Katimavik program. I completed the program over seven years ago after finishing high school and before starting university. While I am sure you are aware of the broader arguments about the value of the Katimavik program, I would like to share with you my personal experience.

“After high school I felt like I was faced with a difficult choice, university or work. Obtaining full-time work with a high school degree seemed daunting. Would I find meaningful work? Would I be paid adequately? How could I convince my potential employers of my capabilities when I had little work experience? University was equally intimidating due to the weight of making a choice of what to study. What if I chose the wrong major? If I took on debt, how would I get out of it?

“Katimavik provided me with another choice and provided me with the freedom to explore all those questions. I lived in Regina, Saskatchewan; Alma, Quebec; and Vernon, British Columbia during my stint in Katimavik. From the first day with the program I felt a certain freedom, being away from my home town. I was free to create and explore a new identity, something that I believe all young people deserve to do. I became someone who was confident in the kitchen, someone who could speak articulately about issues that

matter to me, and someone who took on new experiences with excitement rather than fear. One of the largest take-aways for me was that as an individual you could contribute to a community and it could make a difference. What an amazing experience to learn as a young person. I look back and marvel about what I and my fellow participants accomplished.

“As young Canadians, we are faced with higher tuition rates and a tougher job market. I believe Katimavik has an even more important role today. I was extremely saddened to read about the funding cut, but I am optimistic that advocates of the program will fight for it. As for all the former participants, Katimavik has trained them to stand up for what they believe in and to make a noise.

I appreciate your taking the time to read this, and I hope you will advocate for the continued presence of Katimavik for the sake of young people across Canada and for the communities that Katimavik serves”.

Of course we will. Moving right along—

•(1115)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hate to interrupt my hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster, who has been speaking quite eloquently this morning on this reckless budget that is hurting Canadian families.

At the end of my point of order, I intend to seek the unanimous consent of the House, so I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will hear me out.

My friend from British Columbia has been reading into the record emails and tweets that he has received from concerned Canadians from coast to coast to coast. A lot of these remarks are from Canadians in Conservative-held ridings, so it has been invaluable to hear their perspectives and for their own members to hear their objections to the budget. It is important for these emails to be part of the record so that all members can consult them in their work. I therefore seek the unanimous consent of the House for Mr. Julian to table the emails that he is reading from this morning.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind the hon. member that mentioning members by name in the House is not allowed.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, I thank you for picking up on the fact that she had mentioned the member by his name. It is important that we do respect this and I appreciate your input.

•(1120)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Why don't they want to have these tabled?

The Budget

Mr. Peter Julian: It is very strange, Madam Speaker. We will have to explain the Conservative reluctance to have all these emails, tweets, postings on Facebook and the faxes flooding in to our offices across the country tabled in the House. That shows we were right. Rather than sitting and letting the Conservatives churn out their manufactured Prime Minister's office talking notes, we are ensuring that the points of view of Canadian families, seniors and workers are put forward in the House of Commons. Obviously the Conservatives are not willing to do that.

I will keep going, ensuring that those views of Canadians are represented here. This is not our House. It is not a Conservative House. It is not an NDP House. It is the House of Commons. It is the House of the people of Canada. Their points of view should be expressed, heard and understood on the floor of the House of Commons. I find it very difficult to understand why the Conservatives are so reluctant to have those views expressed and to have them tabled.

As my colleague, the member for Newton—North Delta so eloquently said, and as my colleague, the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung said, these are points of view that the Conservatives should be reading. They should not be just listening to me, to NDP members putting them forward. They should be reading them. They should be understanding how Canadians are reacting to their budget and they should be saying that since they have made some very clear violations of solid commitments that the Prime Minister made in the last election campaign, that maybe they should redo the budget that is keeping their commitment to the Canadian people, rather than the attacking and slashing of a wide variety of programs we have mentioned.

I will continue to read into the record a few more comments that have come from young Canadians. This is from another individual from the region of Halifax-Dartmouth, who says, “I am 18 years old, finishing high school in June. I was one of the volunteers going to participate in the July-December group. I've been preparing and looking forward to this for a while now. This would be my first time leaving home for this long. I would meet new people, make new friends and get a large amount of life experience that I just can't get elsewhere, and all the while, changing a community in my country of Canada for the better. Doing this would help me change my outlook on things and help me to fix problems with self-esteem and confidence. I planned my future around it.

When I heard that the funding was cut, I was devastated. I was counting on Katimavik to help with my resumé and employment options to show that I am willing to volunteer, that I am independent and have experience working as a team. As of right now, I have no idea what I am going to do with the next year of my life. I could work. There are few options for work where I live. Please bring back Katimavik. Give it the funding it needs so me and so many other Canadians can experience what it has to offer and make us better citizens”.

This is yet another voice of another young Canadian asking the government to listen to their voices, to listen about their concerns about the future, about a 15% youth unemployment rate, with all of the doors that the government has closed to post-secondary education, making it one of the least accessible education systems

among industrialized countries. After closing all those doors to youth, the Conservatives closed off the final program.

We find that despicable. Canadian youth deserve much better.

● (1125)

This is another comment from a young man, again from the Sackville region of Nova Scotia. He says, “I was shocked and saddened to see the Conservatives' plan to cut the Katimavik youth volunteer program. We, the Canadian citizens, need our MPs to fight this decision and save Katimavik and so many other programs from the chopping block”.

Another comment comes from the island of Montreal. It reads, “I am writing to you to ask you to please help fight for the continued funding of the Katimavik program. The government has said that the program reaches a relatively small number of participants at a relatively high cost per participant. I hope from my example you can see that this is not the case. You see, I was a Katimavik participant 10 years ago, when I was 20 years old. I had completed a college degree and was working for minimum wage. To be honest, I didn't have much direction in my life at the time and so my family signed me up for Katimavik. I thought about the places I would travel to. I was excited. And what started as an excuse to travel the country, transformed the person I am, the person I want to be and my aspirations for the country”.

The person goes on to talk about growing up in a suburb of Toronto and not having been outside of an urban-suburban setting. However, this person lived in three different communities across the country, ranging from a small town of 500 people to a large town of 45,000 people and in a very multicultural dynamic with Canadians from across the country, including four Quebeckers and one native Inuit.

Another constituent from Richmond Hill, Ontario says, “Together, we learned to appreciate the differences between us, and 10 years later, it's clear to me that this is not something that a majority of people have a chance to appreciate. But it is critical for us to work in an effective, democratic society. So please, when you talk of the cost of Katimavik, please don't let it be spoken about in terms of cost per participant. By sponsoring Katimavik, the government is not just investing in a select few individuals. The government is investing in youth, investing in communities, investing in developing understanding between people of different backgrounds and investing in a future of a Canada that is full of engaged citizens. The Katimavik program is critical to maintaining these important values that I think we can all agree define us as Canadians. I can only hope that in the future the Katimavik program will be better known to all Canadians and will be able to accommodate anyone and everyone that wants to join”.

The Budget

This is another voice from a young Canadian from Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia. This individual wrote to the member of Parliament, who is the member of Parliament for Sackville—Eastern Shore, the long-standing veterans affairs critic in the NDP caucus. It says, “Hello, I received an email earlier today informing me of the Katimavik project and how the funding for the program has been ended. In the email I was told that if I had an opinion, or wanted to make myself heard about this matter, to email my elected official. This is what I am doing now. This email is not for me, but for future youth who wish to sign up for this program and fail to do so for this same reason.

I have met so many people who have done this program and have come away with jobs and with new life experience that they put forward to their future careers. I work next to a group where one of them volunteered through Katimavik and years later she's back because she enjoyed the experience so much she decided to pursue that as her job. I'm stating my opinion on this as I am still counted as youth, and I'd like to make it clear that this type of cut in our government spending should never have occurred”.

I will move on to another young Canadian voice from Edmonton, Alberta, and I would like to pay tribute again to the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, who states, “I was lucky enough to be a Katimavik participant in 2009-10. It's difficult to articulate just how much of an impact this program had on me as an individual, on my group and on the communities that we lived in. My group will always be my family, volunteering 40 hours a week individually and then evenings and weekends as a group. It did an incredible job of teaching all of us the value of hard work and perseverance.

• (1130)

The Government of Canada has attempted to justify its termination of the program with numbers. They say it costs too much for so few people, \$45 million this past year for 1,000 participants, but what they fail to recognize is the number of people in all of the participating communities that this program has helped. My group was sent to Kamloops, British Columbia, London, Ontario and Dieppe, New Brunswick. I can honestly say that there are very few programs which foster national unity, cultural understanding and civic engagement as effectively as Katimavik, beside the basic life skills which we were all forced to develop along the way, neo-planning, event planning, budgeting, cooking, cleaning, etc. The grassroots impact of this program is unbelievable. Because of this program, I've learned to listen to others and consider that every opinion and every voice deserves to be heard”.

It would be wise to send all those Conservative MPs on Katimavik. They could actually learn listening skills and all the other things. As the individual said, “I've learned to listen to others and consider that every opinion and every voice deserves to be heard”. That is certainly the way we stand in the NDP, yet Conservatives do not seem to share that. Maybe that is why they are cutting the program. It is that respect to which they seem to be opposed.

Another young individual says, “I learned to speak French from my best friend in the program because it was no longer a subject in school. It was a way of understanding the points of view presented

by my group mates. French was no longer a textbook. It became a face, a friend, a piece of me and a piece of my identity as a Canadian. By becoming involved in our community placements through our volunteer work, we became a part of our communities. Kamloops, B.C., London, Ontario, Dieppe, New Brunswick will always be a kind of home for me and I beg that Canadians listen to my story and the story of other participants and billet families and community partners, for if you do, you will hear the voices of thousands of Canadians who not only embrace this program but desperately need it.

The first photo which I've included in this package is one from the second month my group and I had been together, our first Christmas away from home. We decided to take pictures in ugly Christmas sweaters we found in a local thrift shop. Two months together and we already knew that we had a bond which could never be forgotten. This is my team and I will always be there for them no matter how many years separate us from the program and no matter how many kilometres separate us from each other”.

These are the kind of heartfelt expressions we are getting from young people across the country, from every province, region and community. They are all saying together, with one voice, not to cut Katimavik and that this program should never have been cut. Like so many other things that were cut in this budget, Canada's youth deserve better than what the government put forward in cutting Katimavik.

I will read another one in English and then I will read other emails that we have received in French.

This from British Columbia. This individual is writing to his NDP MP, the fabulous member of Parliament for New Westminster—Coquitlam, a strong representative. He says, “I have one very disappointed 19-year-old son this week. After several months of conscientiously preparing and submitting documentation for Katimavik, my son learned in an email that the federal government thought, in its wisdom, to cancel the funding for the program in the latest budget. I guess the concept of youth community service was simply too hard to bear for this reigning government”.

• (1135)

“I certainly understand the government's need to balance the budget, but honestly, encouraging the next generation of Canadians to develop their independence and citizenship and community service seems to me to be a budget priority well spent. The government thinks that it is a waste of money. Perhaps they can tell us why. The government wants to save Canadians money but perhaps simplification of the current tax system could help. I have personally discovered that there is a whole variety of complex and ambiguous exceptions within Revenue Canada and I have spent thousands of dollars of my time figuring out all of this complexity. Although I have never been a very political person over the years, I generally find myself increasingly drawn to the NDP vision for a kinder responsible government. I would hope that the official opposition NDP will challenge this destruction of Katimavik or at least identify alternatives for Canadian youth like my son over the coming months.”

We certainly will do exactly that. We will continue to fight the cuts to Katimavik.

[*Translation*]

There are other people speaking out. These comments are coming in from across Canada.

There is Ms. Allard, a woman from the riding of Honoré-Mercier, which is represented by a solid New Democrat. Ms. Allard says:

The Budget

I am writing in reaction to the budget that was brought down today. I am just a student. I am not usually interested in politics. In fact, I rarely get involved. I get involved only when it is necessary, and today it is necessary.

The government has decided to stop funding the Katimavik youth program after 35 years. Katimavik is a program that allows youths between 17 and 21 to have an unforgettable experience.

Through that experience, the young people visit Canada, get involved in volunteer activities and participate in community life in the places they are assigned to.

Enough generalities. Let me tell you about my personal experience. I had the opportunity to participate in Katimavik from September 2008 to June 2009. Those nine months were not at all a holiday. As a young 17-year-old, I experienced highs and lows. But I survived; better yet, I grew up (yes, I will trot out that cliché). I lived in Ontario, Nova Scotia and Quebec. I worked with people from all over Canada and from various backgrounds: the young country girl from Ontario and the girl off the reserve in Saskatchewan, the city boy from downtown Toronto. All these people helped me learn about this beautiful country of which I am a citizen. Thanks to this program, thanks to the people I met, I am no longer self-absorbed and I take into consideration the reality of the people around me, the people who do not necessarily live as I do. Furthermore, the volunteer work helps the communities chosen. A number of organizations survive thanks to these volunteers. Every one of us can change the world. Katimavik empowers youth and helps them realize that this is not a cliché; it is true.

In general, Katimavik truly helps shape the citizens of tomorrow. It must continue to receive funding.

[Mr. Prime Minister], eliminating funding for Katimavik not only cuts help for communities, but also hinders the development of Canada's young people.

That is the voice of Ms. Allard in the riding of Honoré-Mercier. She is very eloquent when she talks about the importance of keeping the Katimavik program alive. We are all saying that Canada's youth deserve better than what this government's budget has delivered.

That is exactly right and we have heard it over and over again. Young people have told us that the program helped them to learn to respect Canada's diversity, to respect viewpoints other than their own, to listen to people and to understand them. These are all values that we need in Canada, that our youth need. We need youth who can think for themselves, who can come up with solutions and who can have a vision for the future of our country.

However, this government does not share this vision. This government absolutely refuses to have a vision for the future for young Canadians. We are saddened by this. We have a short-sighted government with a one-track mind that is so set in its ways that it is wiping an entire generation of young people off the map.

That is unacceptable. What is important is that so many voices are being raised across the country to say the same thing.

• (1140)

They are saying that this government lacks vision, that this government must do better for young people and that this government should not have cut vital programs for families, seniors and youth. We hope that the Conservatives will listen to these heartfelt messages from across the country.

I would like to read another message, this time from Montreal. This one says: "The government plans to eliminate the Canada School of Public Service's advanced leadership program. Once again, education is being cut. The young leaders of tomorrow cannot count on this government's support. Given the cuts that are being made to the public service and the attrition that will result in heavier workloads for fewer employees, would it not be wise to ensure that public servants have the skills they need to do their jobs? This is the

Conservative government's vision: a pared-down and incompetent public service."

This comes from a Montreal resident who is raising the types of concerns shared by people across the country.

I have another comment from a person from the riding of Hochelaga in eastern Montreal, which is also represented by a very good NDP member.

This man wrote his member of Parliament about the problems with the budget. He said: "The F-35s are going to cost tens of billions of dollars, as are the new prisons and the expenditures associated with invading Canadians' privacy. This government has lost our trust. This government seems to be even more right-wing than Sarkozy. When faced with all these facts, we have to say that this budget is not good for Canadian families."

We wholeheartedly agree.

[English]

We are doing our best to keep up with all of the various comments pouring in from Canadians across the country. What it does show is the very close regard with which all Canadians and Canadian families are looking at this budget. That is why we are finding it difficult to keep up with providing all the comments as Canadians tweet them and put them on Facebook and in a wide variety of other places.

I will go to another Conservative riding. This comment is from a woman in Vancouver Island North from the town of Black Creek, B.C. She says, "My riding, Vancouver Island North, is one of those ridings under suspicion of electoral fraud". She mentions the name of her Conservative MP. She goes on to say, "I have lived here for over six years now and I have yet to receive either a phone call or a written answer from my Conservative MP. I have called and I have emailed. Regardless of the subject or the number of times I have corresponded, I have still never heard from my Conservative MP directly. I thought he was supposed to represent and respond to all in his riding, not just his supporters. We have raised, a whole number of times, concerns about pieces of legislation that have come forward. It seems to me that the government, with the budget for example, seems to be thumbing their noses at all of us".

She is hoping that the investigation into possible cases of election fraud in the riding are completed quickly because she does not believe that the ballot count was accurate.

I will now move from the west coast to the east coast to a riding in Cape Breton Island. This gentleman writes, "I have been trying to figure out how the budget will affect our fishermen. I understand that removing the fish habitat will endanger our waters. That is very bad, not just for us, but for future generations. What I don't understand is how the EI changes will affect my fishermen or the labourers that they employ. What effects will come to seasonal workers?"

The Budget

I received another message from another individual on the east coast yesterday who wrote, “I am writing to thank you for the tremendous stamina and efforts today in the House. You did a great service to Canadians and I am grateful. At the end of the day today, you mentioned that you will resume tomorrow. I certainly hope that you do and hope that you can mention the two petition reports that I have attached here and possibly read a couple of the comments”.

The two petitions she mentions are “Keep Protection of Habitat in the Canada Fisheries Act”. I certainly mention that for Canadians who want to follow up on that. She also mentions “Save the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act from Further Gutting”. Those are the two petitions both in response to this budget and both with thousands of signatures.

She goes on to say, “From my personal perspective, this budget is a betrayal to Canadians and, in a broader sense, it is a betrayal to citizens everywhere. As a country that used to be respected and admired on an international scale for our decency, democracy and environmental protection and stewardship, we used to lead by example. Not any more. This budget does not respect Canadians' values or interests. It moves our nation backwards by decades, a mistake that will affect the entire planet, not just us. The reckless and expedited development of the oil sands will have a significant impact on global climate change”.

• (1145)

“This budget attacks youth, veterans, seniors, safe food, charitable and environmental groups, public broadcasting, agriculture, fisheries and the environment and only benefits industry and big oil. I believe that the increasing restrictions placed on scientists and the environmental movement goes against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. My heart is heavy with the weight of what this budget, if passed, will embark upon us”. She is absolutely right. Canadians get what is in this budget. They get the attack on a whole variety of things Canadians depend on. Canadian families from coast to coast to coast deserve better than these cuts, better than these attacks by a mean-spirited government against a whole range of things that protect our quality of life.

With the passion we bring, all 102 members of this NDP official opposition caucus are determined to fight back on this budget because of the notes we are getting from people across the country and the concerns that have been raised by such a wide variety of Canadians. Canadians are right on the money about what this budget does.

When we were back in the seventh or eighth hour of debate, now in the tenth or eleventh hour, I quoted a heart-felt letter from a gentleman in Surrey, British Columbia, that brought hope to me and I hope to all of us. He is a life-long Conservative supporter who looked at the budget, read what the budget does, saw how mean-spirited it was and is now saying that people can change their way of thinking and that many of his friends and other people his age in his family are thinking differently about the government. Yes, we are passionately fighting back against all of the mean-spirited cuts that are in this budget, which repudiates everything that the Prime Minister promised.

However, we also have a profound sense of hope as we see Canadians reacting to the budget, as we see them waking up and

saying, if they voted Conservative, that it was not what they voted for, as the gentleman from Surrey said so eloquently. In that hope, we know we can look forward to October 20, 2015, the day after the next general election, when it will be the first day of a new sunrise for Canada and the first day of the first NDP government in our history, because we know that will bring new change and hope to so many Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1150)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. members to reduce the applause so the occupant of the Chair can hear the comments and that they can be read into the record. At this point, I cannot always hear the comments nor can those transcribing.

Mr. Peter Julian: Actually, Madam Speaker, that was my fault. If they are kind enough to applaud and show so much energy 10 or 11 hours into the debate, then what you are actually suggesting to me, I think, is that I should stop talking when they are applauding. I will do that.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for that admonishment.

Mr. Peter Julian: I thank the Speaker for, as always, managing the House business with a great deal of dignity, tact and strength. We thank her for her service to the country in the Speaker's chair.

I have another very eloquent letter from Manitoba. We have mentioned the issue of manual labour a number of times. It was mentioned earlier when I quoted a gentleman who works with floor installers.

Yesterday we heard from a number of people from the manual trades. Manual workers wrote in because the budget talks about raising the retirement age from 65 to 67. They say that is provoking profound hardship in the lives of so many future seniors who have worked all their lives in the manual trades and whose bodies simply cannot give any more.

Earlier today I cited a profoundly eloquent letter from a constituent in the Annapolis Valley who said very clearly that, with the government's actions in raising the retirement age, she foresees many more seniors late in their lives having to go out into the blueberry fields to pick berries as a way to keep a roof over their heads. It is shameful that the government is even contemplating forcing that skyrocketing level of poverty that will become commonplace in Canada as a result of deliberate government policies.

We are hearing these eloquent arguments from Canadians across the country who are just expressing themselves and they are doing it through us by emails, tweets and postings on Facebook. They are asking the government to please listen to them because what it is doing will profoundly impact their lives negatively. They are telling the government that it is forcing them to work two years longer, if they can, and, if they cannot, they will be forced to live in poverty. The government is giving them the worst of possible choices. After giving all of their lives to their community and their country, the government is raising the retirement age from 65 to 67.

The Budget

Members will recall that we had the analysis that actually showed that the government is simply wrong when it says that OECD countries are raising the retirement age to 67. My NDP colleagues will recall that we were actually only talking about a handful of countries. Yes, there are some countries that have raised the retirement age, but they did not raise it from 65 to 67. They raised it from 62 or 63 to 65. Canada is off-side with the vast majority of industrialized countries in the OECD because what we are doing is out of step. Three-quarters of the countries in the OECD have 65 or under as the retirement age. Canada, under the Conservative government, is showing a disrespect to seniors that few other countries have shown.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: We want to hook ourselves to Greece.

Mr. Peter Julian: The government likes to say that Greece has done worse. Well, the government seems to be doing everything in its power to push the quality of life downward to those of other countries that we have heard about that have a worse quality of life.

• (1155)

This is what Manning Blair wrote to an NDP member:

You asked for our thoughts on the budget. I do not live in your riding; I am stuck with a Conservative member of Parliament and so I adopt other MPs randomly.

The first thing that strikes me is that as a 47-year-old blue-collar worker with arthritis, I have to work an extra two years. I'm really looking forward to that. I've already changed careers because driving truck is less physically demanding than construction work and I hope to hell I can keep passing the medical until I am 67 or I am really screwed. Of course, having come of age under the destruction of the Mulroney government and having had to suffer under Grant Devine in Saskatchewan and Gary Filmon in Manitoba, I kind of got off to an iffy financial start and have never really been able to save much. I have been downsized and right-sized. The OAS was about my only chance to retire at 65, thanks largely to the fiscal incompetence of Conservative federal and provincial governments. Still, I am in better shape than many. My house is paid for and I can always pick up some side work doing landscaping or landscape carpentry. That hurts like hell too when you have arthritis, which is why I quit doing it full time and started driving truck, but I can do it. Right now I am so upset that I can only do it when I get a chance. I was taught from a young age to work and make sure that I took care of myself, but this Conservative—

He does not use the word “government”. He uses a word that is unparliamentary, but we can understand his frustration.

—I am certainly not going to continue to pay for their grafts and kickbacks.

The second thing that strikes me about the budget is the continuing attack on science. I do not know exactly why the Conservatives hate science so much, but my suspicion is that it interferes both with their beliefs and their twisted instinct for short-term greed. Heck, it might just be that whatever gene makes you Conservative also—

I cannot complete the sentence, but the individual is saying that he thinks it makes one less intelligent. He went on to say:

If they fund science properly, maybe we could find out and discover a cure for Conservative—

Certainly, judging from the emails that we are getting, a lot of Canadians would like to see this. He said:

The Conservatives' hatred of science definitely shows up in this budget though. They cut funding for pure science, wanting it to be directed to feed corporate greed instead.

As he says, we need to make sure that we are investing in science. He went on to say:

Most concerning to me is global warming and the die-off that we are seeing in bees. There are other things, of course, but these are very important to me. There is nothing in this budget about dealing with the environment. The Prime Minister's

continuing attack on the climate is pretty well documented and his cuts to science and reduced environmental regulation will make things even worse.

You asked for my thoughts and these are my thoughts. Keep fighting for us.

We certainly will. We will keep standing up for the Blairs of the country. There is no doubt about that.

I have another tweet hot off the press, “Many veterans of the Afghan campaign will not be eligible for OAS until 67, unlike veterans of past wars. They deserve fairness too.” We certainly support that.

All this feedback is flooding in from Canadians. I would like to read into the record emails from two residents of Victoria. I paid tribute to the member for Victoria earlier.

• (1200)

One individual from Victoria writes:

I am very upset about the Conservatives' 2012 budget. I feel particularly threatened by the so-called streamlining of legislative decision making around development projects and the cuts to the CBC, never mind everything that was not even touched in any significant way, education, housing, environment, transportation. I feel that the kinds of budget decisions the Conservatives are making are anti-democratic, limiting national public meetings, making decision making even further out of the reach of people, concealing the issues that would be addressed in the budget. They are selling this country out and eroding everything that Canadians that I know, we feel we stand for.

Mr. Swinden from Victoria writes:

What impacts me negatively is the fact that the government taxes OAS at 15%. What I object to as a recipient of GIS on a lower income scale is that I then have to pay the money back. This amount of money I should be able to use to afford basics like an eye care exam, a new mattress which will allow me to sleep better, and other basic essentials, not to mention dental and pharmaceutical expenses. What else I object to is that what we have is a government that is breaking its commitments. To help better balance income distribution, retirees on lower incomes should have their OAS increased, especially those living on GIS, in order to meet the rising costs of living so they could live decently and comfortably with reasonable material security.

That is another comment regarding OAS from a Canadian in Victoria, British Columbia. Moving right along, there are more comments coming in.

Ms. Hamilton from Scarborough, Ontario states:

The budget also ignored the needs of youth, especially for increased job and training opportunities and lower tuition fees, disregarded the environment by imposing time limits on environmental studies and new resource projects and providing zero leadership on environmental issues, dropping responsibility for providing leadership in health care, failing to address the fast growing gap between rich and poor, and cutting funding to the arts by strategically attacking groups that take a critical perspective on the status quo: the CBC, the National Film Board, Telefilm.

An individual from the Toronto region states that the federal budget does not address the issue of rising gas prices, particularly in Toronto. The individual also says that the government “thinks its infrastructure program is adequate. Both the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Urban Transit Association have called for a national strategy to invest in expanding public transit, involving the federal government, provinces and municipalities, with dedicated funding. This budget is deaf to this fact.”

My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is wonderful at managing the paperwork. He is doing a great job.

This is another one from the metro Toronto region with respect to the budget. Ms. Blais, a small business owner, writes:

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I am not happy that once again corporations receive breaks and the most vulnerable of our society, elderly, children and those in the mid and low income brackets, are the hardest hit. Canada is in the unique position now of being a world leader in human development, understanding and building a better society, but not with this government, which seems fairly bent on being another version of the U.S. Republican Party.

• (1205)

We are burdened with this majority government. I do not believe there is much you can do to change their minds or the road map they are determined to make. I find it frightening at best. The government is setting this country on a path that will benefit big business, but build an increasing divide between classes, effectively wiping out the middle class, and will leave our seniors in some cases to starve, while our mental health patients are placed in increasing numbers in a prison system that will not rehabilitate them. Canada was once a better country than the U.S. It is sadly becoming a poor imitation of the same.

That is the voice of another Canadian.

Again, from Victoria, British Columbia, there are a number of comments that the budget decisions made by the Conservatives are anti-democratic. They are saying that the Conservatives are limiting the national public media and taking decision making even further out of the reach of people, concealing the issues that would be addressed in the budget. That is something that so many Canadians are raising as a concern.

From the St. John's area, there is a concern about the OETC. This individual indicates that the elimination of the OETC would cause the loss of current and future Canadian higher trained, skilled workers. Many will leave our great country. Without it, a lot of Canadian companies that work in other parts of the world and bring a lot of capital back to Canada would not be able to maintain the workforce they now have. It would make it impossible for them to continue to operate in third world countries, which would be a huge loss for both Canada and the other countries involved. It would also mean that Canadian crew members working on vessels would essentially be taxed twice. Because it would reduce the effect of any job creation plans, he says that we have to stand together to keep that program. He said that to his member of Parliament, the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. That is yet another point that has been raised.

An individual from Edmonton, Alberta has written in to say:

I note that in tabling his March 28, 2012 budget, the federal finance minister made no mention of closing the loopholes that enable ultra-rich Canadians to avoid paying their fair share of tax. Through the use of tax havens and ambiguous tax laws, these wealthy Canadians get away with staggering sums of money that could be used to help sustain social programs and fund infrastructure renewal.

Before I get into what happened this morning, which is a key announcement that we need to come back to, I am going to read a comment that comes from the riding of Honoré-Mercier.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Here is what this woman said:

“Having looked at this week's budget, I would like to draw the following points to your attention. First of all, without a doubt, the government has shown that it is incapable of meeting the millennium development goals and is therefore completely abandoning developing countries. Dedicating 0.7% of its GDP to development assistance is a concrete measure that would help underdeveloped

countries to get ahead. It is unfortunate that Canada cannot lead by example in that regard.

“Second, the government is treating us like imbeciles, wanting us to believe that it can maintain the same level of service to the public while eliminating 20,000 government jobs.

“Third, this government does not have its priorities straight, considering its decision to purchase F-35 fighter jets.

“Who are we so afraid of that the government has to buy those planes, just when it is trying to eliminate the deficit? Personally, I am not afraid of getting attacked by another country, but rather by this government—an attack on my own country.”

I would like to thank this woman from Honoré-Mercier for her letter. Of course, when the government says it can eliminate 20,000 public service positions without reducing services, that is precisely what we are refuting. This poses a serious problem.

This has just been confirmed. Job losses in the public sector will reach the same level as jobs losses in the private sector.

A few hours ago, as you know, we received an analysis by the Canadian Association of Professional Employees. According to that analysis, the 19,700 positions being cut in the public service—to which Ms. Tremblay referred—will lead to the loss of more than 40,000 jobs in the private sector. We are talking about 60,000 jobs lost in all.

We have to understand what is happening. Last fall, jobs were lost everywhere. Factories and all sorts of companies closed. We lost Mabe, Electro-Motive, Aveos—even though those people are trying to keep working—and the Brunswick mine. We lost job after job in a wide range of Canadian companies.

With Electro-Motive we lost 465 jobs; with Aveos, 2,600 jobs; with Ocean Choice International in Newfoundland—my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl knows all about it—we lost hundreds of jobs. With Maple Leaf Foods, in New Brunswick, Ontario and Coquitlam, we will lose 1,550 jobs by 2013. With AstraZeneca, we lost 132 jobs; with Bick's Pickles, 150 jobs; with XL Foods in Calgary, 500 jobs; with Sunoco, 102 jobs.

Ms. Carol Hughes: What did the Conservatives do about this?

Mr. Peter Julian: Absolutely nothing. They did absolutely nothing.

With Navistar, we lost 350 jobs; with Ford in St. Thomas, 1,100 jobs; with NewPage in Nova Scotia, 1,000 jobs. With Mabe, as I mentioned, 700 jobs will be lost by 2014.

Last fall was disastrous.

• (1215)

Jobs were lost across the country, including manufacturing jobs. How did the government react after all these layoffs? Did it say that services need to be maintained? No. It is going to eliminate 19,700 jobs instead. Canadian families are going to lose their livelihood, but what is more, we are losing those jobs. In the NDP, we are saying very clearly that Canadian families deserve better than the job cuts announced in the budget. Canadian families truly deserve better than this.

The Budget

[English]

So this is what they did. After all of those job losses and plant closures, there have been members of the NDP caucus standing up one after the other over the last weeks. In every case there is strong push-back from NDP members. We understand that when a plant is closed and the government does nothing, there is a multiplier effect in the community. When we lose 2,600 jobs for Aveos, as the government has done, we are talking about a multiplier effect of thousands of additional jobs that are lost. This is what the government does not seem capable of understanding.

On Friday, I talked about the Conservative government's economic record. It is appalling when we look at what it has managed to do over the course of a small number of years. Members would agree that the reason we are getting so many Canadians sending in negative comments about the job losses in this budget and about the direction that the government is taking us is because those Canadians understand that the government is not responding to economic fundamentals.

We have catalogued some of the government's achievements that are not in the Prime Minister's Office speaking notes that Conservative MPs receive. They should be, however, because they are facts and we cannot have a fact-free government. We see in the budget cuts to the first nations, eliminating the First Nations Statistical Institute, eliminating the National Council of Welfare and severe punitive cutbacks to Statistics Canada. We see the government moving away from any sort of fact-based public policy. On this side of the House we believe that facts are the foundation upon which we should build public policy. That is the difference between the two sides. Certainly Canadians are looking ahead to October 20, 2015, when the first NDP government in the history of the country takes office. We can assure Canadians that we will be looking at facts and not just fiction that is manufactured by the Prime Minister's Office.

What are the facts? What have been the achievements of the government?

One achievement is we now have the worst merchandise trade deficit in Canadian history. That is because of an erosion of manufacturing that has been unlike any that we have ever seen. The government has managed to achieve the unthinkable, the worst merchandise trade deficit in Canadian history. The government would say it does not matter because we are really good at exporting raw resources: minerals, bitumen and logs. However, then we look at all exports. The merchandise trade deficit is Canada's sending of manufactured goods abroad and importing from other countries. We are not producing those manufactured goods anymore.

Then we look at the overall deficit which is called the current account deficit, the balance of payments deficit. It is also the worst we have ever seen in Canadian history.

• (1220)

On the merchandise trade side, the government has the dubious achievement in its dismal decade, the dismal, dark, divisive decade of Conservative government, of the worst merchandise trade deficit and the worst current account deficit on balance of payments in our

nation's history. These are two achievements, but they are dubious achievements.

What else is there? Another record is that, on manufacturing jobs, we now have the lowest number we have ever had since they first started keeping statistics. It is the worst total we have ever had, a third achievement of the government: worst manufacturing jobs, worst merchandise trade deficit and the worst current account deficit on balance of payments.

What else is there? We also have what are becoming record levels of inequality now, where 20% of the country is earning essentially most of the country's income and has more than three-quarters of the financial resources. That means that the fourth record of the government is now, tragically, the worst level of household debt in our nation's history. We have worst for export, worst for manufacturing jobs and the worst for household debt. That is the Conservative government's economic record.

The Conservatives will point out that in the fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget, they are anticipating that they will change this sorry record. That is what they will say. That is certainly what they will claim.

Let us look at their record so far. I did ask this question before, but I just wanted to raise it with colleagues who are a little bit different today. I just want to ask my colleagues in the House, just for a moment if I could, given how Canada has fared in the last few years, what they thought about how we have managed to do in economic growth among the industrialized countries worldwide.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: According to the government, we must be one or two.

Mr. Peter Julian: My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour says that the government always seems to say it is setting records and doing really well. It quotes *Forbes* magazine, which is a great magazine for billionaires, of course, but we prefer to listen to ordinary Canadians.

What have the Conservatives done in terms of projected growth among industrialized countries? My colleagues says first or second, and that is not the case.

Does anyone say the top five? Are there any takers for the top five?

Okay, does anyone say the top ten? I have a Conservative who says we must be in the top ten. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We are not even in the top ten.

Are there any takers, perhaps on the Conservative side of the House, for the top twelve? No.

Actually, for projected growth in 2012, Canada will rank fourteenth among industrialized countries. That is not too good.

We might say that maybe we will do better on overall growth, if we take worldwide growth. We are fourteenth among industrialized countries. Obviously the industrialized countries are doing much better.

The Budget

Let us take all the countries in the world. Let us take the 200-odd countries in the world and let us ask the same question. How did we do for 2011 in economic growth?

Is anyone for the top ten? Obviously not, because among industrialized countries we are fourteenth, but is anyone for the top twenty? No, I should say that my NDP colleagues are very wise, because we are not in the top twenty.

How about top thirty? Nobody thinks so.

How about the top forty, top fifty, top sixty? How about the top hundred? Nobody, no takers there.

What about the top 120? No.

Okay, it is 130th for 2011 in economic growth. There were 129 countries better managed for economic growth than Canada was in 2011.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: We never hear them say that. They never say that, opposite, do they?

Mr. Peter Julian: No, we have never heard them stand up and say we are number 130.

The next question is this. If the Conservatives did that poorly in 2011, before this budget they must have already had plans in place to do better in 2012.

• (1225)

The IMF, the International Monetary Fund, has a ranking of projected economic growth for 2012. These rankings of economic growth are right here. So, I am just going to ask my colleagues. Obviously we would expect the government to do better in 2012, right?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Oh, yes.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: According to the finance minister, we are always doing better.

Mr. Peter Julian: My colleagues think the government must have done better for the 2012 rankings for the projected economic growth. That was prior to the budget. Let us try that out, then.

Who thinks we are in the top 100? Anybody?

Are we in the top 120?

Are we in the top 130? No?

My colleagues are very wise, again, because it is not the top 130. It is not the top 140. It is not even the top 150.

For 2012, for projected economic growth, we are projected at 152nd internationally. One hundred and fifty-one nations do better than Canada on economic growth, and that was before this budget.

The reason I bring this up is that we now have a budget with 19,700 public sector job losses. But here, from the calculations now done by the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, we see what the real cost of the budget is for Canadian jobs. I will read this out. It just came out. It is hot off the presses. I am certain Conservative members will be getting copies of this. I certainly hope

they will, because if this is not further proof that this is a bad budget, I do not know what is.

According to an analysis done by the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, the \$5.2 billion cutback in spending and services that was announced in the budget tabled in the House last week will now cause 40,825 additional job losses in the private sector. That is 19,700 in the public sector and 40,825 in the private sector. We are now talking about 60,000 families losing a breadwinner after six appalling months on the job front, as a deliberate result of the government's bad management of the economy and irresponsibility around the budget.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: One would think they would have known that, though, right?

Mr. Peter Julian: The question my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is asking is, “Would one not think they would know that?”

This is a government that does not even know how much its prisons are going to cost. This is a government that has absolutely no idea how much the F-35s are going to cost. The Parliamentary Budget Officer, fortunately for us, for Canadian taxpayers' sake, did a study and showed it was going to cost \$30 billion, including the maintenance contracts. However, that was before all of these additional problems came up with the F-35s, which have been identified by the Auditor General and others.

The government has no idea how much the F-35s will cost. It has no idea how much the prison program will cost. Obviously, it had no idea that what it was doing was throwing 60,000 Canadians out on the street, that it was essentially leading to what can only be called a job meltdown, with more than 60,000 families losing a breadwinner.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Speaking of the F-35s, they are getting into a bit of trouble on that, I think, are they not?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is absolutely right. I think we will find in question period, which will start in about an hour and a half, some real discussion around this F-35 fiasco.

The Canadian Association of Professional Employees applied an economic model developed by Statistics Canada to the information contained in the 2012 federal budget, which included \$5.2 billion of spending cuts and a reduction in the size of the federal public service through the elimination of 19,200 jobs.

The Statistics Canada model indicated that job losses in the public and private sectors would affect all parts of Canada to varying degrees, and the Canadian Association of Professional Employees found that the announced cuts would result in the following job losses by region.

The Budget

• (1230)

Here we go; here is where we really get a sense of the magnitude of what the government has done. Whether it knew it was doing it or not, whether it understood the economic impact of the multiplier effect or not, I cannot speculate. What is very clearly true is that when there are job losses in the tens of thousands, in this massive way, this is going to provoke exactly what the rating agencies, Fitch and Moody's, and so many economists are warning about, that after all the economic problems we have had over the last few months with the factory closures that I mentioned earlier, the plant closures, the loss of jobs, tens of thousands of jobs, economists and Fitch and Moody's and the rating agencies were all saying, "Do not cut deep; if you throw more people out of work, what you are going to do is provoke an even worse economic downturn".

Now we are seeing the results. That is exactly what it is doing. Here are job losses by region. In the province of British Columbia, where I come from, what will happen is 5,869 British Columbia families will lose the breadwinner, 5,869. That is for my province of British Columbia, and that is catastrophic.

I will give one comparison. The last time we talked about job losses of this magnitude is when the mean-spirited government brought in the softwood lumber sellout. We fought that in this House, and in fact I fought it in committee. I remember speaking for 16 hours against what was a horribly poorly negotiated agreement. We knew it would lead to jobs losses. In my area of Burnaby—New Westminster, scant weeks after the government pushed through the softwood lumber sellout, 2,000 jobs evaporated. Three plants were closed.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Did the government say it was sorry?

Mr. Peter Julian: No, the government never apologized to the softwood lumber workers who lost their jobs, not once. It never said "We are sorry". Interfor, Western Forest Products and Canfor all closed their doors as the result of deliberate government policy.

That was 2,000 jobs lost, and here we are talking about nearly 6,000 in British Columbia. That is absolutely catastrophic. That is what the government has done with deliberate government policy.

Let us move on to the other side of the country. In Atlantic Canada, we have the Canadian Association of Professional Employees economic model, developed by Statistics Canada, which can still do that because the mean-spirited cuts we saw last Thursday have not taken effect yet. We can still do those economic models. We can still resort to facts. That is extremely important. We can still have facts.

The facts are that for Atlantic Canada the budget is going to kill 6,758 jobs. That is including the multiplier effect. In British Columbia we are talking about 5,869 lost, including 4,009 in the private sector. In Atlantic Canada we are talking about 6,758 lost, including 4,286 in the private sector.

Let us move on to the Prairies. Doubtless to say, Prairie MPs from Conservative ridings are going to be hearing from their constituents. The impact on the Prairies, in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, is 7,538 jobs lost, including 4,886 in the private sector. We have already seen the Prairies hard hit by the government policies in the

destruction of the Wheat Board. We already know how farmers are reacting to that. The farmers fought tooth and nail against the government. Again, when we talk about those promises made prior to May 2, we can remember the Minister of Agriculture standing up and saying "No way. Farmers get the final say on the Wheat Board. We certainly will not ramrod our ideology on the backs of farmers on the Prairies".

• (1235)

Conservatives were elected and, like all of the other broken promises, they promptly forgot their promise to western farmers. They did not consult them. When the western farmers elected a board that was solidly pro Wheat Board, they decided they would not listen to democracy or western farmers and certainly not westerners. Instead they imposed their view and made the decision for western farmers.

Western farmers will have to put up with the government's renegeing on solemn commitments that were made. It is a recurring theme that the Prime Minister breaks commitments.

In addition to all of that other economic hardship, the government seemingly can only export raw minerals, raw bitumen and raw logs. The only arrow it has in its quiver is exporting raw materials and jobs as a result. Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as a result of this budget, will lose 7,538 jobs in total and 4,886 of those are private sector jobs. That is catastrophic for the Prairies and western Canada. When we add up the losses on the Prairies and in British Columbia, that is well over 13,000 jobs that have evaporated because of the government. It is unbelievable that the government would be that irresponsible. We are talking about impacts right across western Canada and across Atlantic Canada.

In the most irresponsible way possible, the government has decided that it will go to war on jobs. It is not a fewer jobs, less growth, less prosperity budget. It is a budget that is a war on jobs. It is a budget that is a repudiation of any kind of job strategy. Over 60,000 jobs have been lost because the government is so profoundly irresponsible that it thinks it can meddle in ideology and that somehow everything will work out. When we look at its economic record, it has failed on jobs and on wages because Canadians are poorer under the government. There has been a real wage reduction over the last few years because wages have not kept up with inflation. There are record levels of debt. It has failed on exports. There is the lowest level of manufacturing jobs in our nation's history since we started reporting those statistics. To add it all in, the government is now eviscerating jobs right across the country.

An hon. member: Shocking.

Mr. Peter Julian: It is shocking and it is irresponsible. Canadians get it. I have been reading into the record the comments of Canadians from coast to coast who are concerned about the direction in which the government is headed.

The Budget

Coming back to the rankings before I complete the table, after eviscerating tens of thousands of jobs, the government is hoping that economic growth is going to be better than what the IMF projects for Canada, which is 152nd. The Conservatives have dragged us all the way down to 152nd worldwide. If we look at what happens to a coach in a sporting context who brings the team down to last place, the coach is fired. If a government brings Canada down from its lofty height to 152nd worldwide for economic growth in 2012, even before it eviscerated over 60,000 jobs, we see a whole different order of things. It is not that we have to fire the coach, we have to fire the whole team and that is just what Canadians will do on October 20, 2015.

I thank my colleagues for their enthusiasm and energy because that is what New Democrats do. They bring a lot of energy to their jobs. In part, it is because we get so much energy from Canadians who are writing in to us today concerned about the impacts of this budget. Canadians understand that when 60,000 jobs are slashed in the public and private sector in one budget that it is not an achievement. The budget day of last Thursday was a black day for Canada.

• (1240)

I talked about the well over 13,000 lost jobs in western Canada. I talked about the 6,758 lost jobs in Atlantic Canada, including the great provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

After all these factory closures in Ontario and Quebec over the last few months, one has to ask what has happened in central Canada.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

In Quebec 13,299 jobs will be lost. This province has already been hard hit by all the bad government policies that have resulted in factory closures throughout Quebec, in industrial areas such as Montreal, the South Shore and the Quebec City region. And in these areas, because of these bad government policies, there will be a total of 13,299 jobs lost, including 9,314 in the private sector.

We are experiencing an economic downturn. Everyone, all the economists and the rating agencies such as Moody's and Fitch, have warned the government that eliminating jobs will only slow the economy further. Who would have thought that the government would be so irresponsible and so driven by ideology that it would attack the public sector and cut services needed by the public, causing an even more serious economic crisis than the one we have been living through for months?

We can all agree that when tens of thousands of jobs are eliminated, we have an economic crisis on our hands. When tens of thousands of jobs are eliminated, it is a crisis for communities and for those who cannot meet their families' needs. These people have to find a way to put food on the table and to keep a roof over their heads. Even worse, it has an impact everywhere, on all communities and all regions. When a position is eliminated in the Eastern Townships, for example, the effects are felt in Sherbrooke, all over the Eastern Townships and all over Quebec.

Because of the deliberate policies of this Conservative government, Quebecers will feel the effects of bad government policy 13,299 times. That is terrible. The NDP believes that all Canadian families deserve better than the job cuts that this government has delivered in its budget. They really deserve better.

[*English*]

What about Ontario? The government has killed more than 13,000 jobs in Quebec, more than 13,000 jobs in western Canada and close to 7,000 jobs in Atlantic Canada. What has it done in the heartland of our country? Everywhere else we are seeing significant job losses.

Thanks to the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister, across Ontario, the southwest, to the north, eastern Ontario, through the Toronto region, 26,155 Canadian workers in either the public or the private sector will get that sickening feeling as they are given pink slips. They will have to go home, talk to their families and figure out some way of getting through the coming months and years because their jobs are gone and the economy will be worsened. Of the 26,155 jobs lost in Ontario, 18,199 are in the private sector.

When we look at all those job losses, over 60,000 across the country, this budget is an economic catastrophe. Everybody warned the government about the cuts. The only ones who seem satisfied with the cuts are the people who simply do not understand the multiplier effect of these public sector cuts, folks who may not have lived through what happened in Ontario with Walkerton, and other examples. Every time there are deep cuts to these austerity programs, it hurts families, the services and the economy overall. That is what is happening in this case. The government has deliberately and consciously taken actions that will lead to the loss of more than 60,000 jobs.

Before I close on that point, I would like to raise a few other rankings because it is important.

When we look at the overall so-called economic achievements of the government, they are quite dubious, such as record levels of export deficits and family debt, as well as considerable job losses. When we look back to May 2008, before we entered into the recession, since that time the government managed to barely create 200,000 net new jobs. Some would say that 200,000 is a really good achievement, except that the labour force grew over that same time frame, from May 2008 to today, by nearly half a million.

We were close to 300,000 jobs short. That means Canadians are going out and hitting the streets and sidewalks, knocking on doors trying to get a job and not getting them because we are 300,000 jobs short. They are discouraged and are still trying, but the result is the government's dubious efforts with respect to jobs. It throws out a big number, which we can only attribute to the same kind of sleight of hand it used for trying to calculate the prison budgets or the F-35 budget. It said that it was better than that and threw out some number that nobody could ever confirm where it dreamed it up. It cannot make up public policy on the back of a napkin. It just cannot invent figures. It has to actually go with facts. As we have mentioned before, the budget is cutting all the fact-finding agencies. It is not using facts. Rather, it is absolute fiction.

The Budget

When we look at that lack of quantity of jobs and we also look at the lack of quality of jobs, the few jobs that have been created under the government over the last six years actually pay \$10,000 a year less than the jobs that have been lost. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost. It has gained some of them back, but the jobs that have been lost are the family-sustaining manufacturing jobs. Those are the higher paying, value-added, family-sustaining manufacturing jobs.

• (1250)

As members know, we are now at a record low level of manufacturing jobs, lower than even 40 years ago when we had a much smaller population. The government has lost those good quality family-sustaining jobs. What did the government gain? It has been part-time jobs, temporary jobs and jobs that pay \$10,000 a year less.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: And now they are changing EI.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Dartmouth points out, they are also changing EI.

We are talking about an appallingly bad economic record. Bankers and owners of oil corporations, of course, are happy with the government. However, most Canadians are not in that fortunate position and most of them are the ones who are struggling every day to make ends meet, trying to find and cobble together a number of different part-time jobs, hoping that will give them enough income to provide for their family. They are the ones who are striving to scrimp and save so they can pay for their kids' education, and perhaps for family members who need medication or health care. They are striving as well to make ends meet and looking for that day when they can retire and enjoy life because they are working seven days a week. Even that has been taken away by the Conservative government in this budget, because people are now forced to work two years longer.

With all of those dubious achievements, let us look at a couple of final statistics that show how very bad the government has been on its watch. I am not going to take as a benchmark the statistics prior to the Conservative government coming into place in 2006, but the actual period of the Conservative government from 2007 to 2011. First, I am going to ask a question about the change in real per capita GDP. In other words, in terms of the growth of gross domestic product per Canadian as we have increased our population, how has Canada fared?

I will ask my colleagues if they think we have been in the top five.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Peter Julian: Do they think we have been in the top 10?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Peter Julian: In the top 12?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Peter Julian: These are very wise colleagues I have here. How about the top 15?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, and the member for Berthier—Maskinongé wins the prize. We are 17th in terms of change in real per capita GDP, on the Conservative government's watch from 2007 to 2011, among industrialized countries. That is a pathetic record. The Conservatives would say that is better than our 152nd place in terms of worldwide economic growth. However, it is not much better, and as it is a smaller pool, we are still as bad off proportionately speaking. Given the small number of industrialized countries, 17th place is nothing at all. However, here is the more important thing. While we are in 17th place, our real per capita GDP actually declined in this period under the Conservatives by minus 1.4%. Our per capita GDP has not gone up, but has gone down under these Conservatives. If that is not a more complete analysis of just what a failure the government has been, I do not know what is. We are well behind virtually every industrialized country and we are in negative real per capita GDP growth, at minus 1.4%.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Let us now look at the changes in the employment rate. For the same period and again among the industrialized countries, do my colleagues believe that we are in the top three? No? They are not sure? Are we in the top 5? No? Perhaps in the top 10? No, not at all? We would hope, but such is not the case. Are we in the top 12? How about the top 15?

Unfortunately, it is the same thing. Canada is in 17th place. On the Conservative government's watch, from 2008 to 2011, Canada ranked 17th among the few industrialized countries. Once again, the important thing to note is that the growth in Canada's employment rate was -1.2%. We are in the red on this, too. It is not just that we are in 17th place but that the growth in our employment rate was -1.2%. That means that the employment situation in Canada has gotten worse as a result of Conservative policies. The Conservatives have led us into increased poverty, and we are in 152nd place in worldwide economic growth for 2012. And that was before the budget.

Now, we have just learned that the government plans to irresponsibly eliminate 60,000 jobs in Canada, 26,000—

• (1300)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been very interested and somewhat stimulated by the debate of the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, but I want to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that the motion we are debating is that the House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government. I refer to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, particularly page 898, where it states, “The general nature of the budget motion allows for a wide-ranging debate, during which the rules of relevance are generally relaxed”.

The Budget

I understand that. However, of late, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster has been talking about jobs and economic development, and I do not see anything within the jobs, growth and long term prosperity budget that talks about either of those things, jobs or economic growth.

While I understand that the member has been given some considerable latitude, I think we need to focus a little more closely on some of the items that are actually in the budget, and certainly jobs and economic growth are not there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his intervention and his reference to an article of the Standing Orders. He is of course correct, but as he cited in his very own argument, members are afforded lots of freedom to explore different ideas that relate to the budget, as is normally the case for most debates in the House.

I have heard nothing in the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster's remarks that I would say are not relevant to the question before the House, and we will let him continue.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for that ruling and I thank my colleague for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. I hope he does not find this speech too stimulating.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I am just trying to focus you.

Mr. Peter Julian: I appreciate that, and the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is right: there is absolutely nothing on jobs in the fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget that was brought forward last Thursday. In fact, this budget is the antithesis of jobs. It is the exact opposite of what one would do if one were to create a jobs strategy. The budget contains exactly what the government should not be doing.

It is perfectly relevant for us to raise the fact that this is an anti-jobs, fewer jobs, less growth and less prosperity budget, which is what we have been saying all along. Hopefully that has been part of the narrative that we have been establishing, including for example by a former Conservative voter from Surrey, British Columbia, who wrote in to say that through this debate he was becoming disillusioned with his Conservative government and did not think that he would be voting Conservative any more.

The reason we are bringing all of this to bear in our narrative is that Canadians need to know that this budget destroys jobs. We have been saying all along that Canadian families deserve better than that; they need a government that is actually creating jobs.

I would like to thank the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and all of the members who are showing such great support in the House today. It is a terrific team that we have in the NDP caucus, as it has been in all of the classes, in 2004, 2006, 2008, and the very dynamic class of 2011 in particular, whose new members are doing a phenomenal job.

As I promised to do yesterday, I will start reading into the record the details of the slashing and cutting that will take place. I have just explained our first evaluation of what this budget actually means in terms of job losses, explaining that we are talking about over 60,000

lost jobs across the country. We now know what regions those job losses will come in, which is very important for Canadians to know.

I would like to detail the service cuts that we are seeing in each of the ministries. I will start with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

Our former leader, the member of Parliament for Hull—Aylmer, went with the member of Parliament for Timmins—James Bay up to the community of Attawapiskat in James Bay. We saw the appalling state of funding and the appalling state of housing in the area of Attawapiskat. I heard from so many people in my constituency who were profoundly concerned about what they saw, that Canadians were being treated as second-class citizens. Although there is some renewal in the budget of previous programs that were cut and there is some lip service paid to issues around first nation education in funding, here is what is being cut from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

● (1305)

In 2012-13, we are seeing total cuts of \$26.9 million. We know how deep the needs are. The government is cutting \$26.9 million out of the budget for Aboriginal Affairs. In 2013-14, the amount rises to \$60 million. In 2014-15, \$165.6 million will be cut out of Aboriginal Affairs.

We have an educational funding crisis among aboriginal communities. We have a housing crisis among aboriginal communities. We have an infrastructure crisis. There are communities that do not have running water. There are communities that do not have access to safe water. There are communities that do not have sewer systems.

What the government is doing is gutting Aboriginal Affairs. In the long term, on an ongoing basis, \$165.6 million will be cut.

It does not just stop there. When we look at these departmental estimations of the massive cuts that are taking place, there is the First Nations Statistical Institute. The First Nations Statistical Institute provides facts, the understanding of what is actually happening with aboriginal communities, what is happening with first nations communities and Canadians.

We see here that in the budget itself, First Nations Statistical Institute will see \$2.5 million cut from its budget this year and in 2013-14, the guillotine will be applied. First Nations Statistical Institute, \$5 million, will be cut completely. There will no longer be that development of facts which is so vitally important for an understanding of how, as Canadians together we address what is an ongoing crisis among aboriginal communities, the lack of infrastructure, lack of services, lack of housing, lack of educational opportunities. This is a national shame.

The government is hacking, slashing and gutting the services that need more funding. We need to provide it in very effective ways. To cut \$165 million a year out of the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development portfolio is simply irresponsible. First nations Canadians, aboriginal Canadians deserve better than those massive cutbacks.

Let us move on to the agents of Parliament.

The Budget

As we know, the government has been willing to invest whatever it takes on the F-35s. That was a \$9 billion budget that has bloated up to, according to the PBO, \$30 billion. That was before the latest cost overruns, which put us somewhere and nobody really knows, between \$30 billion and \$40 billion.

I detailed yesterday the government's misguided prisons agenda at a time when the crime rate is falling. The Conservatives want to put more non-violent criminals away for longer. It wants to take away the rehabilitation programs, the addiction programs, the crime prevention programs. It wants to take away all the programs that actually work in the criminal justice system and replace them with prisons.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Flying in the face of facts.

Mr. Peter Julian: That flies in the face of facts, Mr. Speaker, but then there seem to be fewer and fewer facts available to the government.

It wants to cut back on crime prevention when we know that if we spend a dollar on crime prevention, we save six dollars later on, on policing costs, on criminal justice costs and on prison costs. The government gutted crime prevention programs. It gutted addiction programs. It gutted rehabilitation programs. It gutted all those programs that actually save money, and came forward with this wacky and irresponsible prisons program at a time when the crime rate is falling.

The government has never come clean on how much it costs. The Parliamentary Budget Officer made some estimations that are quite different from what the government says. The only valid analysis that has been done of the prisons agenda is a \$19 billion cost to the taxpayers to build those prisons.

My point is we are talking about \$30 billion to \$40 billion for the F-35 fighter jets, \$19 billion and \$3 billion or \$4 billion a year more in maintenance costs for these new prisons that are needed when the crime rate is falling. That is where the government wants to invest.

• (1310)

We have just talked about the sorry situation in so many aboriginal communities, and there the government is hacking and slashing. We are saying our priorities are different. We believe Canadians' priorities are different.

We believe that what Canadians want to do is build the kind of country where there is prosperity right across the country, where there is real, solid investment in job creation, where there is real investment in dealing with our infrastructure problems. When 300,000 Canadians are sleeping on the main streets and in the parks of our nation, we need to reinvest in social housing. I know it was cut by the Liberals, but the Conservatives should have restored those social housing investments.

We believe that how we move this country forward is by investing in job creation through infrastructure and social housing, providing for Canadians, making sure that our pension system is working effectively, keeping citizens out of poverty. By doing that we actually build the kind of Canada which the vast majority of Canadians want to see, not by throwing away tens of billions of dollars on prisons or F-35 fighter jets, but by prudent and effective

financial management and putting the money where Canadians' priorities are.

Canadians really want to see this country grow and prosper. They do not want to see Canadians out on the street. They do not want to see senior citizens working in blueberry fields as one constituent mentioned. Canadians want to see the kind of Canada they deserve, which is a Canada where everyone matters and where no one is left behind.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my colleagues share with their energy and enthusiasm that vision of tomorrow.

What has the government done instead of that vision, instead of investing in those kinds of things that Canadians need and want? It has thrown away tens of billions of dollars on the F-35s and on prisons. Here is where it is cutting. I mentioned Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, but let us move on to the agents of Parliament.

The Auditor General of Canada is a position that has so much respect across the country. The Auditor General is the person who actually identifies when there is misspending and protects the taxpayers' interest, protects Canadians' interest. To do that, the Auditor General needs the resources to undertake the audits that auditors do.

I mentioned on Friday that before I was elected to Parliament I ran a social enterprise. We won a couple of business excellence awards; I am very proud of that. In running that enterprise, making sure that we were making payroll for over 50 employees, we made sure that we had careful auditing of all of our expenditures. We were providing services to the deaf and hard of hearing communities. We were providing a full range of goods as well. We had a store across the province and a virtual store as well. We were selling equipment. We were providing services. All of it was on a fee-for-service basis. I am very proud of that. I am very proud of the record of that social enterprise.

We made sure that as we balanced that budget and as we moved forward we paid down some debts as well. We were debt free by the time I finished there, before I was elected to Parliament. We made sure that we had auditors carefully evaluating every single step of the way. That is how it is done. I am a financial administrator. That is my background. There has to be those impartial auditors looking over things, making sure there is a maximization of the effectiveness of the investments.

The Auditor General does that for the nation. The NDP has always said that the Auditor General needs more resources to audit effectively more of the expenses of government. If the government had been listening to the Auditor General, it never would have gotten into the F-35 fiasco in the first place. It would not have blown tens of billions of dollars on the F-35s.

The Budget

•(1315)

If the government had done that careful evaluation with the Auditor General, it never would have gotten into this misguided prisons agenda. The Auditor General would have said, "Hold on, you do not have the budget. You do not know how much it is going to cost. You have to be a little more rigorous in your cost accounting on the prisons. You cannot just throw legislation before the House of Commons and do it in such an irresponsible way".

If the Conservatives had done that with the Auditor General, they would not have seen what they have seen over the last few months, which has been a steady erosion in public confidence in the government's ability to handle money.

What the Conservatives should do is learn from the New Democrats. I have mentioned a couple of times the annual fiscal returns that are done by the federal Ministry of Finance, and there are not a lot of NDP members hanging out there. Annually for 20 years the federal Ministry of Finance has done an evaluation of NDP governments compared to Conservative governments, Liberal governments and governments of other parties. The NDP governments, for 20 years running, year after year, have come out number one in terms of balancing budgets, managing money and paying down debt, number one in the nation every year.

We are number one in the nation. The Liberals are not even close. I think they are fifth. They are worse than the Social Credit Party and the Parti Québécois. The Conservatives simply are not as good as the NDP, because the Conservatives erode the public institutions that are supposed to do the monitoring. As I said, when I ran my social enterprise, the auditors have to be involved at every stage to make sure that we are maximizing those investments.

What has the government done with respect to the Auditor General of Canada? If what the government really intends to do is to try to save some money, but if it is being spent effectively, one would assume we would see an increase in the budget for the Auditor General of Canada. That just makes common sense. The government should not cut back on its monitoring agency. It should do the opposite and invest more, because that monitoring agency can help save the government further money down the road.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Unless it has something to hide.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, unless the government has something to hide.

Here is the problem. The Conservatives are so poor at managing money. We have seen that with the F-35s and with the prisons agenda. They are so appallingly bad at managing taxpayers' money that they have done exactly the opposite. In 2014-15, they are slashing \$6.7 million out of the Auditor General of Canada, and we say shame on them. Canadian families deserve better. They deserve the protection of the Auditor General of Canada. The Auditor General of Canada deserves an increase in funding.

That means the Auditor General will be able to monitor fewer departments. The Auditor General will be cut back in a dozen cases and will not be able to oversee the Conservative government's wild expenditures. The government is wild in its excess. We have seen this with the F-35s: \$30 billion or \$40 billion, "Hey, it is all okay. It

is our pet project. We do not want to control expenditures". For the Conservatives to cut back on the Auditor General of Canada shows complete disrespect for Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to say to Canadians to send tweets, post on Facebook or write emails telling their Conservative MPs what they think of their decision to slash the Auditor General of Canada, to slash that protection that belongs to all of us to make sure these incredibly irresponsible spending decisions of the Conservatives are actually reined in. If folks want to write in, we would love to hear from them.

•(1320)

It is not just the Auditor General who the Conservatives are attacking. I will read a couple of tweets that have just come in. Buswell says, "\$7.5 million a year cut to Elections Canada in the midst of the robocall scandal but \$12 million spent on budget 2012 promotion. Responsible government?" This is the reaction that Canadians are having to the second item among eight agents of Parliament, which is the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada.

The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, as we know, is now investigating the robocall scandal and what has been a wide variety of violations of the Canada Elections Act. We know the government has been ruled guilty as charged in previous violations of the Canada Elections Act. It seems to not respect the law. It seems unable and incapable of respecting the law. It seems to be quite willing to break the law when it comes to election campaigns and Canadians feel differently about that. Canadians have a profound belief that political parties and all Canadians should respect the law and that a party that forms government should be respecting the law at all times.

We must respect the ability of the Chief Electoral Officer to investigate alleged violations of the Canada Elections Act, of which we are all aware. One does not cut back on police officers when they are investigating crimes. We ensure the police officers have the wherewithal and resources to actually fully investigate.

What is very disturbing is that on page 260 we see the results of the Chief Electoral Officer wanting to investigate these allegations of widespread law-breaking of the Canada Elections Act. In 2012-13, \$7.5 million will be cut from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. In 2013-14, \$7.5 million will be cut again. In 2014-15, it will be cut again. On an ongoing basis, it will be cut again. The government is punishing the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada and Elections Canada for doing their job. Their job is to maintain the law and ensure there are no violations of the Canada Elections Act. If the government really believes in being tough on crime, it can start by fully funding the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada so that Elections Canada can conduct the investigation into what happened in the last election campaign.

What else do we see? The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada has been critical, as we know, about the Internet snooping bill introduced by the government. The government wants to snoop in people's homes and pry into their private lives and what they read and see on the Internet. We remember the despicable reaction of the Minister of Public Safety on that. We have an impartial servant, an agent of Parliament, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada that speaks out on violations of our civic rights and privacy such as that.

The Budget

This is what will happen. In 2012-13, \$0.7 million will be cut from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. Can anyone believe the government would do that? In 2013-14, \$0.7 million will be cut from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and in 2014-15, \$1.1 million will be cut.

These are institutions that protect the public interest. The Auditor General of Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada will all be slashed and burned because the government does not like having impartial, independent protectors of the public interest standing up for Canadians.

● (1325)

I would ask all Canadians who are concerned about these mean-spirited cuts to tell their local Conservative member of Parliament. They can phone, email or tweet their member and ensure they copy it to an NDP MP as well. This can only be considered abuse of what is parliamentary funding and is something that should not be supported or condoned. These agencies protect the public interests and we are saying that Canadian families deserve better. These agencies should be fully funded so they can do their job.

I will move on to what else the government has hacked and slashed. I will move on to Agriculture and Agri-food. My colleagues from the eastern townships who know the agriculture industry backward and forward are concerned about this. Canadians should be concerned as well because one of the components within Agriculture and Agri-food is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and we know what it is responsible for. This is a pretty vital and important Canadian public service. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency ensures that when Canadian families get a food product that they are giving to their kids and family that the product is safe. Members who have talked to the public in any capacity across the country or members who have seen any of the opinion polls that have been taken, know full well that, with some of the outbreaks we have seen that have killed Canadians, food safety is a primary concern of Canadian families. Listeriosis is one example. We have seen many other cases and we need to ensure that the public interest is protected, that there are expanded food safety inspections and that Canadians have an even greater sense of well-being around food safety.

What did the government do around food inspection and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency? It is appalling for all of those Canadians who are concerned about food safety and inspection and who want to know that the products they are serving to their kids are safe. Is that not a very fundamental thing in an industrialized country like Canada? In a country that is as well developed as Canada, should we not have the ability to sit down to an evening meal and not have to worry about what the consequences may be?

This is what the Conservative government did to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. For 2012-13, it is cutting \$2.1 million out of its operations. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will not have a greater ability to ensure that the food we eat is safe. It will have less of an ability. In 2013-14, it gets even worse. The cutbacks to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency are in the order of \$10 million at a time when there is adequate inspection and supervision of only an estimated 2% of Canadian foods. The risk of the kinds of

outbreaks that have killed so many Canadians will be greatly increased when \$10 million are cut out of the budget. Canadians all know that the Food Inspection Agency is vitally important but what happens in 2014-15? The Conservative government will cut \$56.1 million out of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. It is gutting the agency. It is not just that year. It is from then on.

● (1330)

As long as the Conservatives are in power, Canadians should be concerned that the food inspection process will not fully protect their families. There could be outbreaks of other problems with our food supply because of the government's irresponsibility. However, for those Canadian families who are concerned, on October 20, 2015, when there is an NDP government in place, we will ensure that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and food inspection is fully funded so that families right across the country are protected.

At a time when the Canadian Wheat Board has been gutted and when the government has mused about cutting back on supply management, we know how important that is to sustain rural communities right across the country. The supply managed sector is the only sector where farmers have been able to make a decent living. As I have mentioned before, Alberta has the lowest farmer seats in the country because the Conservative government, both provincially and federally, have not taken care of Alberta farmers in any way. When we look at the supply managed sector, we get that stability that has allowed farm families and farming communities to prosper. With all of these hits, threatening supply management and gutting the Wheat Board, what is the government doing? Overall for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, next year it is cutting \$15 million from the budget, in 2013 it will cut \$158 million from the budget and in 2014 it will cut \$252 million out of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. We say that Canadian farmers deserve better than that, better than the neglect of the government, better than the government cutting back on support for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Tragically, I must go on because we are seeing so much money that the government is willing to put away on F-35s, on prisons and on corporate tax cuts but it is not cutting into the fat. It is cutting right through to the bone in a most irresponsible way. We talked earlier about the 60,000 jobs lost as a result of this budget and at the worst possible time for the economy. Now, as we detail the cuts, we are seeing what is happening in every case.

The Budget

I will move on to Citizenship and Immigration because that is an area that I know well. In my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, over 100 languages are spoken. There are new Canadians who come from around the world to join us in Canada and help build our country. They come with a variety of skills. They have a passion for Canada when they arrive that is exciting to see. When I walk through Richmond Park in the summertime I see those new Canadian families. In one area I will see a number of families from various parts of Africa, from Sierra Leone, the Congo, South Sudan or Ethiopia. I will walk through another section and see Indo-Canadian families or families that have come from China, Taiwan, Vietnam or Thailand. I will walk through another park and I will hear Spanish and see people from South America. In other parks I will see people from Europe, Romania or Russia. All of them have come to Canada with the idea of building this country and, in a very real way, to build a new life.

I do not mind telling the House that often it is tragic for them because of the cutbacks of the mean-spirited government. Over the last few years there has been no progress on credential recognition at all. People who are trained as doctors and engineers, except in a few minor cases, are simply unable to practise and contribute what they know, their experience and education, to this country.

• (1335)

What is worse under this government is the situation around visitor visas. We can imagine someone coming halfway around the world to start a new life in Canada and wanting their sister to visit for the birth of a new son, or wanting their cousins and aunts to be with them on the day of a parent's funeral. Like any family, they want to be together.

Under the Conservative government, there have been such substantial cutbacks that now, in virtually all cases, visitor visas are denied. I have had to fight for families to be together for the birth of their child, an important anniversary, a wedding or a funeral. Under this government, even with an NDP MP fighting like heck to get a visitor visa accepted, more often than not, it is denied. What a mean-spirited government. What that means is those new Canadians are treated like second-class citizens. They cannot have the support of their families at a critical time. That is what we all want. That is what Canada should be delivering.

We have heard from new Canadian communities for years that we need more funding in citizenship and immigration to handle the workload, the piles of unprocessed visitor visa applications and the long lineup for sponsorship applications that take decades to resolve. We need a government that cares about new Canadians and invests to improve the poor state of those services that treat new Canadians as second-class citizens.

Here, we see the results of what any new Canadian who voted for the Conservatives actually got on May 2. The government promised it would improve those services for new Canadians and improve their quality of life so they could fully contribute to the country. The member for Newton—North Delta is absolutely right. The government is slashing \$29.8 million from citizenship and immigration in 2012-13. Shame on the government. It gets worse. In 2013-14, \$65.2 million will be slashed, and in 2014-15, nearly \$85 million will be slashed.

New Canadians have done so much to build our country. In fact, all of us, except first nations, have come to Canada through immigration over the centuries. We need to make sure that the services are there for new Canadians when they need them.

With the slashing of the citizenship and immigration budget, the government has repudiated its commitment to new Canadians, many of whom voted for Conservatives in the last election because Conservatives said they would make those investments and improve those services. We are saying new Canadians deserve better.

For those new Canadian families who are watching today, I would like them to send their comments to Conservative members of Parliament and copy NDP MPs. NDP MPs know about the problems because we are involved in casework. We are helping new Canadian families every day who have seen their loved ones' visitor visas rejected. They see that they are not being recognized for their credentials, skills and experience. We would like them to let us know their stories, because we will make sure that the government is aware of what it has done to new Canadians by slashing those budgets.

It gets worse. We see the cuts that have been made in every area of service upon which Canadian families depend.

• (1340)

The government is not cutting the F-35s. It is not cutting the prison program. It is willing to spend any amount of money, tens of billions of bucks. It will throw money away. It will just shovel it off the back of a truck.

However, as far as prudent monitoring of spending that comes from the Auditor General, as far as dealing with the crisis in aboriginal communities, as far as actually responding to the needs of new Canadians, nothing. It is slashing. It is cutting. It is a modern group of political Vikings running roughshod over key services to Canadians.

Let us move on to the environment. I hear some groans from my colleagues behind me. Prior to May 2, remember the Prime Minister looking Canadians in the eyes and saying, "We're going to protect the environment"? Then it withdrew from Kyoto. Then we saw the real face over the last few months. The environment ministry is going to endure cuts at a time when Canadians want the environment protected more than ever. In 2012-13, we are seeing cuts of \$19.5 million in the environment ministry.

My colleague from Sherbrooke asks what happens in 2013-14. There will be \$56.4 million cut out of the environment. In 2014-15, it rises to \$88.2 million. That includes Environment Canada and Parks Canada. The national parks that are a national trust for all of us and a source of inspiration for so many Canadian families. When they can finally get away for their two weeks of annual vacation, often they will go to Canadian parks. Canadian families under the current government are struggling harder than ever to make ends meet. Occasionally, when they get a weekend off, they will go to a national park. However, we are seeing cuts of \$30 million to Parks Canada.

The Budget

The purported goal of the government was to bring together the environment and the economy. The place to do that was at the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. Next year, it is cutting \$200,000 out of its budget. And then comes the guillotine. Another organization sacrificed to Conservative ideology. In 2013-14, a \$5.2 million cut, and the organization is killed.

Nothing on climate change. Nothing to respond to the concerns of so many Canadians on the environment.

Here is tweet from Black Spruce, "Budget 2012, no climate change discussion, zero funding, \$99 million to deal with 2011 flooding and no reference to climate change". This will affect future generations. On this side of the House, we have strong environmental advocates. We say Canadian families deserve better. We need a government in power that respects the environment and puts in place protections for the environment. That is what we promise to do in 2015.

It is a tale of woe when we look at where the Conservative government is cutting. We will move on to something that is extremely important to my colleagues on the east coast and the west coast: Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

• (1345)

I will speak from a personal perspective. We have seen the near collapse of the salmon fishery in British Columbia. We have seen, over the last few decades, a neglect of the fisheries in British Columbia that is beyond belief. For a government that purports to represent British Columbia, the underfunding has been staggering. Many fishers and people in the community have called for adequate funding for Fisheries and Oceans Canada on the west coast and the east coast. When we talk to NDP members who represent east coast ridings, they say the same thing, "We need more funding to make sure that the fisheries are sustainable."

With the salmon fishers in British Columbia, we need improved salmon enhancement and monitoring so that we can understand the impact of sea lice on juvenile salmon. A lot of people make that connection, but we simply have not had the resources to find the facts that seem to be cut out of every aspect of this Conservative budget.

For years, British Columbians have said that they need more resources for Fisheries and Oceans Canada to make sure that we are adequately addressing a near collapse. There has only been one year in the last four where we could say that the salmon fishery was alive and well. However, at a near collapse, it has been three years out of four.

What will happen to Fisheries and Oceans Canada? One would expect a government to say that it would invest and make sure that those resources are there on the west coast and on the east coast. Tragically, that is not the case.

In 2012-13, \$3.8 million will be gouged out of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. In 2013-14, it goes to \$13.4 million and in 2014-15, it goes to \$79.3 million. This at a time when we need increased resources to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of our salmon fisheries and other fisheries.

As my colleague for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has mentioned, we are also seeing an attack on the inshore fishery in Atlantic Canada and the Quebec region. It is tragic.

The reality is that those Canadians who are involved in the fisheries deserve to have a government that keeps the commitment it made on May 2. They deserve a government that actually provides support for Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Frankly, Canadians who are in the fisheries deserve better from this government than these cutbacks.

I am not going to be able to detail all of the cuts that are in this budget prior to question period because there will not be enough time. I will come back to this after question period if my colleagues permit me.

I will quickly mention some of the other cuts. Within the health portfolio, we are talking about cuts of up to \$310 million by 2014-15. There are massive cuts to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board.

• (1350)

All these cuts were not supposed to happen. In every case, the Conservative government promised to maintain those services prior to May 2.

We talked earlier about a fact free government, a government that wanted to banish facts from consideration. When we look at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, what disappears? It is the National Council of Welfare, which provides supports so the government can understand the facts around public policy, particularly relating to poor Canadian families. What is the government doing? It is cutting away those facts. It is cutting out that source of factual information. Poor Canadian families deserve better than that. They deserve better than just being thrown out the door because the statistics do not keep with the government's own narrative.

Let us look at the industry portfolio. As mentioned earlier, the government wants to be fact free. It is a government that believes itself to be in a fact-free zone. It does not mind manufacturing its own facts; it just does not want to have facts come from a factual basis. There is a war against facts by the government.

With Statistics Canada, we can all recall, and it almost ironically funny, the war of the government on the long form census because it was somehow an invasion of privacy. Then a few months later, the government came forward with its Internet snooping bill to snoop into every affair of Canadians. Canadians get that the government does not want the long form census because it does not like facts. Statistics Canada will have a \$8.3 million cut in 2012-13, a \$8.3 million cut in 2013-14 and a \$33.9 million cut in 2014-15, cuts from statistics and facts.

Though I could share a lot more, including the cuts in the regional development agencies, I would like to mention one more area before question period. I promise my colleagues I will come back after question period.

Statements by Members

At the city hall in New Westminster, there is a cenotaph for the veterans of World War I, World War II and the Korean Conflict. Two members of the Julian family are on that cenotaph. Thousands of Canadians gather in front of it every year. They do it on Remembrance Day, like they do in small towns and cities across the country, to honour our veterans. They believe profoundly that we owe a debt of gratitude to the veterans of our country.

I feel profoundly saddened by what the government has done to Veterans Affairs. After all that our veterans have done, and the new veterans who have shown such courage and bravery, the Veterans Affairs portfolio has been slashed by \$36 million in 2012-13, \$49.3 million in 2013-14 and \$66.7 million slashed in 2014-15.

Our veterans have given so much to our country and a grateful country says “Thank you” and “Treat our veterans with respect”. The government has chosen not to do that and has cut back on veterans' programs and supports. Our veterans deserve better than that. They deserve the respect of the government. They deserve a government that will stand up for them.

● (1355)

What is wrong with the budget is it is a repudiation of everything the government promised when it ran for election. It is a repudiation of the kinds of things that Canadian families feel very strongly about: food safety; protecting and supporting our environment; ensuring that veterans are taken care of; ensuring that Canadian rural communities are supported. All of the things that, over time, Canadians have grown to support the government is hacking and slashing. It is not cutting the F-35s and its prison program. It is cutting into the bone.

Since the budget was tabled, we have been raising our concern about where the government is heading. That is why so many Canadians over the last few days have been writing, tweeting, posting on Facebook, faxing and emailing NDP MPs, so their voices can be heard. Canadian voices have been heard today and we will continue to support them and have their voices heard in the House of Commons because that is what we do. We stand up for Canadian families and we will continue to do this throughout the entire budget debate. We will support Canadian families, we will stand up for them and we will be there for them because they deserve better—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I must interrupt the hon. member as we will commence with statements by members.

The hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

TEMAGAMI BOAT MANUFACTURING INC.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I was proud to announce the creation of 13 private sector manufacturing jobs in beautiful Temagami.

Thanks to the coordination of five government programs, Temagami Boat Manufacturing Inc. will be a sustainable new business that will diversify local industry, promote local long-term

growth and support tourism in the region, a prime example that our government's policies work in rural Canada.

I want to thank everyone for their hard work in coordinating the funding from Temfund, South Timiskaming CFDC, Claybelt CFDC, NeoNet and the Yves Landry Foundation. Thanks to our efforts, fishermen, lodge owners and cottage goers looking for reliable quality watercraft will find another option in Nipissing—Timiskaming.

Together, our Conservative government's policies and the 2012 economic action plan are making jobs, growth and long-term prosperity a top priority for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

* * *

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, media reports often use vocabulary that stigmatizes seniors as victims or a burden on the state. Yet these are the people who built this country, who have paid taxes their whole lives and who raised their children who are now taking their place in the workforce.

[*English*]

While seniors are on retirement, they are still contributing to their community through volunteer work through social and political engagement, through sharing their knowledge and expertise and above all sharing precious moments with their family and friends.

Yes, our seniors are Canada's richness. They deserve our respect. This is why I will strongly oppose increasing the age of accessibility to OAS from 65 to 67. We can do better to increase seniors' quality of life and I will continue to fight to ensure that.

[*Translation*]

Today I particularly want to highlight the importance of the Dollard-des-Ormeaux seniors' club and the dynamic men and women who make up its 500-plus membership. Thanks to co-operation from the City of Dollard-des-Ormeaux and the hard work of dedicated employees and volunteers, the club offers weekly physical, social and artistic activities to seniors.

I have fond memories of songs sung by the choir, dancing at the Christmas supper and the warm welcome—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Statements by Members

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after submitting ideas from my riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo in the budgetary process, I was pleased to see a number of them highlighted in budget 2012.

First was the announcement that the government intended to move forward with legislation that would allow private property ownership within current reserve boundaries. This is an important next step in a long-time dream of Manny Jules, chair of the First Nations Tax Commission. This change would assist interested first nations in addressing barriers to economic development on reserve.

Further, when the Red Tape Reduction Commission visited Kamloops, there were concerns regarding high penalties for those businesses that filed their information returns late with Revenue Canada. Budget 2012 responded with reduced penalties to be applied when the number of returns were small.

Over the past four budget submissions, people in my riding have provided great ideas and insights and they have been included time and time again. I would encourage everyone to stay involved in the budget process because results are being delivered.

* * *

SACKVILLE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the town of Sackville, New Brunswick as it celebrates its 250th anniversary.

Sackville is known across Canada as the home of Mount Allison University, a Canadian cultural capital and a progressive, welcoming town focused on sustainable development, economic innovation and inclusion. Close to the Nova Scotia border, along the famous Tantramar Marshes, Sackville's natural beauty and ecological importance are well known across Canada. The residents of this community are justified to celebrate this wonderful milestone for Sackville and to look forward to the future with optimism and pride.

I also want to pay a special tribute to my friend, Mayor Pat Estabrooks, who will retire from municipal politics this May. Pat has led Sackville with honour and hard work and leaves an impressive record of achievement.

[Translation]

We congratulate the Town of Sackville on its 250th anniversary and we wish it all the best for the future.

* * *

[English]

ALBERNI VALLEY

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend saw the kick-off of a year-long centennial celebration of the founding of the Alberni Valley's twin cities.

Centuries of first nations presence by the Tseshaht and Hupacasath preceded the growing development and industrial activity that saw Alberni emerge as the first community in 1886. Rivalry grew as the wharf was established up the inlet. Rail pushed

through in 1908, linking the port, the mills and the steamships, but the first road favoured Alberni.

Nearly 100 automobiles assembled in Alberni as the unofficial marker for mile one on the Trans-Canada Highway was laid. History records the theft and eventual return of that marker, which had mysteriously shown up in the neighbouring port.

The museum has created a first-class display. Dozens of people in period costume are already recapturing the pioneering spirit. The August long weekend will see a major homecoming event.

Port Alberni is inviting all of Canada to ride the steam train, dodge the notorious Beaufort Gang, visit the historic McLean Mill and join in the fun as port revisits pioneer days and historic routes.

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● (1405)

BEST MUNICIPAL WATER IN THE WORLD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's smallest city of 676 residents, Greenwood, B.C., has won the title of Best Municipal Water in the World.

In January of this year, Mayor Nipper Kettle sent a sample of its tap water to the International Water Tasting competition in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia.

The award-winning 22nd annual competition welcomed more than 100 water samples from across the country and around the globe.

Greenwood's water, which comes from a 110-foot well, was judged on appearance, odour, flavour, mouth feel, aftertaste and overall impressions.

I stopped in Canada's smallest city a few weeks ago at Deadwood Junction to have a tasty cinnamon bun and filled up my water bottle with Greenwood's liquid gold.

To Mayor Kettle and all the citizens of this fabulous community, on behalf of the Parliament of Canada, I offer my heartfelt congratulations. I look forward to participating in the official ceremony on May 11. In the meantime, I urge all Canadians to visit Greenwood and taste its liquid gold.

* * *

[Translation]

GLENGARRY—PRESCOTT—RUSSELL

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the strong and vibrant Franco-Ontarian culture in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, which has one of the largest francophone populations in any riding outside Quebec.

Statements by Members

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, I extend my congratulations to the University of Guelph's Alfred campus on having educated our francophone youth in agriculture for 30 years. Congratulations.

I am also very proud of cultural organizations such as Le Chenail, La Maison des arts and Les trois p'tits points, for all they do to promote francophone culture in such a lively and engaging way.

Glengarry—Prescott—Russell can also rely on people who lead by example. At this year's 14th Banquet de la francophonie, I had the privilege of recognizing the accomplishments of some remarkable francophones.

To Louis Aubry, Sylvie Jean, René Pitre, Edgar Pommerville, Félix Desroches, Camille Legris and Zoé Monette, I extend my sincere congratulations and thank you for all you have done to promote French language and culture in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

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[English]

ORANGEVILLE ROTARY CLUB

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to recognize the 75th anniversary of the Orangeville Rotary Club, which will be celebrating this remarkable milestone on April 19, 2012.

It is a tremendous achievement for a club that has contributed so much to our community. Successful projects and events such as Rotary Park, the Skateboard Park, Ribfest and the annual Make Orangeville Shine can be attributed to all the outstanding volunteers belonging to this club, including Keith Hunter, Peter Parkinson, John Russell, Steve Cavell, Cory Jones and Sally Slumskie. We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation for their tireless work to improve life in our community.

On behalf of the residents of Dufferin—Caledon, I sincerely commend this club on always living up to Rotary's founding principles of service above self, and I wish it another 75 years of exceptional community service.

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[Translation]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the abrupt closure of Aveos dealt a serious blow to two residents of Saint-Jérôme. Not only did Éric Gaudreau and Bertrand Fraser lose their jobs, but they have also been left with nothing since they were on extended sick leave when the company closed.

The staff at the employment insurance office told them that they are not eligible to receive benefits because they have not worked for the past year. The disability insurance that they had been receiving while on sick leave is no longer payable because Aveos stopped paying the premiums to the Sun Life insurance company. About a hundred other Aveos employees who were also on long-term disability are in the same situation.

The Conservatives did not hesitate to use heavy-handed measures to intimidate Air Canada workers and prevent them from exercising their legitimate right to strike, but when it comes to helping disabled workers preserve their dignity, the government is doing nothing and will not lift a finger to help.

When the next election is held, Canadians will remember the Aveos workers with disabilities who were abandoned by the Conservative government.

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[English]

NATIONAL ONCOLOGY NURSING DAY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the ninth annual National Oncology Nursing Day. This year's theme, "Partners in Care: Advocating for Excellence", recognizes the incredible role oncology nurses play in our national health care system.

Cancer discriminates against no one. It affects people of all genders, nationalities and age groups. Last year there were almost 178,000 new cases of cancer diagnosed and 75,000 cancer-related deaths in our country.

Oncology nurses are on the front lines, caring for those patients and their families and supporting them through the stress of a cancer diagnosis and the fear and uncertainty that come with it.

Our government is committed to strengthening Canada's health workforce by supporting health care workers, nursing stakeholders and working with all levels of government to improve our health care system.

Our government's most recent budget further supports nurses, making those in rural and remote communities eligible for Canada student loan forgiveness.

As a former oncology nurse myself, I invite members to join with me in expressing our support and sincere appreciation for Canada's oncology nurses.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

INVISIBLE WORK DAY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to recognize Invisible Work Day. This morning I had the privilege of acting as honorary chair at an event in Laval organized by the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale de Laval.

Invisible work is unpaid work. It includes all work done within families and all volunteer work done in communities.

In 2010, Canada became the first and only country to declare a national day to recognize invisible work.

During the most recent census, it was estimated that this work was worth about \$26 billion a year. However, the federal government did away with the only tool that allowed us to quantify and assess invisible work when it abolished the long form census.

Statements by Members

I would like to thank the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale de Laval for inviting me to today's activities and for its initiatives to mark this Invisible Work Day.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a decade ago, a radical imam from Tunisia named Saïd Jaziri entered Canada by defrauding our immigration system. This illegal immigrant lied to immigration authorities about his past and presented himself as an innocent refugee.

For years, our Conservative government tried to have this man deported from Canada. After various hearings and claims before eight different bodies, including the Federal Court of Canada, the efforts by our Conservative government to deport this radical imam from our country have finally been successful. Saïd Jaziri has been deported from Canada.

Why does the NDP continue to side with illegal immigrants who lied to immigration authorities? Quebeckers can count on our Conservative government, not the NDP, to ensure that individuals who lie and cheat to enter Canada will not be allowed to return to this great country.

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[English]

PARKINSON'S AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month in Canada. More than 100,000 Canadians live with Parkinson's, a chronic progressive disease that results in increasing disability and mobility problems. Yet there is hope. Parkinson Society Canada made this year's theme, "Get Ready, Get Set, Get Moving". Parkinson's is a movement disorder, yet one of the best things one can do to improve the symptoms of Parkinson's is to start moving and keep moving.

[Translation]

Whether by walking, cycling, dancing or simply doing errands, the key to maintaining mobility and staying healthy with Parkinson's is to remain active.

Studies have shown that physical activity improves strength, flexibility, balance and general health for people who have Parkinson's disease.

[English]

I encourage all members in the House to consider their constituents living with Parkinson's disease. They rely on our leadership to make strong policy decisions that will help them live the highest quality and most productive lives possible.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night an unelected and unaccountable Liberal senator continued the opposition's misinformation campaign on our government's efforts in the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. A misleading collection of pictures of firearms was sent around that

included prohibited firearms. Liberals know it is misleading because they created the firearms classification system themselves. This is part of a clear pattern of opposition parties trying to mislead Canadians on this issue.

The MP for Papineau did the same with deceitful tweets, and the NDP put up false billboards in major cities last year. The opposition needs to stop playing dirty tricks and start working for everyday Canadians. Firearms are part of the way of life of rural Canadians, hunters and farmers. Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that will happen very soon.

Rather than engaging in fearmongering, I call on the Liberals to stop treating law-abiding hunters, farmers and sharp shooters like common criminals.

* * *

•(1415)

ETHICS

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems every day that passes another link between Conservatives and RMG surfaces. This time it is a connection between Republican fundraisers, the Prime Minister and the charities favoured by government funds, non-partisan institutes that receive millions of tax dollars from the government. Yet they also use RMG and its U.S. Republican counterpart, Target Outreach, to raise even more funds.

It is funny. On one hand the Conservatives are building a multi-million-dollar CRA fund to attack and de-fund unfriendly charities and, on the other, they are giving millions to an institute with whom they share the same fundraiser. Why is a supposedly non-partisan Canadian charity organization using an explicitly right-wing fundraiser to raise more money from Canadians? It is clear that there are far more questions here than answers and this is why we need a public inquiry.

* * *

IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal culture of favouritism left our immigration system in disarray. For years, hundreds of thousands of people were stuck in a queue to get into Canada. They spent up to a decade waiting for an answer, any answer. Their lives were on hold.

As Nick Noorani from Destination Canada Info said, "The backlog has choked up our system and has led to wait times that have made us uncompetitive in the quest for global talent".

Economic action plan 2012 includes measures that transform Canada's economic immigration programs. It creates a just-in-time system that will recruit people with the right skills to meet Canada's labour markets today and into the future.

Oral Questions

As Tung Chan, the former CEO of the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Foundation, recently said, “It is welcome news to see that the government is continuing its quest to improve our immigration system and to make sure immigrants are able to hit the ground running and contributing to the Canadian economy when they arrive”.

I would encourage the opposition to listen to these words of wisdom. Vote for our reforms. They will finally position Canada for long-term prosperity.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative budget betrays the promise made by the Prime Minister himself. Contrary to what he promised in this House just a few months ago, the Conservative budget attacks the incomes of retirees, attacks health transfers and attacks services to the public.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why he chose to break his promise?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. For example, our health transfers are increasing twice as fast as the health expenses of the provincial governments. We are keeping our promises.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that they are taking away \$31 billion without consultation.

Among the budgetary choices that make no sense, let us talk about the F-35s. In March, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated the cost of the F-35s to be \$30 billion. The Conservatives did everything they could to discredit Kevin Page, saying that the planes would cost half that much. However, the Auditor General is proving today that the government knew that the cost of the F-35s was going to be even higher. The government knew it.

Why did the Conservatives deliberately mislead Parliament and Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the Leader of the Opposition's conclusions. The Auditor General reached certain conclusions and we have accepted his recommendations. He identified a need for greater supervision over costs and the government will accept his recommendations.

[*English*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a question of ethics. The Auditor General has concluded that the Conservatives knew their figures were misleading but they gave them to Parliament anyway. The Auditor General's report on the F-35 is a litany of poor public administration, bad decision-making and lack of accountability by Conservative ministers.

The key question for the Prime Minister is how could he allow Parliament to be intentionally misled on the F-35s? Either he knew, and it is unconscionable, or he did not know and it is incompetence. Which is it?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a miscategorization of what the Auditor General actually said.

I remind the leader of the opposition that the government has not yet purchased this airplane. It has not yet signed a contract.

The Auditor General has identified a need for greater independence and supervision over some of the activities of the Department of National Defence in this regard. The government will put that supervision in place before we proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the government accepts the recommendations, who will be held responsible for this fiasco?

In 2006, the Conservatives made a commitment to purchase the F-35s with taxpayers' money without a guarantee that Canadian corporations would benefit. According to the Auditor General, the Conservative ministers also provided misleading information about regional spinoffs. The Conservatives held press conferences to announce regional spinoffs that were non-existent.

How can the Conservatives justify providing misleading information about the F-35 fighter jets?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we accept the conclusions of the Auditor General and we will implement his recommendations.

The Government of Canada has taken action today to ensure that due diligence, oversight and transparency are firmly embedded in the process to replace Canada's aging fighter jets. That is why we have frozen funding for the acquisition, and are establishing a separate F-35 secretariat outside of National Defence to lead this project moving forward.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the Conservatives should do is apologize for misleading Canadians. Public Works is supposed to supervise large procurement projects and, in 2009, it had the opportunity to sound the alarm. However, according to the Auditor General, the department failed to exercise due diligence.

Who was the Minister of Public Works at the time? Who stood by and just watched? Of course, it was the member for Mégantic—L'Érable. After he was informed of this fiasco in the making, why did the Minister of Public Works at the time do nothing to prevent this disaster?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have not signed a contract to purchase any aircraft. We have frozen the funding in anticipation of refining the cost estimates before a decision is made for any acquisition. A budget, as we have said, has been allocated, and we will stay within that budget.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General, the F-35 affair is just riddled with lies.

The government cannot dodge responsibility. It is not credible and simply not true for Conservatives to say that they did not know until today. They were told by the Liberal opposition 21 months ago. They were told by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

The government's own internal figures were similar to the PBO's, but denied that and is misleading Parliament. Even worse, it has not fixed the problem. Why is there still no open competitive bidding?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the premise that the report is riddled with lies.

Let me quote:

The Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program is unique. In this context, National Defence, as the lead department, exercised due diligence in managing Canada's participation in the Program. National Defence managed industrial participation well (together with Industry Canada), identified and communicated risks and mitigation strategies related to JSF Program participation....

I am surprised that the member opposite would categorize those statements as lies.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if he reads carefully, those words apply to the period before 2006.

With their culture of deceit laid bare, Conservatives throw some scapegoat under the bus: Linda Keen, Richard Colvin, and Munir Sheikh. On election fraud, it is Michael Sona. Now on the F-35s, it is whole department of defence. However, the government cannot victimize bureaucrats and the military. It cannot blame child pornographers and Taliban terrorists.

This is their process from the top down. It is the Prime Minister's job to know the truth and to tell the truth, and he failed.

Why is there still no competition?

• (1425)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really surprised that we would be lumping in all kinds of issues with respect to the Auditor General's report, which we accept.

The report is clear, and we have a strategy to move forward. I invite the member opposite to have a good read and to understand our commitment to dealing with this issue.

The Auditor General has spoken, we have listened and we are moving forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Auditor General told us that the administration of the F-35 program is a monumental fiasco. This

government has shown itself to be incompetent and completely blind for six years, and it is already trying to blame public officials and the military for its incompetence. Pretending that the government was not aware of the facts is unacceptable. It is time to fire a minister.

Why would the Prime Minister not demand the resignation of the Minister of National Defence, someone who is more than incompetent?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning the Auditor General was very clear—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Works has the floor.

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, this morning the Auditor General was very clear. He said that the Department of National Defence needed to refine its cost estimates and needed to be more transparent.

Our government's response is also very clear: We will ensure that the Department of National Defence does refine its cost estimates. In addition, we will ensure that we move this project into a secretariat that will manage the process of replacing the CF-18s, and we will immediately freeze the funding for the F-35s.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a different minister, the same spin.

The Auditor General has been very clear. Conservatives used two different estimates for F-35 maintenance costs, one for internal decision-making and another lower figure for the public.

While the Associate Minister of National Defence has, day after day, dutifully repeated talking points, he was hiding a secret estimate that was \$10 billion higher. I have two simple questions for the Associate Minister of National Defence.

Why did he mislead Canadians? Will he apologize?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not accept the premise.

We do in fact accept the conclusions of the Auditor General, and we will in fact implement his recommendations.

The Government of Canada is taking action today to ensure that due diligence, oversight and transparency are firmly embedded in the program to replace the aging fighter jets. That is why we have frozen funding for the acquisition and are establishing a separate F-35 secretariat, outside of national defence, to lead this program forward.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are having trouble with the facts, still, so let me help them.

Oral Questions

In February of 2010, the Conservatives were told by the U.S. government that the F-35 “would cost more and take longer to finish than planned”, yet the Conservatives intentionally hid the facts from Canadians.

The Minister of National Defence even did his best to demonize the Parliamentary Budget Officer, despite knowing full well that the PBO was correct. Why did the Minister of National Defence attack the PBO and mislead Parliament?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we accept the recommendations and findings of the Auditor General. We have a seven-point plan to move forward to address these issues. In that regard, we are addressing these issues in earnest and will continue to move forward.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Auditor General once again showed how the Conservatives are mismanaging the public purse. They have misled Parliament on the F-35's costs, mishandled aviation safety, and failed to safely manage the border.

The Conservative government has simply not gotten the job done. Its solution is to gut public services further and to let us hope for the best.

Given this scathing report from the Auditor General, why will the Conservatives not acknowledge what they did wrong and tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General was clear this morning in his report. His one recommendation was that the Department of National Defence continue to refine its cost estimates for the F-35 and that it be more transparent.

We accept that, and we will not purchase any new aircraft until the Department of National Defence has met that recommendation.

In addition to that, we will immediately freeze the funding allocated for the F-35 and ensure that a secretariat is put in place to manage the process for this procurement to replace the CF-18.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not enough to just accept recommendations. It would seem that, instead of preventing mismanagement, the government waits until it is caught in the act before apologizing.

The Conservatives wasted public money on some very questionable projects for the G8 summit, and now the same thing is happening all over again with the F-35 jets. Whether we are talking about border inspections of imports or monitoring of civil aviation, administrative problems continue to come to light.

With such poor management, how can Canadians trust this government?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Auditor General's report indicated in one recommendation that the Department of National Defence needs to

refine its cost estimates. That is important recommendation for the member to recognize because the funding has not yet been spent. The department needs to refine its cost estimates for this project. We accept that recommendation.

Furthermore, we have frozen the funds associated with this to ensure full respect for taxpayers.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it does not make any sense. According to Statistics Canada, there are 700,000 more unemployed workers in Canada than before the recession. This government wants to eliminate close to 20,000 public sector jobs and cut \$5.2 billion in services.

A study published this morning shows that these cuts will result in the loss of 40,000 more jobs in the private sector.

Where is the real job creation strategy? What is this government waiting for to face reality and to put a real job creation strategy on the table?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are some spending reductions of course in the budget that was tabled on Thursday. The actual number of federal public servants who will be leaving the public service is about 12,000.

The so-called study to which the member refers is by the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, which is using a wild number of 40,825 Canadians. However, that is not as wild as the number they used in February, which was not fewer than 116,000 Canadians. That is a long way from the truth: 12,000, as documented in the budget.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they were actually using numbers from Statistics Canada.

The government seems to fear the facts, because the reality is that the job cuts unleashed in this budget will have a major impact on core services for Canadians. From health care, food inspection, and transportation safety to critical science and research on the environment, these services are vital for Canadian families.

Why did the Conservatives table a budget that fails to deal with the priorities of Canadian families? Why are they turning the lives of Canadian families backwards when they should be turning their lives forward? Why are they not doing that in the budget?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what we are doing in the budget. We are looking at long-term growth, jobs and prosperity in Canada. We have the track record on this side of the House with 610,000 net new jobs in Canada since the end of the recession.

What is the prescription from the other side of the House? It is a \$10 billion tax hike. That is what the New Democratic opposition recommends for Canada, a huge job-killing tax. That is not what we are doing, which is jobs, growth and prosperity.

*Oral Questions***AVIATION SAFETY**

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General reported that one out of three airline safety inspections was not done. Why were they not done? There was not enough staff. Even when air traffic is increasing by 4% this year, the Conservatives are cutting \$17 million from aviation safety and \$60 million from Transport Canada. Inspectors will be cut. The safety of air travellers will be at risk.

How can the minister justify these dangerous cuts to inspectors who keep our planes safe?

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 member does not use the right numbers, but I am sure she will have more questions. For the moment, I will thank the Auditor General for his work and we accept his recommendations.

The Auditor General confirms that Canada has one of the safest aviation systems in the world. That is what he said today.

My department has already identified these shortcomings, and I can confirm that some of the recommendations are already in place.

• (1435)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives just do not understand their reckless cuts will have real safety consequences. The Auditor General found there was no plan to meet inspection needs, no up-to-date information to assess risk, and no management oversight, no approval process. It took the minister sometimes 10 years to deal with emerging safety issues, 10 years.

Will the minister clean up his department and stop these dangerous cuts?

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, we are always working to make air travel safer and as safe as possible. Our actions deliver results. Since 2000, the number of aviation accidents fell by 25%. The Auditor General has confirmed that we are making real progress by being the first country in the world to implement a safety management systems approach, and we are confident it will be better.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the closure of Aveos has endangered Canada's reputation as a leader in the aerospace industry. Some investors have expressed interest but they need assurances that they will get contracts from Air Canada. The municipalities affected want to find a solution, as do the provincial governments.

Will this government work with the municipalities, the provinces, Air Canada and investors in order to find a solution?

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, of course we are very sorry that these workers have lost their jobs.

As we said before, Air Canada is a private company, as is Aveos.

This member would have us, rather than the companies' representatives, manage the companies. We have a legal opinion confirming that Air Canada is complying with the legislation, and we are going to let the people at Air Canada make their business decisions because that is what we have to do. Our job is to promote a healthy and safe airline industry and that is what we are going to do.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General made it abundantly clear that the F-35 program started to crash when the Conservatives took office in 2006. The Department of Public Works did not even realize that the Minister of National Defence had initiated a sole-source procurement program four years earlier. However, nothing has changed. They still call the process the F-35 secretariat, with all the same impugned players, plus the minister of gazebos from Muskoka.

What is needed is an open process to get the right plane at the right price, not an F-35 secretariat.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the Auditor General was very clear in his recommendation. His one recommendation is that the Department of National Defence needs to refine its cost estimates. We also believe that it needs to be more transparent.

Our government's response is also clear. We will not purchase new aircraft until that recommendation is met, and we are going further. We have a multi-point plan to address this, including freezing all of the funding allocated for the F-35 until conditions are met. To ensure further transparency, the secretariat will also have to table in Parliament the cost estimates.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the only people asking questions are the opposition members. Clearly, it is not the ministers themselves.

When the PBO tabled the F-35 cost estimates in 2011, he was ridiculed by the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence and the Conservative caucus. In 2010, though, the U.S. government had already told the government that the F-35s would "cost more and take longer to finish than planned". The PBO was right and the Prime Minister was wrong.

Did the minister know that he was misleading Parliament, or is he merely incompetent?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to address the Auditor General's recommendation, we have immediately frozen the funding allocated to the F-35. We have also said we will not purchase new aircraft until this recommendation is met.

Furthermore, to ensure proper oversight and prior to any project approval moving forward, Treasury Board will first commission an independent review of the Department of National Defence's acquisition and sustainment project assumptions and the potential costs for the F-35. All of this will be made public and shared with Parliament.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has just confirmed how incompetent and dishonest the Conservatives have been with regard to the F-35 procurement.

Billions of taxpayer dollars are at stake, but the Conservatives chose to ignore our warnings and never bothered to check whether there were any problems. Now our air force risks paying the price for the Conservatives' incompetence.

Why were the Conservatives dishonest with Canadians and why did they fail to ensure the integrity of the process?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the Auditor General made one recommendation, and that is for the Department of National Defence to refine its cost estimates.

However, our response goes much further than that to address this issue. We have frozen funding for the F-35 for this project. We have also established a secretariat to manage the process of replacing the CF-18s outside of the Department of National Defence. To ensure oversight, we will have a deputy ministers committee managing this process. All cost estimates will be tabled in Parliament and made public.

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POVERTY

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us take a look at what the Conservatives waste taxpayer money on instead of helping seniors, especially low-income seniors when they retire: inefficient private pension plans; billions for failed fighter jets; and let us not forget glow sticks and gazebos in Muskoka.

Now we will not know the effects of the hardships caused by denying OAS for two extra years because the government cut the National Council of Welfare.

Did the Conservatives eliminate the council because they want to hide the truth about seniors poverty from Canadians?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Our budget is

focused on making sure individuals have jobs. That is the best way to eliminate poverty: making sure individuals have jobs.

With respect to the National Council of Welfare, we are putting our policy resources to best use and in the most efficient manner. There are many non-governmental organizations that provide comparable independent advice and research on poverty and other related issues.

We will continue to take poverty very seriously, but we are also going to be focused on making sure Canadians have the skills they need so that they can participate in the economy.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives will not listen to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, so what makes us think they will listen to anyone else?

They want to hide the fact that pushing the retirement age back to 67 is going to hurt low-income seniors, so they have eliminated the National Council of Welfare. The government thinks if poverty is not measured, it simply does not exist. Low-income seniors will slip between the cracks and the Conservatives will continue to choose their big business friends over those who truly need help.

Why will the Conservatives not come clean and admit they do not care about seniors living in poverty?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. This country has one of the lowest poverty rates for seniors in the world because of this Conservative government. In fact, under the Liberals, in 1999 it was 7.9%. Under this government, it was 5.2% in 2009.

This government increased the GIS, a record increase, in the last quarter of the century, and the NDP voted against it.

Let us be very clear. These changes will begin in 2023. They will be fully implemented in 2029. We are looking out for low-income seniors. We are making sure that they are provided for.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the idea of setting up a toll on the Champlain Bridge was bad enough, but now the Conservatives are talking about setting up tolls on the Jacques Cartier and Mercier bridges as well.

This decision could have an adverse economic effect on families on the south shore and the merchants of Montreal. People are going to take detours in order to avoid the tolls.

Why do the Conservatives want to make families pay for a new bridge when access to the island is currently free?

Oral Questions

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, I am extremely proud of the way we are dealing with the matter of the new bridge over the St. Lawrence. A lot of progress has been made. In the coming weeks, we will announce which company or companies won the contract for the environmental aspect as we continue moving forward.

For now, there will not be any tolls. However, during the consultation process that we conducted, a number of mayors in the region spoke to me about a regional toll. Why would we do all the work and spend the money without looking at tolls? We are going to consider every possible avenue. We will stay on course and deliver a new bridge over the St. Lawrence instead of complaining about it.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to talk about bridges, but I would refer to the bridge that has been burned between Quebec and the Conservative government.

This morning the Government of Quebec confirmed that it plans to go to court to prevent the Conservatives from destroying the data from the firearms registry.

This ideological government and its lackeys in the Senate refuse to listen to the calls of Quebecers, police chiefs and, most importantly, victims. It is not too late. The data can still be saved.

Will the government save the data in order to protect public safety or would it rather become embroiled in a long and costly court battle with Quebec?

• (1445)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our legislation provides for the elimination of the data related to the long gun registry— inaccurate, outdated and erroneous data. I am not the one saying so. As early as 2006, the Auditor General confirmed that that data was inaccurate.

We are acting within the federal government's jurisdiction in the area of criminal law and we will defend our jurisdiction.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the leader of what is called the largest proven human trafficking ring in Canadian history will be sentenced.

This is a deplorable crime that leads to vulnerable people being taken advantage of, often for the profit of criminal and terrorist organizations.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety tell the House what the government is doing on this file?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her terrific work on this file.

Human trafficking is a despicable crime. Our government has taken strong action, such as helping to implement mandatory minimum sentences for those convicted of child trafficking, and supporting the RCMP in its Blue Blindfold campaign to raise public awareness.

We are also committed to implementing a national action plan to combat human trafficking.

* * *

[Translation]

RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the precise moment when Canada should be helping emerging democracies, this government decides to eliminate the organization that is in the best position to do that job: Rights & Democracy.

The Conservatives made partisan appointments to Rights & Democracy. Then they attacked its respected director, who unfortunately then died. In a nutshell, they literally poisoned the organization, and today they have decided to finish it off.

Does the minister think this is what showing leadership on the international scene means?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, promoting freedom, human rights and democracy is a central element of our foreign policy. Our ambassadors and our foreign service officers do that work every day, all around the world.

For some time, the numerous problems at Rights & Democracy have been the subject of much comment in the media. It is high time that we put these problems behind us and move forward.

[English]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Conservatives created those problems.

The government dumped the idea of a democracy promotion institute that they had announced in the Speech from the Throne in 2008. Now they are killing Rights and Democracy, and they want to cut DFAIT programming under the international assistance envelope, which is often used to promote democracy.

The government speaks a lot about democracy, but it does not seem to want to walk the talk. What does it have against democracy?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what we are doing. There have been many problems at this agency for some time. These problems are very well known. What we are simply doing is taking this important project of rights, democracy and freedom and bringing that within our department.

I have a lot of confidence in the hard-working public servants at the Department of Foreign Affairs that we will be able to continue to tackle this issue. We have played a big role in helping the people seek freedom in Libya. We are working with the international community on Syria and we will never let that go. Freedom is an important responsibility and we will continue to promote it around the world.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): I will talk about freedoms, Mr. Speaker. Henk Tepper is now back home and safe, but questions still remain. His family and lawyers spoke to the media yesterday and they have nothing good to say about the government's efforts in this case. The Tepper family does not seem to think that the government did anything at all.

The minister keeps talking about quiet diplomacy. What does it mean?

• (1450)

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very sorry that the Tepper family has the perception that the Government of Canada did not help to secure Mr. Tepper's release. That is most certainly not the case. The Government of Canada made dozens of representations to Lebanese officials in support of Mr. Tepper's application to be released and we are very glad to see that he is back home safely in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the minister is being asked is to explain to us why the government is refusing to tell the Tepper family the truth.

For over a year, the family lived with the worry of their family member being in prison and their government telling them nothing about what was being done to bring him home.

Is that how this government protects the rights of Canadians who are detained abroad? Will they finally explain to us what role they played in Henk Tepper's release? The Teppers are entitled to know the truth.

[English]

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that our government made dozens of representations to Lebanese officials concerning Mr. Tepper's situation. Both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I liaised with our Lebanese counterparts at the highest levels on several occasions. Official diplomacy supported work on the legal front and we are very happy to say that Mr. Tepper is back home with his family.

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PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after falsely promising to protect seniors' pensions, the Prime Minister has jammed his hands deep into the pockets of tomorrow's seniors. This is typical Conservative dishonesty of saying one thing and doing something completely different. Worse, he has done it at a time when he himself is preparing to cash in on a special taxpayer funded retirement bonus with nine times the OAS.

Could the minister please explain the hypocrisy in attacking OAS pensions but leaving the PM's golden parachute untouched?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are trying to ensure that we are fair to future generations by ensuring there is an old age security system for them and we are trying to be fair to taxpayers who will

finally see all members of Parliament receive a pension that is in line with private sector expectations, to which they are contributing an equal share to the taxpayers. That is the fairness that taxpayers deserve and that is what we will be delivering.

* * *

RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government continues its ideological assault on anyone who does not share its narrow views. Having de-funded the Mennonite Central Committee, Development and Peace, CCIC, KAIROS and other organizations critical of the government, today it went a step further and killed Rights & Democracy. Having spent six years destabilizing and poisoning this once proud organization, the Conservatives have taken yet another step diminishing Canada's role on the international stage.

When will the Conservative government end its ideological witch hunt of people who do good work but have the audacity to speak truth to power?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the promotion of freedom, human rights and democracy around the world is an important priority of the Canadian government. Our ambassadors and foreign service officers do this in every corner of the world each and every day. We think there have been a number of problems at this agency going back a number of years. It is time to turn the page and move forward. We will continue to do all of these things but they will be done inside my department by the hard-working men and women at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

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[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday in Neuville, 600 people protested against the proposed airport and the loophole in federal legislation that allows a developer to build an airport anywhere in the country without having to comply with provincial and municipal laws.

The minister constantly tells us that the airline industry is a federal jurisdiction. Therefore, it is up to the federal minister to amend the federal legislation in order to close this loophole and ensure that provincial and municipal laws are complied with.

Will the minister finally hear the people's message and promise to amend the legislation?

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, I will reiterate that the role of the federal transport minister is to ensure the development of a safe airline industry. We will not intervene in this matter, and any regulatory change made after the fact will change absolutely nothing.

As for the letter we received from the Government of Quebec, we are reviewing the options. It was interesting to learn yesterday, from the developer's press release, that there have been seven meetings with the mayor and municipal councillors. I find it hard to believe that the community wants no part of this when there have been seven meetings and the mayor and the town council have submitted seven possible scenarios involving seven different plots of land.

Signed agreements must be honoured.

● (1455)

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, continually hearing the same empty responses from the minister only proves to me that he does not know his portfolio. For months now, the NDP has been trying to make the minister understand that the provinces and municipalities should have a say in the location of an airport in their area. A glimmer of hope emerged on Saturday. Apparently, the minister finally agreed to meet with the mayor of Neuville.

Time is running out. Can the minister tell us when he plans to meet with Mayor Gaudreau?

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 member should check with the person who told her that, because I have received no such information.

There are several sensitive files concerning airports across the country, and our role is to promote aviation safety everywhere, since it is extremely important. In this particular instance, the facility has not yet been completed. Once it has, Transport Canada will ensure that all safety rules are obeyed, and we will continue to support developers who follow the rules.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is listening to Canada's veterans. We are providing them with the hassle-free service that they have asked for. We are cutting red tape and making changes so that our veterans, including the veterans in Cold Lake and all over Canada, receive the benefits and services they deserve in a more timely manner.

Could the parliamentary secretary comment on the changes that our government is making to the reimbursement process for the most popular program under the veterans independence program?

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Westlock—St. Paul for his great work in advocating for his residents.

Earlier today in Halifax, the Minister of Veterans Affairs announced significant changes to the veterans independence program. No longer will our veterans and their families need to submit receipts for housekeeping and yard work services. Instead, each year we will provide them with two payments upfront that they can then use for snow removal, yard work services or housekeeping services. This will remove millions of transactions between veterans and the bureaucracy and provide our veterans and their families with

Oral Questions

a hassle-free service. This is yet another way our Conservative government—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax West.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after spending 27 months in a Spanish prison waiting for a chance to clear his name, Philip Halliday was recently able to have a visit from his family. Although his wife and sons were glad to finally see him, they were appalled by his physical condition. He suffers from liver and kidney problems and requires medical attention.

The minister was quick to claim credit for the return of Henk Tepper to New Brunswick. Will she now finally take action to bring Philip Halliday home to his family in Digby?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are paying very close attention to Mr. Halliday's case. We know how difficult this situation is for him and his family. I have contacted the Spanish minister of foreign affairs to advocate on Mr. Halliday's behalf. Our ambassador in Spain is engaged with local authorities as well. Our government is also in contact with prison officials to ensure that Mr. Halliday's medical needs are being met.

The Government of Canada cannot exempt Canadians from legal processes nor interfere in the judicial proceedings in other countries. However, we will continue to press for a timely and transparent trial for Mr. Halliday.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since February 15, the drug shortage has deprived Canadians of essential care. This morning, in committee, representatives from Health Canada stated that the drug approval process falls under federal jurisdiction. Yet, the Conservatives completely neglect this issue. The Conservatives have asked the provinces to diversify their supply sources.

How are they supposed to do this when they are given but one choice? If nothing is done, doctors will still have their hands tied, the shortage will continue and patients will again be the ones to suffer.

Does the minister have a credible plan instead of passing the buck to the provinces and industry?

*Speaker's Ruling**[English]*

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said all along, the shortage results from a decision by the provinces and territories to sole source drug contracts. Our role is to ensure that the drugs are safe before they enter the market. We are working around the clock to address this issue by identifying new suppliers for the provinces and territories, fast-tracking approvals and providing access to the national emergency stockpile system.

Going forward, we are encouraging the provinces and the territories to ensure that the decision of one drug maker will not seriously disrupt our—

• (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans.

* * *

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on jobs, growth and Canada's long-term prosperity.

[Translation]

In the next phase of our economic action plan, our government must have a plan to help the arts and culture.

[English]

Could the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages please tell this House how our steadfast support for the arts and culture will help keep our economy on track?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans for his fantastic work in support of the arts. We believe that a strong economy will lead to a strong arts sector and budget 2012 speaks to that, as did our previous budgets.

Eric Dubeau, co-president of the Canadian Arts Coalition, said, “This budget is encouraging for the arts and culture community. We feel the government has heard us regarding the importance of arts and culture for the economy and the creation of jobs”.

Simon Brault, president of Culture Montréal and the vice-chair of the Canada Council for the Arts said, “This budget is a clear signal of support for the arts. Canadians are incredibly proud of our artists and what they create in this...”—

The Speaker: The hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years, genetically engineered animals have been propped up as another solution to what ails the agriculture industry. The developers of GE animals have been happy to sell an idea, take their subsidy but never really develop a business case.

After 13 years in the development stage, Ontario Pork has decided to drop the enviropig program. Farmers do not want this pig and the public has no appetite for this meat.

At a time when the government is cutting inspection staff at CFIA and when farmers and agricultural employers are struggling, will the government finally stop accepting requests to approve GM fish and food animals?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to explain to the gentleman across that Canadian food is safe. There are rigorous scientific protocols that must be met on anything to do with genetic modification and, of course, the enviropig passed all of those. With the proponent backing out from the deal, those animals will be euthanized and we will continue to move on.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that Quebecers spent \$250 million to implement the firearms registry, and even though this registry was implemented in collaboration with Quebec and the provinces, this government wants to destroy the data.

The Quebec government has even filed an injunction to recover its data. Moreover, according to Quebec's Minister of Justice, the federal government has exceeded its jurisdiction.

Will the Minister of Public Safety listen to reason and transfer the data to the government of Quebec, which has already paid its fair share?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we respect the Canadian Constitution and our areas of constitutional jurisdiction. By abolishing the registry, we are respecting the Constitution.

We have promised Canadians that we would abolish this registry. We are going to keep our word and the registry will be abolished. It is up to the provinces, within their area of jurisdiction, to do what they want, but they should not count on us to transfer useless, inaccurate and outdated data.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

QUESTION NO. 410—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on March 28, 2012, by the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie concerning the government's response to written Question No. 410.

I would like to thank the hon. member for having raised this matter and the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his intervention.

[English]

For the benefit of members, the Chair would like to review the events that led to this question of privilege.

Speaker's Ruling

On March 14, 2012, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie rose on a point of order to argue that the government's reply to her written Question No. 410, which had been tabled in the House by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons on March 12, 2012, and can be found at page 6088 in *Debates*, was insufficient. She stated that the reply did not fully answer all the questions and did not contain the detailed information she had requested.

Noting that the response stated more information would be forthcoming and that there were only two days remaining before the expiry of the 45-day limit for a response to her question, the hon. member asked if the government would be providing a more complete response before the expiry of the time limit. The parliamentary secretary replied that the government had already responded within the appropriate time, that the answer was self-explanatory and that additional information would be forthcoming.

• (1505)

[Translation]

In raising a question of privilege on March 28, 2012, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie again argued that the answer provided by the government was, by its own admission, incomplete. Noting that the response did not address the specific sub-questions she had submitted, she added that the government had failed to provide any additional information by the expiry of the deadline on March 16, 2012. She also took exception to the March 14 statement of the parliamentary secretary that more information would be provided by the government in the future, insisting that she was not interested in additional “talking points”, but rather specific answers to her specific questions.

Stating that “written questions are one of the tools that Canadians, via their elected representatives, can use to force the government to be accountable”, the hon. member claimed that the government's refusal to answer the question constituted a violation of her rights as a member and impeded her in her ability to perform her duties. She therefore requested that the Speaker find a prima facie question of privilege.

[English]

Before I address the specific points raised by the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, it may be of some assistance for the Chair to provide a brief overview of our procedures with regard to written questions by looking at how they have evolved in the text of the rule governing them, current Standing Order 39.

[Translation]

Since the time of Confederation, the Standing Orders have contained provisions allowing members to pose written questions to the government. Over the years, the rules and practices dealing with such things as the number, content, and time and methods of responding to questions have been reviewed and modified. For example, prior to 1986, there was no limit to the number of written questions that a member could place on the Order Paper and Notice Paper: it was not unusual for some members to submit tens, and in one case, hundreds of written questions.

[English]

In 1986 the House adopted changes to limit to four the number of questions a member could have on the order paper at any one time, and to codify the right of members to request that the ministry respond to their questions within 45 days.

In 2001, the House further amended the Standing Orders to provide that if a question was not responded to within the requested 45 days, the matter of the failure of the ministry to respond would be deemed referred to a standing committee for study.

[Translation]

It should also be noted that since the change limiting the number of questions a member can have on the order paper, there has been a notable increase in the length of the questions submitted. As noted on various occasions by government spokespersons, the length of questions can, in turn, have an impact on the ability to provide an answer within the 45-day limit and may require considerable resources.

[English]

I think all members would agree that order paper questions are a very important tool for members seeking detailed, lengthy or technical information that helps them carry out their duties. As is noted in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 520:

Given that the purpose of a written question is to seek and receive a precise, detailed answer, it is incumbent on a Member submitting a question for the *Notice Paper* “to ensure that it is formulated carefully enough to elicit the precise information sought”.

[Translation]

And further, at page 522:

The guidelines that apply to the form and content of written questions are also applicable to the answers provided by the government. As such, no argument or opinion is to be given and only the information needed to respond to the question is to be provided in an effort to maintain the process of written questions as an exchange of information rather than an opportunity for debate.

In the case before us, I can appreciate the member's frustration with the reply provided. That said, the authorities are clear: the Speaker's role in such matters is extremely limited.

[English]

As pointed out by the government House leader, House procedure in these matters is clearly explained in O'Brien and Bosc, page 522 which states:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions.

As my predecessor, Speaker Milliken declared in a ruling, delivered on February 8, 2005, page 3234 of *Debates*:

Any dispute regarding the accuracy or appropriateness of this response is a matter of debate. It is not something upon which the Speaker is permitted to pass judgment.

[Translation]

O'Brien and Bosc, at page 522, states:

As with oral questions, it is acceptable for the government, in responding to a written question, to indicate to the House that it cannot supply an answer.

Then at pages 522 and 523 it summarizes how the Chair is guided by precedent in these cases, stating:

The Budget

...on several occasions, Members have raised questions of privilege in the House regarding the accuracy of information contained in responses to written questions; in none of these cases was the matter found to be a prima facie breach of privilege. The Speaker has ruled that it is not the role of the Chair to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate...

To that quote, I might add the word “complete”.

● (1510)

[*English*]

The hon. government House leader and the hon. parliamentary secretary have both indicated that the government intends to present further material with respect to the member's question in the future. This is consistent with our practice as one can confirm on page 522 of O'Brien and Bosc, which states:

On occasion, the government has supplied supplementary...replies to questions already answered.

The original response to Question No. 410 tells us that this is how the government intends to proceed in this case, just as we have recently seen the government provide such supplementary responses to other questions.

Accordingly, I must conclude that the government has complied with the requirements of the Standing Order and therefore I cannot find a prima facie question of privilege.

[*Translation*]

However, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie clearly feels aggrieved by the insufficiency of the response she received. I would therefore invite her to raise her concerns about our practice with regard to written questions with the Standing Committee and Procedure and House Affairs as that committee continues with its study of the Standing Orders. Indeed, as your Speaker, in light of the various complaints that have been voiced in the chamber with regard to written questions, from both sides of the House, I would encourage the committee to look closely at our current rules and to assess whether improvements can be made to our current practice to better serve the needs of the House and its members.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

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 reading comments from Canadians. I should note that I have had some folks say the NDP is taking this time and what are Canadians gaining for that? Hundreds of Canadians have been able to express their points of view directly on the floor of the House of Commons, through Twitter, Facebook, emails, faxes and letters.

The alternative would have been 24 members of Parliament from the Conservative Party reading and rereading the Prime Minister's Office talking points. There is no doubt that Canadians gain when their comments go directly to the floor of the House of Commons. I

do not think Canadians would have gained to have 24 interventions from 24 Conservative MPs reading identical presentations.

Though we are getting a flood of responses from across the country, unfortunately, there is no way I am going to be able to read all of them. As I mentioned this morning, at about 4:35 this afternoon I will be offering an amendment and then I will be sitting down. I thank my Conservative colleagues for applauding my sitting down, but of course in the meantime we will continue to ensure that over the course of the 13 hours of debate, I guess it will be 14 by the time we finish—

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Has it been that long?

Mr. Peter Julian: It has been that long. We have been able to get hundreds of Canadians on the record in *Hansard*. It is a wonderful thing when Canadians speak and can have their voices transmitted directly to the floor of the House of Commons.

I am going to go through some of the many tweets. Tweets tend to be very quick. Some members of Parliament have derided tweets as a form of feedback from Canadians. We disagree. We believe that Canadians who tweet or post on Facebook have as much right as any other Canadian to be heard. From one woman, “Shocking what the Conservative budget is doing to environmental protection. Sustainable development includes jobs and the economy.” Another said, “Is it even constitutional to weaken environmental processes in a budget?”

Another Canadian is cheering the member of Parliament for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, saying she is enjoying the supportive demeanour of the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. I certainly agree with that one.

A writer says, “Canadian fisheries policy is an international tragedy”. Newfoundland and Labrador's comments are at the hands of what he considers to be the tyranny of our majority political system.

Another writer says, “Wouldn't it be wiser to eliminate the deficit by seeking to create jobs and a tax base rather than throwing tens of thousands of workers on to the street?” I certainly agree with that. As we saw earlier today, the first economic analysis of the budget shows 60,000 jobs will be lost because of the budget. He goes on to say that economist Toby Sanger says, “The scale of cuts to the public sector will lead to the loss of 60,000 jobs in both public and private sectors. The 2012 budget is a book of deception. How can it be a job-creating budget when the government will axe 20,000 public sector jobs?”

● (1515)

A proud Canadian writes, “Repeating Conservative talking points is not debate either. At least what the NDP is doing is bringing Canadians' voices to the House of Commons”.

[*Translation*]

“Why make major cutbacks at Elections Canada when it is investigating what may be the biggest case of electoral fraud in Canadian history? Hmm...” asks one woman who is wondering why, as remarked earlier, these major cutbacks are being made at Elections Canada.

The Budget

[English]

She says, “Cuts to the CBC are equivalent to turning off the lights so people cannot see what is happening. You don't like the message, you kill the messenger”.

Another individual writes, “Thank you to the NDP. It's hard to admit, but I really am afraid for my generation's future. Just hearing someone talking about is comforting”.

To continue on, another writes, “Well done, sir. Keep getting the real Canadian voices heard in the House. The truth can never be silenced”.

Then there are a number of other comments, such as this one, “Thank you for raising our comments in the House of Commons”.

Another writes, “Thank you for being my voice in Parliament on the budget. My member of Parliament, who's a Conservative, doesn't care”.

A constituent from Alberta writes, “The CBC is very important to Canadians and cuts are appalling. We need them for a strong media that is truthful”.

There was also a student who writes, “I am a student from the riding of Leeds and Grenville. With all of these services cut, how will I get a job and pay off my student debt?”

Another writes, “Can the next government undo food regulation downgrades that the Conservatives have put into effect?” Members will recall I mentioned earlier the substantial cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

A constituent from my riding on the west coast says that she is proud that I am her member of Parliament. I am certainly proud of her as well. She writes, “This budget attacks the most vulnerable. Thanks for speaking out so strongly on this”.

Another writes, “I'm staying at work until the NDP is done standing up for public servants, pensions and Katimavik”.

Another writes, “I think it's great that the NDP is reading concerns of the citizens in the House of Commons. It sounds like democracy. Finally, our voices are being heard”.

This is a compliment from an individual who writes, “In the early 1990s Liberal senators read names off a GST petition into the record. I think what the NDP did today was spectacularly better on the budget, hearing from Canadians”.

I will move on to a couple of comments posted on Facebook.

● (1520)

[Translation]

My colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie will check the Twitter and Facebook accounts in the next hour—the 13th hour of debate so far on the budget—to get as many comments from Canadian families as possible.

[English]

On Facebook, an gentleman says, “Katimavik has been the single largest factor contributing to the formation of my own personal Canadian identity. Through Katimavik, I lived, learned, shared and

worked with French, English and Aboriginal youth from all walks of life”.

This is another, “I am from the Haldimand—Norfolk riding in Ontario, which is also a Conservative-controlled riding. The Prime Minister wants to get tough on criminals to make Canada safe from crime. The people of Canada think that he should start with his own party, since there seems to be more fraud and corruption in his own party than ever before in Canadian politics. There has not been one week since the last election that this government has not been exposed for some allegations of some kind of criminal behaviour”.

A constituent from Alberta who says, “I am very sick of the Prime Minister's Canada. It sure is not my Canada. I will be affected by every aspect of this budget. I will be affected by the old age security changes. I will be affected by environmental issues. I work in a public sector job and I care about all of these cuts. We must stop this agenda”.

A constituent from northeastern Ontario, I think, in a Conservative-held riding, says, “Ask the Speaker of the House if Canadians can take the Prime Minister's paycheque back and put it into the Canada pension plan, because we are not getting value for money”. That is a very interesting comment from northeastern Ontario.

Those are some of the tweets and some of the Facebook comments that have come in. I am going to turn back to some of the letters and emails that we are getting as well. They are flooding in, so I am going to try to ensure I can get in as many as possible over the course of the next hour.

Tomorrow, with the debate being different, we are not going to be hearing from Canadians. What we will be hearing tomorrow, unfortunately, for the most part because that is the way the speaking order works, will be primarily from Conservative members of Parliament, primarily giving what is a packaged message from the Prime Minister's office.

For those many Canadians who have been excited and galvanized and who have been sending in information, in letters, tweets and postings on Facebook, this has been an Ottawa spring. It has been spring in the House of Commons, where Canadians can actually have their voices heard directly.

Tomorrow it will be more of a very packaged political messaging that comes from the Prime Minister's office. People will be hearing more of the same that we heard last Thursday, unfortunately. We will endeavour to get as many comments in as possible.

Another Twitter reads, “The fisheries and oceans cuts as the Prime Minister signs a trade deal with overfished Asia, is that a coincidence?”

There are a number of comments that have come in during the period of question period. I want to ensure I get those comments in. Comments are flooding in. That is the only way to put it, really. We are seeing an avalanche of feedback, with so many people writing in. That is the only way I can put this.

The Budget

I am going to start with New Brunswick, another Conservative-held riding. That is what we have been endeavouring to do, to let those voices from Conservative ridings be heard in the House of Commons. We are getting all of these comments in.

• (1525)

This is from a constituent in New Brunswick. She writes, "I live near Oromocto, New Brunswick, the busiest Department of National Defence base in our great country. Today my husband retired after 33 years—Afghanistan twice, the Gulf War, Serbia, et cetera, to many places to protect this free land. His severance package will be here in 12 to 16 weeks. Because of this budget, the future severance of brave men and women will be no more. This was discussed at his farewell luncheon today. Instead of what I expected to hear, I listened as they said, 'Well, we'll just soldier on'. I was amazed and this government should be ashamed. Where are their clawbacks? Why don't they lead by example or step aside, learn from this extraordinary group I've just had lunch with and save this country as they have".

On behalf of the NDP caucus, I would thank her for writing in. Also, we rise today and thank her husband for his 33 years of service to the country. We will certainly commit to continue to fight for the families of service men and service women and veterans

As we have heard, the cuts that are taking place are not cuts to the F-35s, the bloated fiasco that we have seen unfold before us, where Conservatives have been willing to spend any amount of money for these fighter jets. What was started as a \$9 billion budget has now morphed into a monster of somewhere around \$40 billion. Nobody on the Conservative side of the House has the least idea of how much it all costs.

These substantial cuts in the budget hurt the men and women who serve our country and impact the benefits of veterans, the men and women who have served our country. This is the world upside down. Those who have shown the most bravery and commitment to the country are the ones who are being treated the worst, most disrespectfully by the Conservative government. It is treating our service men, service women and veterans with disrespect.

We are saying loudly and clearly that the men and women who serve our country and the veterans who have served our country deserve respect from the government. They deserve better than what the government has done in this budget.

I will move on to another heartfelt comment from a Canadian resident of the Toronto area, who writes, "I just got off the phone with Michelle, my daughter, who has mental health issues. She was crying because today was the last day she got to see her worker who lost her job, a victim of the cuts in the budget. I didn't know what to say to her. She lives in assisted housing and on a good day you wouldn't know she even has mental health problems. Unfortunately, she desperately needs a case worker to help her have more good days than not. I'm not a professional in that field and the only thing I can do for her in this situation is to listen and to write to let you know that the statistics have a face and that the impact of budget cuts affect a real person now, not to mention the additional heartbreak of her family."

This is what we are getting from across the country. Hundreds of Canadians have written in expressing, in such a poignant way, their

lives and reality of those lives. This mean-spirited budget that strips away services, casts away jobs and in a fundamental way denies all the commitments that the Prime Minister made prior to the last election is not something that takes place in some kind of isolated vacuum where real people are not profoundly hurt. For three days now, time after time after time, we have heard heartfelt expressions of what this budget will do to families across the country, how it will impact them, how it will make their lives worse, how it will turn them backward.

• (1530)

That is the point we are making. For the government to table a budget in such a mean-spirited and callous way, to rip apart those services, the veteran services, the supports for servicemen and service women, to rip apart all of these other things, has impacts on the lives of Canadians that will be felt from coast to coast to coast.

We do not believe that the tens of billions of dollars the government wants to throw away on the F-35s or the tens of billions of dollars the government wants to throw away on prisons are the appropriate priorities. We have been hearing from people from all across the country, from virtually every riding, certainly every region, and not a single Canadian has said, "We think the resources of this nation should be devoted to jets and jails". Not a single Canadian has said, "Oh yea, we share this government's obsession with fancy fighter jets at \$40 billion and shiny new prisons, when the crime rate is falling, at \$15 billion or \$20 billion". Not a single Canadian has expressed that. This tells us that Canadians simply are not on the same wavelength as the Conservative government. That is profound.

Members will recall, and it is important to note, that the first letter I read out today was from a person who had voted Conservative all his life, a Mr. McKay from Surrey, British Columbia. He said that when the government plays with people's lives as it is doing, by cutting jobs and playing with the pension plan and cutting funding to the youth of this nation, it is heartbreaking to so many Canadians and sickening. What he says is, "I am talking to people, friends my age, and we are all thinking of changing the way we think about our government". Even though this is a small partisan note, I think it is important to mention that he concludes by saying, "Even though I've never voted NDP, I just might think of changing my mind because of this government's actions". Finally, he adds, "Please, NDP, keep up the good work you're doing on these issues". That shows a real sign of change as we get these heartfelt expressions from across the country. We are getting former Conservative voters who are saying they do not agree with the direction this country is going.

The Budget

A Mr. Becker writes, “All I get from my [Conservative] member of Parliament in response to inquiries, feedback and requests for information are form letters with the Conservatives' talking points”. He adds the hash mark for worthless.

From the Toronto region, Mr. McCart says, “We cannot allow anymore cuts to our not-up-to-par health-already care. Raising the age of retirement from 65 to 67 can't happen. This is a scam by our government, hoping that by raising the age we will start to die off so as not to have to pay out. Maybe the government should be downsized or fired if they don't do a good enough job for us Canadian citizens”.

We saw today what happened with the Conservative government's economic performance. We were 130th in the world in 2011 for economic growth, and now in 2012 the government is doing even worse at 152nd worldwide for economic growth, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I'm still surprised.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, it is amazing, absolutely appalling, how badly the government has done. It has dragged us down to 152nd worldwide for economic growth. Thus the comments of the last Canadian I referenced are very apt. If we fire a coach because the team goes from first place to eighth place, what do we do with the whole team when the team drags the whole country down to 152nd place? We fire the whole bunch and start anew. That is just what Canadians are going to do on October 20, 2015.

• (1535)

[Translation]

I will read a message from the riding of Berthier—Maskinongé. One Canadian said the following: “I think that it is scandalous that the retirement age has been pushed back from 65 to 67. Once again, the poor will be penalized.”

I will read another comment from the Ottawa region:

[English]

“I believe that responding to the Conservative government's incessant attacks on the environment is critical.... I call on the new leader of the opposition, the member for Outremont, on behalf of the 60% of us who did not vote for the Conservative Party of Canada, to take the government to task for all the things that are wrong in this budget and to continue fighting it through implementation”.

He is absolutely right. That is what we are doing. I thank him, a Mr. Scott from Ottawa, for saying that.

We could have just said on Friday that we're going to let 24 Conservative MPs stand and read their package of the Prime Minister's Office's talking points. That is what the last three days of debate could have been. That is certainly what the Liberals seem to want to see. That is certainly what the Conservatives seem to want to see.

What we are saying is that the last three days of debate have allowed hundreds of Canadians to participate by Twitter, Facebook and email, and that is a good thing. It is democratic when we have

hundreds of Canadians who have been able to actively participate and send their comments on what they feel about the budget, where they feel the government has done wrong things to the country. Through all of this correspondence, there is hope for the future. It is very clear, whether Canadians are younger or older, regardless of their background and region, that they all know that Canada can do better, that Canadians deserve better and that one day they will have a government that will actually take their concerns into consideration.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: They deserve better.

Mr. Peter Julian: They definitely do.

I am going to move on to someone's comments from Calgary, another Conservative-held riding. He says, “It's a pleasure to write to [Mr. Julian] to express my appreciation for standing up in the House of Commons for two days and continuing to express the collective outrage of all residents in Canada, whether citizens or otherwise. This budget is a mean-spirited attack on the future of Canada. It's especially mean and devious because the justifications for the large-scale job and budget cuts is clothed in language that is designed to lull people into believing that the Conservative government cares. It uses specialized rhetorical and cheap marketing tricks to convince people that these cuts are intended to balance some arbitrary future budget forecasts. It ignores the suffering, both short- and long-term, that people will incur. It lays the groundwork to permanently and negatively alter future prosperity by asking ordinary people to shoulder the excesses of this government. Many members of this government have engaged in unethical and immoral behaviour that has strained the public purse, yet these members are never held accountable. Instead, ordinary people are asked to place themselves on the chopping block. As an immigrant to this country, I am very concerned about the cuts to Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Too often, this government will increase the backlog in applications and then arbitrarily decide to negate all the applications from the past and introduce radical changes in the name of efficiency. Yet the same government has no hesitation in cutting the budget for Citizenship and Immigration Canada and thereby hugely inconveniencing applicants both now and in the future. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your physically and psychologically arduous endeavour to stand up for hours and days on end to bring our concerns to public attention”.

I would respond that it is not physically or psychologically difficult to stand up for Canadians. That is what NDP MPs do. That is what we do every day. That is what we do in the House.

What is physically and psychologically arduous is seeing what the government is doing to this country, after promising a completely different approach on governance. What we are seeing are all the broken promises and the vandalism that the government is enacting on this country. That is why the 102 members of the official opposition, the NDP caucus, were standing so strongly against the budget. We know the harm it will do.

The Budget

• (1540)

We have heard the voices of Canadians flooding in even as we speak. We are saying that we will not let those Canadians down. We will fight the budget all the way, despite the fact the government says it can do whatever it wants. By fighting the budget we are sowing the seeds for the day a Canadian sunrise will come. It will come sooner perhaps than we expect, but at the latest it has to come on October 20, 2015 when we can finally put the government out of office.

I have a few more emails coming in that I will read out. This is from a constituent of the great riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River: “It seems the finance minister has started to show the voters who put his party in office its true agenda, taking care of the banks, corporations and oil companies. Who got all the tax cuts and how do we pay for them? In his own words, it was reported in the news, on the back of average Canadians. The old age pension has been raised to 67 from 65. So here we have a government keeping an aging population working to get more revenue out of them and denying younger Canadians employment because the older folks can’t afford to retire. Canadians will be happy to see election day after the Conservatives have dealt them such a generous helping of cuts to programs with no relief for working people. The past just wants to keep repeating itself—”

There he is referring to the former Liberal government as well.

He continues, “—and Canadians will not even know what is happening until it is too late. The old age pension is just the beginning. They are going to mess with health care and we know they will, but we also know that Canadians will be happy to see the next election day”.

We are certainly looking forward to that, as I think all Canadians are.

Now I will move on. This letter is from eastern Ontario: “I just heard about your speaking in the House from my sister. I’m sure she has already told you that she lives with a disability and how budget cuts will affect her. I am writing you because I will be retiring soon, and after almost 50 years of contributing to this country, the Conservative government is about to steal my retirement. They are going to spend the money on fighter jets we don’t need and jails we don’t need. The money left over they will give to their millionaire supporters. You’re the only party that can stop them. Keep up the good work”.

I say to that constituent that we will keep up that work and we will continue to stand up for Canadian families.

Now moving on to the Toronto area, another person says: “I support the NDP 2,000%. You are standing up for families, for working people and our elderly and our retirees. This budget has failed Canadians. Don’t let this government get away with this attack on our country’s foundation and a sound and balanced economy. Stand strong”.

To that constituent, I say that we will stand strong. We will stand up for Canadians, there is no doubt about that.

If I am accelerating a little bit, Madam Speaker, you can certainly understand that Canadians are galvanized by this debate. They are appalled by this budget. They are appalled by the cuts and reckless

disregard the government has for the economy by its throwing away of 60,000 jobs in both the public and the private sectors. That is why there are so many comments coming in and we simply cannot keep up, but we will endeavour to do so. We will have some time tomorrow, though it will be mostly Prime Minister’s office talking points that will be mentioned, to raise other concerns. However, we certainly encourage Canadians to keep writing in.

• (1545)

I have another one from a gentleman in Winnipeg, Manitoba, who states, “As a young Canadian worker, I have serious concerns about this budget, perhaps too many to go into great depth about. However, I am mostly deeply concerned about the proposed cuts to old age security. As a young worker whose parents have recently retired, I have begun to think more seriously about my own retirement. As someone who’s chosen to work for a small non-profit, I do not have the benefit of the sort of guaranteed pension that the Prime Minister and his cabinet afforded themselves. While I put aside what I can into RRSPs and a non-guaranteed pension plan, I know that when the time comes for my own retirement that I will need OAS. By delaying OAS benefits to 67, I will need to save an additional \$30,000 for retirement that I would have if this government was to maintain the current 65 age requirement. This is an incredible burden to put on myself and all members of my generation. My generation is being hit in so many directions. Sky-high tuition is creating record student debt levels, jobs opportunities for youth are disappearing, wages are flat or declining, defined pensions are disappearing and housing costs are out of control. We are the first generation of Canadians to know for a fact that we will be worse off than our parents. So my question for the Prime Minister is simply this: Do you hate my generation or do you simply not care?”

That is the voice of honesty and passion from Winnipeg, Manitoba. We thank that gentleman writing in. We want to tell him and all young Canadians across the country that we believe younger Canadians deserve better and that is why we are voting against the budget.

[*Translation*]

The following message comes from the riding of Joliette, represented by an excellent member of Parliament. I cannot see whether she is in the House right now, but she is excellent. Let us applaud her.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: A resident from the riding of Joliette said the following: “I would like my question regarding the pension at age 67 asked of the Minister of Human Resources. When she said recently that Canadians would have all the time they needed to reorganize their pension, what did she mean exactly? Would the Government of Canada at least have the decency to tell me whether Canadians will have to pay less withholding tax, so that I can reorganize my pension?”

Yet another Canadian badly affected by this budget.

The Budget

The next message comes from the wonderful riding of Longueuil, which is also represented by an excellent member of Parliament.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: This member of Parliament listens. I visited his riding and I saw the member in action. He truly is very talented and very good. On top of that, he is friendly.

Here is what a constituent from his riding said: “As a former colleague from CBC/Radio–Canada, let me tell you that the atmosphere at CBC/Radio–Canada is glum in the big tower? We are meeting with Mr. Lacroix next week; there are but a few new projects for the fall, and little hope for the future. The cutbacks are really hurting and I have dozens of colleagues who have to look for a new job this fall. Even I do not know where I will be. With three children, I need to work. The Conservatives say that they want to stimulate the economy with this budget. I fail to see how making cutbacks to culture, CBC/Radio–Canada, the National Film Board, and Telefilm is going to stimulate the economy, when it has been proven that every dollar invested in culture brings in far more than it costs. I fail to see the benefit in making cutbacks to Radio–Canada, aside from the fact that it is an organization that the current government finds threatening. CBC/Radio–Canada plays a key role in maintaining the fragile unity of this country and its numerous remote regions. CBC/Radio–Canada costs \$34 per Canadian; it is smart, innovative, and brings people together. It ranks 16th out of 18 OECD countries in terms of funding for public television. Do not tell me that we are not getting out money’s worth.

Exactly. This person from the riding of Longueuil is entirely correct.

● (1550)

[*English*]

A citizen in Samia, Ontario, a Conservative riding, is concerned about what the government is doing. She says, “My adult son has a developmental disability. Freezing the amounts will prevent him from being as independent as possible, as inclusive a citizen in his community as he could be otherwise. Individuals who already live in poverty are purposefully being held here. This is social injustice. The government who put this budget into place will never change until they feel uncomfortable with their own decisions. Don’t they feel uncomfortable keeping my son in poverty?”

As members know, a number of Canadians have raised concerns around Katimavik. We are getting flooded with comments on that as it is very important. A whole range of issues have been raised by Canadians. I do not want to necessarily conclude with Katimavik but I would like to read some comments. Even though I could never read all of the comments we are getting in from Conservative ridings, I will try to tackle some of them. I will stay as long as I can on the general criticism of this budget and more specific concerns that have been raised. Canadians deserve to have their voices count in the Parliament of the country, there is no doubt about that.

My voice is getting hoarse and I hope to keep on speaking. As a New Democrat, I will speak as long as my voice allows. That is what New Democrats do. We work as hard as we can for as long as we have.

I will follow-up with another comment from a woman in Stratford, Ontario, another Conservative riding. She says, “First off, on this penny wise and pound foolish budget, I am fine with the penny being axed”. So are we. In fact, it was an NDP idea. It is one of the few good things in the budget.

She goes on to say, “I’m against cutting the funding to the National Council on Welfare. I’m against stopping the automatic guaranteed income supplement enrolment. I’m against encouraging cross-border shopping. I’m against cuts to foreign aid. I’m against cuts to Elections Canada. I’m against the cuts to the CBC. I’m against the loss of Katimavik. I’m against the change in the OAS. I’m against the so-called streamlining of the environmental review process. I’m against the cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which will no longer be monitoring food labels among other things. I’m against these new requirements of charities to provide more information on their political activities, including the extent to which these are funded by foreign sources”.

This Canadian from Stratford, Ontario, another Conservative riding, is saying that aside from the cut of the penny, she is opposed to virtually everything that was brought forward in this very bad, mean-spirited budget. Who can blame her, given the impacts that we are aware of on the environment, on services, on future seniors, as well as the decisions taken to cut health care funding in the long term? When we look at the budget as a complete package, Canadians from coast to coast to coast are clearly putting their thumbs down.

● (1555)

I have another comment from another Conservative held riding. A woman from West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country wrote, “I realize that there are great challenges to mitigate the effects of climate change but it appears that the Government of Canada does not seem to want to make any effort towards weaning the country off fossil fuels or to reduce our high per capita footprint. I am most disappointed with the negative elements towards environmentalism and environmentalists in the recent budget. Your government is trying to demonize dissent by making it difficult for charities that don’t agree with you to continue to function, and you are also ignoring the rights of first nations and ordinary Canadians who are entitled to have a voice in the face of large industrial projects, and who have deep concerns about fast-tracking the environmental process. Remember that the B.C. government had rubber-stamped the Taseko Mines project, and it would have gone ahead if it had not been for a more stringent federal review, which, by the former environment minister’s own analysis, was scathing in its content. It is shocking to me that the Conservative Party is proposing to weaken the Fisheries Act with changes to section 35(1). Please keep that section as it currently stands, with emphasis on environmental protection. We must protect our wild places for future prosperity, not for short-term gain”.

That was the voice of another Canadian from another Conservative held riding.

The Budget

I will keep going. This is a comment from another Conservative held riding in the area of Regina. As members know, some of those ridings were won by only a few votes. As we can hear, Canadians in a whole range of Conservative ridings are expressing real concerns about the Conservatives' budget

A gentleman from Regina, Saskatchewan wrote, "As a grandfather, I am deeply concerned about the future sustainability of our country. Why are we not moving away from the insane high carbon systems we now have in place for energy, transportation, food production and so many other areas when we know that these are unsustainable? Where is the much-needed movement toward solar, wind and geothermal power? Where are the moves to stimulate Canadian made, green job making alternatives? The countless facets of our country's life will be in deep trouble in the coming years. This budget and the government's continuing direction is awful. Here in Saskatchewan, where the majority of our drinking water comes from glaciers high in the Alberta mountains, we will be facing a huge crisis in the coming years as glaciers disappear due to human influenced climate change. Instead of looking forward to these, the government is continuing to rely simply on bitumen and natural resource extraction. I do believe, I truly believe that an engaged and organized citizenry is a chief way in which we can move this current government aside".

We share those concerns and we will be working to move the government aside on October 19, 2015.

A woman from another Conservative held riding in Edmonton is concerned about the OAS changes. She writes, "This is a bad, bad idea. This is not just a spending saving. It's a renunciation of the social policies Canadians have painstakingly established after the hard lessons of two world wars and the Great Depression. OAS and GIC were established because seniors living in dire poverty was a national shame. But after 20 years of significant reductions in the situation, the elderly poverty rate has been increasing since the mid-1990s. It's shameful. Here in Alberta, in 2006 more than 50% of seniors, whether single or a couple, lived on a total before tax income of less than \$24,000 per person.

• (1600)

"The number of seniors living on the precarious edge of severe poverty is increasing, as everyday living costs increase and user fees for health care services, for pharmaceuticals, for vision and dental care, for food, utilities, transportation and rent are continually shifting the cost of survival, let alone quality of life, to vulnerable individuals and their families.

"Provincial and municipal governments are left to try to offset the consequences, with increasing pressure on provincial and municipal revenues. We wonder why property taxes are increasing. We have to subsidize seniors as well as support food banks and homeless shelters because of the federal government's irresponsibility.

"Reducing income security will have consequences in every area of the lives of seniors, their families and their communities. There will be no miracle to prevent this. It doesn't matter less to me that it will perhaps not affect me personally. It will affect my children and grandchildren, and that matters. It will increase the cost of other services, increase the profits of financial services. It's a bad, bad idea. Shame on this government."

We say to her that we agree with her. Shame on the government. Canadian families and seniors deserve better than what the government is doing.

I must say I am very impressed with the remarkable energy of the NDP caucus. It is amazing, regardless of what class members were in. Most of the class here is 2011. There are those from the class of 2008 as well, and I am from the class of 2004. Regardless of the class, we have a very energetic, hard-working, disciplined, effective, high-class group of NDP MPs in the House of Commons, and I really appreciate their support.

They give me energy as well. I have to admit that I have been up speaking now for 13 or 14 hours and even though I am galvanized, of course, by the information I am bringing forward from Canadians from coast to coast to coast, I have to admit that I am looking forward to sitting down and having a beer tonight, a little later on.

The reality is that the issues are too compelling, when we talk about how this is impacting veterans and manual labourers. I talked earlier today about that poignant letter from Mr. McDonnell, who talked about floor installers and how difficult it is for them with this forced retirement age of 67. We talked about kids who have written in from across this country and what it means now that the government has taken away their futures. It has made it impossible for them to get post-secondary educations. Student debt loads are bigger than ever, but at the same time it is wrenching away the youth program that was in place.

When we hear about all of these issues on the NDP side of the House, we believe we have to push on and keep speaking out. We do not see any alternative to speaking out as loudly, clearly and strongly as we can on behalf of Canadians.

This one is from another Canadian in Ottawa, Ontario, and it states:

"In 1967 a report on first nations education said, 'Let someone hazard a guess as to what year or what century significant changes toward real equality will be noted in the achievements of children?' Forty-five years later, the federal budget says that first nations children need to keep waiting and that the Prime Minister has given no date as to when the inequality will end. The multiple federal government funding inequalities in children's services on reserves, in areas like education, child welfare, languages, recreation, water, housing and sewer on reserves pile up on the hopes and dreams of this generation of children. Canadians expect more of their government than excuses for giving children less because of their race. The time for equitable funding structures and ways that respond to the culture and needs of first nations children is now."

We agree with Ms. Blackstock. We agree that the time for equitable funding for first nations children is now, not some time in the future, not cutting back services. It is now.

The Budget

•(1605)

These are the voices of Canadians that have been raised.

Because I wanted to do this, for just a moment I will set aside the notes. I know they will be coming back to the topic of Katimavik shortly, and I will certainly do that also.

We talked earlier about the issues around the cutbacks to Aboriginal Affairs Canada and how that will impact what has been a massive deficit in the lives of aboriginal Canadians. We know about the visit of our former leader, the member of Parliament for Hull—Aylmer, to Attawapiskat and how deplorable the situation is up there. That is one of the key areas of the budget.

Before I go on to some of the emails we have received from those concerned about the cuts to the youth program, Katimavik, briefly for the record I want to raise the actuarial table as well as the issue from the Parliamentary Budget Officer with respect to the sustainability of OAS. Tomorrow we will hear from all the Conservatives the comments contained in the prepackaged PMO's kit. They are all going to be saying the same thing. However, for the last three days, Canadians have finally had their place front and centre in the House of Commons. The voices of hundreds of Canadians have finally been provided through Twitter, Facebook, email and the ordinary handwritten letter. I think it is important for Canadians to know what the real facts are as they hear the prepackaged comments from the PMO tomorrow.

We talked earlier about how this budget cuts away the facts. It cuts away the National Council of Welfare and the First Nations Statistical Institute, and it guts Statistics Canada. Yet again, that is what the government is choosing to do. Therefore, we need to establish the facts prior to the prepackaged comments that will come tomorrow.

I want to submit the evidence. When I started this debate on Friday, I said this in a sense was putting the government on trial for poor economic management, because on Friday we talked about the appallingly poor economic management of the government. On Monday and Tuesday we talked about the budget cuts and what that represents.

To my sense, this is a kind of a trial into the government's behaviour. There is no doubt about that. We are submitting evidence and ultimately the public will judge. In a sense, the public will get their opportunity as a jury to function on the government on October 19, 2015. That is the date of the next election. That is when Canadians will be looking at all the evidence we have submitted, and the government will submit whatever facts it manages to cook up or come up with. At that point, we will see what the verdict of the Canadian people is.

Tomorrow, when the government members stand up and all say the same thing, it will be pretty well the same speech. However, it will be a speech that talks about how the OAS was not viable, how it is difficult and tough to force Canadians to work two more years, but they will all say they did not have a choice.

Therefore I am submitting as evidence the government's own actuarial table. What it says is that in 2012, this year, reading from the government's own document, the total of the OAS and GIS and

allowances, as a percentage of GDP, was 2.43% of GDP for the ongoing sustainability of OAS in 2012.

Let us look ahead at the same actuarial table, if we fast forward to 2060. This year it is 2.43%. In 2060 it is 2.35%.

•(1610)

In other words, as a percentage of GDP, that is the impact of the OAS as it currently is constituted, not with this additional two years of work, not with the pain of people having \$30,000 less for their retirement, not with the pain and the penalties that are applied particularly to hard-working Canadians. The government seems to be absolutely punishing manual workers, the floor installers, the carpenters, the many we have heard from over the last few days. The government is saying, "Oh, those manual workers. We're going to punish them. They can't work. Their bodies are broken after 30 or 35 years of working. Well, they'll just have to sleep on the streets because they're not going to get their OAS until 67".

However, it is doing all of that predicated on the notion that somehow OAS is not sustainable. I will mention this figure one more time. This year, it is 2.43% of GDP. In 2060, it will be 2.35%. That is 0.08% less than it is this year.

This is the lie the government is putting forward. It is simply not true to say OAS is not sustainable in the long term. This is from the government's own actuarial tables.

Second, I submit for evidence that what we have here is the Parliamentary Budget Officer's discussion, his summary of the "Federal Fiscal Sustainability and Elderly Benefits". It says the following is true: OAS is sustainable in the long term.

The summary of that document that is available through the Parliamentary Budget Office shows the federal sustainability, and elderly benefits are sustainable. It says that very clearly. It says elderly benefits are projected to decline gradually to below the former level of GDP by the end of the projection horizon as the baby boom cohorts expire and as growth in the average benefit continues to lag growth in real GDP by capita.

I submit those two reports, the government's own actuarial tables and the PBO's "Federal Fiscal Sustainability and Elderly Benefits" as well.

I am just going to try to go back. I have some concluding remarks, of course, that I am going to make, as I committed to this morning. I thank my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour who is reminding me, and my colleague across the way is absolutely right that he making sure I get everything in that I need to get in, and that, of course, is the budgetary amendment we will be offering. That gives me about 20 minutes.

I will move on to a number of comments made about Katimavik by younger Canadians. I thank the younger Canadians who have flooded our offices with comments about the cutbacks to the youth program. I would like to say there is absolutely no way we can even begin to read all the comments into the record about the youth program that has been so savagely cut by the government. I know that so many youth are concerned and have been raising this concern.

The Budget

We will read a few more into the record, but I know there will be hundreds who may be disappointed today. However, we will continue to fight for Katimavik. There is no doubt about that. Those comments are going to be very useful.

●(1615)

Mr. Forsyth from Hamilton, Ontario said, “I am an environmental studies student at York University who is proud to call Hamilton my home. I am disgusted with the budget that has been recently released. I am deeply saddened to see that Katimavik's funding has been cut completely and the program will no longer be able to continue providing Canadian youth from all walks of life the opportunity of a lifetime. Katimavik gives youth the opportunity to travel the country, to provide volunteer work for NGOs and not-for-profits, to soul search and find direction in life, to learn new languages and about new cultures. More importantly, the program gives its participants the chance to engage as a citizen and grow as a person. I am afraid that this government doesn't see how much good a program like Katimavik can do for our country and for communities.”

I thank Mr. Forsyth for his comments.

Mr. Christie wrote, “I write to you about the benefits of Katimavik across our nation. The benefits keep non-profit and social services stable and keep youth engaged in communities across Canada, making changes in their lives as well as work experience. Katimavik has credits towards certain schools and programs upon completion as well, including the school I will be attending, the University of Capilano in the Lower Mainland of B.C. The service that Katimavik provides is very substantial for non-profits that can barely keep themselves afloat and the underprivileged in the north and elsewhere. Katimavik provides youth growth and changes the majority of our youth who partake in the program. With unemployment rates rising, Katimavik helps not only to give youth a job to volunteer at, but the experience of that volunteer placement to help serve them better in the job market after. The Conservative government is worried about costs and that it is too expensive even after Katimavik's 35 years of service to the country. I disagree. Please help save Katimavik.”

I thank Mr. Christie for his comments.

A constituent from Winnipeg, Manitoba said, “The government is focusing exclusively on the 30,000 alumni who have benefited from the program and use this number to justify the cut to an expensive program, but this is not just about the 30,000 alumni. This program touched the lives of thousands of field staff and office staff across the country, work supervisors, billeting families, local Katimavik committee members, community members and volunteers, the participants' family members and the hundreds of thousands of others who have crossed paths with the program. This is not an expensive program that benefits a small number of people. It is a valuable program that has touched the lives of millions. For every dollar invested in Katimavik, more than \$2 is generated in economic return, and this figure doesn't take into account the fact that participants continue giving back to the community long after the program is over. We need to shift the focus away from this number and represent properly the millions of people who have been changed because of Katimavik.”

I thank her for her letter.

Mr. Hébert wrote, “Katimavik has taken my life in a whole new direction. Before Katimavik, I was a drug addicted bartender-waiter and stuck in a rut without wanting to return to school and the apathy in my life. Katimavik gave me a whole new outlook on the world, people and life. It has opened my eyes to countless things such as empathy, work ethic, community engagement, critical thinking and a passion to improve my/our country. I returned to be project leader with Katimavik as it was the most challenging thing I have ever done. It provided great experiences, growth and learning for myself and those around me. I still give back to communities that aren't mine because it's still my country. I owe my life to Katimavik for all that it has given me and allowed me to give to others.”

I thank Mr. Hébert very much for his honesty in bringing forward that eloquent defence of Katimavik.

Ms. Fudge from St. John's, Newfoundland, speaking of Katimavik said, “This program has a major impact on Canadian society which can be seen in the lives of young people developing into engaged and socially active adults and the numerous volunteer hours that help community-based organizations by bringing together English and French Canadians, and most importantly, in the definition of a Canadian identity. This program is uniquely Canadian and deserves a place in the development of our culture. Please voice your support to continue funding the Katimavik program.”

We are. All 102 NDP MPs are voicing their support for Katimavik's continuation.

I find it difficult to read all of the notes that are coming in. There are a lot of them, particularly from Conservative-held ridings. It is very clear that the young people of this country who are writing in defence of Katimavik are saying much more than just about the cuts that have happened in this meanspirited Conservative budget.

●(1620)

It is much more than about Katimavik. When the young people are writing in and they are talking about opportunity, talking about their nation, what they are doing is starting a dialogue with all of us. What they are saying is that they do not like the direction in which the country is headed. They are saying that what they want is the kind of government with the kind of direction that responds to fundamental Canadian values.

We have heard it today from so many Canadians, those values of fairness, solidarity, taking care of each other, and working together towards a common goal. All of these hundreds of Canadians who have been writing, tweeting, and posting on Facebook, and there are more coming in even as I speak. My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie are watching them roll in right now.

The Budget

They are all sending a message to the government and to the entire House of Commons. What they are saying is that the budget represents a watershed. What this has done, the callousness with which the government has approached the whole idea of the budget, the impunity the government seems to be taking to renege on all of its election commitments, and all of us saw when the Prime Minister stared Canada in the face and said, "I will not cut health care transfers. I will not cut retirement security. I will not cut services." He made that commitment to all of us, to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Canadians see now that those promises are hollow. They see in this budget that is not what the government is going to do. The government is taking the country in a completely different direction from what it promised and what the Prime Minister promised.

What we are hearing today from so many Canadians from coast to coast is that Canadians believe that all of us deserve better, that Canada deserves better. That is the message we are getting from so many people. It is a message that has had an impact certainly on all of us as we have been listening. We have been watching the emails roll in. We have seen the smoke come out of our fax machine as faxes come in from across the country. We have seen the comments on Twitter and the postings on Facebook. It has certainly had an impact on us. We hope it has had an impact on Conservative members of Parliament.

Before I start my concluding remarks, I want to reference something I said earlier today, about the gentleman from Surrey, British Columbia, Mr. McKay, a lifelong Conservative. All his life he has been voting for the Conservative Party. Mr. McKay said:

I will start by saying you are doing a great job, as I watched you today Monday April the 2nd 2012 on the parliamentary channel here in Surrey B.C.... I have been a long-standing voter for the Conservatives for quite a lot of years now.... I am 60 years of age and I am on disability. I have never been so upset as I am now with this Government of Canada. When they play with people's lives as they are doing by cutting jobs, playing with the pension plan, it is heartbreaking to a lot of people, but when they start cutting funding for [our] youth in this Country [it] is totally sickening. If they would put more funds towards helping [our] youth of today we would not need so many jails to house them.

This lifelong Conservative who never voted NDP in his entire life said:

I hope you and your party members keep up the pressure and get this changed before there is severe damage done to our great country. Like I said before, I have been a voter for the Conservatives for years now. But people do and can change [their] way of thinking. I have been talking to a lot of people and friends my age and we are all thinking of changing the way we think about our government of the day. Even though I have never voted NDP, I just might start thinking of changing my mind. So thank you for your time. Please, you and the NDP keep up the good work you are all doing towards this issue.

• (1625)

Here is a lifelong Conservative who is changing his mind. After all the comments that have come in from Canadians from coast to coast, we are certainly hoping that there are Conservative MPs who will listen to their constituents and change their minds about what is such a bad budget, because Canadian families deserve better than what is in this budget.

I said yesterday in my concluding remarks that today I would talk about the role New Democrats have played in this House of Commons, the role we have played over the last few days and the

role we continue to play under the leadership of our new leader, the member for Outremont.

I mentioned the first of four chapters, and that was the two first labour MPs down at the end of the House of Commons, J.S. Woodsworth and A.A. Heaps. Both of them were ridiculed for having brought forward this radical idea that we could have old age pensions, that seniors could actually live on a decent income. They saw their chance in the mid-1920s. Even though they were ridiculed, they pushed the minority government. As a result of that, today we have old age pensions in our country.

Later on those labour parties got together across the country and they formed the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

Mr. Pat Martin: Nice name.

Mr. Peter Julian: It was a very nice name. Seven members entered into the House of Commons. Yes, they were down at the end, and we can still hear the heckling and the unkind remarks that were directed toward those seven because they had radical ideas. They believed that when somebody was out of work, there should actually be unemployment insurance. They believed that there should be family allowances to help raise children, that the government should be providing some support so that people could raise their children.

Those seven were vilified. Then something happened. There were seven members and as we went through one of the greatest conflicts in the history of humanity, the Second World War, many of the men and women who served our country overseas started to understand the importance of the message that those seven members were delivering in this House of Commons.

There was a time in the early 1940s when Canadians started to understand the importance of the message those seven members were bringing forward, and they started listening. More and more Canadians talked to each other and said that these are the kinds of things they want to have in a free and democratic society.

Canadians started reacting. In the opinion polls, those seven members went from being in third place to second place, and then they were leading in the polls. The old parties that vilified them for their radical ideas like unemployment insurance suddenly shifted. They decided to put into place all of those things that those seven members were vilified for only months before. Those seven members also made a difference in this House of Commons and Canada is better as a result.

I have just a few minutes left, but I do want to make sure that this history lesson is heard.

The Budget

•(1630)

In the 1950s there were a dozen members in the House of Commons who had the radical notion that all Canadians were created equal. Those dozen members campaigned for the right to vote, for Canadians of Asian origin and Canadians of aboriginal origin. At the age of 14, when I joined the NDP, I reacted to what I saw at that age. I recall seeing a Liberal Party headline that said that a vote for the CCF would give Japanese Canadians the vote. Those dozen members campaigned strenuously. They were sometimes vilified, but they campaigned for the civil rights of all Canadians. Those dozen Canadians succeeded in getting full civil rights given to all Canadians. There were a dozen members in the House of Commons and they made a difference.

[*Translation*]

In the 1960s, there were about 15 New Democratic Party members, and they believed strongly in human rights and civil rights. When the government invoked the War Measures Act, something I am sure members will remember, it put hundreds of people in prison just because they had spoken freely in a democratic society. At that time, the 15 New Democrat members said that no Canadian should be in prison, regardless of the War Measures Act, simply for expressing their opinion. Those members were often attacked by the other parties at the time. Today, four decades later, we know that Tommy Douglas and his caucus of 15 members were right: those people's civil rights had to be respected, regardless of what they had freely said in society.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Julian: Whether we be two or seven or 12 or 15 members—and today we are 102—we fill the same role, and we stand with Canadian families. As a number of people have said today, we are looking to the future. We are thinking about October 20, 2015, because that will be the day when the 102 New Democrat members become many more: that will be the first New Democrat government in the history of our country, in the history of Canada

•(1635)

[*English*]

I hope members did not mind my little history lesson. It was important to show the function that we have had in the House and the fact that we will never be turned away from representing Canadians. That is what New Democrats do.

As I promised I would sit down at this time, it is now my pleasure to move the following amendment to the budget. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

this House not approve the budgetary policy of this government because it will: a) increase unemployment and fail to stem growing inequality; b) cut promised health transfers to the provinces; c) unilaterally download billions of dollars of costs onto provinces, territories and municipalities; d) needlessly increase the age of eligibility for the OAS and GIS for future retirees, many of whom will be forced into poverty; e) decrease protection of our environment; f) cut vital public services to Canadians; g) undermine Canada's reputation on the world stage; h) attack support for our culture and heritage, including CBC/Radio-Canada; and i) unfairly use the Canada Revenue Agency to attack charities for ideological reasons.

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order.

Before we proceed to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, Infrastructure; the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Status of Women; the hon. member for Davenport, Housing.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

•(1640)

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am curious. I heard what the NDP said in relation to the motion. Frankly, I know that many of the NDP members, from their talk over on the other side, must live in fantasy land. This is the proposal they are making. They are finding cuts that do not exist, suggesting there are cuts to certain programs.

The hon. member has left out discussion, in the last 15 hours of his predictable yet unimportant speech, on the penny. We know what will happen to the penny. He must have left it out for political reasons.

The rest of his speech was in fantasy land. However, will the hon. member not get behind the government and support it on the elimination of the penny? Will he do that for us? We know it will be better for retailers and for Canadians. It went out of style some time ago. Will the hon. member support the elimination of the penny?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, that is the difference between the Conservatives and us. They believe it is all about the penny. We believe it is all about governing and public policy, responding to Canadian needs.

We did mention the penny. In fact, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has been at the origin of abolishing the penny. I am glad the government is giving him full credit for the work he has done.

The reality is it is a penny-wise and pound foolish budget. It will hurt Canadians. That is why we are voting against it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting. There are over 34 million people across Canada. All those individuals are represented by 308 members of Parliament.

We recognize this is one of the most important motions we will debate inside this chamber. We are spending well in excess of \$250 billion.

We all have concerns that we would like to be able to express in regard to the budget, issues such as increasing the OAS and GIS eligibility age from 65 to 67 and health care transfers. In Winnipeg hundreds of jobs have been lost through Aveos. In Manitoba people are concerned about the Wheat Board and the impact that will have.

There are literally hundreds of issues across this great nation of ours. We would hope that in recognition of how important this debate is, we would allow members to contribute to that debate. We all have stories at the constituency level. Constituents are talking to us, wanting us to bring forward those issues.

The Budget

When the government brings in time allocation, opposition members jointly oppose it because we want members to be able to speak, even if we disagree with them.

We have witnessed a demonstration of the different type of leadership in the NDP. Is it the New Democratic Party's intention, on every bill that it opposes, to use as much time on the clock in order to prevent other members of Parliament from being able to contribute by representing their constituents, which we believe is ultimately in the best interest of all Canadians? We want MPs to be engaged in debate. Does the hon. member also acknowledge the importance of having engagement and debate from members or Parliament when we are talking about issues such as spending \$250-plus billion?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I have been in the House since 2004 and the member is right to say that there is a different calibre of leadership in the NDP than there was in the Liberal Party. From 2006 until 2011, we saw Liberal members of Parliament, every time a budget was presented, paying lip service to what the Conservatives were doing as they vandalized the economy and the country. Then every NDP MP who was here prior to 2011 saw time after time, 114 consecutive times, Liberals voting to support the Conservative government. New Democrats are saying that when we think the direction is wrong, we are going to stand up to the government because it is the right thing to do.

The member of Parliament says that the hundreds of Canadians who have written to us and want their views expressed in the House of Commons are somehow wrong and that this should be just about the Liberal Party and politicians. We disagree. It is about Canadians. It is about the impact on Canadian families. That is why I delivered hundreds of messages in the House over the last few days.

●(1645)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I share some of what my colleague from Winnipeg North said. It is a shame that so far the only comments I have been able to make about climate in this debate was when the hon. member accidentally read out of my tweets, which was forwarded to him from a constituent of mine.

Agreeing with everything Canadians are saying from coast to coast about how bad this budget is, I would like the hon. member to speak more specifically about the ways in which this budget, ignoring the climate crisis as it does, does nothing but promote the rapid expansion of the fossil fuel industry from coast to coast, and I mean coasts. From the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Hecate Strait, this budget was written by the oil industry. It is time we have a separation of oil and state in our country. Fundamentally, this budget violates every notion of responsible government.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I certainly agree with the member. I would ask the member this simple question. The choice on Friday morning was to allow for the Conservatives to dominate debate, as they have in so many other cases, where they get most of the speaking spots and Conservative MP after Conservative MP stands in the House and regurgitates the same Prime Minister office talking points, every one of them, with the same message. We could have had three days of that or three days of hearing from Canadians, and that is who we have heard from, hundreds of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

From one end of the country to the other, all across Canada, they have spoken out against this budget. That is what we need to know. Everyone agrees that this is a bad budget, that it has a negative impact on Canadian families. Canadian families deserve better than that. They deserve much better than that.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Madam Speaker, over the last 13 hours, we listened to the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, during which we began a conversation with Canadians about this budget, why it was so wrong and why we were opposed to it. Canadians want to hear what we are going to do as the opposition. I would like the member to speak more clearly about the fact that this is just the beginning of the kind of opposition there is going to be from this official opposition. There will be a structured, responsible conversation in the chamber and outside of it from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, first, I would like to pay tribute to the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who has been at my side handing me tweets and Facebook postings throughout this entire day. He has been tireless. I do not think he has even taken any breaks.

Second, when my colleague talks about a structured, organized, energetic and strong opposition under the leadership of the member for Outremont, Canadians have not seen anything yet. We will fight hard for Canadian families on the floor of the House of Commons and right across the country.

●(1650)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak, albeit briefly, to this motion.

I would like to request unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Kings—Hants.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to split his time with the member for Kings—Hants?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have heard it said that this is a Liberal budget. I have heard it said by Andrew Coyne. I have heard it said by le chef du Bloc québécois, Daniel Paillé. I have heard it said by several Conservative members of Parliament. So, I want to devote the bulk of my very brief speech to the point that this is not a Liberal budget. There are several elements of the budget that a Liberal government would never have done.

The Budget

[Translation]

On the question of old age security, a Liberal government would never have raised the age of eligibility from 65 to 67. When it comes to the transparency of budget cuts, a Liberal government would never have made cuts without transparency, as this Conservative government is doing. When it comes to the environment, a Liberal government would never have weakened the regulations and the environmental assessment process. And a Liberal government would never have cut Elections Canada's budget just when Elections Canada needed those funds to conduct its investigations.

[English]

In more detail, the OAS going from 65 to 67 is utterly unnecessary because the thing is entirely stable and doable, according to the Chief Actuary. It is entirely unfair, it hits the most vulnerable seniors to the tune of some \$30,000 over two years. It is generationally inequitable, it hits manual workers who are often unable to work beyond the age of 65. It places the burden on the provinces.

In terms of transparency, the budget contains weasel words, like they will "achieve efficiencies and savings through the consolidation and streamlining of administrative functions, program management". These are words that mean nothing. When we were government, we did expenditure review and we produced detailed records of cuts in every single departmental program.

In terms of innovation, a Liberal government would never have cut the tax incentive to innovate. According to Andrew Dunn, a tax specialist at Deloitte Touche, "It's becoming more of a planned economy and less of a capitalist economy." The Conservatives favour a planned economy where government picks winners by making transfers, rather than a capitalist economy based on tax incentives.

My time is short, so I will just close on the environment and Elections Canada. On the environment, we on the Liberal side would not oppose streamlining of environmental evaluation processes.

However, the problem is, one can tell that the Prime Minister clearly wants that pipeline to be built, come hell or high water, whatever the consequences for the environment and for aboriginal people. That is why we oppose it. He is not just streamlining environmental regulation, he is cutting it out so that he can get his favourite pipeline built. That is sufficient reason for us to oppose it.

Finally, on Elections Canada, clearly it is wrong to cut his budget by \$7.5 million at a time when he needs the money to do this robocall investigation.

[Translation]

For all these reasons and for many more reasons, the Liberals will be voting against the budget.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Liberal member.

There was a Liberal government from 1993 to January 2006. Did the Liberal government not cut \$400 million from the CBC? Did it not cut health spending to the point where the health care system became ill as a result, and still is today? Did the Liberal government take \$57 billion away from working men and women? That was the

theft of \$57 billion from working men and women, a theft legalized by the Conservatives.

• (1655)

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Speaker, the member should recall that in 1993, the Liberals had inherited a \$42 billion deficit from the Conservatives. There was a budget crisis in the air. The IMF was going to come to Canada, and the *Wall Street Journal* said we were a third-world country. There was a crisis atmosphere. That is why the Liberals made significant cuts, as he says.

However, after balancing the budget in two years, we reinvested those funds in the economy, and in particular in the health accord and the agreement with the aboriginal people.

[English]

And if it had not been for the NDP bringing down the Liberal government in 2005, we would have enacted child care, we would have enacted Kelowna, and Canada would have been a much better place.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Just a little more time.

Hon. John Baird: Did they not pick a bad time to get their fingers in the cookie jar?

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order.

The hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, it sounds like bickering among good friend fellows.

I am curious. We know what happened in the 1990s. We know that \$25 billion was cut from the provinces for health care and education by the Liberals. We know about the \$125 billion infrastructure deficit that the Conservative government took over from the previous Liberal government. How does the member feel about the last 13 hours of debate by one member of the NDP? How does he feel about him trying to stifle debate, and in particular stifling debate of the Liberal Party?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Speaker, I have never heard such a convoluted question.

However, he talks about infrastructure deficit. In the budget there is \$150 million for infrastructure, enough to build about 150 miles of highway across the country. There is nothing on affordable housing, nothing significant on public transit, nothing to deal with the infrastructure problems of the country. Therefore, that is a highly delinquent budget in an area of a huge national infrastructure deficit.

As to his question about the NDP hogging the time, as my colleague from Winnipeg North pointed out, we did not approve of that at all.

An hon. member: Even their own members.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member could just comment on the F-35 as a priority in spending, whether it is F-35 or jails?

The Budget

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Speaker, we do not need more jails. The crime rate has been coming down. We do need to replace the fighter jets. I used to be defence minister. As the Auditor General made clear today, the problems with the F-35 only began in 2006 when a government of a certain other party came to power. As was very clear from the Auditor General today, the Conservatives totally messed up on the F-35, there is no other way to put it. There is a huge amount of work to do to set things straight.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to focus my remarks on this budget on the issue of income inequality.

According to some recent polls, Canadians view income inequality as the most important issue facing the country. The gap between rich and poor, the increasing challenge for young people and low-income Canadians to make ends meet, is an issue of grave importance to a lot of Canadian families from coast to coast.

This budget does not discuss income inequality but, perversely, it does address it. I say perversely because it actually makes income inequality worse. The cutting of OAS makes the most vulnerable Canadians wait two extra years for their old age security. The Conservative excuse of sustainability is false. We have reports now from the Chief Actuary, from finance, from the OECD and from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that tell us that OAS is sustainable. The fact is that OAS, in 1993, was 2.7% of GDP. Today, in 2012, it is 2.4%. By 2030, it will be around 3.1%. But then later, by 2060, it will go down to about 2.3% of GDP. It is totally sustainable.

The Conservatives referenced that other countries have changed their pension systems. Well, they had to change their pension systems because their pension systems were not sustainable. In Canada, under the Chrétien and Martin governments, the changes made to CPP have enabled it to be sustainable for generations, in fact for the next 70 years.

The Conservatives are making a false argument. The OAS is sustainable in its current form. Even if sustainability were an issue, and we needed to address it, we would not address it by raising the age of OAS qualification. That would be a regressive step, punishing the most vulnerable, the poorest of the poor.

Let us look at who depends on OAS: 40% of Canadians who live on OAS make less than \$20,000 per year; 53% of Canadians who live on OAS make less than \$25,000 per year. Older, single women living in poverty depend disproportionately on OAS. Physical workers, those carpet layers, carpenters, pipe fitters and those working in a fish plant on their feet in a cold, damp environment all day, by the age of 65, their bodies are ready for a break.

It is important to realize that to qualify for GIS, people need to qualify for OAS. So the very poorest of the poor, Canada's most vulnerable, have to wait two more years, and that is about \$30,000 for people who are living below the poverty line.

I would like to blame this on the law of unintended consequences, that somehow the Conservatives did not foresee this unintended consequence. The reality is that this is part of a Conservative agenda. When it comes to income inequality, this is not an unintended consequence. The Conservatives seem to be waging war on the poor.

In previous Conservative budgets, they introduced non-refundable tax credits, boutique credits for caregivers, volunteer firefighters, people with disabilities and a children's activity tax credit. Perversely, they did not make them refundable. As a result, low-income Canadians do not qualify. We have raised this over and over again.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and organizations representing the disabled have raised this issue. Simply making these refundable as opposed to the current form of non-refundable would benefit low-income Canadians who need the help the most. However, the Conservatives refused to do this.

In terms of some of the changes they have made, the tax-free savings account and income-splitting that they are proposing at some point in the future when they achieve a mythical surplus, do not do anything for low-income Canadians. If people can afford to pay into retirement savings, the TFSA can help. If they cannot, then they do not get TFSA, I guess they get SFA.

The fact is that income disparity in Canada is a big issue. The gap between rich and poor, and income inequality is a major issue for Canadian families. It is important to realize that this recovery that the Conservatives speak of is an uneven recovery.

● (1700)

Unemployment in Canada is 1.4% higher than it was before the downturn. It has gone from 6% to 7.4%. Youth employment is at its worst in 10 years. If we break it down across the country, 60% of the jobs created in the last year were created in just two provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan, which depend on oil, gas and mining.

We realize that oil, gas and mining is good for the whole country but the reality is that other provinces are hemorrhaging jobs, such as in Ontario, Quebec and the maritime provinces. This could have been a great budget for the Conservatives to renew the ecoenergy retrofit program, creating jobs for young Canadians and the jobs of tomorrow in the green economy. The Conservatives cancelled that program three times but this time, I guess with the strong, stable national majority government, they do not need to worry about these election type things at this point.

It is also important to realize that, in terms of income disparity, more than half of Canadian tax filers make less than \$30,000 per year and two-thirds of Canadian tax filers make less than \$40,000 per year. These are the people who are actually filing taxes. What about the number of Canadians who do not file taxes?

The Budget

In this budget there were a number of attacks on Atlantic Canada. There were cuts to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, ACOA, Marine Atlantic, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the elimination of the Atlantic investment tax credit.

I want to talk about my part of Nova Scotia in the Annapolis Valley. In Kings county, Hants county and Annapolis county, we have 10,000 fewer net full-time jobs compared to the fall of 2008. Seventeen hundred more people are unemployed and looking for work. The unemployment rate in my riding in the Annapolis Valley and in the riding of the member for West Nova has gone from 5% to 8.7% since 2008.

I also want to speak to the fiscal disparity between the provinces. This budget does nothing but increase it. It will impose billions of costs for new prisons onto provincial governments. It does nothing to preserve health care for the future and preserve the capacity as we see the gap between rich and poor provinces grow, as we see deficits pile onto the provinces that do not have a wealth of natural resources. This is a concern.

This is a “you're on your own budget”. If people are doing great in Canada right now, if they have a job, if they are in oil, gas and mining, that is fine. However, if they do not have a job, this budget leaves them behind.

We in the Liberal Party, believe we can do better. We need an economy and a recovery that benefits all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Therefore, I move:

That the amendment be amended by adding after the words “ideological reasons” the following:

- j) force Canadians to make tremendous sacrifices by cutting their retirement income but fails to similarly increase the qualifying age from 65 to 67 for the Prime Minister's retiring allowance of two-thirds the sitting Prime Minister's salary; and
- k) not make cuts to the budgets of ministerial offices or the Office of the Prime Minister.

• (1705)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have looked through this budget to find any evidence of cuts to the kinds of perks that Canadians are looking for members of Parliament to take on. The Prime Minister is expanding this House of Commons by 30 seats, which will add millions in costs every year. The budget of the Prime Minister's Office is now, I believe, in excess of \$10 million and yet the Conservatives are adding costs of \$165 million to help pipelines, tankers and offshore drilling. They are adding \$8 million so that the Canada Revenue Agency can go after charities.

Where is the fiscal responsibility in this budget? I know the hon. member for Kings—Hants is a bit of a fiscal hawk. I wonder what his thoughts are on the fiscal conservatism of this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: I should have stated that the subamendment is in order.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, it is utter hypocrisy that a government would preach restraint to Canadians and the public service when at the same time it is increasing by 30 members the House of Commons. In reality, there is no other parliament or congress in the world that, as population grows, increases its

numbers; not the Bundestag, not the Congress in the U.S. and not Westminster. What they do is redistribute, which is quite reasonable. At a time of restraint, to add 30 new members of Parliament is madness. We are the only ones in the world who are doing that.

The leader of the Green Party also raised the issue of the inconsistency of the government spending over half a billion dollars on quasi-partisan government advertising and at the same time cutting CBC, which Canadians depend on, by 11%. At a time when we should be investing in public broadcasting and cutting partisan waste and advertising, the government is doing the opposite to promote its own agenda and not to promote Canadian culture.

• (1710)

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was wondering what the member thinks about some of the things in the budget. He talks about productivity and encourages the government to move forward with productivity. The budget provides an additional \$50 million over two years to the youth employment strategy to assist more young people in gaining tangible skills and experience. It provides \$6 million over three years to extend and expand the third quarter project to key centres across the country and it improves labour market opportunities for Canadians with disabilities. Further, it invests \$74 million over two years to ensure that EI claimants benefit from accepting work.

Those are all things that are about productivity, about Canadians getting jobs, about Canadians having more opportunity and about small and medium businesses having more opportunities. Did the member not read that in the budget?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, the member referred to one of the changes to EI, which is to reduce the clawback if recipients take some part-time work. That specific change makes some sense.

The changes in the budget to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, which the member for York West proposed to this House, would protect disability pensions when companies go bankrupt. That makes sense.

However, all those small programs to create jobs that the member described, their potential impact pales in comparison to the significant negative effect of raising payroll taxes by \$600 million every year for the next three years. That is what this budget does. It is a bit of a shell game. The government puts \$50 million or \$10 million in this program and do something over here but then it increases payroll taxes, a direct tax on jobs, by \$600 million per year at a time when unemployment is 1.4% higher than it was before the recession. That is the part that I have a quarrel with in this budget.

The Budget

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do know the shell game the Liberal member was talking about because when he was in the Liberal Party, which was some time after he was in the Conservative Party, the Liberals actually played a shell game. That was \$25 billion in social transfers. My province of Alberta will never forget when the federal government said no to health care and no to education. We remember that shell game and I think most Canadians remember the Liberal shell game.

I had an opportunity to ask some questions earlier. I know the NDP member who spoke earlier got on tweeters and was starting to quote some people. I asked my own questions about that. I was wondering what people thought about what he was doing and I received some questions and comments on it. One comment was from Bruce from Toronto who said, "It hurts him more than you and me. He is waiting for a truck to arrive with a new shipment of policy and talking points".

I would agree with him because I think that is exactly the situation. The NDP does not have any policy and therefore the only solution it has is to criticize our policy.

What is more clear than anything is when we recognize what our budget is. The budget in brief is available to all parliamentarians and I would encourage the members from the NDP and the Liberal Party to read it. If they cannot get the bigger book, which is also available to them, they might like to read this because it goes through, in very simple terms, what we are doing for Canadians. I think the title says it all, "Jobs Growth and Long-Term Prosperity".

I did ask the NDP earlier whether he would stand up for pennies. He thought naturally, because I mentioned eliminating the penny, that is what I was asking. However, what I was asking him to do was to stand up for taxpayers because taxpayers are the ones who earn the pennies. They are the ones who earn the dollars and give us the right to be in this place by electing us.

I was doing some calculations earlier, because there are cutbacks in this place, as there are cutbacks right across the country. There are cutbacks on my pension. I have been in a wage freeze for a few years now, so I know that. However, he has taken 13 hours of this place in debate. Those 13 hours do calculate down to time and this place costs \$440-some-odd million to run for a year, so he actually has taken about \$6.5 million worth of taxpayer money to have his little shenanigans and to try to stifle debate by the Liberals.

I am not proud of that and I am not proud to be a member of Parliament who has the ability to do so. Although he has the right to speak, we also need to respect the penny and respect taxpayers and I do not see that respect coming from the other side.

I would like to talk about some of the great things in this budget—

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member. It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the subamendment and the amendment now before the House.

The question is on the subamendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the subamendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1800)

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 178)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Ayala	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Paetti	Patry
Pécelet	Perreault

The Budget

Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rae
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Trudeau	Turmel
Valeriotte — 135	

Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer — 153	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bernier	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Oda
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment defeated.

The next question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 179*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman

Private Members' Business

Fry
Garrison
Giguère
Goodale
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu
Hyer
Julian
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nicholls
Pacetti
Péclet
Pilon
Quach
Rafferty
Raynault
Rousseau
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
Valeriotte — 135

Garneau
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
May
McGuinty
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mourani
Murray
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Perreault
Plamondon
Rae
Ravignat
Regan
Saganash
Savoie
Scott
Sgro
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel

Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Richardson
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 153

Komarnicki
Lauzon
Leaf
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
Oda
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Rickford
Saxton
Seeback
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trotter
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Aspin
Bateman
Bernier
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeschen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoepfner
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Ashfield
Baird
Benoit
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[English]

It being 6:08, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1810)

[English]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.) moved that Bill C-326, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act (biweekly payment of benefits), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being given this time on what is certainly a special occasion, given the fact that I introduced this bill several years ago for the first time.

Private Members' Business

I discovered some time ago that the essence of this bill is really about allowing pensioners and seniors the freedom and flexibility to budget. This bill would certainly allow them to do that. Honestly, the number one issue in my riding, from looking at the number of calls that come into my offices, is about income security for seniors, certainly for those who are receiving the CPP and old age security, as well as GIS, the guaranteed income supplement.

In essence, this bill does not create a large burden on the taxpayer by putting up more money; it is a question of administration. It is a question of budgeting for the individual who chooses, is not forced, to be paid twice a month instead of just once.

Where does this come from? What is the origin? Who particularly wants this and why? At first blush, many people who are not receiving this might say to themselves, "I do not really see the difference. If we are dealing with the same amount of money on a monthly basis, why would people be worried about getting paid twice of month instead of once?"

During the deliberations, in several meetings across this country, including one in Newfoundland and Labrador, about four years ago it was brought to my attention that it would be a good benefit for seniors to be paid twice a month or at the very least have the option for that. That option allows seniors to budget better, especially those who are impoverished or are living below the poverty line. I will explain that soon.

This first came about in a meeting at a convention I went to staged by the Newfoundland and Labrador Pensioners and Senior Citizens 50+ Federation. Its president, Robert Rogers, brought this to my attention, about how so many seniors would love to have this type of flexibility to be paid twice. To me it seemed as if it had been mentioned before but was not really a big issue, until they took a vote at the convention. Well over 80% of the people said they would like to have that option.

One of the things I have noticed, too, is that many of the people who said they would like to have the option were between the ages of 65 and 80. In that age group of 65 to 80, a lot of seniors in my riding still live in their home or live in an apartment dwelling, where they pay for their medications and food. Being paid twice a month helps those seniors to budget that much better.

For seniors over the age of 80, a lot prefer to be paid once a month because they are in assisted living. They are in a place where all their bills are paid up front, and therefore they would like to retain that option.

That is what the bill does. It essentially allows an individual to check a box to say "Yes, I prefer to be paid twice a month". Once again, that is the Canada pension plan, old age security and, if eligible, the guaranteed income supplement. The benefit of this is that it would allow seniors who were used to receiving their income biweekly during their working life to continue with a familiar schedule.

My office has had several discussions with a gentleman by the name of Leo Bonnell who works out of Newfoundland. He is a former banker, and he is a big believer in this type of policy that allows seniors to have the flexibility to be paid twice a month. He is on the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Advisory Council on

Aging and Seniors, and he is an active member of the Newfoundland and Labrador Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation. As I mentioned, he has been advocating for this option for quite some time.

He believes that this type of system would be much more convenient for seniors as they would have a more regular cash flow. The cash flow element is of the essence here. That is what Mr. Bonnell talked about.

In Newfoundland and Labrador we often see a mad dash for the supermarkets on what many people call cheque day. There is one day of the month when most of the cheques are mailed, and on that particular day the grocery stores and the pharmacies are overcrowded. I see MPs in the House nodding their heads in agreement. They know what I am talking about. They hear about it, and they see it time and time again.

● (1815)

The people who own these stores will tell us much the same. The story is that the stores are overcrowded and some people are desperate, especially when it comes to medications.

For example, seniors budget their cheque for bills, medications and groceries. So they go out on the day they are paid, like most seniors do on that particular day, and they buy all the necessary provisions based on their own budget.

The problem is that unexpected things happen. Two weeks later they can come down with a chest infection and need another type of medication. They are only paid once a month, but emergencies occur. Let us say they bought the normal amount of medication and now they have a chest infection so they have to go back and get more, based on the doctor's orders, and they have to wait. Many seniors are waiting up to four weeks because they do not have the extra amount of money, because they buy all of their goods, including not just medications but also groceries. They also look after provisions such as fuel, home heating, their rent and all of that. If something unforeseen happens, being paid twice a month certainly would help. It does not alleviate the indebtedness they have to take on, but instead of waiting three weeks to get that essential medication, they may only have to wait three or four days because they know that at the middle of the month another cheque is coming.

We have also received some great feedback from seniors groups across this country. From the most populous provinces, Ontario, Quebec, and also British Columbia we see a lot of support for the bill. One of our local seniors groups, in the riding of my hon. colleague from Random—Burin—St. George's around the community of Clarenville, hosted a seniors information session whereby various presentations were given to some 60 seniors from Clarenville.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking you for a little—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor has the floor.

Mr. Scott Simms: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Private Members' Business

I mentioned a group around the Clarendville area. The feedback survey included a question as to whether participants would like the option of receiving their benefits biweekly. About 75% of respondents answered yes. We believe this is a good indicator of the type of support the bill would receive.

We received feedback from the group known as CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. CARP supports measures that increase the flexibility with which Canadians have access to their CPP funds and other retirement benefits, and that is what the bill is about. The bill gives seniors the option of biweekly payments.

My colleague has given me material from her riding that shows there is overwhelming support for issues that come up for seniors, especially those between the ages of 65 and 80 and those who live in their own dwellings.

One of the points that is brought up in this House quite a bit is the costs. I realize there would be administrative costs to change this. We did our due diligence and looked into it. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said the cost of administering the bill is “not fiscally significant”.

Administrative costs should not be high because most seniors now receive their payments via direct deposit, which reduces mailing costs. It is the mailing costs which are one of the biggest financial liabilities when it comes to the administrative costs of changing this measure, but because people are getting paid by direct deposit, the costs would not be as significant. I hope the government and all members of the House will bear that in mind. If this is a time of austerity in Canada, then I certainly think the benefits far outweigh the administrative costs in this particular measure.

I would like to wrap up by referring to a letter that I received from Benjamin and Dawn Crewdson of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. I would like to read most of the letter because I think it is very pertinent to this debate. I thank them, if they are watching, for allowing me to read this letter in the House. It brings out the points very clearly. Mr. Crewdson writes:

I am a senior citizen (age 74) and for many years I and my wife have been trying to exist on CPP, OAS & GIS for a total at present of \$2,000.00 a month.... We have no other assets. But what...did not bring to the table (or else it wasn't reported) is not only the difficulty of budgeting, but the fear that pervades one's life after a small monthly cheque is received. When my cheque arrives (by direct deposit) the first thing my wife and I do is pay the rent, the light, and the communications (telephone, TV, computer). Then we try to take care of personal grooming, hair-cut for me, hair-do for the wife. Then we have to calculate the number of weeks before the next cheque to allocate our monthly groceries. Many's the month my cheque is fully allocated within a few days of receiving it. We then know that we have to live the rest of the month with no additional funds.

The fear I mention not only pervades one's life for the period before the next cheque, but in my case, I am diagnosed Chronic Kidney Failure patient. I have to attend hemo-dialysis treatments three times a week, the costs of which (transportation, dietetic and medications) was never considered in our original allocation of our funds. I now live in fear that one day I will not have sufficient [money] to cover my bus fares to the hospital and so miss a treatment, or that we will have significant funds to cover the cost of my medications, which are hefty, or that we can only cover the cost of my diet requirements by cutting down on other foodstuffs....

I hope you appreciate that we are not asking for more money, which would be nice, but my hope and prayer is that we can get your Bill through Parliament, and give us a cheque twice a month instead of once. I acknowledge that the sum of money—

● (1820)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. I hate to interrupt the hon. member, but hon. members, there is too much noise in the chamber. The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor has the floor, and I am certain there are many members in the House of Commons who would like to hear what the hon. member has to say.

The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, that was very well said.

I want to read the last paragraph of the letter from Mr. Crewdson, who says that he wants to be paid twice a month instead of once. He thinks it is a small measure that could go a long way. The final paragraph states:

I hope you appreciate that we are not asking for more money, which would be nice, but my hope and prayer is that we can get your Bill through parliament, and give us a cheque twice a month instead of once. I acknowledge that the sum of money will be the same, but it can be handled better, budgeted better, and take away a lot of fear that we experience at present. If I can assist you in promoting your Bill — letter writing and so on, do not hesitate to contact me.... This is something worthy of us all pulling together to achieve.

Sincerely

Benjamin W. Crewdson and Dawn Crewdson

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

By pulling together, I think he means all of us here in this House. I am willing to bet that for most MPs, income security for seniors if it is not the most talked about issue in constituency offices, it is up there in the top five. It has to be. I can tell by the nodding heads that I am right.

This is not a slight against anybody or any party. This is a measure that would allow people the dignity to be able to budget better. Yes, sometimes and oftentimes tragically things happen where, if one is being paid twice a month, it would become that much better to budget.

I bring this matter to the House because I feel it is that important. Again, the administrative costs are not that high. The benefit of allowing people CPP, old age security and guaranteed income supplement to be paid twice a month instead of just once is a huge benefit for seniors to budget.

I want to thank this House and all members. Mr. Crewdson would also like to thank members very much.

● (1825)

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although sometimes it was hard to hear my colleague's comments because of all the noise, I appreciate his persevering through it. I appreciate his bringing up the budgeting issues and other aspects for seniors. He raised some good points.

The member talked about the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I think that with any bill we consider we would want to consider the cost of it as well. The member indicated in his comments that the PBO said that it was not fiscally significant. The PBO is usually not unreserved in issuing his numbers. I wonder if the member might give us an indication as to what that number was when it was not fiscally significant.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of variables involved that we really cannot calculate. When the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that it was not fiscally significant, chances are it was based on the people who had claimed in the past through electronic payment, which would therefore reduce the cost. I think there was more of a variation. In the past there was a high price tag attached to it, but now with people getting payments electronically, as Mr. Crewdson is getting, it brings the cost down substantially.

Again, I go back to the benefits. I certainly feel that the benefits outweigh the cost in this particular measure. I am one who considers that issues should be fiscally prudent as well. I think this is a good measure.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my Liberal colleague.

This bill is all well and good, but is it going to help those living in poverty? Will the combination of old age security and the guaranteed income supplement ensure that, henceforth, the elderly will remain above the poverty line?

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, but I would like to answer the member's question by reading from the letter once again.

Mr. Crewdson, who is from St. John's, said, "I acknowledge that the sum of money will be the same, but it can be handled better, budgeted better". This is a budgeting issue, quite frankly.

Would I love to double the amount that seniors are receiving? Of course, I would, in a flash, in a minute. However, it is not in the budget. I would love to make the amendment to do so. However, right now I want to move at this level, which is to say that I think there is a way the government could accept this particular measure as a modest way of improving the lifestyles of our seniors over the age of 65.

As a matter of fact, the member for Edmonton—Leduc brought forward a motion, which the government vehemently supported, regarding financial literacy. This is an example of a good measure toward financial literacy. It would allow better budgeting in this nation, and the administrative costs would not be that significant in order for us to provide that benefit of better budgeting.

I would love to bring all of these people above the poverty line. However, right now I want to focus on this because I think it is a modest measure which I hope the government would see as a common-sense thing to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague on his speech regarding this bill.

Having listened to all the examples he gave on the daily lives of those people who receive cheques, it is quite clear that this money is spent locally.

I would like his point of view on this. Beyond any economic consideration, does not simplifying these people's lives also simplify the life of the community around them?

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, that is the wonderful thing about debate in this House. Even though we spend years working on a bill, a new dimension of something that is good in public policy gets borne out. I would like to thank my hon. colleague for doing that. Of course, it is an issue for the local community, given the fact that many of these people would be able to remain within that community because they would know that they would get a payment twice a month. Therefore, it would be easier for them to shop locally.

I would humbly suggest that it is not something that we would strictly consider an economic value or an economic development, but it is one dimension to this particular issue. In the member's province and in mine, there are a lot of towns where mills have shut down. If the seniors in those particular communities received a steady income, it would count toward the viability of a particular community.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations and I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous for the following motion: "Whereas Canada, by nature, offers abundant recreational and fitness opportunities through such things as our mountains, oceans, lakes, forests and parks, we, as Canadians, could, with access to these opportunities, be the healthiest and fittest people on earth; participation rates in healthy physical activities have been declining; we have public facilities to promote health and fitness operated by local governments from coast to coast to coast; the Government of Canada and Canadian people recognize the growing concern over chronic disease and other impediments to health and fitness for Canadians; health and fitness ought to be promoted for Canadians of all ages and disabilities; and we all aspire to increase participation by Canadians in health, recreational sports and fitness activities; therefore, as a step to increase participation and enhance the health of all Canadians, this House encourages local governments across Canada to collaborate in promoting higher participation rates in recreational sports and fitness activities."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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 start by underscoring our government's commitment to improving the well-being of seniors and our continued efforts to address their needs now and into the future. For this reason, I welcome the opportunity to speak to Bill C-326, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act (biweekly payment of benefits).

Private Members' Business

I am certain the notion of paying Canada pension plan and old age security benefits to seniors on a biweekly rather than a monthly basis was proposed with the best of intentions. However, our government's priority is reducing administrative costs to ensure the maximum amount of seniors benefits.

The government recently undertook a significant exercise, the deficit reduction action plan, to reduce duplication, overlap and redundant processes across government to ensure the greatest value for taxpayer dollars. We recently implemented a one-for-one rule to reduce government red tape. Not only will this transformative measure reduce the bureaucratic administration of government, but it will reduce the cost of businesses and create jobs and growth.

Clearly, members can tell that we are passionate about reducing the size of government and reducing redundancy within government. As a result, the government cannot support a bill that would increase the administrative costs of government by tens of millions of dollars in this time of fiscal restraint.

The old age security program and Canada pension plan are the first two pillars of Canada's retirement system. As such, they provide significant income security to Canadians in their senior years. Indeed, our public pension system is projected to provide Canadians with close to \$72 billion this year alone. When month-to-month circumstances do not change, as is the case with retirement benefits, the practice of paying all benefits at the end of the month is the most efficient. This practice is also consistent with other income support methods both in Canada and internationally.

For the sake of contrast, I would point out that the employment insurance system is different. The EI system is meant to support individuals in a time of transition and, as such, is highly reactive to changing circumstances of those individuals. As a result, EI is paid in two week increments.

This is quite different from retirement programs that are largely set out once an individual applies initially and rarely have the benefit rates re-evaluated.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Changing the frequency of benefit payments may seem like a simple administrative task, Mr. Speaker, but it is fraught with consequences. The current system works well, allowing for efficient administration, as well as an efficient use of tax dollars. A bi-monthly payment schedule would put this efficiency at risk.

[*English*]

Consider the number of players involved in the delivery of all benefit payments. Service Canada works in partnership with Public Works and Government Services Canada and Canada Post and the banks coordinate the financial transfer of benefit payments. Each organization has its own work plan around the payment dates that take place on the third last banking day of each month. This is not to say nothing of the provincial and territorial governments that provide top-ups, tax credits and other benefits that are tied to monthly calculations for these payments.

Apart from the system costs of amending two acts of Parliament, changing the frequency of benefit payments would demand

additional resources of all the players involved. Frankly, it would be difficult to justify the significant costs.

However, there are deeper issues at stake here. The changes proposed by the bill fly in the face of profound socio-economic changes effecting the country.

Like many countries, Canada is in the midst of a major demographic shift. Our population is aging. On the one hand, Canadians are living longer and on the other, we are having fewer children. These significant changes are making the total costs of OAS benefits increasingly difficult to sustain and afford for tomorrow's workers and taxpayers.

The chief actuary forecasts that the number of OAS recipients will nearly double from 2010 to 2030, from 4.8 million to 9.3 million individuals. Today, there are four Canadians working for every retired person. In 2030 the ratio will be two to one. In essence, about the same number of workers as today will be supporting twice as many seniors by 2030.

In this light, it is our view that the benefits to seniors of an increased flexibility in budgeting are outweighed by the extra cost shouldered by the taxpayers. Simply put, the changes proposed in Bill C-326 are not good value for money, not in light of our need to ensure the very sustainability of OAS for future generations. This is why our government plans to increase the age of OAS eligibility from 65 to 67, to ensure the sustainability of the OAS program.

Our government has the best interests of seniors at heart, both the seniors who receive public pensions today and those who will count on them in years ahead.

However, should any doubt remain, I would like to remind the House of the government's actions on behalf of current generations of seniors.

Since 2006, this government has provided \$2.3 billion in annual tax relief to seniors and pensioners. We have introduced pension income splitting and doubled the pension income credit. We have also invested significantly in affordable housing. These changes were introduced in spite of the opposition's attempt to vote them down.

What is more, we have targeted the needs of low-income seniors through a variety of measures related to the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS.

First, seniors no longer have to apply to GIS every year. Automatic renewals exist, linked to their income tax return each year.

Second, in addition to raising the GIS twice above indexation, we introduced a top-up benefit to help the most vulnerable seniors. This represents a \$1.5 billion investment over five years, the largest increase of the GIS for our most vulnerable seniors in a quarter century.

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Third, our government is committed to Canada's economic action plan 2012 to proactively enrol seniors in OAS and to ensure that they receive the benefits to which they are entitled. This measure further enhances the financial security and well-being of more than 680,000 seniors across the country. As of last July, single seniors entitled to the GIS will receive an additional \$600 of annual benefits and couples will receive \$840.

Finally, through budget 2008, we introduced the GIS exemptions earning, from \$500 to \$3,500. This enables working GIS recipients to keep up to another \$1,500 of their benefits each year.

[*Translation*]

Our government is committed to improving the quality of life of seniors, and continues to seek ways to address their needs now and in the future.

[*English*]

To that end, we take our role as custodian of the OAS and CPP very seriously. Any changes to these programs, no matter how minor, are examined carefully to assess their potential impact, not just on seniors but on all Canadians.

We have reviewed the changes proposed in Bill C-326 and believe they cannot be justified in our current fiscal reality. Nor can we justify the risk of changes posed to the efficiency of service delivery that would be imposed at this government level, on the provinces and the other service providers.

For these reasons, our government cannot support the bill in this time of fiscal restraint, and I urge the hon. members in the House to join me in opposing it.

• (1840)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this place to speak to Bill C-326, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act (biweekly payment of benefits).

The bill seeks to amend these acts to allow for CPP and OAS benefits to be paid biweekly. It is worthy noting that this change would apply only at the request of persons receiving the benefits. In other words, it would be a matter of choice for the seniors and retirees.

Members will no doubt know this is actually the third time the bill has been brought before the House, the first time being in 2008.

Although the bill's intent is laudable, the NDP has not seen a call for such action from Canadians for such a change. Having said that, because it is voluntary, the NDP will support it.

Regarding changes to CPP, OAS and GIS, I and my fellow New Democrats have been campaigning since 2009 for much stronger action than what is contained in Bill C-326. Members will know, from reports to the House, following my appointment as pensions critic for the NDP in 2009, that I hosted two round tables of pension experts that February. These experts concluded at the time that the CPP was fine, fully funded for 75 years. As of late, the government has actually agreed with that statement. Their additional conclusion was that OAS likewise was sustainable for the long term. These panellists reached these conclusions even after considering the

impact of retiring baby boomers and what that impact would be on OAS.

Following the advice that was given us from these round tables, my staff and I turned our attention to the broader question of retirement security for all Canadians.

In June of 2009, my opposition day motion on pensions raised in the House of Commons for the first time the urgent need for an increase to GIS to raise some 300,000 seniors out of poverty.

The motion also highlighted the NDP plan for a phased-in increase of the core assets of the CPP until it reached the capacity to double its benefits that it provided to Canadians.

The motion also included a proposal for a national pension insurance fund paid for by plan holders to protect workers when companies went out of business.

Finally included in the motion was a proposal to change the ability for workers to use the legislation governing CCAA protection and actual bankruptcy proceedings under the provisions of the BIA whenever a company went into bankruptcy. This would have given workers and retirees status as creditors in order to access the company's final assets.

I am pleased to remind the House that our opposition day motion at that time was passed unanimously, with all parties in agreement, including the Conservatives.

The fact that the Conservatives so heartily supported our road map for changing Canada's retirement security program gave us hope that we would see these changes in short order. Sadly, that has not been the case. In spite of taking such an enlightened decision to support the NDP motion and in effect endorsing our plan, the Conservative government has not delivered on that promise.

During last May's election campaign, Jack Layton, our leader at the time, was clear that the NDP would follow through on our promise to raise the GIS significantly. In fact, it was the very first proposal in our platform, as was increasing the CPP. New Democrats had done a cost analysis of our plan and were prepared to move forward delivering for Canadians.

While New Democrats were being very clear on our plan, and were clear during the election campaign with respect to seniors, pensioners and those people who were planning their retirements, what did the Conservatives and the Prime Minister have to say on the retirement security of seniors during that election campaign? Did the Prime Minister or his party once raise the fact that they were planning an increase to the eligibility of OAS and GIS from 65 to 67? Of course they did not. They knew their own base of voters would oppose this unneeded attack on the poorest of the poor.

Private Members' Business

• (1845)

What will our next steps be? Although Bill C-326 offers a very modest change for Canadian citizens and seniors, we will not stand in the way of this particular bill. We also want to emphatically reiterate to Canadians that the NDP, after forming the next majority government in 2015, will rescind any motion or law that has changed the eligibility for OAS or GIS from age 65 to 67.

In the meantime, all New Democrats in this House will continue to press the Conservative government to honour its 2009 vote on our opposition day motion. We will call on the Conservatives and all members of this House to work with the NDP, in consultation with the provinces and territories, to bring forward the measures that are necessary to establish a phased-in doubling of Canada pension plan benefits.

We are looking forward as well to working constructively with the government, using my Bill C-331, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (pension plans), as a template for changing the CCAA and the BIA to protect retirees' pensions during CCAA or bankruptcy proceedings. I do believe that this would bring a significant change to employers' understanding regarding pension assets. They do not realize at this point in time that these are deferred wages and that they should belong solely to the workers. That change in view or ideology, however we want to propose it, is a hurdle that we have to get over as Canadians in dealing with the assets of companies that happen to have the misfortune of going under.

To the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, I want to say that the New Democrats will be supporting Bill C-326 as it moves forward through the House. We are also looking forward to all of the advances that we can make together to better the lives of Canadian seniors and retirees.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, along with my colleagues in the NDP, I am very pleased as the critic for seniors to be able to stand here in support of Bill C-326 brought forward by my colleague, the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. There I would note that we do indeed have long names for some of the wonderful, beautiful parts of our country.

I find it ironic that we are dealing with Bill C-326 now, after seeing the budget few days ago and knowing that the government is going to change the age of retirement for future seniors and baby boomers in Canada. I think it is a real step backwards from where we want to be as a country.

Given that the government has announced its plan to slash seniors' benefits, I am especially keen to discuss this measure, as it would actually help low income seniors rather than hurt them. It is a simple thing to do and not a complicated issue. It is not going to cost a lot of money. All it is going to do is to help some of the people out there who truly need help.

Let me be clear on Bill C-326. It is not suggesting that we pay seniors half as much, but rather that we pay seniors in shorter intervals. I think we all know the difficulties when a cheque cannot be stretched until the end of the month. My colleague outlined many good examples, including one of his constituents.

It is very sad to think that seniors in this country today, in this rich country of ours called Canada, have to try to manage to get through the month in order to be able to buy medication. It is absolutely outrageous that anyone is living like that, especially seniors.

I understand that many of my colleagues on the other side of the House like the idea of finding ways to reduce what we provide to baby boomers and seniors, but the document that attacks seniors is the Conservative budget. In contrast, Bill C-326 actually helps seniors by adding some flexibility to how they set up their household finances. It is not complicated; it sounds pretty normal.

The OAS is currently delivered by a monthly cheque of approximately \$540.12 to those who get the maximum OAS benefit, which most people actually do not get. Then if they qualify, which many of the seniors we are talking about do, they would get the maximum GIS of \$732, albeit which many people do not get. The total would be \$1,272 a month. We are talking about giving it to them on a bi-weekly basis, the way lots of us pay lots of our bills.

To stretch that \$1,272 over a whole month would be tough, I would suggest, for any one of us, never mind talking about a senior citizen who quite possibly has health issues to deal with, and who knows what else. Most financial planners tell us that people struggle to set up and maintain an effective monthly household budget. With less than \$293 per week, this task gets even harder for those over the age of 65.

Paying seniors twice per month would help seniors to budget and plan more effectively and to have a little more comfort in their homes. More money would help, and we all understand that.

We have talked about all of the other countries that are changing their pension systems, but many of them have very rich pensions. Seniors living in Norway get 66% of their income replaced. In Canada, we give people 25%, and now we want to make them wait an extra two years to even get that. Some think we have an over-generous system of looking after our seniors, but we clearly do not.

Canadian seniors and baby boomers have worked and contributed to this nation for generations, so we should do whatever we can to ensure that they get to live with some dignity in retirement. This is why I have written a white paper on pension reform and a pension income bill of rights, and it is why I oppose this 2012 budget.

In contrast to Bill C-326, budget 2012 is an outright betrayal of seniors and baby boomers. It is a betrayal for many reasons, one of them being that this Prime Minister campaigned on a promise to protect seniors' pensions. With his most recent budget, the Prime Minister has jammed his hands deep into the pockets of tomorrow's seniors and baby boomers. Even more, budget 2012 is a betrayal because it is a step closer to throwing seniors to the wolves.

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The minister said it is about choices. On that we are in agreement: governing is all about choices. We make our choices, the government makes its choices but it is the government. Clearly its choices are jets and jails in contrast to helping seniors. The government chose to limit the choices seniors and baby boomers have and Bill C-326 is about increasing choices for seniors. Of course, the government will oppose any effort to help low income seniors, because it has already charted its course and that, obviously, does not include a serious role for government and helping the most vulnerable in society.

• (1850)

Unfortunately, this is typical Conservative dishonesty, saying one thing at election time and 11 months later making major changes to this country when it comes to retirement planning. Even worse, it is doing it at a time when it has been discovered that the Prime Minister himself is preparing to cash in on a very special deal that only the PM gets, which is a taxpayer-funded annual retirement bonus worth nine times the OAS. That is \$100,000 per year over and above his investments and the MP pension plan. I do not think that any prime minister should be getting this, never mind one who has tabled an austerity budget that is chopping seniors' benefits and making them wait an extra two years.

I know my pleas tonight are going to fall on deaf ears when it comes to the front bench, but is there no one on the back bench who really cares about seniors? If so, he or she should stand and support this bill. It is a good bill that will be helpful. It will make life a little easier and is not going to cost the government any money, if that is what those members are worried about. Bill C-326 is one way of mitigating the damage being done by the budget. Conservatives are asking seniors to do more with less, so we should at least give them the tools they need to manage.

Bill C-326 is a step toward helping seniors manage their households more effectively. That is all it is. It is very important for those on the other end getting the cheques. It is not a \$100,000 stipend like the Prime Minister is going to get, but it will be a helping hand for many seniors. In an era when the government is determined to slash what is available for the lowest income seniors, Bill C-326 deserves a look by all of us in the House.

I want to congratulate the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor for his ongoing work for seniors. He is constantly raising seniors issues with me, and constantly talks about how his constituents are struggling and how much they are looking to him for leadership to make a difference. I am pleased to lend my support to Bill C-326 and would say to all members in the House that if we are doing nothing good for seniors this whole year, let us at least do this. Let us make it a little easier for them. I hope we will all vote to pass this bill.

• (1855)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government cannot support Bill C-326. It is not in the best interests of Canadians nor in the best interests of seniors or taxpayers.

I know the bill itself proposes that, rather than having the payments monthly, they would be made biweekly. The member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor would say it is a small

thing, in terms of the change. However, it is a big thing, in terms of the costs that would be involved and what would be passed on to taxpayers. The member for York West, who was for a short time minister of human resources, would know that these matters administratively cost a lot of money. There is a lot of bureaucracy involved. These proposed changes would needlessly increase expenses and add to the bureaucratic administration of the government at a time when we are looking at ways to reduce spending and ensure more efficient operation of government.

Let me assure members in the House that as a government, we are committed to ensuring Canadians receive the benefits to which they are eligible. There is no question about that. That is why we brought in automatic renewal of the OAS and GIS for seniors who file a tax return.

We also announced in our economic action plan 2012 that we would be proactively enrolling Canadians for their old age security benefits to ensure that every senior receives their full entitlement. We are acting to ensure that government services are streamlined, efficient and take less effort for Canadians to receive the services they deserve.

The current system of monthly payments is the most efficient way to administer old age security and Canada pension plan programs. While we can never be sure exactly how many seniors would take advantage of a biweekly payment schedule, it would not be unrealistic to expect we would almost double the number of transactions for CPP and OAS benefits. Service Canada and Public Works and Government Services Canada estimate that the total cost would increase by \$40 million to \$50 million per year. It is a small change maybe, but potentially quite costly. We certainly have to take that into account when we are considering streamlining government and reducing expenses.

In this time of fiscal restraint, our government is committed to delivering the highest quality service in a way that is efficient, effective and focused on the needs of Canadians. As we recently highlighted in Canada's economic action plan 2012, the government has recently completed significant reviews aimed at reducing government bureaucracy.

The most immediate exercise was the government's deficit reduction action plan. This exercise examined government spending to reduce overlap redundancy in administrative costs and ensure value for taxpayer dollars. This review demonstrated our resolve as a government to put taxpayers first, while making strategic choices to ensure efficient government spending well into the future.

The second exercise was the red tape panel that led to a one-to-one rule. The principle is quite simple. Every time the government creates a regulation, the department has to eliminate a regulation. This would make interaction with government much more efficient, while also simplifying the administration of government.

I do not understand why the member opposite would like to add to the bureaucratic processes of government. We recognize that today's seniors have played, and continue to play, a vital role in Canadian society. There is no doubt about that. By working hard throughout their lives and paying taxes, they have contributed to Canada's strong fiscal foundation. They continue to contribute by offering their wisdom, their talent and their time in their communities. They are role models for all of us.

Our government is committed to improving the well-being of Canadian seniors. We are certainly open to exploring ways to better assist these respected and valued members of our communities now and into the future. We have made provision for the retirement benefits to be more convenient for seniors.

However, we must question whether the measures proposed in Bill C-326 would address the real problem.

Does the monthly payment system really need fixing? Would a biweekly system really give value for money? If not, it would be irresponsible for us to impose yet another layer of process and drive up unnecessary spending at a time when taxpayers expect us to be prudent in handling their hard-earned money.

Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to complete Canada's economic recovery and return to balanced budgets. This is exactly what we are doing.

● (1900)

Payment processing already involves several departments acting in conjunction. There is more involved than most would think. The processing cost of a single cheque or direct deposit may not seem like much when looked at in isolation, but when the government is issuing millions of cheques and deposits each month, it becomes a whole different matter.

The changes could actually have unintended consequences for seniors that are not desirable. The proposed changes would also increase the burden on the system, just as we are facing increased financial pressures from a growing population of seniors. As members of the House are well aware, the first of Canada's baby boomer generation started to turn 65 in 2011. Within less than two decades, almost one in four Canadians will be over 65. Looking at these numbers alone, the coming challenges are evident. It is important to understand that distributing benefits to seniors requires a lot of organization and coordination.

To ensure the efficient delivery of all benefit payments, Service Canada works in partnership with Public Works and Government Services Canada, Canada Post and the banking sector to coordinate the financial transfers of benefits payments. Each organization has developed work plans around a payment date that is the third last banking day of each month.

This practice of paying all benefits at the end of the month was adopted to provide the best service possible in a cost-effective way. Monthly payments are the commonly accepted standard for government benefits. I want to point out that most federal benefits are paid out on a monthly basis: benefits paid by Veterans Affairs Canada, the universal child care benefit and the child tax benefit, among others. Monthly payments are also typical in programs for

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seniors in the majority of countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Payments made monthly are also the norm for most seniors benefits in Canada at the provincial and territorial level. Let me expand on this last point quickly. There are several provincial and territorial programs that base their benefit level on an individual's OAS and GIS payments. If we changed things at the federal level, it would mean that the systems at the provincial level would also need to be changed to reflect this fact. In the highly automated environment governments operate in today, something that may seem like a small change can have a considerable ripple effect.

In a time of spending restraints it would be difficult to justify the costs involved in changing the system, based on an argument of convenience in changing it from monthly to biweekly.

We fully understand the importance of a secure and dignified retirement for hard-working Canadians. OAS and CPP are the first two pillars of Canada's retirement income system and play a significant role in providing income security to Canadians in their senior years. There can be no question of our commitment to ensure that Canadians receive the benefits for which they are eligible and entitled. However, the change proposed in Bill C-326 would further complicate the system without addressing any pressing need.

The additional cost involved would only draw funding away to underwrite the administrative process. These funds could be better spent on measures that would truly help seniors and other Canadians.

For these reasons our government is in favour of keeping the legislated monthly payment schedule of CPP and OAS. My colleagues and I cannot support Bill C-326. It would be an irresponsible use of taxpayers' dollars.

I would urge members opposite to reconsider their position, to look at the ramifications of what they are suggesting, to look at the millions of cheques and deposits that have to be made, the numbers of departments that would be involved and the bureaucracy that it would take to get there. I urge them to reconsider whether they want to spend those kinds of dollars, those kinds of efforts and that kind of energy to achieve merely the advanced payment from monthly to biweekly when the system we have now is working. It is timely, it has developed, it is something people have come to expect and something that has been a common practice in other areas as well. Other services use that model. It has been something Canadians have accepted over the years and it is something that the opposition should look at. That money could be better spent doing other things for seniors or other members of the Canadian public.

I would ask them to reconsider their position and not proceed with this unnecessary amendment at this time.

● (1905)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, I must inform him that I will have to interrupt him at 7:08pm at the conclusion of time provided for private members' business.

The hon. member for Mr. Alain Giguère has the floor.

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Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague who spoke before me, and I am extremely disappointed. He is talking about a little detail that may be important in future: an administrative expense.

By pushing back the age of retirement, the government decided this week to cut the funds allocated to the guaranteed income supplement, old age security and the Canada pension plan by \$10.8 billion. Ten billion, eight hundred million dollars. It did not ask itself a lot of questions about the administrative problems this might cause for the people who would not be receiving that money.

Last year, the government refused to help the Nortel and AbitibiBowater employees and the employees of several other companies who lost their pension funds. That is another little administrative problem. It is called being able to make ends meet at the end of the month. Unfortunately, those people cannot do that, because this government decided again that this little administrative problem was too important for them.

Bill C-326 is merely a small gesture, a little administrative reform, one that is technical, if not cosmetic. It is simply a matter of arranging for benefits to be paid every two weeks. We are not asking for a miracle. We simply want Canada pension plan payments to be made twice a month. This is simply to give recipients some financial flexibility in their day-to-day budgeting.

This request has been made by numerous retirees. It is a matter of replying to a very simple request. People do not want to find themselves constantly in busy pharmacies all at the same time and tripping over one another at the bank. They want there to be a little rotation. There is nothing difficult or extraordinarily costly about this.

I would have liked these people who are quick to make budget cuts to think at least once, just once, about the people who need a favour.

It is not so extraordinary to ask for this gesture after everything the government has taken away from them. After everything it has taken away, the least it could have done would have been to agree to this little reform. It adds nothing to the cheques. Poor people will still be just as poor, but they could manage their grocery and drug purchases better. This is not an extraordinary request, but the government has refused it.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities what he intended to do in order to preserve one of the most important port facilities in my riding, the

Portneuf wharf. Today, I hope to obtain a clearer answer to the questions I asked some weeks ago.

This wharf, which was built in the 1950s, is today in desperate need of repairs in order to keep it safe for the public. It has raised a number of concerns: the structure requires major repairs in certain places, and work must commence as quickly as possible.

The water in which the wharf's structure sits must also be decontaminated because the creosote wood used during the wharf's construction contaminated the surrounding water.

The wharf is particularly important for the Portneuf region and the entire population. In addition to being the longest deep water wharf in Canada, it is important to the tourism industry and to businesses in the City of Portneuf. The wharf provides the public with access to the river, and anyone who has had the opportunity to visit Portneuf—and I hope that there are many of you here today—will attest to the fact that the view from the wharf of the Saint Lawrence River is uninterrupted.

The wharf is an object of pride for the residents of Portneuf and an integral part of my region's heritage. This infrastructure must be conserved at all costs.

The City of Portneuf has been trying to buy the wharf back from the federal government since 2009. The negotiations between the municipality and Transport Canada were part of the port divestiture program, which ended only a couple of days ago. The program would have enabled the city to become the owner of the port facilities once the federal government carried out the necessary repairs. The repairs were a prerequisite to divesting the wharf to the municipality.

As I mentioned, the negotiations started in September 2009, and discussions were advancing quite well. A pre-transfer agreement was even reached between the municipality and the federal government. However, in July 2010, Transport Canada decided to put an end to the negotiations because of the huge costs involved in decontaminating and repairing the site in order to make it safer. These costs were discovered after a report was commissioned by the municipality to determine the future of the Portneuf wharf.

Since July 2010, the municipality of Portneuf has been trying to resume negotiations with Transport Canada, but with no success. The mayor of Portneuf is trying to get answers, but it is impossible for him to speak with anyone at Transport Canada. And so, because it is apparently not possible to speak directly to the minister, I put a question on the order paper several weeks ago, asking the minister whether the department wanted to divest itself of the wharf or keep it, and what would become of the repairs needed in order for the wharf to last and of responsibility for environmental liability issues if it kept the wharf or divested it. In writing, I learned that the department wanted to divest itself of the wharf, and I was referred to the criteria for the port divestiture program. When I asked the question orally, the minister replied that the program was already over, although I had asked him the question at the beginning of March. He tells me that all of the funds have already been committed.

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At this point, there has got to be a clear answer, because the two answers are completely inconsistent, and the people in my riding need an answer. If the department intends to transfer the wharf to the municipality, the minister has to act, and quickly. However, if it wants to keep the wharf, the municipality will not oppose that; quite the contrary, it would like a commitment to preserving the wharf. I would like to get some slightly clearer answers on this.

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Portneuf wharf is a regional and local port that Transport Canada has been trying to transfer into the port divestiture program since the program was established in 1995. Over the past 15 years, this matter has undergone a series of examinations.

The various options respecting the wharf's future have been the subject of numerous discussions with the municipality of Portneuf, the regional municipality for the county, the Government of Quebec, experts, developers and the wharf's main user, which is now operating out of the port of Quebec.

It should be noted that Transport Canada carried out repairs to the wharf at a cost of around \$500,000 in 2007-08 so that this user could come back and resume its operations at Portneuf wharf.

Future commercial transportation at the wharf faces major obstacles. The residents of Portneuf have been concerned about the impact of substantial quantities of bulk products being transported by water, which could have resulted in heavy truck traffic in the municipality, with considerable impacts for residents. In addition, the proximity of the port's operations alongside the recreational marina adjacent to the wharf raised other concerns.

After analyzing the number of possible solutions over a number of years, including the feasibility of putting a conveyor system in place to reduce the impact of bulk transshipments, stakeholders proposed demolishing the wharf completely and building a new, smaller berth for use by tourist vessels each year. This would cost approximately \$15 million.

I recognize the considerable efforts that local stakeholders have made to find a solution for the wharf's future and would like to assure the member that Transport Canada's regional office lent its support throughout each stage of this process, which has a 15 year history.

When there are conclusive economic advantages, Transport Canada can participate in the implementation of solutions that have economic benefits and demonstrate the sound management of public funds.

Therefore, all other solutions brought forward by the municipality of Portneuf will have to demonstrate how the economic repercussions of such projects justify investment. The chosen solution will have to comply with environmental requirements, be sustainable and provide financial autonomy.

Since the port divestiture program contributes to Canada's economic action plan, the program has been refinanced until the end of March 2014. This gives the people of Portneuf an opportunity

to reassess the options in order to find a solution that is compatible with the framework of the port divestiture program, the allocated budget and the March 2014 deadline.

We recognize the tremendous efforts made by local stakeholders to find a solution to the future of the wharf. The member can rest assured that Transport Canada's regional office has collaborated at all steps in this process made over the past 15 years and it will continue to fulfill its responsibilities with respect to ensuring the safety and environmental protection of Portneuf wharf, regardless of which solution is chosen for its future.

● (1915)

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for her answer, which contained a great deal of misinformation.

If Transport Canada had really cooperated at every stage of the process with the municipality of Portneuf, the department would not have stopped negotiations in July 2010 on the basis of the environmental costs it was going to have to bear.

I do however have a question to ask her. Early in the week, divers were seen by representatives of the municipality at the Portneuf wharf. After looking into the matter, it turns out that these divers were sent by Public Works and Government Services Canada to carry out safety evaluations of the wharf. I would like a little more detail about this process. Are there new projects slated for the wharf in the near future? Does the government intend to carry out repairs? I would like some clarification on this.

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to demonstrate the good management of public funds, and with respect to the allocation of financial resources available under the port divestiture program, priority was given to the divesting port facilities owned by the federal government to interested stakeholders, including local municipalities or provincial governments.

After several years of analysis of a variety of options, the member must understand that Transport Canada, whose mission is to develop an efficient transport system, can hardly participate in the development of a solution adopted by the city of Portneuf valued at approximately \$15 million since this option has no link with the commercial transportation of goods.

The port divestiture program has been extended for a period of two years until March 31, 2014. As a result, any potential solution proposed by the city of Portneuf must demonstrate that the economic benefits of such a project justify the magnitude of the sums to be invested. The solution chosen by the parties must comply with all requirements of environmental sustainability and financial independence.

Members can rest assured that Transport Canada will continue to fulfill its responsibilities with respect to ensuring the safety and environmental protection of the Portneuf wharf, regardless of which solution is chosen for its future.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will begin with a comment about the accusation by the Minister of Justice that I or members of the New Democratic Party do not value or appreciate the work done by individuals sitting on the judicial advisory committees.

I do appreciate all the hard work by these men and women. All New Democrats know that the justice system would not function without the hard work of judicial advisory committees. Unfortunately, instead of answering my question, the minister decided to take an undignified pot shot and make unfounded allegations. I am hopeful that I will get an answer to my question today and not just more rhetoric.

I will refresh members' memories. My question was specifically about women on federal judiciary advisory committees and I asked why women were being overlooked as advisors to the government for appointments of federal judges. There are in fact only 6 women among the 52 people appointed. The ripple effect of this is staggering. It is mostly men on the committees and they are choosing our judges and, consequently, choosing mostly male federal judges.

I will give the House some numbers. In 2011, 8 women were chosen and 41 men. In 2010, 13 female judges were appointed and 37 male judges. As of the end of last year, 356 female were federal judges out of a total of over 1,100 judges, which is about 31%. The number of female judges appointed has actually dropped under the Conservative banner with only 19% in 2011. This is a drastic drop in comparison to previous governments where female appointments were up to about 40%.

These numbers cannot be shrugged off with a "Well, more men are in the profession." Females are increasingly outnumbering the number of men graduating from law schools. The past president of the Canadian Bar Association, Rod Snow, recognizes the gender imbalance in Canadian judicial circles. He said specifically that the number of women on the bench still did not fully reflect the gender balance in the country or in the profession.

I want to emphasize the point that there are many women in the legal profession. In Ontario in 2010, 54% of lawyers under age 40 were women. Women make up 44% of lawyers in the 40 to 49 age category. The numbers do fall off a bit when we get to 50 to 65 but only to about 29%.

I do want to say that women's voices need to be heard, women's opinions add value and women need to be represented on judicial boards and appointed as judges.

I will repeat my question in the hope of getting an answer. Only 20% of judicial appointees are women. This problem will not be fixed until there is more diversity on the advisory committees. The troubling truth is that two provinces, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, do not have any women on federal judiciary advisory committees. Canadians expect their judiciary to be more diverse and to reflect Canada. More women than ever are pursuing careers in law.

Why will the Conservative government not make gender equality a priority?

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to revisit the figures and clarify the important facts.

[*English*]

The hon. member has her figures wrong, and I speak as someone who was called to the bar 32 years ago, was a past president of the B.C. branch of the Canadian Bar Association and is now the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

In fact, of the 1,114 federally appointed judges active as of February 1, 2012, 32% are women, with one-third of our federal bench now composed of women. We have come a long way since the first federal appointment of a female judge in 1943. Indeed, the government has continued to make important strides in increasing gender diversity on our Superior Court benches.

Since February 1, 2006, the proportion of women on the bench rose from 29% to 32%, of full-time sitting judges that number increases to 36%, a clear indicator of the upward trend. In fact, all four of the full-time members of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories are women.

[*Translation*]

I would invite the hon. member to consider the situation at the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court reflects Canada's true diversity. Every region is represented at the Supreme Court by judges with diverse training backgrounds in both systems. The two official languages can be found there, as can a dialogue between these traditions.

[*English*]

The Supreme Court of Canada serves as a model of diversity and legal excellence throughout the world. The first appointment of a female judge to the Supreme Court of Canada, Bertha Wilson, occurred in 1982. Today, four of the nine judges of the Supreme Court, including our Chief Justice, are women, most recently, Madam Justice Karakatsanis from the Ontario Court of Appeal. No other high court in the Commonwealth, indeed in the common law world, can claim the benefit of such strong female representation.

These statistics underscore the government's firm commitment to achieving diversity, including gender representation, on our superior court benches. Canadians may be proud of the advances that have been made in increasing the representation of certain groups, particularly women, on the bench.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe has made particular reference to the composition of certain judicial advisory committees which assess each lawyer's qualifications for the bench. She attributes her allegations of under-representation of women on our benches to the current committee composition particularly in two provinces. In saying this, the hon. member appears to suggest that only women are committed to gender equality and the goal of achieving a representative bench.

Adjournment Proceedings

Such a suggestion does a real disservice to the committed members of these committees who give up a significant amount of their free time without compensation to make this important contribution. These committees are a key mechanism for achieving a representative bench. In making their assessments, committee members are asked to consider each candidate's awareness of racial and gender issues as well as their ability to remain neutral while hearing all sides of an argument.

It is important to recognize that the composition of these committees is designed to reflect factors appropriate to each jurisdiction, such as geography, language, multiculturalism and gender. As such, the composition is intended to provide an important balance of perspectives on what makes a good judge.

Representatives on these committees, of course, come from nominations from the judiciary, the legal community, such as the Canadian Bar Association, representatives of the provincial and territorial attorneys general, and also federally appointed members. They also include lay members from the community who provide a valuable broader perspective.

We are fortunate indeed to have so many committed judicial advisory committee members, men and women who are willing to undertake this important role in the public interest.

• (1925)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say that I am surprised by the member's answer. The government's record speaks volumes. It has failed women time and time again.

With cuts to Status of Women Canada, dismantling of the gun registry, the elimination of funding for Sisters in Spirit, the cuts to funding for women's advocacy organizations and the elimination of the court challenges program, women's rights have repeatedly taken a back seat under the Conservative government's watch. This is a disservice and a mistake.

Women have come a long way, but full equality remains out of reach. A good step toward breaching the equality "glass ceiling" would be for the Conservative government to appoint qualified women to the judicial advisory committees and ensure that qualified female judges are appointed to federal courts.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the federal judicial appointments process has incorporated several mechanisms designed to encourage greater diversity within the federal judiciary. First, efforts have been made to make the application process open and accessible to all. All law societies are regularly approached by the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs to publicize the procedures for application. The commissioner's office has been active in promoting the process among minority groups, both at meetings and in writing. In addition, members of the legal community and all other interested persons and organizations are encouraged to submit to the commissioner the names of persons they consider qualified for judicial office. The commissioner will then send application materials to the nominee.

I have already talked about the provincial and territorial advisory committees, which are expressly mandated to consider and promote diversity in their assessment of applications for the bench. The Minister of Justice also welcomes the advice of interested groups and

informed individuals on particular appointments, especially in the furtherance of achieving a representative bench.

This is not an easy challenge, nor one that is isolated to judicial appointments. Canadian law societies, legal professional associations, such as the Canadian Bar Association, and all those committed to the excellence of our legal system are struggling with how to ensure that women not only continue to graduate from law school in record numbers but remain in practice to strengthen the profession and the administration of justice.

HOUSING

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise in the House this evening to seek clarity on the issue of affordable housing and the answer I received some weeks ago by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

[*Translation*]

We need to address the housing crisis that currently exists in every city across Canada.

• (1930)

[*English*]

Indeed, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has identified the lack of affordable rental housing as a crisis in this country that affects not just big cities and not just small towns but also rural municipalities from coast to coast to coast. This is the reality in Canada and is the subject of the question I asked the minister around affordable housing and the crisis, the fact that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are in core housing need.

The answer we got, which was rather laughable in my view, was that the government is building some and renovating some.

When we look at the budget that was just released, what we see is that in the last year of the economic action plan there were no investments in affordable housing, not one dollar.

In this budget we also see cuts to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

We also know that we will see further cuts to social housing. However, it is not just social housing; it is middle-class families who cannot afford to buy a house.

To a previous question I asked the minister, the answer that came back was that the affordable housing issue had been solved because interest rates are low and people can buy houses, as if that somehow magically solves the problem of affordable housing.

Whatever the government and the minister have said about affordable housing and the government's commitment to it has rung utterly false, not just in the House but right across the country, because the facts have not changed, as one of our colleagues across the way likes to say. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians are in core housing need, and the government does not have a plan.

Adjournment Proceedings

A few weeks ago, we presented a national housing strategy. One of the key issues included in that was for the government to convene a meeting with all the stakeholders on the housing issue. It would not cost a lot, especially if the government does not go too wild on the hors d'oeuvres. It should include provincial ministers, those in municipal affairs who are responsible for housing, aboriginal communities, non-profit and private sector housing providers and civil society organizations, including those that represent groups in need of adequate housing, in order to try to understand and come to terms with an overall strategy that would actually deal with housing instead of just the spin we get from the government.

It is not just me saying this. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has underlined this as one of the key issues affecting all its members from coast to coast to coast.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for Davenport on the issue of affordable housing.

Our government has made unprecedented investments in affordable housing over the past six years. The facts are clear. Since 2006, the federal government has invested an estimated \$9.5 billion in housing programs. These investments have benefited low income Canadian seniors, persons with disabilities, recent immigrants, aboriginal people and those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The largest portion of federal funding for housing, \$1.7 billion a year, helps ensure that households living in existing social housing can continue to afford their homes. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which administers this funding on behalf of the Government of Canada, reports that almost 615,000 households benefit from this federal investment.

Our government also recognizes that investments are needed in new affordable housing and other solutions that reduce the number of Canadians with housing needs. This is why in 2008 we committed \$1.9 billion over five years to improve existing housing and build new affordable housing to help the homeless.

[Translation]

As part of this investment, the affordable housing initiative and the federal renovation programs for low-income households were extended for two years.

We then sat down with the provinces, territories and other stakeholders to determine the best way of using the funds over the remaining three years of the five-year commitment. This led to the announcement in July of the Framework for Investment in Affordable Housing.

• (1935)

[English]

When provincial and territorial investments are included, this framework provides for a combined investment of more than \$1.4 billion over three years toward reducing the number of Canadians with housing needs.

I am pleased to note today that bilateral agreements have been signed with most provinces and territories to implement this

framework agreement. As a result, funds are flowing to programs and projects in communities all across the country.

The government's commitment to affordable housing was also evident during the stimulus phase of Canada's economic action plan, which included the investment of more than \$2 billion in additional funding over two years. This money went toward renovating and repairing existing social housing; building new affordable housing for low income seniors, people with disabilities and northerners; and to address housing needs on reserve. All together, these investments have supported more than 14,000 social housing and first nations housing projects.

In first nations communities, more than \$400 million in federal funding is invested in housing on reserve each year, funding that is used to subsidize existing rental housing, build new homes and renovate existing housing as repairs are needed.

In response to a question from the hon. member for Davenport last December, the minister stated that all Canadians deserved a warm, safe place to live. The investments our government has made and continues to make demonstrate that we are doing our part to make sure this happens.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her comments and for sticking around tonight. I appreciate it.

However, the answer she has given me is perplexing. We know the statistics, that 44% of first nations living on reserve live in dwellings that need major repairs. According to the Native Counselling Services of Alberta, the aboriginal homeless rate is at about 40% Canada wide. Moreover, 15% of Canada's homeless population is aboriginal.

At some point the government has to come to terms with the fact that whatever it thinks it is doing around housing, it is not working. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians are either in core housing need or are homeless, or cannot afford the place they are living in. The government continues to ignore the issue of affordable housing, not just in our big cities but also in our rural municipalities and small towns.

We have to do something about that. We on this side have a national housing strategy, and we think that it would be the right first step.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, our record speaks for itself. As the minister and others have stated in the House time and time again, our government has made unprecedented investments in housing since 2006. Working with other governments, stakeholders, not-for-profits and the private sector, we have made real differences in the lives of tens of thousands of Canadian families.

Adjournment Proceedings

We continue to invest in housing programs. Through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Government of Canada will invest more than \$2 billion in support of housing this year. This includes \$1.7 billion to support 615,000 households living in existing social housing. These investments demonstrate our commitment to affordable housing and deserve the support of hon. members on all sides of the House.

Despite the fact we have specific funding for affordable housing for seniors and the disabled and those on and off reserve, the opposition parties, including the NDP members, have voted against

all of these items to help Canadians. Hence, I actually find it quite surprising to have received the question tonight from the member opposite.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:39 p.m.)

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