



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 201 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, January 31, 2013

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, January 31, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

STATUTES REPEAL ACT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) and section 2 of the Statutes Repeal Act, I am tabling, in both official languages, the 2013 annual report under the Statutes Repeal Act.

* * *

SUCCESSION TO THE THRONE ACT, 2013

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-53, An Act to assent to alterations in the law touching the Succession to the Throne.

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

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, it is my duty and honour to inform the House that His Excellency the Governor General, having been informed of the purport of a bill entitled “An Act to assent to alterations in the law touching the Succession to the Throne”, has given his consent as far as Her Majesty's prerogatives may be affected to the consideration by Parliament of the bill, and that Parliament may do therein as it thinks fit.

* * *

UNITED KINGDOM'S SUCCESSION TO THE THRONE LEGISLATION

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table, in both official languages, the text of the United Kingdom's Succession to the Crown bill dated January 30, 2013, including a French version of the text that was ably prepared by the Department of Justice.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 36th report of the Standing Committee and Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of the committees of this House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 36th report later this day.

* * *

TAMIL HERITAGE MONTH ACT

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-471, An Act to designate the month of January as Tamil Heritage Month.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to introduce this bill that will designate the month of January as Tamil Heritage Month.

This month is celebrated throughout the country by the more than 300,000 Canadians of Tamil heritage, as we recognize the cultural, political and economic contributions of Tamil Canadians in our communities.

I would like to acknowledge the organizations and individuals in Scarborough—Rouge River and across the country, who have organized events during this month, for the pride they take in our Tamil heritage. I am so pleased that this bill would enshrine Tamil Heritage Month into federal legislation.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the 36th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier today be concurred in.

Business of Supply

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have one petition to table today. A few months ago, CBC revealed that ultrasounds are being used in Canada to tell the sex of an unborn child, so the parents can choose to terminate the pregnancy in the case where the unborn child is a girl.

The petitioners note that 92% of Canadians believe that sex selective pregnancy termination is wrong and should be ended. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to support Motion M-408 to condemn discrimination against females occurring through sex selective pregnancy termination.

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to table a petition from residents of Winnipeg North who are asking the government to maintain the retirement age at 65 as opposed to increasing it to age 67. In essence, the residents of Winnipeg North believe in our social pension programs of OAS, GIS and CPP and want the Prime Minister to respect them for what they are and to enhance them as opposed to taking them away.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also am honoured to present a petition from my constituents. It says that sex selection is condemned by all the national parties, that the Conservative government condemns sex selection and that the NDP says it highlights the discrimination between men and women. They call on Parliament to condemn this worst form of discrimination against females by condemning sex selection.

* * *

• (1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ABORIGINAL CANADIANS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP) moved:

That the House, recognizing the broad-based demand for action, call on the government to make the improvement of economic outcomes of First Nations, Inuit and Métis a central focus of Budget 2013, and to commit to action on treaty

implementation and full and meaningful consultation on legislation that affects the rights of Aboriginal Canadians, as required by domestic and international law.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

The reason the NDP has brought the motion forward today is that what we have seen, both from Conservatives and Liberals, is years of broken promises. We are seeing continuing poverty in first nation, Métis and Inuit communities. We are seeing a grassroots movement from coast to coast to coast, like Idle No More, signifying that people on the ground are simply tired of these broken promises. We have seen the Assembly of First Nations put forward an eight-point plan and we have seen a 13-point declaration of commitment that is called, “First Nations: Working Towards Fundamental Change”.

In this context, New Democrats felt it was important for us to bring this matter to the House and to have a fulsome debate about three key elements: that is, economic development, treaties and duty to consult.

I am going to focus on those three elements in my brief 10 minutes.

I want to begin with economic development, and I want to refer to the report of the Auditor General from 2011. In that report, the Auditor General indicated it is clear that living conditions are poorer on first nation reserves than anywhere else in Canada. The Auditor General went on to indicate in the report that the department agreed with that and had developed a community well-being index, based upon a United Nations' measure. In 2010, the department reported that the index showed little or no progress in the well-being of first nation communities between 2001 and 2006. Instead, the average well-being of those communities continued to rank significantly below that of other Canadian communities.

Conditions on too many reserves are poor and have not improved significantly and, of course, the Auditor General went on to criticize government performance and to recommend a number of ways in which the government could move forward. Part of those ways did focus on aspects of economic development. When we are talking about economic development, there are a number of principles that have been outlined in numerous reports and studies that talk about local employment, local ownership and decision-making, reinvestment of profits in communities, local knowledge and skill development, positive environmental impact and increased health and well-being in the community.

It would seem to be to the government's advantage to talk about investing in things like education and infrastructure, to do that duty to consult to make sure the programs were reflecting community needs, but we have seen an ongoing absence of that kind of priority with the current government.

I mentioned there have been numerous studies. I want to touch briefly on the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. Now, this was done in the United States, but this was two decades of research that talked about the key elements that needed to be in place for first nations—in the United States at least—to have fulsome economic development. It indicated a number of matters, but I just want to touch briefly on three of them.

Sovereignty matters. When native nations make their own decisions about what development approaches to take, they consistently outperform external decision-makers on matters as diverse as governmental form, natural resources, economic development, health care and social service provision.

Institutions matter. For development to take hold, assertions of sovereignty must be backed by capable institutions of governance.

Culture matters. Successful economies stand on the shoulders of legitimate, culturally grounded institutions of self-government. Indigenous societies are diverse. Each nation must equip itself with a governing structure, economic system, policies and procedures that fit its own contemporary cultures.

Again, it seems there is a road map for the government to invest in the mechanisms that will support economic development in communities, and we only need to look at the continuing desperate conditions in some communities.

I must point out that there are first nation communities that are very successful. Westbank comes to mind. There are very good examples out there, and there are ways that some of those best practices could be made available to other communities.

●(1015)

I want to touch on treaties. I went to the government's own website on this as a starting point, and it was very interesting to read its "Fact Sheet: Treaties with Aboriginal people in Canada". It states:

The Government of Canada and the courts understand treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal people to be solemn agreements that set out promises, obligations and benefits for both parties.

Starting in 1701, in what was to eventually become Canada, the British Crown entered into solemn treaties to encourage peaceful relations between First Nations and non-Aboriginal people. Over the next several centuries, treaties were signed to define, among other things, the respective rights of Aboriginal people and governments to use and enjoy lands that Aboriginal people traditionally occupied.

Reading that statement on the government's own website, one would think the government would come to the table with an intent to respect promises that have been made over centuries. When we are talking about treaties in Canada, we have very different situations from coast to coast to coast. We have the numbered treaties, which are old treaties in this country. We have land claims. We have a situation in British Columbia where we have some modern treaties; however, a large part of British Columbia has no treaties in place.

I want to touch on three aspects of these treaties, and I will turn to the land claims coalition. Why should Canadians care about treaties? I think the coalition lays it out very well. It indicates, in part:

Fully implemented modern treaties benefit all Canadians. They clarify the terms of the ongoing relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown, and of the Crown's occupation and use in conjunction with Aboriginal peoples of their traditional lands and resources. In other words, modern treaties define how resources on traditional lands can be used and co-managed to the great benefit of all Canadians.

For Aboriginal signatories, modern treaties offer new opportunities for self-reliance, political and economic development, as well as cultural and social well-being. They are the basis for building a new and positive relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the wider Canadian society.

Having read the government's website about fulfillment of promises, one would think the land claims coalition would be celebrating the success of these land claims agreements. Instead, what has happened is that the agreements are signed and then the

Business of Supply

government walks away from the spirit and intent of those agreements. The land claims coalition has had to come together to hold the government's feet to the fire. It has raised a number of implementation issues, and because I only have 10 minutes I cannot go over all of them.

However, there are a couple of key points. It says there have been numerous reports that have reaffirmed the intent of the land claims agreements and treaties, and that these reports "...have confirmed that the Government of Canada is fulfilling neither its obligations in full under these agreements nor their spirit and intent. Consequently modern treaties are failing to achieve their overall fundamental developmental objectives". Instead, we are seeing that some of the nations have been forced into courts to try to get the government to uphold its promises.

Turning to Nunavut, it is in the courts as we speak, to try to get the government to live up to the self-government and land claims agreement.

I will touch briefly on numbered treaties. There was the proclamation back in 1763, and then we had numbered treaties signed between 1870 and 1921. On a site called Our Legacy, the section entitled "Treaties: Negotiations and Rights" outlines the continued problems with how the numbered treaties are not being respected. It says, in part, that "the government of Canada questions the original Spirit and Intent of Treaty".

We are starting to see a theme here: land claims, numbered treaties. I will get to B.C. in a minute about the spirit and intent. It continues:

It is a very simple answer. Non-Indigenous People were granted the right to live in Indigenous Peoples' territories so long as they maintained peace and respected the land. In exchange Indigenous Peoples were to receive benefits such as health care and education.

We see the government continuing to quibble about what those treaties meant instead of honouring their spirit and intent and moving the treaties that were signed decades ago into the modern day to honour those commitments.

I will touch briefly on the B.C. treaty process. I come from British Columbia, and I need to talk about this. An article titled "Report on treaty negotiations holds key to progress" says that those treaties are very important in terms of the economic development and stability in British Columbia.

There is resource development happening in British Columbia. Without movement forward on those treaties, we will not have the economic stability that is important for first nations, for Métis, for Inuit in the north, and for the rest of British Columbians and Canadians. I urge all members of this House to support this important motion.

Business of Supply

● (1020)

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I compliment the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for her initiative today. There are many positive things happening across the country. We have added eight new first nations very recently to the first nations land management regime. That means those first nations have chosen freedom from 34 sections of the Indian Act so they have control over their land and resources. Within the last two weeks, I announced the regulations that will now allow the natural gas facility at the Haisla First Nation in Kitimat to proceed, bringing jobs and economic opportunity to northwestern British Columbia and opening up markets for Canada in Asia and other places.

There are many examples, and rather than focusing on an attempt to create a negative picture, I would make that comment.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, what we have is a fundamental difference on how to move forward. The government has invested in some things; there have been some investments in education, housing and infrastructure. However, it is always top-down. If the government were serious about moving forward, it would work in a spirit of true partnership and consultation to bring first nations, Inuit and Métis up to the standard of living that the rest of Canadians expect.

If it is going so well, why have we had the Tsilhqot'in obtain leave to appeal to the Supreme Court on issues around aboriginal rights and title to the land? This is directly tied to economic development because this is a court case that has been going on for, I believe, two decades, with regard to logging in British Columbia. If it is going so well, why have Frog Lake and Mikisew Cree filed a notice of application for judicial review with the Federal Court in Ottawa with regard to Bill C-38 and Bill C-45? It is because they do not feel the government consulted appropriately around developing environmental policies, their implementation, and their impact on first nations communities.

Therefore, there is a fundamental difference about how to proceed here.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at this point I think it is important to recognize former Prime Minister Paul Martin and the Liberal government's efforts in putting together what was likely one of the greatest accomplishments within the first nations and aboriginal communities when we came up with the Kelowna accord. It was very comprehensive, dealt with many different issues and brought together many different stakeholders around the table. Many discussions were had, and ultimately an accord was reached. That was an accord that I believe would have made a huge difference in the standards of living for first nations from coast to coast. Unfortunately, at the end of the day the Kelowna accord was not implemented because the New Democrats voted with the Conservatives to defeat Prime Minister Paul Martin in the then Liberal government.

My specific question to the member is, will the NDP clearly indicate that it supported the Kelowna accord and that it would like to see it brought back to the House of Commons?

● (1025)

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has 40 seconds.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I need to remind the member that the Canadian people threw the Liberals out, not the New Democrats.

When it comes to the Kelowna accord, those investments, of course, are extremely important, and we did support the Kelowna accord. However, I need to point out to the member that it also did not deal with some fundamental aspects of relationships. It did not talk about treaties. It did not talk about land claims. It did not talk about the duty to consult. It was a good first step, but we need to move much further in terms of recognizing the nation-to-nation status within Canada, and recognizing that duty to consult and that full partnership at the table. Then, perhaps, we will be able to move forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking today in support of this important motion put forward by my colleague for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I wish to thank her for her tireless efforts and dedication. I consider it a privilege to work alongside such a strong Canadian representative in our ranks.

[English]

Today we have a motion of extreme importance before us, one that can represent the start of a better future for all Canadians, if all parties in the House seize upon this important moment.

For nearly two months we have seen the issues of indigenous nations of Canada brought to the fore in ways that have never been seen before, with the Idle No More movement. We have seen peaceful protests, combined with proud expressions of aboriginal culture, raise awareness of these issues like never before. Who knew it would be a round dance revolution that would start this discussion in earnest? This movement has brought many issues onto the public agenda, some of which we are focusing on today and that call upon the government to act immediately.

However, from my observations, Idle No More comes back to some very simple principles: respect, partnership and a better future for all who now call this land home. When we talk about respect, we are talking about respecting the treaties and subsequent agreements that the Crown and Canada have entered into with indigenous nations. When we are talking about partnership, we are talking about the relationship those treaties envisioned: two peoples working together for the prosperity of all. When we talk about a better future for all, we are talking about what is possible if we finally tackle these outstanding issues rather than leaving them to fester.

[Translation]

These principles are the very foundation of our country. Do not forget: first peoples in this country were not conquered or defeated in some major military battle. Our ancestors welcomed the newcomers to their land, shared it with them and signed treaties that would become the legal foundation for the Canada of today.

Business of Supply

These treaties that Canada and the Crown signed with aboriginal nations are an integral part of our foundational documents, along with the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We, the NDP, have been conscious of those facts for a long time now, and our policies and approaches incorporate them.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the current government. Its actions and words demonstrate that either it does not know our history or it is choosing to ignore it.

[English]

APTN News recently uncovered a staggering example of this very problem. On January 25, it reported details of a leaked confidential accounting of the Prime Minister's January 11 meeting with some first nations leaders. In that document, some very disturbing comments made by the President of the Treasury Board came to light. The document began by stating that he referred to the meeting as a meeting with “a group of at risk Canadians...”. Let that sink in for a moment. The minister of the Crown referred to the leaders and their peoples, not as Cree, Mi'kmaq, Ojibwa, Algonquin, or the proper name of any aboriginal nation; he referred to them as a group of at risk Canadians.

Some might call that a mistake, and others might call it a bad start, when restarting our foundational relationship. Most would call it disrespectful. I would hope that the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka would take the chance at some point during this debate to apologize for that poor choice of words.

Unfortunately, that was not the only comment that came from the member at that meeting. The document went on to quote the President of the Treasury Board admitting that he did not understand the treaty relationship or why that discussion needs to occur before economic development.

I have to question why the Prime Minister took a minister with such lack of knowledge into the meeting, while benching his Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who I know has a very strong grasp of the issues, into that meeting. I have a great deal of respect for the knowledge and experience of the hon. member for Labrador, and I cannot help but wonder how serious the Prime Minister is when he leaves such a resource sitting on the sidelines.

• (1030)

[Translation]

The hon. member for Labrador has considerable experience in federal and provincial government consultations. The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka and President of the Treasury Board provided a good example of his lack of knowledge. According to the media in his riding, a few days after the January 11 meeting, he explained what he meant by “consultation”. Questioned about the fact that aboriginals were not consulted about Bill C-45, he said that there was a consultation; it was called a federal election. Wrong answer.

[English]

Recently, seemingly in response to the Idle No More movement, the government has started to use some language about its duties that I have found rather worrisome. The Prime Minister and his ministers have started to say they are happy to “work with willing partners”

when it comes to dealing with outstanding aboriginal issues. The last time I checked, the Government of Canada had a duty to consult and accommodate all aboriginal peoples, not just those the government believes are willing. The government needs to understand it cannot ignore the situations it sees as more difficult. It might be harder to arrive at solutions in those cases, but it will not get any easier by simply ignoring them. As an example, why should the Innu of Labrador find that the Government of Canada will work with them because the government might consider them more willing, while the Innu from Quebec, represented by my good friend from Manicouagan, have their longstanding grievances ignored because the government is not willing to talk to them?

[Translation]

The motion before us today calls upon the government to “commit to action on treaty implementation and full and meaningful consultation on legislation that affects the rights of Aboriginal Canadians, as required by domestic and international law.” However, as we know, the Constitution and international law are continually evolving thanks to new legal instruments, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and court rulings.

I find it sad that I have to remind the House that aboriginal people are among the small number of groups that constantly have to turn to the courts to have their basic constitutional rights respected.

It is estimated that the Government of Canada spends \$300 million a year opposing the rights of aboriginal peoples before the courts. More often than not, the government loses those cases. The government has spent billions of dollars in recent decades trying to stop the inevitable, and meanwhile, court decisions are not implemented in a timely manner and progress continues to be impeded.

[English]

Earlier this month the Federal Court ruled in the Daniels decision that Métis and non-status aboriginals are Indians under the Constitution Act of 1867. This decision could have big implications once negotiations around its implementation are completed. This case was brought forward 13 years ago by the Métis leader Harry Daniels. Sadly, Harry passed away in 2004, eight years before this decision.

Thirteen years is a long time to have a case before the courts, not to mention it being very costly. For 13 years both Liberal and Conservative governments spent millions upon millions trying to deny Métis and non-status people their rights under the Constitution.

The government has yet to publicly state if it will appeal this ruling. If history is a guide, it is very likely the government will.

Some members on the government benches might be wondering what this has to do with the motion before us today. My answer is simple: one cannot properly act on implementing rights or start to take part in meaningful consultations while at the same time fighting the very concept of these rights in the courts.

Business of Supply

● (1035)

[Translation]

In closing, the Conservative government has a lot to learn about this, and I sincerely hope it will begin doing things differently so we can see some real progress. In June 2008, the Prime Minister stood in this place and apologized for residential schools, and he promised a new relationship. Nearly five years later, it is quite clear that very little has changed for the better. We can accomplish great things, and quickly, when there is political will to do so. We in the official opposition have that will.

This motion is meant to help build a better future for everyone.

Meegwetch.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I bring up the Kelowna accord because it was more than just a small step. It was a significant step that brought a different attitude toward dealing with first nations, one based on consultations and on enabling the leaders within first nation communities and others to get issues resolved.

There was well over a billion dollars put toward housing. The hon. member said there was nothing for water, but there was over \$400 million to try to deal with some water-related issues. These were substantial measures for working with first nations.

If members take shots at other political parties, whether the current or previous member, they have to be careful not to throw stones in glass houses. One could reflect on how abusive the New Democratic government is in Manitoba regarding the water claims resulting from the hydro development and the displacement that took place. It was not the New Democrats who ultimately resolved those land issues with first nations. I would highly recommend that if the New Democrats really want to do justice to the issue, they need to recognize that we have to enable the first nations' leadership to come to the table and bring their ideas forward, and to work with our first nations to make a difference.

That is what this is really all about. As much as possible, members need to encourage the government. Would the hon. member not agree that in an apolitical fashion—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask all hon. members to limit themselves to one minute and fifteen seconds during the question and comment period, please.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to hear this challenge issued to us from the other end of the House. The challenge issued by my colleague will be answered in 2015, I promise.

I am well aware of the importance of relationships. Yes, the Kelowna accord addressed some fundamental issues and sought to meet the basic needs of aboriginal communities. Congratulations on those efforts. However, they came a little too late, since the accord was signed on the weekend right before a federal election.

I would like to come back to what my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan was saying earlier. Our discussions should focus on the relationships we ought to have. Our discussions should focus on new relationships between the federal government and Canada's aboriginal peoples.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has been a tremendous leader over many years and, most recently, with the tabling of his private member's bill on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. I want to ask him a question about that. Article 19 of the declaration states:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

The government committed to the UN Declaration and I wonder if the member could speak specifically to that particular clause and what it means to that ongoing relationship.

● (1040)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, it is important to realize when reading article 19 that it concerns a process that needs to take place between member states and indigenous peoples worldwide, in this case Canada and the aboriginal peoples here. The government has a duty to consult and accommodate first nations and aboriginal peoples in this country under the Constitution. Now that norm is also part of international law. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples sets out in many articles the obligation to cooperate, to consult and to agree with indigenous peoples.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. The member's motion calls for improved economic outcomes for first nations, Inuit and Métis, and a commitment on treaty implementation and meaningful consultation on legislation with aboriginal peoples in Canada.

I am proud of our government's record on improving the lives of aboriginal people in Canada. Since 2006, our government has made unprecedented investments that will make a concrete difference in the lives of aboriginal people, including skills training, housing on reserves, potable water, schools, treaty rights, protection of the rights of women and the resolution of land claims.

For example, we have built over 30 new schools on reserve and renovated more than 200 others. We have invested in a major way in safe drinking water systems. We have built over 10,000 new homes and renovated thousands more. We have increased funding for child and family services by 25%. We have legislated that the Canadian Human Rights Act will apply to first nation individuals living on reserves. This was a glaring discriminatory provision in the Canadian Human Rights Act, which we reversed, over the objections of the opposition.

Business of Supply

We introduced legislation to improve the accountability of first nation governments to their people. We introduced legislation to create an open and transparent elections process, necessary for economic development. We have settled over 80 outstanding land claims, many of which had been languishing for 20 years in the hopper. We have invested in over 700 projects, linking aboriginals across Canada with job training and counselling services.

I have had a long history with first nations and have seen a lot of change over the years. I am very encouraged to see firsthand many examples of strong first nation leadership driving very positive change.

Aboriginal peoples represent the fastest growing population in Canada. Given the country's labour shortages and the proximity of first nation communities to resource development projects, there is a tremendous economic opportunity before us. That is why we have consistently invested in measures to improve aboriginal participation in the economy.

Like economic action plan 2012, economic action plan 2013 will be focused on jobs and opportunities for all Canadians, including first nations, Inuit and Métis.

Finding ways to ensure that first nations can benefit from resource development is a priority. It is good for first nations, for Canada, for our Métis and for our Inuit. Our government is investing in measures that will help ensure that first nations are well-positioned to take advantage of these and other economic opportunities. For example, our government has invested in over 700 initiatives to link aboriginal people with job training, mentoring and other supports. We also invest more than \$400 million annually in direct funding for aboriginal skills development and training.

My department's major projects and investment funds initiative has also contributed over \$22 million to support aboriginal participation in 87 energy and resource projects, such as hydro, mining, renewable energy and forestry. These contributions have helped create over 400 jobs and levered just over \$307 million from public and private debt and equity financing sources.

In addition to these investments, our government has worked to modernize legislation to allow first nations and aboriginal organizations to operate at the speed of business. Last year, our government introduced Bill C-27, the first nations financial transparency act to allow first nations community members access to the same basic financial information about their government and their elected officials available to all other Canadians.

● (1045)

More specifically, the bill would require first nation elected officials to publish their statements of remuneration and expenses as well as their audited consolidated financial statements. The bill would provide community members with the information required to make informed decisions about their leadership and to provide investors with the confidence they need to enter into financial partnerships with first nations.

Now that the legislation is before the Senate committee, we hope to see it passed into law very soon.

The first nations financial transparency act was driven by grassroots first nation members who were calling for greater accountability from their governments. Many of these people have suffered retribution, including intimidation and verbal and physical abuse, for having spoken in support of greater transparency and accountability.

Another important legislative initiative that would foster jobs and economic growth is Bill C-47, the northern jobs and growth act, which includes the Nunavut planning and project assessment act and the Northwest Territories surface rights board act, along with related amendments to the Yukon Surface Rights Board Act. Together, these measures would fulfill outstanding obligations under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, as well as the Gwich'in and Sahtu land claims agreements, and respond to calls for measures to streamline and improve regulatory processes in the north. The bill is currently being studied by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Amendments to the land designation sections of the Indian Act that comprised a portion of Bill C-45 would also create economic opportunities. These amendments would speed up the process for leasing lands for economic development purposes, while allowing first nations to maintain full ownership of their lands. As a result, it would provide greater flexibility for first nations to act on time-sensitive economic development opportunities. These amendments responded directly to first nations who had expressed frustration to me, to the standing committee and to other members with the overly complex and lengthy process of designating land, which was an impediment to investment opportunities.

I quote from Chief Shane Gottfriedson, chief of the Tk'emlúps Indian Band in British Columbia, speaking about these changes to the land designation process in Bill C-45. "[Before the changes] it was just horrific for us to try and do any sort of business within our territory".

Chief Reginald Bellerose of the Muskowekwan First Nation in Saskatchewan also spoke in favour of the changes: "[Muskowekwan First Nation] recognizes the positive steps the federal government has made to assist First Nation communities to operate in a more efficient and commercial manner. Specifically, Bill C-45 provides for a more efficient land designation vote process".

We have heard from first nations that they want to be able to move at the speed of business and we continue to work with willing partners to remove economic barriers to the success of first nation communities as they seek out opportunities to generate wealth for their communities and their members.

Business of Supply

If further proof was needed that legislative action can speed economic development, I would like to point to my announcement just last week on new regulations under the First Nations Commercial and Industrial Development Act that will allow the Kitimat natural gas facility on the Haisla First Nation's Bees Indian Reserve No. 6 to move forward. The Kitimat LNG facility will provide Canada's energy producers with a doorway to overseas markets. It will create well-paying jobs and economic growth opportunities for the Haisla First Nation and the entire northwest region of British Columbia.

• (1050)

We have also invested in modernizing the land management regimes for first nations so that they can unlock the potential of their lands and natural resources. This past month I announced that eight more first nations will soon be operating under the First Nations Land Management Act. These first nations have chosen freedom from 34 land-related sections of the Indian Act, which were holding them back from achieving their full economic potential. They now have power over their own reserve lands and resources so that they can take advantage of economic activities without wading through bureaucratic red tape.

This is in addition to 18 other first nations that I announced last January, making a total of 69 first nations that can now develop their own land codes, which will allow them to more quickly and effectively pursue economic opportunities and create jobs. Through these initiatives we are putting in place the building blocks for future success. These foundational pieces will help prepare communities to take advantage of new economic opportunities available to them.

We are a business-like government. We like to obtain concrete results. We are making unprecedented investments in the spirit of partnership and we recognize historical grievances. This is why we have settled outstanding land claims that have been long languishing.

The government is committed to continue building on the progress we have made to improve living conditions for first nations and to create jobs and economic opportunities in their communities. Specifically, we are committed to expediting comprehensive claims and treaty implementation. We all recognize that while much progress has been made, more work remains to be done. We are taking steps to improve land claim and self-government negotiation processes. This includes identifying alternatives to negotiations that meet the interests of the parties as well as practical measures to make sure that first nations are ready and able to fully engage and participate in the process.

In some cases there are alternatives to comprehensive claims and we are good with that. For example, the Haisla, the Squamish First Nation and Westbank First Nation are not specifically interested in pursuing treaties. They realize there are other measures that can and have been put in place, which are expediting the conditions for economic prosperity for their communities. We are also involved currently in self-government negotiations on a number of historic treaties. An example of that is the Sioux Valley Dakota First Nation in Manitoba, where we anticipate imminent the conclusion of self-government negotiations.

There is a clear link between the strength of the relationship and the economic prosperity of first nations and all Canadians. Protection of aboriginal treaty rights and consultations with aboriginals are enshrined in our laws, which have been passed by this Parliament. This government fully respects our duty to consult. That is why we have conducted more than 5,000 consultations annually. As minister, I have visited over 50 first nation communities since 2010 and I have had hundreds of productive meetings with first nation chiefs, councillors and community members across Canada.

This government also undertook unprecedented consultations on Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act. We are currently in the midst of intensive consultations with first nation leaders, teachers, students and educators in the development of a first nation education act. I would like to highlight some of the important work that has been done on the development of a first nation education act.

• (1055)

In economic action plan 2012, our government committed to work with willing partners to establish a first nation education act that will establish the structures and standards to support strong and accountable education systems on reserve. Through intense consultations, we have committed to work with willing partners to have the legislation in place by September 2014. We are determined to follow through on this commitment.

First nation students are the only children in Canada whose education system is not governed by legislation. Our government, unlike previous governments, is committed to bringing forward such legislation. The legislation would provide the modern framework necessary to build standards and structures, strengthen governance and accountability, and provide the mechanism for stable, predictable and sustainable funding.

I would like to add that, as recently as yesterday, I met with the first nation education steering committee in British Columbia. We have other examples, such as Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey in Nova Scotia, where these parameters are already in place. An important part of our consultation is to meet with first nation authorities that have already done much work in this area and are obtaining results of the kind that are setting a great example.

We are making other investments. We have also invested an additional \$100 million over three years to help ensure readiness for the new education system to be put in place by September 2014. We committed an incremental \$175 million, on top of the \$200 million that we spend on an annual basis, to new school projects. It is unfortunate that the member who brought forward today's motion chose to vote against these investments in first nation education.

This past December I announced the launch of intensive face-to-face consultation with first nation parents, students, leaders, educators and others on the initiative. The first in a series of sessions began in Halifax last week. The second session will be in Saskatoon next week.

Business of Supply

I want to state very clearly that there is no legislation drafted. The purpose of these ongoing consultations is to get views and feedback so that legislation can be drafted. The input gathered during consultations will help shape the drafting of the legislation. Once drafted, the proposed legislation will be shared with every first nation across Canada, as well as with provincial governments and other stakeholders for feedback.

Modern land claims and self-government agreements can also provide a path to self-sufficiency and unlock economic opportunities. We are working in partnership with first nations on a new results-based approach to treaty and self-government negotiations to achieve more treaties in less time so that aboriginal communities can begin to unlock economic opportunities that can be realized through treaties.

Under the new approach, our government will focus its resources on tables with the greatest potential for success to bring treaties to fruition. The chief commissioner of the B.C. Treaty Commission is strongly supportive of our new approach, saying that she is encouraged our government is accelerating progress. We have heard first nations' concerns and we are delivering necessary change. It is also clear that there are options to the treaty process. Our goal is to achieve treaties where we can and to develop options to treaties where we cannot.

I will conclude by saying that moving forward will take time and dedicated effort from all parties. We are fully committed to taking further steps along this journey. We will continue to focus on real structural reforms and increasing the effectiveness of long-term investments.

● (1100)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to listen to the minister because at the heart of the matter is how one defines a relationship on a nation-to-nation basis. The government continues to impose a top-down agenda. It claims that it has consulted, but if it truly has consulted, then why the wave of opposition to almost every bill that the government introduces? Bill C-45, the omnibus budget bill, sparked protests from coast to coast because of the lack of consultation and because the bill directly impacted the rights of first nations in their own communities. The government did not consult in any way, shape or form on that legislation.

The Auditor General indicated in the 2011 report that in order to make meaningful change, first nations would have to fully participate in the development of legislative reforms and they would also have to co-lead discussions on identifying credible funding mechanisms.

If the government is truly committed to changing the nature of the relationship, would the minister today indicate, on point 8 of the Assembly of First Nations request, that the government has a dedicated cabinet committee with a secretary within the Privy Council with specific responsibility to the first nation-crown relationship to oversee implementation? Has that committee been appointed?

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I travelled widely this past summer and visited many first nations. The entire question of the legislation that the member referred to was wide open for comments

this summer, and I received none. We have a strong relationship. We have been building partnerships. First nations do recognize that we mean business, that we are conducting ourselves in a business-like way and that we are very interested in achieving progress and results.

In terms of the specifics of the question related to the outcomes from the January 11 meeting, we are making good progress on all the commitments that were made from that meeting. The national chief and the Prime Minister will be having a meeting in the relatively near future. I am sure they can fully discuss at that time the progress that has been made.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister would consider this suggestion. He attaches a great deal of importance to the educational reforms, which he is now negotiating. Once the government has concluded its consultation process, I wonder if it would agree to either put out a white paper or else refer the subject matter of the bill to committee so the House and those appearing before the committee could have an opportunity to discuss it so we could develop a much stronger consensus in the House on the governance changes that we all recognize are required with respect to education.

● (1105)

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party is very thoughtful on these matters. We all share this strong concern and priority for first nations education across the country.

Two things are at play here.

We want to consult as widely as possible and we are very interested in these consultations going beyond the political level to the teachers, students and parents. We are encouraging that at all of the round tables and in all of the discussions we are having. We will draft some legislation out of that and then we will share that legislation widely. What we do in this place with legislation oftentimes becomes a partisan political exercise as opposed to doing what is right in every other way. That is one of my concerns.

The other concern I have is the fact that we want to get on with this. We made a commitment to have this all in place for the 2014 school year. From that perspective, as long as we can fit into these time frames, we are willing to be flexible.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister might make comments on a couple of issues.

Some comments were made relating to the government's commitment to settling some outstanding issues. I recall during the last campaign the Conservatives' commitment to settling land claims, building more affordable housing both on and off reserve and bringing more and more resources to bear for fresh water and infrastructure on first nations.

Business of Supply

I also wonder if the minister would not mind commenting on some of the successes the government has had with education in certain areas of Canada. I can think principally of the arrangement between Canada and British Columbia for the delivery of education and its administration. This is a big country and there are different models that might be more successful or reconfigured. Could the minister comment on that?

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, to talk about all four of those subjects in one minute and fifteen seconds would be somewhat difficult.

The government has done something quite extraordinary regarding first nations health and safety when it comes to drinking water. We commissioned a national survey that showed a very unsatisfactory situation across the country. We covered 98% of all the residences and public buildings on reserves across the country, which demonstrated there was a big problem. We inherited a legacy of a big problem.

I heard the Liberal member talking about the commitment of \$300 million. We have spent almost \$3 billion on drinking water systems. I made an announcement two weeks ago of a further \$330 million over the next two years on 50 high-risk water systems. We are moving ahead. We want concrete, deliverable results. The same applies to the other subjects brought up by my colleague.

• (1110)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief comment first.

I would like to remind the minister of something. On several occasions, he referred to our Métis, Inuit and aboriginal peoples. I think the hon. member for Winnipeg North also mentioned that five times, according to my count. He talked about our aboriginal peoples. I want to remind them, and put it on the record, that I am nobody's Indian in this chamber, to paraphrase another politician from the House.

Could the minister define for the House exactly what he means by willing partners? I talked about it briefly in my presentation. He referred to that on a couple of occasions.

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there was an earlier comment made by the member that we were not interested in talking with the Innu of Quebec. That is absolutely incorrect. I have spoken with several of the chiefs and I have been to their communities. We have certainly encouraged negotiations and are continuing to do that.

It goes without saying that we can work with people who wish to work with us and achieve major progress. Where there is no collaboration or co-operation, it is made much more difficult.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the chance to enter into this discussion today. It is going to be one of those moments in the House of Commons where, at the conclusion of the debate, it sounds as if every party will vote in favour of the motion brought forward by the member for the New Democratic Party.

However, I do not think we should paper over some of the differences and tensions which exist in the House. At the same time, I do not think we should underestimate the degree to which it is, from time to time, possible in our country for us to move beyond

partisanship to a greater understanding of the issues that are at stake in this debate.

On many other occasions in the House and outside, I have said that the issue of the reconciliation of the relationship between the first nations, the Métis and Inuit people of Canada and the rest of us is the largest piece of unfinished business in the country. I say this having spent some considerable time as both a federal and provincial politician and political leader and also in my time in private life.

There are many reasons for this. Members opposite may be surprised to hear me say this. It is an issue that genuinely goes beyond partisanship, because if someone were to say if we looked at the record of other governments in the past and say that they were either blameless or perfect and that all the fault lied in one government, then that, frankly, would be a ludicrous comment. It would be an inaccurate comment. The fact is that both federally and provincially, as Canadian governments, we all have our share of responsibility for a relationship that has simply not been established in a way that would make us an even better country than we are. At the same time, we surely are allowed to comment on the fact that certain decisions have been made by one government or another which have set us back.

One thing the minister did not comment on in his remarks and one thing he did not say when he talked about the legacy of issues that was left to the new government to assume responsibility for is this. One of the very first decisions the Government of Canada made in 2006 was this. I refer to it as the Government of Canada because I am not allowed to use the colloquial term, which the government itself insists it uses in all of its press releases, because I would break the rules of the House. The Conservative government tore up an agreement that had been reached between the Government of Canada, the previous Martin government, and all of the provinces and the first nations' leadership of the country. It is not an act of partisanship on my part to say that the Conservative government was worse than being simply dishonourable. It was also a mistake because a year and a half of consultation had gone into those discussions, those improvements in education, housing, to the political priority that was to be given to moving forward on a government-to-government basis with the leadership of the first nations. All of that was scrapped. All of that was put aside and the new government said that it knew better, that it would spend less, that it would, in effect, do less, that it would invest less and that was the way it would be.

When we look at the housing budgets, the education budgets, the clean water budgets, the self-government budgets and the treaty making budgets, they were all reduced in comparison with the commitments that were made and budgeted in the Kelowna accord. They were not simply a declaration made by the Government of Canada. They were an understanding reached with the provinces and the first nations as well.

Business of Supply

•(1115)

Therefore, I feel an obligation to at least put on the record the fact that there was a government that said we have to change things and that made changing things a priority. It is regrettable that the government that succeeded the Liberal government decided not to proceed on that basis but, in effect, to start all over again. One might say every government has the right to say it will do it its own way, that it has a better answer.

Let us not forget that it was the Reform Party that kept the House in knots for days and days because it opposed the Nisga'a treaty, as it did not accept the principle of self-government. It did not accept the principle of government-to-government negotiation and did not accept the arrangements that had been arrived at.

It is very difficult for us simply to say let us turn the page and pretend that did not happen. Wherever there is a lingering after-effect of the Reform Party agenda regarding this question, the question of the relationship between aboriginal people and the governments of Canada, it is not a positive after-effect, because it is one that does not accept the whole principle that there is a treaty relationship with the Crown that extends way past Confederation, deep into our history.

Even today, the Supreme Court of Canada and our provincial courts of appeal are having to make decisions on what does a duty to consult mean? How do we interpret the treaty rights? How do we give them life?

[*Translation*]

Admittedly, we began to make progress in every province by recognizing the nature of historic rights. The member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, who just spoke, played an important role in the discussions between the James Bay nations and communities and the Government of Quebec at a historic time. One would think that it would have been difficult to find solutions in the 1970s, but on the contrary, they did it.

Progress was made. When the Constitution was repatriated, I remember the moment when the government had to accept the fact that treaties were to be honoured by our Constitution and that the government had to be clear on the issue. That was a historic moment.

At this time, with the decision of the majority government and the support of the New Democratic Party in the House of Commons, we have embarked on a discussion that recognizes the constitutional reality and the need to respect the rights enshrined therein. The age of paternalism or colonialism, with all its problems, is finally drawing to a close. To be frank, institutional racism and a sense of marginalization were at the very core of the problems and made our situation a difficult one. Constitutional discussions were held. After the failure of the Meech Lake accord, further talks were held in Charlottetown, in which I was directly involved.

•(1120)

[*English*]

I well remember the Charlottetown discussions because I was very directly involved. The discussions came from a conclusion that was reached by the leadership of the country collectively, not New Democrat, Liberal, or Conservative, not provincial or federal, but a determination that if we are to make progress in this area it has to

include everyone. If we are to have a constitutional discussion, it cannot just include the provinces; it also has to include the first nations, the Métis, non-status Indians and the Inuit people.

That made the discussion complicated. It meant that instead of having 9 or 10 around the table we had up to 17 people. It meant that the discussions took time. It meant that we had long discussions in the corridor and outside the corridor. We had resistance and finally we had acceptance. Then when we went to a vote we had rejection.

What is interesting is that despite the rejection and the referendum in Charlottetown, it has been court decisions that have shown the way and said yes, there are implications of treaty rights, there is a meaning and a substance to treaty rights and a meaning and a substance to self-government, which take us beyond where we have been.

We could all recite the statistics, the 35% graduation rates from secondary school on reserve, and 80% in the provinces where they are located. The government has now said that it has an 8% target that takes it up to 43%, which means that it would take 25 years to get to the same graduation rate as the rest of the country. We cannot wait 25 years to have genuine equality and funding for schools. However, it is not just a funding issue; it is also about the outcomes and how we are taking the steps. That is why I attach importance to the minister's statement that the government will come forward with a proposal with respect to first nations education. I just want to make sure that we all have an opportunity to discuss it and that it is not something that is just suddenly created by the Government of Canada. I know there has been a long consultation process, but it sometimes takes time to get these things right. We want to get them right. We want to contribute and be useful partners in making sure we have the governance structures that make sense. However, above all, we want the governance structures to be acceptable to the aboriginal people themselves.

The statistics are amazing. They really date back and come forward from the far-seeing royal commission, which came to force in 1992-1993. There is no greater mistake in public policy than the fact that governments put that report on a shelf—and I say that as a Liberal. We should not have put that report on a shelf because it had some important things to say. First of all, it documented for Canadians the history of discrimination. It also documented something else for Canadians, the demographic revolution taking place in aboriginal communities in cities and on reserve. For example, 50% of the aboriginal population is under the age of 25. We will have 400,000 new aboriginal entrants into the labour market over the next 10 years. Are we ready? Are we training? Are we providing the education? Are we dealing with the challenges? I do not think we are.

That is not to lay all of the blame at the foot of the minister or to say that the Prime Minister is single-handedly to blame; it is to say that it will take extraordinary acts of leadership to deal with the extent of the challenge and the opportunity. We should not see this as a problem. We should not see it as a problem that in Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton or Calgary we will see the aboriginal population grow exponentially over the next 20 years. It is a challenge. It is a challenge because we have not created the institutional structures and realized what we have to do.

Business of Supply

The reason self-government is important and why I hope that self-government will be part of the governance structure for education, just as it needs to be part of the governance structure for health care and everything that goes on, is that the patterns of paternalism and a bureaucratic structure imposed on aboriginal peoples across our land mass, the second largest on the globe, is unsustainable. It is not workable. It wastes money. It creates expenditures that cannot be justified. It also creates inequalities in funding, which are not acceptable.

• (1125)

I would conclude by saying that we will obviously be in support of this resolution. We want to see the government's rhetoric and the minister's statements today matched in the budget by real and genuine progress.

I want to be able to go back to the Six Nations Reserve, which I visited over a couple of months ago, and to the delegation from the city of Brantford and the county of Brant I met more recently, and the Six Nations leaders, who all said, "You have to resolve the land claim issue here because it is blocking all of the progress we need to make in our communities".

In many ways the communities have gone beyond the government. The government has to catch up. We want to see these changes made in the budget. We want to see real progress made, and we want to see it made on a basis that truly respects the fact there is another level and order of government and governance in this country.

I say to my fellow Canadians, when Samuel de Champlain came here, that level of governance was here. We did not come to this country and find a wilderness in which no people lived. There were people working, living, celebrating, praying and creating cultures and languages thousands and thousands of years old.

[Translation]

They were not savages, although they were treated as such for a long time. They did not need to be civilized by the Europeans when they arrived. They already had their own civilization.

[English]

All over the Americas there was a civilization. It was a civilization that was proud, complex, deep and rich, one that the clash of civilizations, the arrival of European settlement, helped to destroy, by disease, by war, by conquest and by an attitude of imperialism that has no place in where we are today as Canadians.

We genuinely have a rendezvous with our own destiny, with an understanding that even now it is not too late, that even now there is still time; but it is time not just for rhetoric, not just for words or even just for structures. It is a time for real action, and the budget is the test. The budget will be the test of action and the budget will be the test of commitment. We look forward to seeing the budget and to the government's actions matching its rhetoric.

I would like to see action from the government matching the eloquence of the Prime Minister's apology on the floor of the House of Commons. I was in the House on that day. No one in the House on that day could not have been moved by the sincerity, by the depth, by the compassion and by the understanding it showed, but now the walk begins. The walk has to match the talk of that discussion. The

sincerity of that apology has to be matched by the sincerity of our commitments.

I say to the minister, we shall continue to work with him and the government. We take a positive, constructive attitude to this. There is no monopoly on the truth in any political party, but there has to be a common ground of political will, and let this resolution express a political will that is more than just words.

• (1130)

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment the member opposite for his speech, which was obviously done without notes and was obviously from the heart.

Last evening I spent some time in the company of Chief Kirby Whiteduck from the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation, who told a story about the fact that this year marks 400 years, exactly, from the time that Samuel de Champlain came to the Ottawa Valley and was hosted by the Algonquin people, who basically treated the visitor, this first contact, with great aplomb. It was actually a very good reminder of how long this relationship has gone on.

There is one thing that concerns me greatly in the member's speech. We have said very clearly that we are seeking the same outcomes in our education initiative for first nation students as for other Canadian students. In Nova Scotia, with the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, MK, school district, we have 70% first nation graduation rates, which is almost up to the provincial school rates.

We are now at the point where the first nation education steering committee in British Columbia has full agreements, full transferability of students between the first nation schools and the provincial schools and vice versa. Students are followed with pin numbers. This is all working very constructively and positively. That is our objective and I just wanted to make that clear.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that.

First of all, I hope we will be able to make some progress on the historic claim of the Algonquins of Golden Lake. I am quite familiar with that issue. Just to show how far back it goes, the discussions began before I became premier in 1990. We came very close to a solution in 1995, but things seemed to fall off the rails for some reason in that year, provincially.

I hope we are finally going to be able to get to a conclusion. I look forward to that very much. I am happy to hear of the progress the minister is describing. The report that came out from his ministry with respect to the current situation looking across the country, that is where the 35% number came from. I did not make it up. The 8% additional target is the target that in fact is set out in that annual report of his own department.

I would say that if that is the target, I think we can do better than that. I see the minister is saying that is not the target, and that is good news. Let us hope we can move more quickly.

Business of Supply

• (1135)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his excellent discourse and putting this in the historical context that it needs. I know our government friends are sometimes very defensive of their fairly poor record, but it did not start with them. This is probably the largest, historic, moral, cultural, economic deficit in Canada, and it has to be paid.

What we have seen from Idle No More is that people are frustrated. They are not willing to sit back and hear more talk in the House of Commons. This has been talked about again and again, and the responses have been talking points, press releases but no concrete action. What we are seeing in communities across this country is an uprising of young people who say they are not going to sacrifice this generation, as other generations have been sacrificed.

In terms of the respect for treaty rights and the fact that these are rights defined by the Constitution and defined in court case after court case as rights that are inherent on the land, and in terms of the issue of Bill C-45 and the decision of the government to strip basic environmental protection so that it can push things through for big oil and big mining without any consultation, what does my hon. colleague think of the lack of respect and the lack of trust that is going to be engendered in first nation communities who are seeing that once again the government is more than willing to walk over their rights?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is perhaps a loud “amen” to what my colleague from Timmins—James Bay had to say. I happen to think that this demographic revolution that I have spoken of is real and profound, and the change in technology and the change in awareness is real and profound.

Speaking personally, when I grew up in Ottawa years ago, the aboriginal issue was one that was far off. It was not close by. Now I have a huge aboriginal population in my riding of Toronto Centre, and the kids in school today in Toronto and elsewhere are not going to accept what was previously seen as being acceptable. This is all changing rapidly.

I visited Attawapiskat, which members often visit. We see 10 people living in a small house of two or three rooms, yet people are watching television. They have a computer in the little house. They are not going to accept the isolation and the discrimination that was previously seen as an inevitable part of people's lives. The comparisons they make and the pictures in their heads are completely different, so of course there is going to be a dramatic change.

The same thing is true for the interpretation of treaty rights. Whether any of us like it or not, there is not going to be major resource development in the northern parts of this country without the participation of the first nation, aboriginal, Métis and Inuit people of this country. Whether it is a development that was approved in Baffin Island or anywhere else, these developments will not happen without the full engagement and support of the appropriate levels of government and of the appropriate orders of government that have to be consulted. That includes the aboriginal orders of government, which I believe are real, tangible and really exist. We are going to see this as time goes on.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the points the hon. member for Toronto Centre made is that it is important to respond to the concerns of our first nations. One of the main problems facing first nations is the quality of their drinking water, the quality of the water from which they fish and so on.

I will share my experience with respect to the situation in Fort Chipewyan. I was with the environment committee a couple of years ago and we went up to Fort Chipewyan where there were grave concerns expressed about the quality of the water as a result of pollution from the oil sands. We were up in Fort Chipewyan because we were exploring whether there was a link between the development of the oil sands and the pollution of the land and water on which the first nations depend. However, it took a long time for the government to recognize that there might be a link. Finally, it did after it was pushed by world-class scientists to recognize that there might be a problem. At that point, the government reacted and said that it needed to monitor the situation.

Would the member for Toronto Centre not agree that we have to be more open in our attitude toward the concerns that the first nations are raising? That is very much what Idle No More is all about. The people who are protesting are raising concerns. Does the member not feel that we have to be more open as a government, as a Parliament and as a society to what people are saying?

• (1140)

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. However, more broadly on the water question, I will make a couple of observations.

First, we have the technology available today to provide safe running drinking water for every Canadian. We have that technology. We need to make sure that technology is made available to every community in the country. However, the second thing we need to do is to make sure those communities have the capacity to maintain that equipment. If communities in northern Manitoba have to wait for somebody to come from Winnipeg to fix what needs to be fixed, if they do not have the training programs, if they do not have the education programs, if people do not have a sense that they themselves have a responsibility to apply the investments that are being made in order to maintain them and keep them up, then we have a real problem, and that connects to self-government.

With respect to the pollution of the Athabasca River, provincial and federal authorities took too long to look at and understand what the effect of groundwater on that river was. However, one of the good things about where we are living today and the technology and the social media available is that people will be “Idle No More”. It does not matter what any of us think about it. This is now the world in which we are living: open, transparent, information being shared and people moving very quickly to highlight areas of abuse. Overall, that is a very healthy thing.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking.

Business of Supply

I have the privilege of speaking about the motion introduced by the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I would like to use my time to elaborate on the idea of first nations consultation, as it is described in the motion that has been presented to the House for consideration.

As I already mentioned on Monday, my speech today will focus on the idea of pro forma consultation. I often use Latinisms because they make my speeches sound more exotic. In English, pro forma means “as a matter of form”. When a criminal trial is held and there is a pro forma hearing, the client does not need to be present. Such a trial merely serves to move the proceedings forward.

Too often, the idea of public consultation is seen and thought of in an unrealistic way. A consultation process will be held but, in reality, people's needs and desires are barely taken into account. This reasoning also applies to the Canadian population as a whole.

The Conservatives, and most likely the governments that preceded them, are of the opinion that they have consulted the public properly if they have met with a certain group or held a public meeting and recorded and compiled people's reactions, regardless of the number of participants. The Conservatives then believe that they can proceed with their agenda, whether it be corporatist, social or cultural, unimpeded. In short, the government has erred in fact and in law, particularly when it comes to aboriginal people.

I would like to explain my reasoning. When it comes to consultations with first nations, we must never overlook the fact that there is always a possibility that the first nations will not support or consent to the measure that is being proposed. This also applies to the Canadian population as a whole.

Canadians have the option of opposing the proposed measure and making the government understand that the measure in question is quite simply unacceptable and should not be implemented. The government has to deal with that variable because it is a valid response that could very well be given if the public is consulted, whether it be with regard to policies or resource extraction initiatives.

Since my colleague's motion primarily has to do with consulting the first nations, it is important to ensure that a significant percentage of the public is canvassed and that there is a plebiscite that is observed and that can be observed on the ground.

In 2013, and I will discuss this further during my speech, the government is trying to find roundabout ways to circumvent the tribal management agencies, the band councils, in order to hold consultations without truly caring about the real impact, the actual desire to be consulted and how it will be carried out in a given community.

I will come back to this, but we must keep in mind that band councils were instituted by the Indian Act and their jurisdiction is limited to reserve lands. When it comes to consultations for mining projects, forestry projects or any other topics involving traditional territories, using the wrong approach complicates matters.

My opinion—which some might say would be arguable in a court of law—is that it would be in the government's best interest to

consult the communities and hold extensive town-hall meetings. It would at least be a bit more transparent than what we are seeing now.

The people are increasingly rejecting many of the socio-economic measures put forward by community management organizations, the band councils, as they are too often modelled on the government's program for economic expansion and blind exploitation of natural resources. This rejection is a testament to the sharp increase in a renewed sense of self that we are seeing within communities in the country.

● (1145)

I say “in the country”, but this wave of assertiveness is being seen around the globe. We even saw it last spring in the streets of Montreal during the uprising, the massive turnout of people, by the hundreds of thousands. And that wave is travelling around the world. However, it is more present and visible in aboriginal communities. Of course, there is Idle No More. But that is not a trademark, and it is being cited a bit too often. It is a positive mobilization that is a testament to this increased assertiveness. That was not seen as often in the past.

This affirmation is not unrelated to the fact that the people are sometimes opposed to this tendency and reject, in a way, many decisions and policies made by these tribal government management agencies—including decisions involving traditional lands—for reasons I have already explained. Band councils cannot interfere with or manage relationships between the people and traditional lands, because their mandate and expertise are limited to reserve lands.

And that is why it is essential—and it should be a requirement—that the Government of Canada use 2013 to travel to communities and speak directly with the people. The Government of Canada would speak with the nine community leaders—chiefs and other counsellors in their capacity as community members—as well as all the other members of the community. The government should not just speak with the nine leaders, take that response and then make a lot of noise about how it has consulted the people. That is utterly untrue.

There are 3,000 people in my community. If the government listens only to the nine individuals who lead the community, the results will be markedly biased. It puts all of the power in the hands of nine people. To ensure real transparency, the people need to be consulted.

Some will say right away that if every resource development initiative were subject to massive consultations, it would be terribly expensive. That is true. However, many questions can always be combined in a single consultation. This is imperative.

Communities are often criticized for not mobilizing, not participating and not even voting, which is false. Some 4,000 Indians voted for me in the last election. First time ever. That had not happened before. When you make an effort, when you go and meet people, when you consult the community, when you go out and see people, they will mobilize and respond positively.

Business of Supply

That is what needs to be done here. If the government really wants to get a feel for what people across the country are thinking and what their concerns are, it has to go to the people directly. It must not go through organizations and settle for a less than substantial response. Meaningful effort needs to be made, despite the vagaries of such a process. Once again, some will say there is a good chance this could go awry and that there are too many unknowns. The Conservatives are afraid to go into aboriginal communities. Technically, although extensive public consultation will inevitably involve some vagaries because the public may be less than receptive or less than supportive of a given initiative, such a process would at least have the advantage of being transparent.

Although the exercise in direct democracy associated with holding public consultations on aboriginal lands presents a number of vagaries on the face of it, the Canadian government could thereby establish the transparency of the process aimed at figuring out where people stand regarding proposed initiatives, whether they are legislative initiatives or initiatives on the ground.

This I submit to you, Mr. Speaker.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of representing a high school where there are literally hundreds of first nation individuals or youth of first nation heritage who graduate, that being R.B. Russell Vocational High School, which is a jewel in Winnipeg's north end, among many other things. Its caring staff and student body do make a difference. They value the importance of education. When students graduate from Tec Voc, they know they will have opportunities. Education is so very important, and we need to see more people graduating and getting that grade 12 certificate.

Would the member comment as to what he believes is an important issue? That is that we need to establish more acceptable goals to ensure we have more young people of first nation heritage who are actually graduating high school. Would the member agree that education equates to opportunities and we need to emphasize the importance of education?

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I agree with him.

When I was a student at the University of Ottawa—I know that I often provide personal examples—my class of 14 students consisted solely of aboriginal young people. Concerted efforts were made to ensure that the students obtained their diplomas. And there was follow-up to that end.

I have spoken to other young people in the same situation today, and the funds are no longer necessarily available. The situation has changed. I do not even know if the pre-law program is still offered at the University of Ottawa.

To set an example, these young people must return to their communities, just as I did. After being admitted to the bar, I returned to practise law in my community. This worked very well. We need to do this in Uashat and Malietenam.

When I practised criminal law I was also involved in youth protection. I always made sure I sent a positive message. I told young people that the tools were available, that the cost of their education would be covered and that they had to really persevere. However, these promises must be kept today and the programs must continue to be accessible.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Manicouagan visited all the aboriginal communities in my riding, and there are quite a few. To date, the ancestral land claims of these Algonquin communities have not been recognized, leading to uncertainty when they attempt to conduct negotiations.

There is a mining boom in Abitibi and Témiscamingue right now. Exploration is taking place on their ancestral land. This is somewhat of a grey area because these exploration companies are not required to negotiate. Sometimes the aboriginal communities are not even aware that exploration activities are being conducted on their ancestral land.

If the government took the trouble to sit down and negotiate all matters pertaining to ancestral land claims, could dealing with this situation provide these communities with economic benefits and stability?

• (1155)

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Government representatives should visit these communities from time to time. When I visited my colleague's riding, some people told me that they had not seen any MPs or ministers in their community in the past 50 years. People need to be there in order to be able to start a dialogue.

Whether or not the aboriginal title is recognized, the communities always have land use rights over their traditional land. Therefore, a consultation must take place as soon as any economic activity interferes with their use of and traditional activities on the land. This obligation is automatic and is part of the fiduciary relationship. I know I keep repeating this, but eventually it will have to sink in. As soon as an activity interferes with the traditional way of life, there must be consultations.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak after my colleague from Manicouagan, who gave an excellent speech.

[English]

I am pleased to speak to this motion today and happy that we are getting an opportunity to address some of the long-standing concerns for Canada's first nation, Inuit and Métis people. It took New Democrats to bring this debate about, since the Conservative government has proven it does not understand the challenges, is unwilling to work in a respectful manner with first nations and is bereft of any ideas that would actually improve the situation for this section of our population, which has been trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty that is unacceptable.

Business of Supply

Canadians are proud of our country, and for many good reasons. We are rated sixth on the United Nations human development index. However, when first nation-specific statistics are applied to that same index, first nations in Canada are rated—get this—63rd.

How could any member elected to this place not see this as a significant and pressing challenge?

It is clear that the current government does not know where to start. It has insisted on presenting its own solutions that pick away at the margins, instead of working with first nations to arrive at a mutually agreeable path of action that could get to the heart of the problem. In doing so, it invites a negative response. By dismissing its duty to consult, it not only angers first nations, but also manages to come up with legislation that acts as a lightning rod for communities that have grown weary of commitments that bear no fruit and of demands that are unreasonable.

Instead of doing something to truly address living conditions and employment opportunities on first nations, the current government has saddled them with onerous accounting regulations that duplicate work that is already being done in a different format.

Instead of doing something to create employment for this chronically underemployed segment of our population, the government meddled in the way that bands make decisions on how to allocate their land.

This Parliament has been seized with bills and budgets that dictate to first nations and do little, if anything, to address the real challenges that would help that United Nations human development index number start to move in the right direction.

For now, the sad fact is that decades of inaction and failure on the part of past governments are catching up with Canada, and the current government's heavy-handed treatment of aboriginal people has brought about a significant and strong reaction from people who have, frankly, had enough. That explains the Idle No More movement that has swept Canada.

However, it would be unfair to say that the movement is a reaction to just that.

Idle No More came about as a response to the hatchet job the current government did on the Navigable Waters Protection Act and picked up steam from there. That issue affects all Canadians, as does the worrisome direction the government has taken on many environmental issues.

I would like to read from a letter that is being circulated by the Chief of the Sturgeon clan in Whitefish River First Nation that helps explain these grassroots activists. Chief Shining Turtle's letter speaks to the pride he feels as he watches young people in that community become engaged in the political process and attempt to take control of their future by taking part in the political discourse of the day. He writes:

These Idle No More drums are not just for us: they beat for you because the legislation we are protesting does not just harm us—it hurts you and your children and your grandchildren. This is not about your aboriginal neighbours, it is about 'justice' for you, too. The omnibus budget bills change the law in ways that will forever harm the water and earth that we all rely on....

He continues:

These bills take power away from the public—both aboriginal and non-aboriginal—to review and understand and speak out about projects which could harm the environment. Your children and grandchildren, and my grandchildren, will live in an unhealthy and, as a result, poorer world because of it.

We can see the issues are not confined to first nation-specific items. There is no doubt that there are many of those types of issues that helped create the climate of discontent, but it was the dismantling of the Navigable Waters Protection Act that provided the spark. Now, it is up to us to do something creative with the fire that has been lit.

● (1200)

We should learn from our mistakes and do that work in a respectful way in full partnership with our aboriginal neighbours, by making certain to fulfill our constitutional obligations, such as the duty to consult. Certainly there is much that can be done from this place that could help with that.

New Democrats are promoting ideas that could help create more employment for aboriginal populations. Instead of bringing in more temporary foreign workers, the NDP believes the government should address labour shortage by bringing in a job and skills plan that provides stable, predictable and sustainable funding. It should be developed in consultation with first nations for the successful aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, and for other programs to help first nations and other aboriginal groups fill skilled job shortages.

We believe the government should provide equitable funding for all first nations schools based on the motion called “Shannen's Dream”, passed unanimously by the House in February 2012, including core and program funding that is stable, sustainable and predictable, and that is determined in consultation with first nations.

That would be a start. However, there are more items that require attention as well. There are also numerous unresolved comprehensive land claims, which are in various stages of negotiation. In Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung, the council of Thessalon First Nation and Chief Alfred Bisaillon recently published a letter to their neighbours that explains the land claim dispute they are trying to work through. The letter explains how the Lake Huron Treaty of 1850 contains a serious mistake in the translation from Ojibwa to English, which resulted in their reserve being surveyed at 40 square miles instead of 144 square miles. They have been frustrated by their dealings with the Canadian government on this, as has the mayor of the township of Huron Shores, Gil Reeves. They have been relegated to observer status as the provincial government hands out logging and mining permits on their land without consent or benefit for their community. Today there are an estimated 900 specific claims that remain unresolved. At the present rate it is expected to take a hundred years to settle them all.

Business of Supply

At the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, we have heard repeatedly that these unresolved land claims stand in the way of the kind of development on these lands that the government is seeking. That is the order of operations that first nations are telling us has to be followed, and no amount of bullying by the government is going to make them budge on that.

This brings us to the federal government's legal duty to consult. That constitutionally entrenched duty has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the courts. Needless to say, the government's obligation to consult and accommodate first nations, Inuit and Métis before passing legislation that affects aboriginal lands, waters and communities was not adhered to when the Conservatives gutted the Navigable Waters Protection Act and weakened environmental protection laws.

As we have heard, the government's failure to follow through on its obligations concerning aboriginal and treaty rights is at the root of the grassroots movement that has swept across the country. New Democrats consistently warned how reckless it was to introduce fundamental changes to environmental protection laws in omnibus budget bills and then ram them through Parliament. However, the Conservatives did not want to hear that, and they turned their backs on their obligation to consult with people affected by these changes. They chose instead to take a divisive and confrontational approach, which is how we find ourselves at a crossroad in Canada. What remains to be seen is whether the government will continue to dictate and polarize the relationship or turn a page and start to listen.

New Democrats are hopeful that it will be the latter. We believe in building a new relationship on a nation-to-nation basis with first nation, Inuit and Métis peoples and are committed to the principles of meaningful consultation and real co-operation. We understand that Canada is a stronger place when we choose to work together.

It is clear the government has not acted in a way that shows it shares this opinion. It made commitments at the first nations-Crown gathering that were abandoned in a few months. Despite promises for respectful consultations, it rammed through legislation without fulfilling its legal obligation to consult aboriginal peoples. When coupled with inaction on longstanding and pressing aboriginal issues, this behaviour has led to an historic and growing wave of grassroots actions sweeping first nations communities. That is why New Democrats are asking for a clear and concrete commitment from the House in order to help realize the potential that exists within first nation, Inuit and Métis communities.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague and the member who spoke before her on their excellent speeches.

One thing keeps coming up when it comes to helping aboriginal peoples, the Assembly of First Nations, better manage funds and get more funds, which is that they must be in a relationship of equals.

We have seen wonderful promises of investments in all kinds of areas, especially economic development and training for young people, but the government has not negotiated or talked, as equals, with the Assembly of First Nations or the aboriginal peoples.

Could my colleague speak to that?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He is right. We cannot continue in this direction. It is not a good direction. We should be developing a good relationship with the first nations.

[*English*]

I met with a group of first nation youth last and week and was more than encouraged by the level of their engagement. I had the sense they were taking the political process in Canada seriously. I have no doubt that strong leaders will emerge from this generation, who will not accept the status quo. They were extremely concerned about the direction the Conservative government is taking and they are not willing to continue to sit down and take it.

When we look at the impact this is having on first nation communities, it is not the fact that they are not handling their budgets properly, but the fact that they do not have enough to be able to run their communities properly. They need affordable housing. When we look at the mortality rate on first nations, it is 1.5 times higher than the Canadian rate. Suicide rates are double that of the general population. Diabetes rates are three times higher among first nations, and there is a growing problem with HIV that sees 5% of the population dealing with 16% of new infections. Those are the issues this government should be dealing with, not attacking our first nations.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for talking about things such as the education gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. If we look at university graduates, for example, something like 10% of aboriginals have a university degree compared to around 23% in the general population.

However, there is a program in my riding called the aboriginal leadership opportunity year, which allows aboriginal Canadians to spend a year at the Royal Military College. A few weeks ago the first commissioning ceremony was held for an aboriginal Canadian who is finishing her studies at the Royal Military College this year.

At the risk of putting my colleague on the spot, and I apologize for doing so, I wonder if she would support doubling the length of that program from one year to two years. I know that retention of students in post-secondary programs is an issue we have to be very cognizant of, and I wonder if the member might support something like that.

● (1210)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, anything we can do to improve education for our first nations is certainly a step in the right direction. However, let us not forget that the Liberals had 13 years to address the issue and we are where we are today because they were part of the problem as well.

We can talk about the Conservatives' relationship on this file as well. It does no good to belittle first nations, as did the MP for Ottawa—Orléans this week, and as did Senator Brazeau. That is not the type of relationship that first nations want. However, it gives us an understanding that the Conservative government has no understanding of first nation issues.

Business of Supply

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion brought forward by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I will be sharing my time with the member for Peace River.

Our government has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to self-government and land claim settlements. We know they are the keys to increasing opportunities, jobs and prosperity for first nations. Enabling first nations to participate more fully in the economic improvements, both for their financial and social well-being, contributes to healthier, more sustainable communities. Equally important, self-government gives greater control to first nations leaders and residents over the decisions that affect their daily lives.

Our government is committed to working with willing first nations to make changes to elements of the Indian Act that are barriers to first nations governance and economic growth. This past month, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development announced that eight more first nations have joined the First Nations Land Management Act and chosen freedom from 34 land-related sections of the Indian Act. They now have power over their own reserve lands and resources, so they are able to take advantage of the economic activities without wading through bureaucratic red tape.

The First Nations Land Management Act is an important stepping stone to achieving self-government because it builds community capacity. Since first nations opted into this act and are no longer required to adhere to these land-related sections of the Indian Act, they have developed experience with land management. This experience, as well as developing a strong governance structure, sets the stage for greater self-government responsibilities down the road and improving accountability to members of first nation communities.

When a first nation opts into the First Nations Land Management Act regime, it opts out of the 34 land-related sections of the Indian Act. This frees the community from the outdated land management provisions of the Indian Act, which have not kept pace with first nations' desire for increased participation in the Canadian economy. There have been 69 first nations that have already made the decision to use this tool. We look forward to welcoming many more of them.

Communities deserve to be responsible for land-related issues that were previously administered by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. This shift gives back the responsibility to the first nations to take greater ownership of economic development on reserve and encourages partnership with the private sector. This is a key component of our government's shared goal with first nations people to increase autonomy and self-sufficient communities. Our government believes that incremental amendments to the Indian Act to bring our concrete, practical changes will lead to real results for grassroots first nations people and enable them to achieve greater self-sufficiency and prosperity.

Another example is Bill C-27, the first nations financial transparency act. Canadians understand the importance of transparency and accountability to promote confidence in their leaders. They know that first nations members deserve the same from their leadership, and they need access to adequate information to ensure their elected leaders are acting in their best interest. Bill C-27 puts in

place the same types of rules for first nations on financial transparency that already apply to other levels of government in Canada. Let me remind my hon. colleagues that chiefs belonging to the Assembly of First Nations passed a resolution at their special chiefs assembly in December 2010 regarding financial disclosure. They affirm the need to publicly release information regarding salaries and expenses to their members. They have also agreed to make financial information available via the Internet where applicable.

• (1215)

Sadly, implementation of this resolution is far from complete. Even the AFN knows that financial disclosure is needed for first nation communities. The bill will provide an important new tool that will enable first nation leaders to be more accountable to their members. Transparency is at the foundation of a healthy democracy. To this end, Bill C-27 is designed to empower first nation community members to hold their leaders to account. Further, this initiative is part of a wider government effort to create greater accountability to enhance economic growth for first nations and all Canadians.

This legislation is something first nation residents are demanding. The real genesis of this legislation rests at the grassroots level. Individual members of first nations and, in some cases, community coalition groups formed across the country have repeatedly complained about questionable financial practices by their band councils. Too many first nation members say that they do not have access to the information they need to hold their officials to account. Bill C-27 will require the salaries and expenses of chiefs and councillors and the audited consolidated financial statements of the first nation as a whole to be publicly disclosed. It will put in place rules regarding financial transparency that are comparable to those that apply to governments across Canada.

Most important, the public availability of this data will result in greater and more consistent transparency practices that will increase investor confidence in first nation communities. The proposed legislation has benefited from the input of first nation leaders, such as Chief Darcy Bear of the Whitecap Dakota First Nation in Saskatchewan. Chief Bear stated during his appearance before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs that transparency and accountability were among the principle factors that turned the Whitecap Dakota First Nation from near bankruptcy to the model vibrant community it is today.

Business of Supply

Bill C-27 complements Bill S-6, the first nations elections act. These are both important pieces of legislation that support democratic practices and will empower first nations in the future. If passed, Bill S-6 will help ensure that first nations have a modern legislative framework to better support democracy, accountability and transparent governments, allowing first nation community members to make informed decisions about their leadership and create a better environment for private sector investment. This could in turn lead to greater economic development opportunities and improve the quality of life for first nation communities.

Our government is committed to working with willing first nations to strengthen financial and government transparency and accountability on reserve. The Indian Act cannot be replaced overnight, but our government has committed to working together to create the conditions to enable sustainable and economic success for first nations.

Furthermore, our government is investing in programs such as the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, and the skills partnership fund. A set \$1.68 billion has been committed from 2010 to 2015 to increase first nation participation in the Canadian labour force. I believe this is a great move forward, and I look forward, as a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, to working further with first nations to ensure that they move forward as all Canadians should.

• (1220)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from that side of the House I hear how great they want to make it for first nations, but the problem is that they do not consult.

The member has mentioned the assets, and the assets people I have spoken with said that they want to be consulted with respect to the review process for the next round of funding. Will the government allow that to happen?

I have another question for the member. Chief Shining Turtle has indicated that he has yet to be consulted on these bills, as have some of the other chiefs. Can the member give us some dates when he or some of the other members would be available to meet with Chief Shining Turtle on his territory or with the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnídoo Mnising? I would actually give them an opportunity to come to my community and go from tribal council to tribal council to meet, discuss and consult.

Is the government prepared to do that? Can it give us some dates?

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, as the member is well aware, as a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, we meet with first nations from across Canada all the time and we negotiate.

I strongly suggest that if she has suggestions for that committee, she should bring them forth to the chair.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the Liberal Party came to Parliament, having accomplished 18 months to two years of discussions with first nations, culminating in the Kelowna accord. It dealt with social issues, housing, proper water, health care and even their own auditor general. We realized then that

accountability was significant and important to their well-being and the building of infrastructure.

I wonder why, within six months of the Conservatives coming to power, it abandoned the whole thing, and have done almost nothing since. Why would the Conservatives abandon something so significant and hard fought for?

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government took 13 years to decide what it would do. At least we have ensured that we have acted on our promises to first nations. We will continue to do so in our mandate.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal Party was asked to table the Kelowna accord during my first session here, which was 2006-07, I never saw it. It is interesting that gets put forward.

I am aware that this government has settled well in excess of 70 specific land claims. The Liberal Party, in 13 years, could not lay claim to anything like that record.

First nations are seeking an opportunity and they want to pursue economic development through self-government agreements. I think of the Westbank First Nation in B.C., which has been operating under a self-government agreement since 2003. The Whitecap Dakota in Saskatchewan has been operating under the FNLMA since 2004. It has created over 700 jobs.

I met with an aspiring first nation just this week that wants the opportunity to welcome jobs, opportunity and investment. That is what this government is seeking to do.

Sure the government is seeking transparency and accountability, but is not working with aspiring first nations to create jobs and opportunity the right thing to do?

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, it certainly is. In my riding of Kootenay—Columbia the Ktunaxa Nation and St. Mary's have entered into first nations land management. They will reap the benefit of economic development very quickly as they are very progressive first nations.

As we see more first nations coming to first nations land management, we will see them reap the benefit as well. First nations have a great opportunity in this land to show what they can do in the years to come.

• (1225)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important matter today and share with the House some of the initiatives that our government has undertaken. As I have a short period of time, I will only be able to touch on a few important steps that our government has undertaken over the last number of years and months.

I thank the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for bringing it forward. She is a valued member of our committee and we have a great opportunity to work in that capacity together.

Business of Supply

There is no doubt that aboriginal people face situations that make finding work oftentimes very difficult. Canadians who live in remote, rural and northern communities, which is the case for many aboriginal communities, often find that the challenges are magnified in finding and keeping work.

At the same time, there are tremendous opportunities to promote and encourage greater aboriginal participation in the Canadian economy, for example, our mining and mineral exploration industry. Our country is one of the largest mining industrial sectors in the world, producing more than 60 different metals and minerals.

The Canadian mining industry is truly a giant among giants, accounting for 4.5% of our gross domestic product and 23%, close to a quarter, of all Canadian exports in 2011. The sector is the main industry in more than 115 communities and yet it is about to face some serious labour shortages that will absolutely be acute if the sector grows as much as it is estimated in the next decade.

The energy and natural resource sector represents a huge opportunity for aboriginal communities since many of them are located near mines and other natural resource sites. Aboriginal communities are also in close proximity to many exploration projects and can play an important role in providing local labour. Aboriginal people have the potential to be a driving force behind the successes of these industries.

The mining industry is the largest private sector employer of aboriginal people today, however, there is still much that needs to be done. Unemployment rates among the aboriginal people are still too high. One might ask why there is a high percentage of unemployed people in areas with such robust industries like mining and natural resource exploration. Clearly, there seems to be a mismatch between the demands for skilled workers and the supply for those skilled workers. These skill shortages are likely to get worse because of Canada's low birth rates and the retirement of many experienced older workers from the baby boomer generation. Aboriginals must play an important role in Canada's strategy to address growing skills and labour shortages.

Aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 30 years old are the fastest growing population in Canada today. We recognize that this presents a well of talent that is currently not properly being tapped. That is why our government remains committed to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

Unfortunately, many Canadians living in rural and remote parts of northern communities in Canada do not always have the education and work experience they need to find employment within the resource sector. That is why our government works with partners to ensure aboriginal people are able to take full advantage of the economic opportunities. Several measures are in place to help aboriginal people develop the skills they need to enter the workforce.

One of these measures is the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, or ASETS as it is often called. The program supports over 80 aboriginal organizations to design and deliver skills development and training programs to increase the participation of first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in the labour market. Agreement holders tailor their training programs to the specific needs of the community and work in partnership with the private

sector. Training institutions and the provinces and territories also work toward this effort.

In 2011 and 2012 ASETS was able to find 11,000 jobs for aboriginals in their local areas. ASETS is looking to build off the successes of last year and hopes to see between 12,000 and 16,000 jobs created this year alone.

• (1230)

Another measure is the skills and partnership fund, the SPF as it is often referred to, which supports innovative partner-based projects for aboriginal skill development that responds to economic opportunities. There are currently over 60 projects across Canada that are giving aboriginals the tools that they need to succeed in the labour market. Our government shares the view that partnerships are the key to match skill development and training with the labour market demand. We will continue to make this a priority in especially rural and remote communities.

However, before we get to this point, a solid elementary and secondary education is the way that will give aboriginal children and youth the start that they need in order to succeed.

In budget 2012 our government committed \$275 million over three years to improve school infrastructure and provide early literacy programming and other supports to first nations school systems to pave the way for the development of the first nation education act. Unfortunately the unprecedented support for first nations students was voted against by both NDP and Liberal members.

Our government is also working to help all adult Canadians get the essential skills they need to get to work, to stay employed and to contribute to their communities. By essential skills we mean the skills that are used in nearly every job, every day and in every aspect of life. These skills are used in different ways and at varying levels of complexity. Essential skills include reading and writing and of course, but not limited to, computer use and also oral communications and working with others.

The initiatives and investments that I have outlined today are designed to help aboriginal people find and keep work. They aim to build jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for all aboriginal communities across Canada.

It is in our long-term social and economic interest to see that all Canadians have the education, skills and employment they need to build good lives for themselves and their families, whether they live in remote communities or in urban centres, whether they are aboriginal or non-aboriginal.

To remain competitive in the global economy, we must focus our efforts on increasing our labour force participation, in other words, get more people working as soon as possible.

Business of Supply

While our government remains focused on working with willing partners to ensure that aboriginals can attain the skills and training they need to succeed in the labour market, the opposition parties remain committed to obstructing and voting against all of our efforts.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member. I happen to have in my riding right now probably some of the richest mineral deposits in the world. Beside many of these rich deposits are some of the most impoverished communities in Canada. We are seeing a disconnect as mineral development comes on stream. Even if someone gets hired at the mine, there is no housing in the community so the individual has to leave and ends up being just another fly-in worker just like non-aboriginals. That happens because of the lack of infrastructure in the communities. Local communities do not have the ability to move forward with partnership agreements because the infrastructure is not on the ground. There has not been any job training and basic schools are missing. We do not have grade schools in some of these communities.

What role does my hon. colleague see the government playing if we are to start closing the gap by simply not saying the private sector can do it? There has to be a role for the federal government in terms of job training and infrastructure. The government needs to have a plan to ensure that the young aboriginals sitting there right now without skills are able to get the skills they need so they are in the driver's seat as we start to develop in to the 21st century.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I can relate to the hon. member in many ways as I also represent a constituency that has a large aboriginal population and also is remote and in some cases disconnected. It also has an industrial footprint that continues to grow.

Partnerships do not happen overnight. There needs to be a multifaceted approach in terms of providing education to ensure that young people can get an education so they can have the skills to enter the workforce and take advantage of the opportunities.

That is why our government has invested significantly in the education of aboriginal young people across the country. Since taking office, we have built over 30 brand new schools in first nations communities across the country. We have substantially renovated over 200 schools. These are unprecedented investments in first nations schooling systems. No other government has done what we have done in terms of investing in infrastructure to ensure young people can get the education that is necessary to enter the workforce. We also have made significant investments in housing, water and waste water as well as general infrastructure.

• (1235)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Peace River for his thoughtful comments, and I believe he is earnest in his efforts to resolve all the problems relating to the issue of our first nations. I am not so sure it is shared by his party but I do believe he is earnest in his remarks. However, I have a statement to make and a question to ask of him.

Previously, the member for Peterborough indicated that he has asked many times for a copy of the Kelowna accord and has yet to see it. Therefore, I would ask the member for Peace River to seek the consent of his party. With the consent of the House, I have before me

the document, “Aboriginal Roundtable to Kelowna Accord: Aboriginal Policy Negotiations, 2004-2005”, as well as the Kelowna Accord Implementation Act. This is not the figment of anyone's imagination. These are real documents, real negotiations, with real solutions.

I wonder if I have the consent of the House to table these documents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. It is the Chair that asks for unanimous consent, not the hon. member.

However, having said that, during his question the hon. member for Guelph has asked for unanimous consent to table two documents. Does he have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for the question has expired.

The hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to have those documents put forward in the House. The fact that the hon. member can wave them in a single hand shows the depth of their commitment. I am distressed to consider, when I look at the piles of documents that sit alone on my own desk, as chair of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the commitment of our government. That is just a portion of what we have done; that is only what we are doing right now.

We are talking about piles and piles of consultations and documents, with commitments regarding education; infrastructure investments across this country; investments in water, in sewer, in education, in post-secondary education, in opportunity, hope and prosperity for all first nations across this country. Unfortunately, that is not the legacy of the former Liberal government. For 13 years, all it could come up with was what the member now waves in his hands, whereas what we have today from this government is a demonstration of commitment to first nations moving forward and building this country into the country we all know we can—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for York South—Weston.

I am very proud to speak to the motion about the need for the House of Commons to finally get serious and understand its obligation to address the longstanding moral, economic, social and historic deficit that has left so much of our country in absolutely abominable condition, which must change.

Business of Supply

We have always told ourselves that Canada is the greatest country in the world. The international index of human indicators of health and social well-being always placed Canada right at the very top until it started to factor in the fact there are two worlds in Canada. There is the non-native world and then there is the fourth world that the aboriginal communities are living in. When that was factored in, Canada started to drop year-by-year. We are now down to eighth place, that is, taken as a whole. In terms of first nation communities, we are down in 63rd place among communities in the world.

We are seeing talk from the government. Conservatives have their message box. They have press releases and they expect the young generation marching out there in the streets to be patient. We have seen from the Idle No More campaign an unprecedented response across this country, a virtual uprising of people who have come to feel they are hostages in their own country, that somehow they are a colonized people in their own land. They are saying they are not putting up with it any more.

There is a sense of urgency, an urgency that needs us to move beyond party lines, because this problem did not start with the present Conservative government. This is well over a century in the making. Now is the time to pay up and start fixing some of these fundamental problems. We have 39% of first nation communities at high risk from poor water quality and 34% at medium risk. That amounts to some 83% of first nation communities in this country not having safe drinking water. How can a country this rich say that is okay?

How can we tell young people to be patient when they have substandard systems of education, set up in a manner that is a form of systemic discrimination? Every child in this country walks into a school with an inalienable set of rights unless they live on a first nation, and then they get whatever the government gives them. Those kids are being told to be patient.

They were told to be patient in Attawapiskat when, under the federal government's watch, diesel fumes from a contaminant leak were coming up in classrooms and the kids were passing out in the grade 1 classroom and coming home stinking of diesel fuel from their daily exposure to benzines and xylenes, cancer-causing agents. The families were told to be patient, that it would be fixed. Well it was never fixed. It went on year after year.

That is why people are marching in the streets, because they are not going to be patient any longer. This generation has seen that the time has now come to pay up. It is never convenient to do the right thing. It is never an opportune time to do the right thing. We do the right thing because at a certain point in our juncture or history, it becomes clear that we are not the nation we were meant to be unless we meet that fundamental debt, unless we pay that debt. That is what we are called to do.

We need to deal with the education deficit. I speak about this issue because I saw it through a child's eyes. That is probably the thing I most learned in this job, seeing what it was like through the eyes of a child in Attawapiskat, Shannen Koostachin, who saw her life passing before her because she had gone to school in crappy portables. She knew she had a substandard education. She knew that if she did not get that one chance to get a better education, it would be too late for her and her generation. I saw that look in her eyes. I saw that look in

the eyes of those children and I realized that all the talk that goes on in the House is not enough. We need to start seeing action.

There are a number of steps we need to take in terms of economic development and meeting basic treaty commitments. I would like to talk about treaties, because there is an idea out there that we won, they lost, and why do they not just shut up? What is their problem? That is not what the treaties were about.

● (1240)

When Treaty 9 was signed, representing a large region of the Nishnawbe Aski territory I represent, they went from community to community and asked the people to sign an agreement to share the land. Some people may think this happened in ancient times, but it did not. I know people whose families signed the treaty. Grand Chief Stan Louttit's grandfather signed that treaty. Theresa Spence's grandfather signed the treaty. Government representatives came to Fort Hope saying that this would be a great agreement, gave everyone eight bucks, and told the first nation people: "You go off and do your thing and we'll do ours".

However, Chief Elijah Moonias—and we have another version of Chief Elijah Moonias alive today in Marten Falls dealing with the Ring of Fire—stood up and said to the people: "Wait a minute. What's going on here? The white guys have come up and offered us eight bucks and they're telling us that we don't have to give anything in return". That is in the records. Chief Elijah Moonias warned the people about signing the treaty because they did not know what they were signing on to.

The records also show when first nations were signing Treaty 9 that one of the reasons they felt they needed to sign was that they were worried about the future. They were willing to share the land, but in exchange they wanted education. It was actually in the Treaty 9 documents that they saw that the future for their kids was an education. So the white commissioners signed that. However, they gave them the residential schools. They took their children away from them and tried to destroy them as a people. That is what they got in return for signing Treaty 9.

If we look at the history of Treaty 9, before the community leaders signed it, they asked two clear questions. These people communicated orally, they did not write it down, but they asked for clarification at the treaty signings. One question was: "What will happen to our hunting and fishing rights and our ability to use our lands?" The government answered: "Those will not be impacted in any way". Well, they were lied to there.

The second question they asked was: "Will we be forced to live on these reserves that you're setting up?" The government answered: "No, you'll be free to live wherever you want". This was also a promise that was broken because they are stuck on the reserves. For example, in Attawapiskat, the community cannot even be expanded to put in proper houses. All that land either belongs to the federal government or the province and they are stuck on these postage stamp-size reserves, but right beside them is one of the largest diamond mines in the world, and just down the road there will be gold mines. However, when the treaty was signed, the government said that they would not be impacted in any way in their ability to use the land in traditional ways.

Business of Supply

Now the current Conservative government might not recognize those treaties, but they have been recognized by the Constitution of this country under section 35. They have been recognized in court decision after court decision. There is no ambivalence about the need to consult because the first nation people never gave up the right to use the land, which brings us to Bill C-45.

Bill C-45 is the government's omnibus legislation where it decided to strip protection of waters and basic environmental protections from all the northern lakes and rivers, but it did not have the guts to do it publicly. The government was not going to go and tell the first nation communities that it was open season on their waterways, the Albany River, Moose River and Attawapiskat River. No, the Conservatives stuck that into a budget bill and tried to ram it through without people noticing, and they figured they would get away with it.

However, now people are saying: "Wait a minute, you didn't consult. You didn't do your legal duty to consult". That is what the courts have shown and that is what is in our Constitution.

The time has come to start addressing these issues. We are in this relationship together. Although it has been a very dysfunctional relationship, it is the primary relationship in this country. It is the first relationship. We must recognize that we are all treaty people, that we all share this land, and that we will all make the country what it should be when we make sure that our young first nation children have the same opportunities as everyone else. Until we do that, we will never be the country we are supposed to be. This is the moment for all parliamentarians to start making it happen. Let us tell this generation that they are not going to be betrayed the way the last generation was and the generation before them.

• (1245)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a 2009 KPMG report shows that first nations with direct control over their reserve lands and their resources, under the framework agreement and the First Nations Land Management Act, are making decisions at the speed of business and that economic development is much greater in comparison to those lands that are administered by the government under the Indian Act.

Many of the operational first nations reported a significant increase in new businesses overall by band members, up to 40%, and a corresponding increase in different types of businesses, including suppliers and spinoff businesses. These first nations attracted approximately \$53 million in internal investment and close to \$100 million in external investment. More than 2,000 employment opportunities had been generated for band members and more than 10,000 jobs for non-members. In addition, many of those surveyed reported a shift in the quality of jobs available on reserve, and that these had higher education requirements. This has significantly reduced the dependence on social programs and pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into local economies.

Why does the member opposite not want our first nations to succeed?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, my poor colleague, I invite her to come up and see some of the communities.

We are talking about children who do not have schools. Does she have any communities where kids are denied the right to schools? Do any of the kids in her communities get educated on grounds full of benzene and toxic contamination? No.

If we are talking about all our children getting a fair chance in life, we have to start putting our money where our mouths are.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. It is rare to see such a combination of theoretical knowledge of a file and practical expertise. The hon. member knows these people. His speeches clearly demonstrate that he wants to make peace, to do something new and to restore our relationship with the first nations.

I was floored by the question he was just asked. This leads me to ask the hon. member the following question: does he not find that the current government seems to want to take a business-as-usual approach when Idle No More is putting us in an extremely different situation in terms of communication?

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, it is not business as usual anymore. The time has come to recognize the legitimate issues that are out there. They have to be dealt with on a nation-to-nation basis and with respect. The Conservatives cannot pick and choose. They cannot just pick the one thing they want to bring forward and ignore the rest. It is about restoring the relationship.

In my communities I have seen the enormous potential for change, the enormous potential and the enormous amount of goodwill that exists within the first nation communities. However, the time for respect is here. The current government and the next government have to say that there will be commitments to fix the shortfalls so that the communities can get up to speed. Then the communities need to take that freedom and move forward to build the kind of economies that we need in the 21st century.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today the member for Toronto Centre referenced the Liberal government, in which I served under Prime Minister Paul Martin, in a non-partisan way. I wish to recall one particular part that I think bears not only recall today, but in fact acting upon that commitment, which we have failed signally to do, and it is both a government commitment and a parliamentary commitment.

The first day that government, of which I was a part, met, at our first cabinet meeting, the Prime Minister at the time said that at the end of the day, our government would be judged by one issue, what he called the legacy issue, and that would be how we fulfilled our commitments to the aboriginal peoples.

Business of Supply

As a result of that, he set a whole-of-government process in motion, which included an aboriginal secretariat out of the cabinet, a cabinet committee on aboriginal affairs and an 18-month process, which began as it did at the time with a Canada-aboriginal peoples round table in Ottawa on April 19, 2004, and then ended with the first ministers meeting in Kelowna on November 24, 2005. An 18-month process—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Could the member put his question quickly, please?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, has the government put in place a similar whole-of-government approach, which would not only effect what was intended by the Kelowna accord but what we have somehow forgotten was a parliamentary enactment—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my honoured colleague, I worked with the Algonquin Nation in Quebec under the Liberal government. I can tell members that what I am hearing now sounds more like fiction than the historical record. If on the very first day their cabinet met and said that they would be judged by their legacy to first nations and then they waited until a week before the election to suddenly come up with their deathbed conversion, the intervening 13 years was a big, long dry period.

I say to my hon. colleague that they had the opportunity. They failed. In fact, let us not just blame the Martin government. This goes back to the 20th century. Who was there, year after year, as the situation got worse and worse? It was the Liberal government.

I love deathbed confessions. I know they are sincere, but let us not pretend that it is anything other than that.

• (1255)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak on what is an excellent motion from the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

My riding does not have a reserve in it, but there are first nation people in my riding. I have met with them and talked with them. In fact, a couple of them put on a Remembrance Day sunrise ceremony this past November to honour first nation soldiers who had fought for Canada in wars overseas. It was held at an ordinary school in my riding, Bala Avenue Community School. It was to remind the children in the school that everyone is in this, that we are all together. It was a moving and wonderful ceremony.

Another constituent has asked me on several occasions about whether it would be possible to create a native language immersion school in Toronto, because there are 10,000 native children in Toronto who need an education. We can manage to have immersion schools all over the place for the French language, as one of the nation-to-nation languages in the country, but we cannot seem to put together the wherewithal to build language education for first nation children.

I discovered as a result of my investigation that there are such native language schools at the reserve in Six Nations. They teach their kids Mohawk and Cayuga in an immersion setting from junior

kindergarten all the way up to grade 8. It is wonderful. I will talk more about that later.

It is clear now, from this issue coming forward and from the events in Southern Ontario and all over Canada, that the whole issue of the relationship between the government and first nations, mostly about money but also about land claims, has proven to many first nation people across the country that there is a problem. There are people talking about whether or not it is discriminatory on the part of the government to provide less for first nation people than it provides for others and whether it is discriminatory on the part of the government to not fund education the way it should.

The Idle No More protest has created a grassroots manifestation of the frustration that has gone on for many years in first nation communities. I am talking about dozens and dozens of years since the first obligations of the treaties and it started to become clear that the governments were not going to honour some of those treaties. It is not just the treaties but the care and control of the government of the first nation people that has failed. The governments have been paternalistic, punishing and prejudiced in their behaviour toward first nation people. More recently, this government is showing its paternalistic and punishing nature with the bills it brought forward to force first nations to report in a new and different way all the money they take in and earn, because someone somewhere did not like the way it was being done. It is paternalistic and punishing, and that needs to stop.

There are some who would suggest that there is a sense of disdain for native issues among some in the Conservative caucus. The events this week by the member for Ottawa—Orléans and Senator Brazeau, in a fundraiser, showed some of the potential for contempt we are hearing. I hope and pray it is not widespread among the Conservative caucus, but there are those out there who fear that it is.

With that context, I went to visit the Six Nations reserve as a result of my quest to see if we could create a native language school. I discovered when I was there just how hard it is to educate children on this reserve. Whether it is in native languages or not, it is extremely difficult. They told me that they receive about half the money from the federal government that the provincial government provides to teach children off reserve.

• (1300)

It is roughly \$10,000 per child that the provincial government gives, and the federal government gives, according to the band council on the reserve, around \$5,000 per child. When they question this, the government says “Well, you can pay your teachers less.” Those who are living on reserve do not pay taxes, so that limits the teachers they can get to those on reserve. It is a sense of paternalism. It gets worse, though.

When they created this native language school, they did it not completely independent of the federal government, but as an adjunct to the federal government. They did it with fees from the parents. So it is like a private school in that the parents have to pay to send their children to this school.

Business of Supply

However, small business people in the community have decided to contribute, to donate space to that school. So what did the federal government do when it discovered that space had been donated to the school? It deducted the value of the space from the contributions it made on behalf of the children of that school. It clawed back a donation.

Imagine if any school board in this country tried to do the same thing. If the kids were out there selling chocolate-covered almonds to raise money for a trip, and the school board said “If you raise money, if there is a donation to the school, we are going to claw it back”, that would be unheard of. It would not ever happen.

On the Six Nations Reserve, that is exactly what goes on. It is shameful that this kind of attitude takes place. It is shameful that the Six Nations Reserve cannot, with full funding from the federal government, provide whatever kind of education it wants to provide.

The Six Nations Reserve is in southern Ontario. It is in the bread basket of Canada, and yet there are 325 homes without running water. How did that happen? How is it that we have a lack of running water in homes in southern Ontario, only on a reserve?

Fourteen months ago when the member for Kootenay—Columbia was up speaking on first nations issues, I asked him about these 325 homes. He said:

Mr. Speaker, we will ensure and work toward making sure those people at Six Nations get drinking water to those 325 homes.... The infrastructure that is required to be placed into those homes has to be done through whatever means is required: putting pipes in the ground, ensuring they get to the homes, ensuring they are hooked up to the water system, and ensuring they are hooked up to the waste water system.

I am confident that this will occur very quickly. It is unfortunate that it has taken so long, but I can assure the House that our committee and the minister will ensure that it happens sooner than later.

Nothing has happened. That was 14 months ago. That is typical of the government of the day. “It is a priority for us”, I hear them say over and over again in answer to questions, but it does not get done because it is not really a priority. It was not in the budget. It is not in the plans. It is not in the priorities of the government. However, the government members sit there and say it is a priority, but they do not actually do it. It boils down to money.

The other big problem at the Six Nations Reserve is the land claims issue. It has been festering for many years, and in Ontario, in Caledonia, we saw the manifestation of frustration on the land claims issue in 2006 when a group of native protestors took over a housing construction project and occupied it, preventing houses from being built. They claimed that the land was disputed, and that issue is still festering. That was in 2006. That was seven years ago and it is still there.

It is not just seven years. It has been dozens and dozens of years that these native groups and first nations communities have been saying, over and over again, that their land claims have not been respected by governments, not just the Conservative government but also Liberal governments before them.

That needs to be done, on a nation-to-nation basis. What also needs to be done by the government is a real commitment to dollars. The Liberal government froze the funding for first nations activities, like education, at 2%, and the government has not changed it. It found enough money to increase the budget for the ministry of

defence by 44%, but it can only find 2% for first nations. There is something wrong with the priorities of the government, and we want to change those priorities.

● (1305)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member for York South—Weston looks at the record of this government since 2006 he will see much greater increases in financial commitment to first nations.

As part of this debate, I would simply ask the hon. member if he would acknowledge some of the achievements that have been made by first nations in their communities, thanks to federal government funding. Quite frankly, some of his colleagues have not done so.

There were 10,000 new homes built and many thousands of new homes renovated. There was increased funding for child and family services by 25%, not to mention the skills issue: there were 700 projects, not single, individual initiatives, but projects for whole communities and whole classes of young people, linking aboriginals across Canada with job training and counselling services. Some 400 land claims have been concluded since 2006.

Would the hon. member opposite acknowledge this as significant, substantial progress? Yes, it is progress the government needs to multiply. Would he agree that it is not simply a question of dollars? Without accountability—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for York South—Weston.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite has reminded us that there has been some tinkering by the government, yes, but tinkering is not what is necessary.

What is necessary is a 44% increase, like the ministry of defence has received over the term of office of the Conservative government, the ministry he is purportedly representing. That is not what the native affairs department has received. It is not what natives in Canada have received. They have received some tinkering around the edges.

If one builds 10,000 houses, which is part of the regular process, but one needs to build 80,000 houses, there is something wrong with the message. If there are 427 students on a reserve who cannot get a post-secondary education because the money is not there and they are waiting, there is something wrong with that picture.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether it is today's leader of the Liberal Party or a former leader, former prime minister Paul Martin, the Liberal Party believes there needs to be a comprehensive approach in dealing with first nations and aboriginals.

Business of Supply

Former Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine has argued repeatedly for the implementation of the Kelowna accord. He had called the deal a breakthrough for his people. This is not something, as the member's colleague indicated, that Liberals did on their deathbed. Former prime minister Paul Martin was halfway through a four-year term. There had been 18 months of round tables and consultations that led to the Kelowna accord. However, because the NDP was eager to vote with the Conservatives to cause an election, the Kelowna accord died. That is the reality.

The question I have for the hon. member is: Does he have any remorse or regret? Will he at the very least acknowledge we need another comprehensive accord that is going to deal with first nations issues today?

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, deathbed conversions are not needed here. The Liberal government had 13 years of majority rule, and only in the last year did it come up with something. Only in the last year did it put its mind to something, and that is the problem. That same Liberal government froze the amount of money that had been flowing to first nations people, and that freezing has continued to this day.

As I said, there are 427 kids on a reserve who cannot get post-secondary education because they have run out of money.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to address the motion brought by the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. The motion calls for a broad-based demand for action to make improvements to the economic outcomes for first nations, Inuit and Métis. I will speak to how our government has been doing exactly that by investing in first nations education.

As we say many times in this House, the economy is the number one priority. However, we also know that education and the economy are not mutually exclusive concepts. We cannot have one without the other. It has been stated on numerous occasions by both the Assembly of First Nations and our government that education is essential to improving the lives of aboriginal people and creating economic opportunities on reserve. We also know that a quality education is an essential building block to finding a good job, that finding a good job leads to economic growth and that economic growth will lead to community self-sufficiency.

However, we know that many Canadians living in remote and rural northern communities do not always have the education they need to find the work. That is why ensuring first nations have access to good education and improving the graduation rates for first nations children is important. It is one of our top priorities. We want to ensure that aboriginal youth are able to acquire the new skills and knowledge to enter into the labour market to contribute to a strong Canadian economy. It is not just the Canadian economy; it is, of course, the economy of our first nations. We all participate in the same economy.

Our government recognizes that education is crucial to unlocking the potential of first nations youth and to supporting the growth of prosperous and self-sufficient first nations communities. That is why we are committed to working together with willing partners to ensure that first nations students have the best possible education and all of the opportunities that go with that.

Today I will outline some of the progress the government has made over the years. The story will show we are committed, now and into the future, to work with willing partners to improve the educational system and the graduation rates for first nations students. First nations children need to be equipped with a quality education that can help them reach their full potential to take advantage of the great economic opportunities this country has to offer. That is why every year our government invests approximately \$1.5 billion to support roughly 117,000 elementary and secondary students living on reserve across the country. In addition, we allocate over \$200 million each year to maintain and improve school infrastructure in first nations communities. Our government is also working to improve the programs and structures that will provide the opportunity for first nations students to acquire the skills they need to take full advantage of Canada's economic opportunities.

For example, under economic action plan 2012, our government committed to investing an additional \$275 million, over three years, to improve school infrastructure and education outcomes for first nations students. These additional funds will ensure that more first nations students get the education they need so they can pursue the same opportunities that are available to all Canadian students. Sadly, as we see time and time again, the NDP, including the member who has brought forward this motion today, vote against these investments. Of the additional \$275 million, \$175 million will go to renovating schools on reserves and providing first nations students with a better learning environment. There will be \$100 million allocated to support early literacy programs, services and partnerships with provincial school systems. Again, by voting against these investments time and again, the opposition members are not supportive of improving the educational opportunities for first nations.

● (1310)

These new investments would help ensure that first nation education systems on reserve are prepared for the implementation of a new first nations education act. This proposed act would establish structures and standards to support strong and accountable education systems on reserve. Through intense consultations, we have committed to work with willing partners to have this legislation in place by no later than September 2014.

First nation students are the only children in Canada whose education system is not governed by any legislation. Unlike previous governments, our government is committed to working to bring forward such legislation. This legislation would provide the modern framework necessary to build standards and structures, strengthen governance and accountability, and provide a mechanism for stable, predictable and sustainable funding, which are key ingredients to educational success. Our government is committed to working with first nations to develop a first nations education act, and we are consulting with first nations leaders, educators, parents, students and other interested stakeholders. We are determined to follow through on this commitment.

Business of Supply

The first consultation took place in Halifax on January 22, and provided participants with an opportunity to share their views on first nation education reform and the proposed approach to the development of a first nations education act. These intense consultations will include additional methods for interested individuals to provide us with their perspectives and feedback online, through the departmental website. Intensive consultations with first nation parents, students, leaders and educators, as well as the provinces, are integral to the development and drafting of this legislation.

I must clarify that no legislation has actually been drafted. The purpose of these ongoing consultations is to get views and feedback so the legislation can be drafted. The input gathered during consultations will help shape the drafting of proposed education legislation. Once drafted, the proposed legislation would be shared with every single first nation community across Canada, as well as with provincial governments and other stakeholders, to get their valuable feedback.

Furthermore, I must clarify that a first nations education act would not override aboriginal rights or treaties. The proposed approach will not apply to self-governing first nations that have adopted laws related to education. We all need to continue working together to create the structures and standards that support strong, accountable education systems on reserve that ultimately contribute to the success of individuals, students and their communities.

This is about putting more choice in the hands of first nations and clearly defining and formalizing the roles and responsibilities that are needed to build a strong accountable education system. Our government's efforts on education reform are not intended to create more bureaucracy or burdensome reporting requirements. A modern framework for education would promote accountability and transparency and minimize red tape for first nation schools and organizations. The overall objective is to give first nation students the best chance of success in order for them to graduate, obtain jobs, contribute to their communities and, of course, contribute to the Canadian economy. Our government recognizes that a sound piece of legislation will only be achieved with proper consultations. That is why we must work together.

The rising importance of education is reflected in the new demands of a global economy that is more integrated and interconnected than ever. Education is essential to helping a first nation student realize his or her potential.

Our government has also supported first nation education through committed partnerships that have led to tripartite education agreements across the country. To date, seven tripartite agreements have been entered into, in addition to pre-existing tripartite partnerships in both British Columbia and Nova Scotia. These partnerships have helped strengthen education programs, and services and standards between on-reserve and provincial education systems, so students can transfer between the two systems without any academic penalty. For example, last January our government, along with the B.C. government and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, signed a tripartite framework agreement. The agreement aims to provide B.C. first nation students with access to quality education programs whether they attend school on or off reserve.

●(1315)

Under this agreement, the First Nations Education Steering Committee supports the delivery of quality education programs and services, meeting standards that will allow first nations students to transfer, without academic penalty, at similar levels of achievement between first nations schools and provincial public schools.

In Nova Scotia, the 11 first nations bands have signed on to the final agreement with respect to Mi'kmaq education in Nova Scotia. That agreement states that participating communities shall provide "primary, elementary and secondary education programs and services...".

[The educational programs and services provide by a community must be] comparable to the programs and services provided by other education systems in Canada in order to permit the transfer of students to and from those systems without academic penalty...".

This is a great leap forward for first nation students. Education agreements like these are an example of the progress being made in education through dedicated partnerships; these are partnerships that we want to replicate and emulate with legislation. We expect more tripartite agreements like the ones currently in place to come soon. Tripartite framework agreements are focused on putting the building blocks in place to strengthen first nations schools.

Our progress in education in recent years builds on numerous reports, including the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, as well as the work stemming from the National Panel on First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education. In June 2010, the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations launched the independent National Panel on First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education. The national panel consulted with first nation leaders, parents, elders, students, teachers, provincial officials and the private sector across the country. In February 2012, the national panel released its final report, characterizing the current situation as a non-system that has failed first nations. We know we must work hand in hand with first nations communities to address these challenges. There is simply no other way.

As important as education itself is the building where the learning takes place. Improved learning environments facilitate better educational experiences for first nation students. Since 2006, the government has provided funding for over 260 school projects, including 36 brand new schools and 30 major school renovations or additions.

Business of Supply

As I have mentioned, our government invests over \$200 million annually on school infrastructure. In economic action plan 2012, our government committed an additional \$100 million towards schools on reserve. Through a new “strong schools, successful students initiative”, this funding will help to strengthen the ability of regional first nation organizations to provide students with education supports and services, including tripartite partnerships like the ones I have discussed. First nation schools and educational organizations will benefit from this. These funds will also support programs to improve the school management capacity, initiatives to strengthen the relationship with provincial school systems, and early literacy programming and other supports and services for first nation students in grades K to 12. The “strong schools, successful student initiative” provides new funding for new activities that support capacity development, in areas such as governance and leadership, parental and community involvement, planning, performance measurement, and risk management and organizational planning. This initiative and investment is one more way our government is working to place a good education within the grasp of all first nation students.

A good education opens the door to opportunities, jobs and personal success. With the actions and investments I have outlined today, the government is working to improve access to a good education and graduation rates for first nation students. Structural reforms will make this happen. Partnerships will make this happen. Our government is taking the necessary steps to bring a 21st century education system to our first nations children.

I urge the opposition to support us in these efforts. The stakes are simply too high for us not to make first nations education a priority. Improving the educational outcomes of first nation children will be a key element in overcoming the socio-economic challenges that face many first nation communities.

• (1320)

Improving the educational outcomes of first nation children will also help strengthen our country's prosperity. As our first nations are more successful, the Canadian economy will be more successful.

I am confident that all hon. members must agree with me. The future success of first nations in Canada will be intrinsically linked to the graduation rates of its members. That is why education on first nations is such a priority.

• (1325)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that my colleague talked a lot about education because education is very important. However, I am a little troubled by the figures that he has given us in terms of the government investment.

I come from the Northwest Territories where we handle capital investment in schools for about 33 communities, many of them small isolated communities. The cost of construction and maintenance of these schools far exceeds those in downtown Mississauga or in Brampton, Ontario. We are not talking the same thing. An investment of \$275 million over this many years, when we have 600 reserves where the situation with the building was dire when the government came in, is simply not adequate.

We built a school in Inuvik. Now that is a little larger a community, but the cost of that school was \$120 million to build it properly so it would last for a significant length of time. Therefore, when the government talks about \$275 million over a number of years and that it will do renovations and build some new schools, that is not a lot of schools for 600 reserves.

If my hon. colleague were really interested in getting our support for these types of efforts, he would have to increase that by an exponential factor, that investment over five years in first nation reserves' schools.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I do not think my friend listened to everything I had to say. It is not just \$275 million. That is \$270 million in additional funds that we will invest. As I said in my speech, we invest \$1.5 billion annually, plus \$200 million annually for maintenance. This is an additional \$275 million over three years.

We are providing the kind of funding that is going to be necessary for first nation communities to build the schools as quickly as possible.

Therefore, my friend is off. It is not \$275 million; it is an additional \$275 million over three years.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was only yesterday when the leader of the Liberal Party asked the Prime Minister a question related to graduations. We want to see more individuals graduate. Education equates to opportunities.

Under the government's policy, it would take 20 years before, and that is if things are successful, individuals will hit the average Canadian graduation rates. The government needs to do a lot more on the education front.

There is a difference between the Paul Martin government dealing with a first nation community versus his government. We believed in a comprehensive approach based upon consultations. The Kelowna accord is just an example of that, where 18 months of round table discussions, from all different types of stakeholders, led to a comprehensive agreement.

Why does the current government not see the benefit for all Canadians in developing and supporting a comprehensive agreement and bringing the stakeholders to the table that would ensure there is a long-term vision for our first nations in which they can lead and get behind?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, as is always interesting with the members from the Liberal Party, somehow they have the answer to all the problems that they could not solve in 13 years straight when they were in government. Not only that, in the 75 of the previous 100 years, when they were the government of this country, they were not able to solve any of these problems, but now they have all the answers.

Business of Supply

If my hon. colleague had listened to my speech, I set out an extensive consultation process with respect to the first nations education act. That is exactly the thing we need to move forward on education. We are going to move forward with that. We are going to solve some of these problems.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members just said that they would not support any of our priorities. They are going to hold that political stand by not doing the right thing, but they are going to be political.

Our government has said that that water legislation is our priority. We have said that time and time again. If opposition members would support it, we could pass it very quickly.

Could the hon. member comment on the importance of water legislation?

• (1330)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, this government, unlike the previous government, and we can talk about that track record for the remaining probably seven or eight minutes of my question and answer period, undertook the most extensive review of water and waste water systems across the country, again, something that was not done by a party that was the government for 75 of the last 100 years. We have prioritized which waste water and drinking water systems are most at risk so we can move quickly to try to fix those.

The legislation my colleague talks about is an important step in that direction. I would encourage members in the House, including the member across the way, to support that legislation so we can keep moving forward.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my friend's comments about education. While it is nice that the Conservatives talk about education, could he tell us whether there will be money in the upcoming budget? There are 427 students who cannot go to post-secondary school because there is no money. Those students are sitting and waiting, and apparently there are close to 10,000 such students across the country. Will there be money in the next budget to correct this wrong?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where my friend gets all of his numbers. This gives me a great opportunity to tell everyone about what we have done and this bears repeating. Since 2006 we built over 30 new schools, renovated over 200 schools, built over 10,000 homes and renovated thousands more and increased funding for child and family services by 25%. That is just to name a few things. We are making the kinds of investments that need to be made to improve the educational outcomes of first nation students.

If my friend is so concerned about that, why did he not support our last budget in which we had all kinds of investments for first nation students? Why did he vote against that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am truly astonished by this government's ability to close its eyes to a major and ongoing problem.

There have been demonstrations. Theresa Spence even went on a hunger strike to point out the extent of this government's inaction.

Yet the Conservatives are not shy about standing up in the House to talk about everything they have done.

Can they honestly stand in this House and say that there is not a problem and that they are doing the right thing? Clearly, the evidence says otherwise.

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I certainly cannot say that we are a perfect government. No government has been and he or she who is without sin can cast the first stone. What I can say is that we are working very hard to fix the problems in first nation communities. We recognize there is more to be done, but we have done an incredible job and I have said this before. We have had more accomplishments with meeting benchmarks with first nation communities than any previous government, and the list goes on and on. We have built over 30 schools since 2006 and renovated 200 schools. We have the best track record of any government in investing in our first nation communities and we are proud of that.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my caucus mate intently when he talked about some of the achievements of this government in first nations and I am glad that he recognized that no government is perfect. No person in this room is perfect, but across party lines we all want the best outcomes for our first nation brothers and sisters across the country.

The hon. member also mentioned some of the statistics, some of the progress we have made. I listened previously to the minister when he said that we did not just invest hundreds of millions, but we invested billions in fresh water.

Could the member expand further on some of the accomplishments and some of the challenges that we are prepared to face in the future?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, we have done a lot. As a member of the aboriginal affairs committee, one of things we are talking about is land use development to unleash the economic potential on first nations reserves, things like changing land designations, like we just saw, making it easier for first nations communities to designate lands so they can lease and generate economic activity; and improvements to the first nations land management regime, so more first nations can get out of the land use sections of the Indian Act to spur economic activity.

I could go on, but unfortunately I only have time for a short answer. However, we are doing a lot and we will keep doing more.

• (1335)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Joliette.

The motion before us reads:

That the House, recognizing the broad-based demand for action, call on the government to make the improvement of economic outcomes of First Nations, Inuit and Métis a central focus of Budget 2013, and to commit to action on treaty implementation and full and meaningful consultation on legislation that affects the rights of Aboriginal Canadians, as required by domestic and international law.

Business of Supply

I want to take some time to focus on the Northwest Territories, which is a singularly unique area of Canada where we have settled and unsettled claims. We found the best way to improve the economic situation of our indigenous people in the Northwest Territories is to settle land resources and self-government claims.

In the parts of the Northwest Territories where the claims have been settled, people have increased prosperity and the private sector, which wants to invest there, has certainty in the regulatory process. That is very clear. The opposite is true for those areas of the Northwest Territories, which still have unsettled claims.

In testimony before the members of aboriginal affairs and northern development committee during hearings in Yellowknife on Bill C-47, the NWT and Nunavut Mining Associations and the NWT Chamber of Commerce both stressed the value of having settled claims.

There are some examples of how settled claims can improve the economic situation of first nations people, Inuit people, and I will speak to two of them.

One is the Inuvialuit. The Inuvialuit were the first to settle their claims in the Northwest Territories. They did a very good job of it in 1984, with excellent claim settlement. They took over large pieces of their traditional territory. They got surface and subsurface rights in the oil-rich Mackenzie Delta and the Beaufort Sea area. They were in a position to take advantage of resource development, resource exploration in that area, and they have built an amazing Inuvialuit Development Corporation, which owns outfits like Canadian North Aviation. Members may have flown on it themselves. It owns the Northern Transportation Company Limited. It has investments and opportunities for Inuvialuit people throughout the Northwest Territories, at all levels of employment.

It is through this settlement that the Inuvialuit were to get their heads into economic development, rather than spending their time trying to fight with the federal government over land claim settlements.

We could talk about the Tlicho government, settled under the Liberal government in 2004. Its land extends through diamond-rich areas of the Northwest Territories. It has rights to large areas of land, surface, subsurface. It has opportunities on that land. What has it done with them? It has created the Tlicho Development Corporation. That development corporation, in less than 10 years, has gross revenue in excess of \$130 million, employing 800 people.

This is the kind of effort that could be made by first nations when they achieve control over traditional lands and territories, not when they are stuck on reserves, not when they do not have the opportunity to participate fully in the resource economy.

However, this is not the case in the areas of the Northwest Territories that do not have settled claims. In the Dehcho and the Akaitcho regions, both incredibly rich areas of the Northwest Territories, the Dehcho with its gas deposits, the Akaitcho once again with mining and great opportunities as well, negotiations on land claims are stalled. They have been stalled with the government for many years.

Much of the fault lies with the federal government through actions like continually changing negotiators, never giving negotiators the ability to make decisions, revisiting areas which have been agreed to in negotiations and changing negotiation mandates. These are all things that completely obfuscate the system.

In these two regions there is much uncertainty. The investment is difficult. Now there are brave companies, and I speak of Avalon as one company that is going through the environment assessment process. It won awards for its ability to talk to the first nations in those regions and to bring them into the process themselves.

We see industry taking over the role of government in providing the authority to first nations to make decisions on their land. That is what it takes in unsettled areas.

• (1340)

Chief Roy Fabian of the K'at'l'odeeche First Nation recently told the aboriginal affairs committee the following during hearings on Bill C-47 on the Surface Rights Board Act:

This legislation is a serious matter that strikes at the heart of Treaty 8 and jeopardizes our attempt at reconciliation with Canada. The legislation appears to be an attempt to circumvent our land claims process and undermine our authority over our lands.

...I want to make it clear that this Bill, if passed, will not be recognized as valid law on Katlodeeche territory. If the federal government attempts to impose this legislation on our Treaty land then we will consider our legal options to oppose this legislation and resist every attempt to grant an access order on our land.

Where does that leave industry? Where does that leave certainty? Where are we going with that? That is not working, is it?

Chief Fabian highlights a key element in current federal-aboriginal relations, namely that federal action or inaction is causing a rising sense of dissatisfaction among Canada's first nations, its aboriginal people, leading to movements like Idle No More. It is leading directly there. It is leading to a movement that we can all get behind: we should not all be idle on this issue. We should not be obfuscating. We should not be trying to make this a harder thing to accomplish, to get land claims settled in this country.

Canada's aboriginal people are no longer content to just sit patiently while Ottawa gets around to finally addressing their concerns. They are idle no more. Congratulations to first nations. Congratulations should come from all Canadians. We are glad they are idle no more. We are glad they are standing up for their rights. We are glad they are standing up for the land and the environment. These are things that have to be done. They are not getting done by the government. First nations can provide the leadership.

Canada's first nations want full settlement of their claims on traditional territories and will not wait while federal negotiators play games. They will be idle no more when it comes to getting these claims settled.

Canada's aboriginal people want to be treated fairly. They want to build the economies of their communities and regions. They are not opposed to development. I have shown that. They want to be full partners in development have a say in how it occurs. However because of delays by the federal government, they are no longer willing to wait.

Canadians should get behind them. Let us all be idle no more when it comes to first nation issues.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague on his speech, which was excellent as usual.

I would like to comment on something that is of concern to us here on this side of the House. The current Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development was one of the strongest opponents of the Nisga'a Final Agreement, which today serves as a model for other agreements. Some may recall that this minister said that the treaty would haunt Canadians for generations to come. Those are his words.

We are not concerned about these scare tactics because there have been success stories. My colleague spoke about them at length.

I would like to hear the hon. member talk a bit more about these success stories, which are beneficial to aboriginal people and all Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, when I travel through the Northwest Territories to the different communities, I see that those that have settled claims have relationships at the community and regional levels with all people. They are working with all people. That is how we get things done in Canada.

Things are done in Canada from a position of having something to offer. When first nations have settled claims, when they have certainty on their land, they have something really tangible to offer. They can control that offer as well, tailoring it in a way that works for them.

That is progress. That is going to make progress. That is what all Canadians want.

I am landowner. I control the land that I have. I make decisions about it. I invest if I have to. I look for partners if I have to. These are things we do as Canadians. I want first nations to have all those abilities that we all have as Canadians, tied to what they have from their ancestors, what they have from their position on this land.

Thirty times the courts have agreed with aboriginal people on land issues. Thirty times in a row. When are we going to wake up? When are we going to quit being so idle on these issues?

● (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take this opportunity emphasize the importance of reaching out and trying to bring a consensus, looking for their leadership to maintain their advocacy.

Idle No More is a wonderful movement that has really caught a great deal of momentum from people from coast to coast to coast. I

Business of Supply

think there are many who will draw inspiration from that, whether it continues in a very real way today or dwindles. There has been a great deal of benefit because it has heightened public awareness. I believe, most importantly, it has really motivated a good number of people to take it to the next level, that of being strong advocates for the necessary change first nations are demanding.

Would the hon. member want to add a few words or thoughts to that?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, at all levels first nations have had to recover from the many grievous wounds that have hurt their spirit. However, their spirit is going to recover.

In a way, I am of the fundamental opinion that first nations provide and can exhibit the greatest opportunities for leadership among us in this country. That spirit of leadership shown over the last while needs to be accepted and nurtured by all Canadians, because it will make us a greater and better country in the world we live.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan for moving a motion that expresses the sense of urgency that we, the NDP, feel with respect to Canada's aboriginals.

Before I begin my remarks, I would ask the House to take a few moments to honour the January 19 passing of Gilles Ottawa, an Atikamekw historian from Manawan. His contribution to the Atikamekw collective memory was unique and continues to enrich the entire community. The man is no more, but his wisdom and knowledge will endure.

I would like to explain how important this motion is to the future of aboriginals. I believe that it highlights the failings of generations of Canadian governments and their unclear policies on aboriginals. I would like to talk about the three main points of this motion: the economy, treaties and the law.

Clearly, resolving all of these issues will require considerable effort. But anyone listening to what is going on in reserves across Canada and paying attention to the youth activists and social movements would be naive to believe that the status quo can remain in place. We do not want a naive government, do we?

As a society, we have reached the threshold of a new relationship with this country's aboriginals. We need a complete paradigm shift to face future challenges together. The Conservatives' penchant for throwing the word "economy" around has become a joke. Often used with the word "growth", this concept is as hackneyed as can be. Once a social science, economics was rebranded as a pure science through pressure from a certain school of thought, and now it is used to justify savage attacks on the environment, our democracy and ultimately, our collective identity.

Business of Supply

And so, it is not surprising that the Conservatives are saying quite seriously that the ecocide development projects generated by the mammoth bills will benefit aboriginal people despite the fact that their game plan does not include any consultation. They seriously believe that. However, the idea that the creation of wealth will naturally benefit the public, and aboriginal people in particular, is completely false. By way of evidence, we need only look at the tax credits given to large corporations that are not being reinvested in the economy. In aboriginal communities, things are often much worse. Given the unemployment rate of 27% on the reserves, clearly aboriginal people are not the first to be asked to work on the project sites. What is more, 70% of students who live on reserve do not finish high school.

This is true across Canada and in my riding. I have seen it first-hand in Manawan. There, the elementary school is dilapidated and substandard. At the high school level, the failure rate is 86% and the drop-out rate is almost 50%. Of all the reserves in Quebec, Manawan receives the lowest amount of funding for education, getting only about a third of the amount allocated per student in the rest of the province. Is this normal? Is this how we are going to train good workers and good citizens? Of course not, since that is not Canada's objective right now. For hundreds of years of colonialism, the efforts made to keep aboriginal people down and assimilate them has surpassed those made toward their development. That is clear.

Since 1996, the government has capped the increase in annual funding for basic programs on reserves at 2%, which is lower than the inflation rate and the demographic growth on reserves. Without any help from the government, aboriginal people will have a great deal of difficulty getting out of poverty. That is what is happening right now, whether we like it or not. The status quo cannot continue and we must immediately take real action to improve the economic prospects of aboriginal people in Canada.

It is surprising to see how a government that travels across the globe to sign treaties can be so unwilling to honour the ones it has signed in its own country.

• (1350)

The NDP believes in a nation-to-nation approach to negotiations with aboriginals. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the government, which does not honour the commitments made in treaties between 1701 and 1923.

This hypocrisy was shared equally between the Conservatives and the Liberals. There are currently between 700 and 800 cases of broken treaties that are still unresolved. At the current rate, it will take 100 years to settle all of these cases. That kind of neglect is the epitome of bad faith.

What is worse, again in 2012 and 2013, the Conservative government reiterated its commitment to “respect and honour its treaty relationships and advance approaches to find common ground on treaty implementation”. Big talk.

It would be far more appropriate to talk about “uncommon ground”. Consulting aboriginals is not a choice, it is an obligation of the federal government under the Constitution Act, 1867. Period. So do not try to tell me that the government is doing aboriginals a favour by promising consultations that will never end up happening.

Many independent observers have condemned the Canadian government's actions: the Auditor General in 2003, the Auditor General in 2007, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, and the UN Special Rapporteur. They all agreed that Canada was not honouring its commitments. What they are saying is common sense: do your homework.

After years of negligence, aboriginal people realized that they had no choice but to protest in the street, block bridges or starve themselves in order to have a dialogue. That is not normal. In a country ranked sixth in the world on the UN's human development index, it is inconceivable that we have allowed our aboriginal population to rank 63rd. Yet that is what is happening, what this government is allowing to happen with complete and utter contempt. This is terrible.

Lastly, I would like to say a few words about legislation. In 2012, when Canada finally agreed to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, one might have hoped to see a shift in the government's perspective. Yet nothing happened; nothing has changed, apart from a few empty promises that the government cannot keep. It is easy to sign legal treaties that cannot be enforced and then not respect them. After all, who is going to come and force the government to respect them? Meanwhile, Canada's honour and credibility have taken a beating. As the saying goes, the government needs to walk the talk. Aboriginal people expect nothing less.

The government also has obligations under other international human rights conventions: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. All of these agreements are invaluable, because they identify the kind of world we want to live in. They encompass the values that are important to all Canadians. So why exclude aboriginal people?

I encourage hon. members to vote in favour of this motion, which is meant simply to make up for lost time. A dramatic change in the government's relationship with aboriginal people is needed, because the current situation cannot and will not endure. Those who do not believe me can just sit back and watch, for it will happen, with or without them.

• (1355)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, individuals with strong leadership can make a difference. That is why it is so encouraging when we hear people speak about these types of issues. I have talked a lot about the Kelowna accord. Former prime minister Paul Martin is an example. The former minister of northern affairs, Andy Scott, did a phenomenal job putting things together for the Kelowna accord.

We have heard speeches today from the leader of the Liberal Party and from other members who spoke so eloquently about the importance of this and pleaded to the government to recognize the need for the House of Commons to start working with our first nation leadership to make a difference.

This is one of the reasons why, in principle, we support the NDP motion today. We look forward to seeing the debate continue, but we want to take it to the next step. We want to see strong leadership coming from the Prime Minister of the country because that is what it is going to take in the short term to really make things happen. Would the member not agree?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague who said that the Liberal Party will be supporting our motion.

It is about time we recognized that aboriginal peoples have lived here for millennia. We packed them off to reserves and we told them to fend for themselves. It was a way to destroy them physically and spiritually. We know what happened at the residential schools.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for government orders has now expired. The hon. member for Joliette will have three minutes to respond to questions and comments when the House resumes consideration of the bill.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

SASKATCHEWAN ECONOMY

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism on his recent introduction of the government's new start-up visa program. Saskatchewan's booming economy has resulted in ongoing skilled labour shortages, which will only grow as the economic boom continues to expand to all corners of the province.

Just this month the Conference Board of Canada forecast that real mining production in northern Saskatchewan will grow from \$190 million to \$388 million by 2020. That is a 100% increase. For example, the Goldfields project near Uranium City is forecast to start production in 2014 and the new Cigar Lake uranium mine will begin production in 2013. The board also forecasts that Saskatchewan will see its first diamond mine within the next decade.

Saskatchewan has the resources, the knowledge and the investment potential. What we need are more skilled workers and entrepreneurs to fuel this revving economic engine. The government's new start-up visa is an important step in fuelling this new Saskatchewan.

I would again like to thank the Prime Minister and the Conservative government for their commitment to our economy.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are more than 200,000 people living with an intellectual disability in Quebec. The extraordinary involvement of their families and community groups and integration projects make it possible for these people to attend school or be employed. However,

Statements by Members

there is much work to be done before these people are fully integrated into society.

The Association du Québec pour l'intégration sociale, based in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, includes more than 80 Quebec entities and promotes the interests of people with intellectual disabilities. Since 1997, the organization has received \$340,000 a year in federal funding from the community inclusion initiative.

Recent cuts mean that the Conservatives are going to abandon these people. The association will receive no federal funding in 2015. Unfortunately, this government's blind cuts will have a real and significant effect on the lives of thousands of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

It is not too late to correct this mistake. It is not too late to show respect for these people.

* * *

[*English*]

CITIZENSHIP ACT

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two days ago I had the privilege of presenting to the House my first private member's bill, Bill C-425, an act to amend the Citizenship Act (honouring the Canadian armed forces).

I want to thank all colleagues for their comments and the informed and respectful debate that occurred in the House. It is my understanding, from the first hour of debate, that we all agree with the spirit of the bill, that we all desire to see our men and women in uniform honoured and that we all hold the value of Canadian citizenship to the highest esteem.

I look forward to a second hour of debate that is as constructive as the first hour. I want to thank all members of the House in advance for their anticipated support to send the bill to committee where it can be thoroughly reviewed.

I wish to reiterate that I am open to all friendly amendments that will strengthen the spirit of the bill.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week marks the United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorating the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in 1945, and serving as a poignant reminder of our obligation to confront and combat racism, hatred and anti-Semitism, the paradigm of racist hatred. Simply put, Jews died in Auschwitz because of anti-Semitism, but anti-Semitism did not die.

Statements by Members

We must confront and combat the growing evil of both Holocaust denial and Holocaust inversion, the Nazification of the Jew and the Jewish state, thereby demeaning, distorting and diminishing Holocaust remembrance. We must confront and combat the indifference and inaction that took us down the road to the Holocaust, as it was revealed on this international day of Holocaust remembrance that the existence of the Nazi extermination program and the death camps was already known as early as May 1942.

Finally, we must remember and honour the heroism of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish non-Jew who saved more Jews in four months in Hungary in 1944 than any single government, as the European Parliament did this week and as Canada Post did this month by issuing a stamp in his memory.

[Translation]

By remembering the suffering of the Holocaust victims, we honour them and their spirit of resistance. Never again.

* * *

[English]

BLACKBERRY

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1999, RIM revolutionized wireless technology with the introduction of the BlackBerry. Yesterday, BlackBerry again proved that it is a global leader in the industry with the release of the brand new BlackBerry 10.

BlackBerry's managing director, Andrew MacLeod, recently briefed me about the great features of this new product. It has a new software platform, a greater selection of downloads, faster web browsing and many more features. The BlackBerry 10 has already received positive industry feedback. I am confident users will be pleased with the redesigned, re-engineered and reinvented BlackBerry experience.

As a global leader in wireless technology and an important employer of a skilled and inclusive workforce, BlackBerry's success is important to Canada and my riding of Kitchener Centre. Congratulations to BlackBerry on the successful launch of the BlackBerry 10.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about a major success story in my riding involving the Centre de formation professionnelle des Riverains.

Through the hard work of the school's director, Michel Goudreau, and his team, the school has achieved international recognition for the quality of instruction it provides.

According to the École de technologie supérieure, the school is North America's leading information technology training centre. It helps fight the dropout problem and gives students quick access to the job market in high-demand sectors.

Even though things are getting worse in my riding, Mr. Goudreau is helping to make them better. Soon, nearly 2,000 jobs will be lost when Electrolux and Mabe close up shop. The omnibus bill's employment insurance reform and the closure of the Service Canada office in Repentigny are also hurting my riding. This cunning government is creating a volatile situation because of its irresponsible management.

* * *

[English]

CANADA'S SPACE PROGRAM

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1920, H.G. Wells said, "Life, forever dying to be born afresh, forever young and eager, will presently stand upon this earth as upon a footstool, and stretch out its realm amidst the stars".

Wells knew of what he spoke, as today all of Canada and beyond hang on the tweets, blogs and video feeds from space from our latest astronaut hero, Chris Hadfield. Commander Hadfield and those before him, and all who support Canada's space program, have put our country solemnly at the forefront of world space programs. Canada's contributions go back to the earliest days of space exploration in many areas of technology, the best known of which is robotics and the iconic Canadarm. Commander Hadfield's upcoming accomplishments as the first Canadian commander of the international space station, will send the maple leaf to new heights and will inspire young and old alike to look skyward and marvel at how lucky Canada is to have such great citizens.

Someone else said, "The sky is the limit only for those who aren't afraid to fly!" We should all be proud and thankful for the nine Canadian astronauts who have not been afraid to fly, including our own colleague from Westmount—Ville-Marie, and for the two new astronauts who are praying for their chance to slip "the surly bonds of earth". *Per ardua ad astra*.

* * *

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from charges of Dutch disease to repealing sections of the Clarity Act, the New Democrats seem determined to pit region against region across this great country. Conservatives, on the other hand, are united for the benefit of all.

It is estimated that the oil sands development will contribute \$63 billion to the economy of Ontario. Last week, I along with colleagues from southwestern Ontario facilitated meetings between Alberta oil sands companies and manufacturers in our area. New contracts with Ontario businesses will be established through those productive meetings conducted by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters and the In Situ Oil Sands Alliance. Alberta companies will benefit because they will have reliable made-in-Canada products.

The feedback is positive, Ontario manufacturers are thrilled and fellow Canadians from Alberta were impressed. On this side of the House, we call that “nation building”.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has been ignoring priorities of west coast Canadians for too long. It rammed through not one but two massive omnibus budget bills with no consultation and limited debate and study in Parliament.

The Conservatives are shutting down the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, the busiest in the country, despite vocal opposition from the public, experts, Coast Guard officials, Vancouver's mayor, police and fire chiefs, and British Columbia's premier. It has been three months and still no action on the Cohen Commission's recommendations to protect west coast salmon. They gutted our country's environmental laws in the name of fast-tracking the Enbridge northern gateway pipeline, which lacks public and first nations support.

The Conservatives' disregard for democracy is unacceptable. In contrast, the New Democrats are committed to building a fairer, greener, more prosperous Canada. We are listening to British Columbians, making their priorities our priorities,

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will highlight some good news for northwestern Ontario today. Resolute Forest Products announced a \$50 million investment to build a new sawmill in Atikokan, just to the south of the great Kenora riding. This new private sector investment will bring 90 new direct jobs to the community and many more spinoff jobs.

Unlike the NDP, our government stood by the forest sector in northern Ontario. Whether it was the green pulp and paper transformation program preserving jobs in Dryden, the forest product innovation program diversifying our wood products, or regaining stable access to the U.S. softwood lumber market, our government is delivering.

It is unfortunate that the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River and his party choose to refer to the forest sector as a disease.

We are supporting northwestern Ontario. We know in Ignace, Atikokan and Kenora production is set to open up. We have a lot to look forward to. As parliamentarians and as a government, we have their back for jobs, growth and resource development.

* * *

• (1410)

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each February we commemorate black people's history and celebrate African Canadians for their contributions to Canadian society. This year marks the 21st edition of Black History Month.

My riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has strong institutions, like the Walkley Community Centre, the Quebec Board of

Statements by Members

Black Educators and the NDG Black Community Association. These organizations develop and support black community organizers and leaders.

It is always possible for small groups of well-organized people to be the change that our communities need. I especially want to acknowledge our black youth who are using their energy to bring positive social change to my riding.

I congratulate these organizations for their work and impact in our community.

I invite all Canadians to participate in community activities and to learn about the rich history of black people in Canada.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, numbers released this morning by Statistics Canada show that Canada is staying on the right track for economic growth.

In fact, November's economic growth and the more than 900,000 net new jobs created since July 2009 show that our government's economic action plan is working and working very well. In fact, both the IMF and OECD project Canada will continue to be near the head of the pack among all G7 countries for economic growth in the years ahead.

Countries around the world are looking to Canada's economic leadership as a model they should follow. We are proud of this record, and we will continue to stay on the right track to create jobs and growth across the country.

Contrast that to the NDP leader and his caucus and their plan for a \$21 billion dangerous carbon tax that would kill jobs and hurt the economy. That is bad news for Canada's economy. It is bad news for Canadian families. We will not let that happen.

* * *

[Translation]

DIANE MARLEAU

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues in the Liberal Party and in the House of Commons heard the sad news about the passing of our dear friend Diane Marleau, who was the member of Parliament for Sudbury for nearly 20 years and a minister in the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien's government for a number of years.

[English]

I had the pleasure of knowing and working with Diane Marleau. Her death has taken away a vibrant, engaged, dedicated and committed woman of great valour and great charm. She was a fighter for the causes that matter: for her home community, for jobs, justice, health care and for equal rights for all Canadians.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

It is a difficult loss for her family and for all those who, like me, had the pleasure of working with Diane.

Today, and in the weeks to come, we will celebrate the life of a woman who was full of life and courage, a great Franco-Ontarian and Canadian. We will commit to continuing the good fight she so boldly fought.

* * *

*[English]***ROBBIE BURNS NIGHT**

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House thanks you for your hospitality in hosting the annual celebration of the Scottish bard last night. I am duty bound to inform the House of the tragedy that struck.

There are strange things done in the midnight sun
In a night of twists and turns,
Where the pomp and glory tells a story
To honour Robbie Burns.

The haggis is a glorious sight
Revered by one and all.
The pipes, the toast, what means the most
Is a haggis that doesn't fall.

But what happened last night, when the toast was done
And the crowd looked on in horror:
Too much scotch? An opposition botch?
And the haggis hit the floor!

The Cape Breton—Canso kid was on one end
As he held the haggis low;
And then his mentor from Ottawa Centre
Said, "It's time to go."

He held it high, the kid held it low;
They thought they would be deft.
It's a warning to all of what might fall
When you veer too far to the left.

The haggis then became road kill;
Those are just the facts.
But one Paul-bearer, was heard to swear
"Let's slap on a carbon tax".

There are strange things done in the midnight sun
A lesson the Speaker learns:
Don't give this mission to the opposition
When we honour Robbie Burns.

* * *

●(1415)

*[Translation]***MINISTER OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the announcement of the closure of the maritime search and rescue centre in Quebec City, mariners, the local community and the NDP have repeatedly said that this decision puts lives in danger. That is why a group of Conservative supporters in Lévis—Bellechasse heard the NDP's call and dared to oppose the Conservative Party's senseless decision. They saw the truth.

The Conservative association in Lévis—Bellechasse chose the safety of fishers and boaters over blindly supporting the government's ill-conceived plans.

Today, I would like to salute the honesty of these supporters who made public safety a priority that should never have to suffer because of cuts to public services.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs, who represents this riding, has two choices: he can be a good member of Parliament, listen to the supporters and the people in his riding and condemn this irresponsible closure, or he can continue to support a dangerous decision that defies all logic and was made blindly by the Prime Minister's Office in Ottawa.

It is up to him to decide what kind of MP he wants to be.

* * *

*[English]***YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT**

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems as though the leader of the NDP has some trouble remembering events of the past. Yesterday he stood in this House to talk about youth unemployment. However, he conveniently forgot to mention all the important measures he and his party have voted against to help young Canadians find employment. He omitted the fact that Canada has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the G7.

I will say if the NDP leader and his party are so worried about jobs for youth, then why did he stand up and vote against the youth employment strategy, which has helped more than 50,000 youth receive training, or the Canada summer jobs program, which helps more than 36,000 young Canadians find jobs every year?

Our government is doing more than just talking; we are taking action. I can assure members that the youth in my riding of Simcoe—Grey truly appreciate being equipped with the tools they need to find gainful employment. Unfortunately, the NDP members do not seem to want to support this, and neither does their leader.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the Prime Minister committed to renewing the Crown-first nation relationship, but after failing to act for a full year, he made the same commitment to the National Chief of the AFN on January 11. Yet there was no mention of it in his speech to caucus yesterday.

Many first nations, Inuit and Métis people are living in poverty in homes without electricity and they have no choice but to send their kids to schools that receive one-third less funding than other schools in Canada, while Conservative backbenchers and senator are hurling insults.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT**

Action is needed now. When will the Prime Minister act to start addressing these serious problems?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I outlined yesterday, the government's priorities remain strengthening Canadian families, making sure that our streets and communities are safe, strengthening this country and its place in the world and, of course, on top of them all, making sure we have a strong economy where people of all ages will have opportunities not just now but for generations to come. These are the priorities we have for all Canadians. They are important to all Canadians whether they are anglophone, francophone, aboriginal or new Canadians and we will continue to pursue them in the best interests of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating a motion calling on the government to make the improvement of economic outcomes of aboriginals a central focus in the next budget. The government should therefore conduct nation-to-nation consultations in keeping with treaties.

However, in his speech to caucus, the Prime Minister did not make this issue a priority. What is worse, the Conservative members and senators hurled insults.

How will aboriginals fit into the next budget?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the 2012 plan, our government's economic action plan 2013 will focus on the economy, economic growth, job creation and long-term prosperity. Those are our priorities, not just for aboriginals, but for all Canadians.

I would like to point out that Canada continues to outperform other countries, thanks to the steps we have taken. Of course, there are challenges that lie ahead for certain communities, particularly aboriginal communities. We will continue to pursue these objectives.

* * *

[*English*]

ABORTION

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just days after the 25th anniversary of the Morgentaler decision and just days after we heard the Minister for Status of Women acknowledge that Canadians do not want the abortion debate reopened, we see another attempt by the Conservative backbench to do just that. These Conservatives are trying to get the RCMP to investigate abortions as murders.

Will the government make it clear that this question was settled 25 years ago? Will the Prime Minister make it clear that he and his government understand that abortion is not murder?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all members of the House, whether they agree with it or not, understand that abortion is legal in Canada. This government, myself included, have made it very clear that the government does not intend to change the law in this regard.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying on behalf of all of us in the House that we wish the Minister of Finance well and a speedy recovery.

[*Translation*]

Today, there 300,000 more unemployed people than there were before the recession. In 2008, the unemployment rate was 11% and now it is 15%. The youth unemployment rate is double the national average.

What is the government waiting for? When will it offer up practical measures for reducing the unemployment that is hurting our economy?

[*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 government has taken action to make sure that youth have opportunities across the entire country. With the youth employment strategy we have created over 50,000 new jobs for young Canadians. In budget 2012, huge investments were made to make sure that young Canadians have opportunities to develop skills and contribute to the economy. Unlike the NDP, we are taking action to make sure that young Canadians have opportunities.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that during the recession, 280,000 young Canadians lost their jobs and to this day only about 10% of those jobs have been recovered. Youth unemployment is double the national average. We are talking about one million young Canadians who are out of work. That is no way to build a future economy in this country.

Let me try again: what is the government waiting for to take real steps to help the unemployed get back to work?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP the government has taken action. The government is focused on making sure that young Canadians have opportunities, whether through the Canada student jobs program that created 36,000 new jobs for young Canadians or the 50,000 new permanent jobs for these young Canadians. We are taking action. We are focused. We ask the NDP to join us to make sure that those young Canadians have opportunities.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the annual report of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the department says that the target for graduation from high school is going to move over the next five years from 35% to 43%. That means it would take 25 years for first nation students to reach the same level of graduation as their neighbouring students in provinces across the country.

I ask the Prime Minister, is he aiming high enough?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the government is acutely aware of challenges that remain in first nations education, notwithstanding the fact we have made unprecedented investments in building new schools and renovating existing schools. The government has undertaken a consultation with first nation communities across the country to improve aboriginal education and to make sure we get the results for the dollars we are spending, because there are tremendous opportunities for aboriginal people who have a solid education.

* * *

• (1425)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the same time the government is cutting back on employment insurance to the detriment of hundreds of thousands of people across the country, it is also raising the cost of employment insurance to claimants, to all employees and employers across the country. I wonder if the Prime Minister would now consider, given the slow rate of growth in the economy here and everywhere else in the western world, getting rid of this proposed increase in the EI tax.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Of course, Mr. Speaker, the rates charged for employment insurance vary over time to create a balance in the program. It is the premiums that cover the cost of the program. That is why the government thinks it is so important not to artificially inflate the size of the EI program.

I know the Liberal Party wants to create a 45-day work year under EI across the country. That would drive rates for employees and employers through the roof, increasing them by some 35%. We think that is inappropriate.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's cuts to employment insurance are affecting workers, especially seasonal workers, as well as employers, especially in the tourism and fisheries sectors. Not to mention, they have been very costly for the provinces.

So who is benefiting from these changes? Certainly not workers, employers or the provinces. Basically, nobody benefits.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Liberal leader is saying is absolutely not true.

Clearly, the objective of this government is not to offer employment insurance to everyone, but rather to create jobs for everyone. I am very pleased to see that the Canadian economy has created over 900,000 net new jobs. That is significant.

However, for those who cannot find work, the employment insurance program will remain in place to protect them and their communities.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the Prime Minister sincerely apologized for the residential school tragedy and promised reconciliation between aboriginal

peoples and other Canadians. However, four years into its mandate, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission needs these historical records now, not stonewalling from the government. Instead of allowing the commission to immediately access these documents, the minister said yesterday that his priority was once again to delay so that he could examine the court decision.

Can the minister now commit to respecting the court's judgment, and make these Library and Archives Canada records available immediately?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said from the very beginning, we are absolutely committed to honouring our obligations under the Indian residential schools settlement agreement. The Government of Canada recognizes that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an important part of the reconciliation process between aboriginal peoples and all Canadians. We are reviewing the court's decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all the broken promises, the lack of respect for the nation-to-nation relationship and the obstruction of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada have led to the awakening of aboriginal peoples.

The NDP is committed to moving forward and rebuilding this relationship after decades of political neglect. For that reason, the NDP motion we are debating today calls on the government to take immediate action, in the 2013 budget, to address the economic gap between aboriginal peoples and all other Canadians.

If the minister supports the motion, will he put words into action?

[English]

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like economic action plan 2012, budget 2013 will focus on jobs and economic opportunity for all Canadians, including first nations.

The protection of aboriginal treaty rights and consultation with aboriginals are recognized in our Constitution and statutes. We have made unprecedented investments that will make a concrete difference in people's lives, including skills training, housing on reserves, potable water, schools, treaty rights, protection of the rights of women and the resolution of land claims, and we will continue in that vein.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's speech to his Conservative caucus and the comments by one of his MPs and one of his senators do not bode well for Canada's aboriginal peoples.

The Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, wants tangible results by spring.

Oral Questions

It is hard to know who is responsible for this file in the Prime Minister's Office, but could a Conservative member tell us what tangible steps will be taken to fulfill the commitments made by the Prime Minister at the January 11 meeting?

[English]

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on working in partnership with our aboriginal partners to create jobs and growth for all Canadians, including first nations.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under Conservative rule, ministers who break ethics and conflict of interest rules get off scot-free. No slap on the wrist, no explanation to the House, no consequences, nothing.

The Ethics Commissioner noticed this, and that is why she is now asking for the power to impose fines.

Greater powers for the commissioner may act as a deterrent for repeat offenders like the Minister of Industry, who is the subject of not one, not two, but three investigations.

My question is very simple: will the Conservatives agree to the Ethics Commissioner's request and give her the power she needs to put an end to this impunity?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government created the Conflict of Interest Act following 13 years of Liberal scandals and mismanagement. I can tell the House that we plan to review the Ethics Commissioner's recommendations once she has completed her study.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a pretty dubious commitment.

Still on the subject of impunity, I would like to know what is going on with the southern Ontario fund for investment in innovation.

The Conservatives have created a secret \$20 million fund that they are using to make \$500,000 loans left and right, but nobody knows who is getting that money. This is a new low in Conservative secrecy: lending federal funds and telling taxpayers that they do not need to know how the money is being spent or who it is going to.

Can they tell us who the money from this secret fund is going to?
[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are local leaders of their communities who provide local economic opportunities for those communities. Prior to receiving project funds, each network has to demonstrate that it meets clear guidelines regarding governance, internal administrative structures, and comprehensive selection and outreach processes to ensure not only the project's success but, of course, respect for taxpayer dollars.

These are arm's-length community futures development corporations that have been around for 25 years and have proven to be successful in creating jobs and economic growth.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us get this straight. The Conservatives have set up a \$20 million slush fund so that unnamed businesses can get secret loans without any public accountability. The problem with these sweetheart deals is that we are talking about taxpayers' dollars. This is not some Conservative pork fund to give out from the back of the car.

Have they not learned their lesson? This is how boondoggles are born. Where is the commitment to public transparency for taxpayers' money?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already implied, these community futures development corporations have to sign strict agreements on the use of these funds. This is an arm's-length corporation that deals with local level needs in the economic development and in some cases the diversification of very small communities.

The member opposite is making a very obvious reputation denials of these community futures development corporations. He has no evidence of any wrongdoing whatsoever.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why is he doing it in secret?

No wonder the Ethics Commissioner is fed up with those guys over here. There is a minister who was found guilty of breaking section 9 of the Conflict of Interest Act, but rather than coming clean, the Conservatives have been hiding behind loopholes. They have trolling the letters of opposition members to obscure the fact that he was found guilty. No wonder the Ethics Commissioner wants the power to fine cabinet ministers.

Will the Conservatives support the Ethics Commissioner in her desire to strengthen the rules or will they try to gut the act to cover up for those insiders who continually break the law? It is a simple question.

● (1435)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the other day I read a letter from the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay supporting AVR radio.

It might be interesting to note that the president and executive vice-president of AVR actually made donations to the NDP in 2011. His letter of May 18, 2012, went to the CRTC.

He stands as the ethics czar for the NDP and his main argument is that the NDP should be held to a lower standard of ethics than the Conservative MPs. Perhaps that is what Mary Dawson is talking about.

Ms. Hélène Lavergère (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after slashing CIDA's budget last spring, the new minister spends \$25,000 on a retreat with his staff. That might have undercut his message about "being accountable for every nickel".

Oral Questions

He also wants employees to sign a note saying that they will never criticize CIDA or its representatives. Yet when one of his partisan letters is posted on his department website, he blames CIDA.

Is the minister trying to silence whistleblowers in his own department?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, we developed a code of ethics with the public service, with broad consultation, and the particular code of ethics is in line with the code of values and ethics of the public sector, which expects certain standards of ethical behaviour.

On this side of the House, if there is a whistleblower who has found any wrongdoing, we would welcome and indeed expect that whistleblower to bring this to the attention of the public and of relevant authorities.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in addition to setting up a \$25,000 retreat, the Minister of International Cooperation forced departmental employees to take a restrictive and troubling oath of loyalty that prevents them from criticizing CIDA and its representatives.

The government must not muzzle public servants. If the government wastes money or makes potentially disastrous decisions, someone has to speak up.

Why did the minister force such a code on his employees? What exactly is he trying to hide?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not doing that at all. In fact, as I just mentioned in this chamber, if there is wrongdoing, if a public servant comes across any form of wrongdoing, we not only expect that public servant to come to the public, we welcome that. We also have certain ethical standards, certain standards of behaviour that are part of the code of values and ethics of the public sector, which the public sector was consulted on, and we also expect public servants to uphold those high values and ethical standards on behalf of the Canadian public.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance reforms are generating negative reactions from both employers and workers. Across Quebec and the Maritimes, seasonal workers occupy a high percentage of what is referred to in the act as insurable employment.

How can seasonal employers be assured that they will be able to rehire the employees they have already trained in their respective fields? Does the government have a plan for that?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is making common sense changes to better connect Canadians with available jobs in their local areas that match their skills. In fact, in my riding of Simcoe—Grey, which has many seasonal workers, they are delighted with these changes because it means that there are opportunities for people to stay in their local area, utilizing their local skills and staying close to their families.

These initiatives are clarifying, not changing, the responsibilities of Canadians who are collecting EI. For those who are unable to find employment, employment insurance will continue to be there for them, as it always has been.

* * *

● (1440)

**HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
CANADA**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I asked the minister specifically about when the personal data on 600,000 Canadians went missing. She refused to confirm when it went missing or whether the data went missing as a result of criminal actions.

Therefore, I will ask again very clearly, but this time my question is for the Prime Minister. How long has this hard drive been missing, two months, four months, eight months? These are clear questions. Canadians want answers. When was the last time that this hard drive was in the possession of the minister's department? It is a simple question. We would just like an answer.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government takes the privacy of Canadians extremely seriously. This loss by the department is completely unacceptable. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner has been notified and an investigation is ongoing to safeguard against future incidents. The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has taken significant action and will continue to do so.

Once again, I will emphasize that the government takes this very seriously and the loss by the department is completely unacceptable.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess the Conservatives do not take the issue of when they last had contact with that hard drive very seriously. They certainly have not been forthright with sharing that with the public.

I have another simple question. What about the private information of the parents or of the spouses? Could the parliamentary secretary share with any certainty if this information has been exposed as well?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister was very clear yesterday, and I will be clear today. There has been no fraudulent use of this information.

I will emphasize again that the government takes extremely seriously the privacy of Canadians and the loss by the department of this information is completely unacceptable. The minister has taken action. We will continue to do so. The privacy commissioner is investigating this. The loss by the department is completely unacceptable.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORTION

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the Prime Minister earlier, but I am not sure that his entire caucus was listening. Just a few days after the 25th anniversary of the Morgentaler decision and a few days after the Minister for Status of Women acknowledged that Canadians did not want to reopen the abortion debate, unfortunately, that is exactly what three backbench Conservative MPs are doing. These Conservatives want the RCMP to investigate three abortions as murders.

Does the government realize that the abortion issue has been closed for 25 years, and will it stop going after a woman's clear right to choose? Does the Minister of Justice know that abortion is not murder?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can only point out for the hon. member that she should have paid very close attention to what the Prime Minister said. The Prime Minister was very clear on this. The government will not reintroduce legislation and will not reopen this debate. The government will continue to concentrate on creating jobs and cracking down on crime, and that should have the complete support of the hon. member.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has allowed the debate to be reopened, despite what it says today.

For more than two years the Minister of Health has failed to address the critical issue of drug shortages. Health Canada experts warned that a voluntary system would not work, but the minister ignored them. Now the crisis continues. A recent survey shows that 94% of pharmacists are still experiencing shortages of the drugs that patients need.

Why is the minister ignoring the facts and putting the health of Canadians at risk?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our approach has been to work with the provinces and the drug companies so they can share information about drug shortages publicly on a website.

It was also encouraging that at this year's health ministers meeting, all ministers agreed to work collaboratively on the issue.

We will also continue to monitor whether companies make the information available to doctors and patients and if they do not, then

Oral Questions

we are open to considering passing regulations requiring them to do so.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, without prior consultation, last May Conservatives announced they were closing marine communications stations in Comox, Tofino and Vancouver. Then they announced they were shutting down the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, the busiest in the country. Those were two decisions imposed on British Columbia and no consultation.

Police and fire chiefs, search and rescue officials, mayors and even the premier of British Columbia all warned this was a dangerous idea. People's lives will be put at risk.

Why are Conservatives not listening to British Columbia?

● (1445)

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have addressed both of these issues many times.

With regard to the Kitsilano question, Vancouver will have an abundance of federally-funded search and rescue assets available to protect and save lives. In fact, British Columbia is served by 13 search and rescue lifeboats, two hovercrafts and two helicopters.

Changes in Vancouver will have no negative impact on our ability to respond quickly and effectively to distress incidents on the water.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not just the Coast Guard. Conservatives have also wilfully ignored concerns from across British Columbia about the northern gateway pipeline.

Concerns have come from the coast, from communities along the proposed route and first nations, and these voices of British Columbians have been dismissed by the government.

British Columbians have been clear. We want to protect our sensitive coastal environment and we want to protect the good jobs that come from a clean environment.

Why are Conservatives refusing to listen? Why are they gutting our environmental protection laws? Why are they running roughshod over British Columbians?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth and the member opposite knows that. He knows full well that the northern gateway pipeline is being reviewed by an independent panel. That panel is basing its determination on science, not on, in spite of what he would like, partisanship.

Oral Questions

The review is an open process. People have been able to come and make their presentations. Interested parties, including aboriginal groups, have come and expressed their views.

The member opposite should take his own advice and be willing to listen to the people. We will see where this project goes when the review is done.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in this time of global economic turbulence, countries around the world are looking to Canada as a model of economic leadership. In fact, just a few days ago, Tom Donohue, the president of the American chamber of commerce said, "The great Canadian miracle is something we should follow". That is because our Conservative government's economic action plan is keeping taxes low. We are growing the economy and helping create jobs and returning to balanced budgets.

Would the Minister of Industry update Canadians on the state of the Canadian economy?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Statistics Canada announced another month of positive economic growth in November, along with the creation of over 900,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

It is no wonder both the IMF and the OECD project that Canada will continue to be among the G7 economic leaders in the years ahead.

[Translation]

Some challenges still lie ahead. That is why we will continue to focus on employment, the economy and the sound management of public finances, unlike the Liberals who do not have an economic plan, and unlike the NDP who are proposing an irresponsible \$21 billion carbon tax.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' policies are driving down Canadians' salaries. Since the employment insurance reform was implemented, unemployed Canadians have had to accept lower salaries and jobs outside their field. The minister's reform is going to harm workers, families and regional economies.

Does the minister understand that it will be impossible to replace specialized workers in seasonal sectors who are forced to leave their jobs and take a 30% pay cut?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite has said is completely false. We are focused on ensuring that Canadians have opportunities for jobs in their local areas that match their skills. What would be better than having a job close to home where an individual could support his or her family?

What the opposition member said is completely false, so let us be clear. We want to ensure that Canadians are better connected to jobs. That is why the government's plan has created 920,000 net new jobs.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's talking points clearly do not fit the reality that Canadians are facing. There are five unemployed Canadians for every vacant job. It is even worse in the regions that have most to lose from the government's heartless changes.

The minister does not seem to care. If one cannot find a job, one loses one's EI. Will the minister at least admit that this is the exact opposite of what the system is meant to do for workers who have paid for this insurance?

• (1450)

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 not sure if the hon. member opposite heard what I just said. This government has created 920,000 net new jobs for Canadians.

The changes we are making to employment insurance are to better connect Canadians with the jobs that are available in their local areas, to match their local skills. For those who are, unfortunately, unable to find employment, employment insurance will continue to be there for them, as it always has been.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, a group informed the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development that a delegation of representatives wants to meet with her on February 27 in order to discuss the impact that the employment insurance reform is having on eastern Quebec.

Did the minister read that letter and will she meet with the representatives or not?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate that this government is focused on job creation and economic growth. We have created 920,000 net new jobs under our economic action plan.

The changes that are being made to employment insurance are to clarify, not change, the responsibilities Canadians have with respect to EI. Employment insurance will continue to be there for them, when they require it, if they are temporarily unemployed.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are not surprised that the minister does not want to meet with people. She does not even think she implemented a reform.

The Conservatives are being unfair to seasonal workers in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. Even the deputy premier of New Brunswick, who is a Conservative, said that the termination of the pilot project is going to be bad for the province.

Benefits are running out, the spring gap is coming and our economy is going to suffer.

Will the minister change her mind before it is too late or will she force our workers to seek social assistance? Is this government not ashamed of stealing money from workers?

[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 government is creating common sense changes to employment insurance to make sure we are better connecting Canadians with available jobs. In my local riding of Simcoe—Grey, with its many seasonal workers, that is exactly what these changes are going to do. They are clarifying for my constituents exactly what they need to do to make sure they have access to employment insurance if they require it.

Whether it is the new enhanced jobs alert program or whether it is the enhancement to the youth employment strategy of \$50 million in last year's budget, these are the things we are doing to create new jobs. In fact, we have created 920,000 net new jobs over the course of the economic action plan.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CANADA

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago the hon. member for York West asked the parliamentary secretary a very simple question: When did the human resources department last have the missing data?

The parliamentary secretary did not answer the question, so I am going to give her another chance. Perhaps somebody has briefed her at this point.

Did she not answer the question because the government does not know when it last had that information? Is this the kind of incompetence we can expect from the Conservative government when it is protecting private data on the lives of Canadians?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, the government takes the privacy of Canadians extremely seriously—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the government takes the privacy of Canadians extremely seriously. The loss of this information by the department is completely unacceptable. To safeguard against future incidents the minister has taken action. This is an ongoing investigation.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has not been serious review or reform of Canada's tax system since the Carter commission reforms back in 1972. Our tax code is so dated,

Oral Questions

so bloated and so complicated that even the CAs and the CGAs are seeking tax simplification.

Under the Conservatives, in fact, the tax code has grown by almost 20%. Will the government commit to not continuing this trend of further complicating Canada's tax code in the upcoming budget? When will the government consider presenting real review, real reform, and a fairer and simpler tax system for Canadians?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually making taxes fair is a surprising comment coming from a Liberal. The only thing I have ever heard previously from the Liberals is, "Let's raise taxes on Canadians". We hear that every day from them. We hear it from the NDP opposition members who have actually put a quantifying number on it of \$21 billion. That is how high they want to raise taxes.

We have focused on reducing taxes, making it simpler for Canadians, but most of all reducing their tax burden. In fact, a family of four is paying \$3,000 less now than they were before.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have yet to learn their lesson. The sudden closure of Canada's consulate in Buffalo was a complete fiasco. And now we hear that the Conservatives are closing Canada's consulates in Detroit and Seattle, even though there are thousands of files that have been sitting there for two or even three years, waiting to be processed. They are making exactly the same mistake all over again.

While those forgotten in Buffalo are still waiting for help, how does the minister plan on managing all of these new files? What is his plan?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the question shows that the official opposition has absolutely no grasp of immigration-related issues. The offices in Detroit and Seattle dealt primarily and almost exclusively with temporary visas, not permanent visas.

Permanent residency applications that were received in the Buffalo office and then moved to the Ottawa office are being processed more quickly than they were before. We have reduced the backlog of permanent residency applications by nearly half.

Unfortunately, the opposition opposed all of the positive changes that we made.

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been nine long months and 85% of the files are still waiting to be processed. We have been calling on the Conservatives to take action on the forgotten applications from Buffalo. Instead, the minister is making matters worse, closing the Detroit and Seattle immigration offices without a plan.

Oral Questions

How can the minister suggest that these families of men, women and children will be treated any better than those from Buffalo who are still waiting and still forgotten?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, frankly, the more the New Democrats ask about these issues the more it reflects that they have no understanding of our immigration system. The offices at Seattle and Detroit dealt almost entirely with visitor visas, not permanent residency visas. They are mixing apples and oranges.

Here is the real problem. We had a total immigration backlog of permanent residency applications that capped out at a million. It is now close to 600,000 thanks to the actions this government has taken. That means we have dramatically reduced processing times.

However, if the two opposition parties had their way, if they had defeated the power of ministerial instructions in the Immigration Act, the backlog today would be 1.6 million with 15-year wait times.

* * *

ROYAL SUCCESSION

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Crown has played an integral role in shaping Canada's unique history. It is central to our institutions of government and is at the very heart of our democratic institutions.

The Crown is particularly relevant as we mark the final days of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. Like all institutions, the Canadian Crown has evolved over time and today our government is introducing legislation to formally assent to the next step in this evolution.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage please tell the House more about his legislation?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we have tabled legislation that will ensure that gender equality will indeed be in place for all successors to the throne. This modernization makes good sense. The Prime Minister told Canadians that we would put this reform forward and we are.

Given what we know the legislation to be about in the near future, on behalf of the government and I think indeed all members of Parliament I want to say that we wish the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge all the best in the coming months and indeed many years.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a funeral can cost as much as \$13,000, yet Veterans Affairs provides only \$3,600 through the Last Post Fund to bury low-income soldiers if they meet the outdated eligibility requirements.

In the last six years, over 66% of applications to the fund were rejected, which meant over 20,000 veterans did not even qualify. Department officials and stakeholder organizations have asked the government for changes for years.

Our veterans deserve to be buried with dignity. Will the government do the right thing and increase the amount available for the funerals of our veterans?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006 more than 10,000 veterans and their families have benefited from the funeral and burial program.

Unlike the Liberals who cut this very program, we have brought benefits and programs to veterans at an unprecedented level over the last seven years under the leadership of our Prime Minister. We are always interested in looking at ways we can improve our programs.

* * *

● (1500)

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, without warning the Conservatives have cut the direct mailing of tax packages to Canadians, which has a disproportionate effect on seniors. The Conservative plan to get more people to file their taxes online has security experts raising alarm bells that the new system is opening up greater chances for fraud.

As the Privacy Commissioner now conducts her investigation, would the minister commit to sending tax packages to Canadians until the matter is resolved?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the way that Canadians file their taxes is changing and we are changing to meet those needs. Taxpayers can still file on paper. Tax forms are available on request or at their local post office or at a Service Canada centre.

Last year more than 1.3 million packages were mailed out and never used. That is 80 million pieces of paper that ended up in the garbage. We do not think that is the best, most efficient use of our resources.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has consistently put victims first. While there is nothing more difficult than losing a loved one, more measures of closure can be found when Canada's missing are located and are able to be laid to rest.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the steps that have been taken to ensure that law enforcement has effective tools to help locate missing individuals and identify remains?

Business of the House

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the RCMP has launched a new national website for missing persons and unidentified remains at www.canadasmissing.ca. This website gives the public a chance to make a difference and help bring closure to the families of the victims of a sampling of missing persons cases from across Canada.

We will continue to build on our government's strong record of standing up for victims.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, young people across this country are looking for work, but coming up against closed doors. The Conservative plan is not working. The youth unemployment rate is twice as high as the national average. If youth employment for my generation were a priority for this government, we would not have an unemployment rate as high as it was in 2009, at the height of the recession. Conservative inaction is costing the youth of my generation \$11 billion.

What exactly do the Conservatives plan to do to tackle the abnormally high rate of youth unemployment?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why does the NDP not make this a priority and support what this government is doing with the youth employment strategy to make sure that young Canadians have opportunities for employment?

This government has been focused on creating jobs, in fact, 920,000 net new jobs; 50,000 of which were through the youth employment strategy. I encourage the NDP, when it is given another chance, to support our youth employment strategy because that is what helps create Canadian jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this evening we will be debating federal funding for the lower Churchill project. The Conservatives, the Liberals and even NDP members from Quebec are ignoring Quebec's two unanimous motions condemning the funding. They are allowing Ottawa to use Quebecers' money to support a project that will compete directly with Hydro-Québec, a government entity that the Quebec nation built and paid for itself.

Will the government take this opportunity, a few hours before the debate, to finally show respect for Quebec and agree not to fund this unfair project?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we obviously respect all provinces and all jurisdictions

across this country. The lower Churchill project will provide significant economic benefits to the Atlantic region. It will also substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions. At peak employment it will provide 3,100 jobs for the Atlantic region and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 4.5 megatonnes. That is the equivalent of over one million cars.

Our government's signing of the term sheet for the loan shows our government's support for Newfoundland and Labrador and the Atlantic region.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise on behalf of the official opposition to ask the government about its plans for the House for the rest of this week and next week.

During this first week, it has become clear that the government's legislative agenda is neither clear nor ambitious. That may be a good thing considering the irresponsible legislative agendas the Prime Minister's Office usually has to offer us. The only part of the agenda we saw yesterday was yet another government time allocation motion, the 28th such motion since the beginning of this session. This is yet another attempt to undermine our democratic process.

● (1505)

[English]

I would like to ask my hon. friend across the way if his government intends, for the remainder of this week and the beginning of next, to call Bill C-32, an act to amend the civil marriage act? This was a bill that was introduced on February 17, 2012, and an act that we have committed to see expeditiously through this House for debate and standing vote.

Or, will the government finally call Bill C-30, that much unloved Internet snooping bill that seems to be continually sitting in Conservative legislative purgatory, never to see the light of day?

I am also curious if the minister has an update for this House and for Canadians about the current situation in Mali and this Parliament's opportunity to debate Canada's role in Mali.

[Translation]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me wish you and all hon. members a happy new year.

I believe that 2013 will be a very productive year in the House of Commons.

[English]

The House has been a productive place in the last 200 sitting days. Between the election and today, Parliament has seen three-quarters of the government's legislation pass through at least one of the two chambers, and in fact a majority of the bills we have introduced have made it all the way to entering the statute books. I do look forward to seeing the government add to this record of accomplishment.

Privilege

On the question of Bill C-32, I will again offer to my friend that we could pass that bill right now, at all stages, if the NDP is agreeable. I believe that would be a reasonable course of action.

Today, of course, we are debating an opposition day motion for the New Democratic Party. Tomorrow and Monday will see us start to consider second reading of Bill C-52, the fair rail freight service act. If we have time, we will go back to the second reading debate on Bill C-48, the technical tax amendments act, 2012. Wednesday will see us finish third reading of Bill C-43, the faster removal of foreign criminals act. Tuesday and Thursday shall be the second and third allotted days. I understand that both of those days will go to the official opposition. Then, if we have not previously finished Bill C-52 and Bill C-48, we will return to them next Friday.

Finally, there have been consultations among the parties respecting a take note debate on the situation in Mali. I am pleased to move:

That a take-note debate on the subject of the conflict in Mali take place, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on Tuesday, February 5, 2013.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Ms. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to move the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Tuesday, February 5, 2013, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to raise an issue that I think is very important. This follows on the point I raised in June 2012, which, as we know, was settled amicably.

I will give an example that demonstrates how difficult it is to get information from Public Works and Government Services Canada. After that, I will talk about a pertinent question addressed today.

In early January 2011, some members of the Vanier business improvement area called me looking for information on the grants in lieu of taxes program. As everyone knows, the Crown does not pay property taxes, but the government legislated to ensure the payment of grants in lieu of taxes to the municipalities in which government

buildings are located. The BIA wanted more information—and not any privileged information—about how the program works.

I called the public official responsible for that program at PWGSC. I left a message indicating that I would like to speak with him. About 15 minutes later, my office received a call from the office of the Minister of Public Works informing us that if we wanted any information, we had to go through the minister's office.

Since we needed information, I asked for a briefing session, which took place two weeks later.

Two weeks later, in an office on Parliament Hill, I met with three public servants—the person I spoke with on the phone and two of his associates—along with three people from the Vanier BIA and two of the minister's staff members. We exchanged information. It was completely neutral information that was not privileged. It was public information on how this program works since the people from the BIA were having difficulty. However, that is not the issue here.

Here is what happened at the end of the meeting. The senior public servant gave his business card to the Vanier BIA director and told her that, if she needed any more information, she could call or email him directly.

So I said to him, “Are you saying that she can call you and you will give her the information without any problem, when I cannot get that same information without going through the minister's office?” He said that, according to the instructions he had been given, I indeed had to go through the minister's office.

I thought it was a bit much that an MP could not get information while others could get it directly. However, since the BIA got the information it needed, I did not make a big deal out of it. Perhaps I should have, and my failure to do so may have been a mistake. This creates two problems. First, it creates unnecessary work and makes communication completely inefficient. Second, it calls into question the professionalism of our public servants.

That is terrible because, if an MP requests privileged information, I would expect that public servants would not provide it. However, if an MP asks for public information, he should normally be able to get it, particularly if his constituents have access to it.

That is the situation. That is the case that we are currently dealing with. The second important issue in the riding that I have the honour of representing is the development of the Rockcliffe military base.

•(1510)

[English]

The Canada Lands Company has hired a gentleman called Don Schultz. He is a consultant, and over the last few months he has met with just about anybody who has any interest in this file. All community associations have been met with. The local city councillor has been met with, twice. He has met my neighbours. He has met everybody. I am not criticizing Mr. Schultz; I need that to be very clear. All I have heard about him is very good and positive. He is attentive. He follows up. He is doing a very good job of listening and getting us in.

Since this is a most important file in the riding that I have the honour of representing, I called on December 3, after he had been at this for a few months, to get a sense of how things were going. The answer was that he could not meet with me unless he had authorization from the office of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. This is getting interesting.

I think this brings up the same kind of problems I just mentioned. Why should I have to go through the minister's office, when he is meeting everybody without any authorization from the minister's office? For the elected representative of the people, he therefore has to get permission.

Today, from the office of the minister, I got notice that a briefing would not be possible, but perhaps a conference call could be arranged. This is the question of privilege that I need to raise. As elected officials, information is our lifeblood. If we cannot get access to information that everybody else seems to be able to get without any hurdles, there is a problem. There is an insidiousness here that is frightening.

I have had a number of conversations with colleagues from the government side, and never has any one of them ever told me they have had a problem with accessing information concerning problems in the riding they represent.

Mr. Speaker, I would like you to look into this matter. I believe this is a situation which is significantly problematic. If the government has instructed public servants (a), not to speak to us, therefore not trusting their professionalism, (b), to slow things down purposefully through the minister's office so we cannot get information, what does that say? Does it say that the government is trying purposefully to put us in a situation where we will not be able to defend the interests of the constituents we were elected to represent?

I think my colleagues know that I try to work positively. I try to work constructively. I have done that for a number of years now. However, this is problematic. I know that colleagues on this side and in the NDP have had the same problem.

Mr. Speaker, I believe you have a responsibility as our speaker to protect us and our privilege of having a level playing field of access to information for the benefit of the constituents we have been elected to represent.

•(1515)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening closely. I do not

Business of Supply

know a lot about the circumstances, but I expect the government will want to come back with further submissions.

I will observe that I did not hear any aspect of the duties or responsibilities of a member of Parliament that were in any way blocked so that his abilities to perform them were impaired in any particular way, which I think is fundamental to raising a point of privilege like this.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we also would like to enter this debate at some point, having not yet heard the details of the case other than what my colleague has expressed so far. However, many of my colleagues have faced a number of obstructions from civil servants who have previously been quite open to allowing members access to information that the public has, things being referred to the Prime Minister's Office, through the PCO, in a way that makes it impossible to find out things that are sometimes, as we have found out later, available online.

There is this control element that seems to be happening in the government that specifically targets members of the opposition and therefore infringes upon our privileges as MPs to do the work on behalf of our constituents. Much of that work is based on information that only the government has.

These are not state secrets. These are things that are generally and broadly available. The government seems to have some sort of strategy in which all things have to be referred to the central command, preventing us from doing work we were elected to do.

We will reserve the right to come back to this once we review the details. I look forward to the Speaker's ruling.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. members for their interventions and look forward to future submissions on this question.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ABORIGINAL CANADIANS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to this motion, tabled by the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I appreciate the working relationship that we have on the standing committee.

Our government's number one focus is on creating jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike. We are seeing the results of this work. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, the global economy remains fragile but Canada has produced more than 900,000 net new jobs in recent years. This is no small feat in the current economic climate.

Business of Supply

As we move forward in 2013, our focus remains the economy. We know that in continuing to develop, provide our children with access to good education, train for the job skills of tomorrow, reduce red tape and equip our businesses to succeed worldwide, this includes expanding opportunities for aboriginal peoples to fully participate in the economy. We know there are tremendous opportunities to promote and encourage greater aboriginal participation in the economy and we remain committed to working with willing partners to do exactly that. We are focused on removing barriers to economic development on reserve, helping aboriginal people develop the skills they need to enter the workforce and providing first nation communities and the regions they are located in with greater autonomy to manage their own land and resources.

We can all agree that increasing aboriginal participation in the economy is one of the most effective ways to improve the well-being and quality of life of aboriginal peoples in Canada. It is also vital to Canada's future economic prosperity.

• (1520)

[Translation]

Since the economic action plan was implemented in response to the global economic crisis, Canada has recovered almost all of the output and jobs lost during the recession. The number of jobs has gone up by more than 750,000 since July 2009, and it is now 260,000 higher than the peak reached before the recession, which represents the highest job growth among the G7 countries. These figures are very reassuring to Canadians, in light of the continuing economic uncertainty around the world.

[English]

Key to our economic strength is the continued participation of aboriginal peoples in the economy. The natural resource sector is an important case in point. Canada's natural resource sector employs close to 800,000 Canadians. The mining sector is the largest private employer of aboriginal people, who make up some 7.5% of its workforce. Aboriginal people represent 4.3% of the energy sector's workforce and 10% of the oil sands' workforce. The resource sectors also generate billions of dollars' worth of tax royalties and revenues annually to help pay for government programs and services.

Our resource strength is set to continue to expand well into the future. We currently estimate that over the next decade there will potentially be as many as 600 new projects, representing more than \$650 billion in investments, across the country in resource development. Some of these will be taking place in northwestern Ontario in the great Kenora riding. These projects will create jobs across our region and throughout Canada and will continue to substantially improve our country's economic prosperity. In fact, the numbers continue to climb as new opportunities are identified.

Resource development is vitally important to aboriginal communities across Canada. Take, for example, Fort McKay First Nation in Alberta. It has the largest business relationship with oil sands producers of any first nation community. Fort McKay has gone from having a single janitorial contract in 1986 to running corporations with reported earnings in 2008 of over \$120 million. Unemployment in the community is under 5%. It has a youth centre, a health clinic, and a new housing complex with a hundred homes rented to community members.

Prior to the development of diamond mines in the Northwest Territories, the Tlicho First Nation had small, local businesses in traditional pursuits. Today, it has far more diversified economic activity ranging from retailing to multi-million dollar mining service companies.

There are many more examples of our government partnering with aboriginal communities on resource development projects through the aboriginal business development program. The Kitsaki mining limited partnership is a \$3 million commercial mining extraction equipment project for use in the operations of the open-pit and underground La Ronge gold mine project of Golden Band Resources in Saskatchewan. Our government contributed \$1.1 million to this project.

Just last week, the minister was in British Columbia to announce new regulations under the First Nations Commercial and Industrial Development Act that would allow for the Kitimat LNG liquefied natural gas facility on the Haisla First Nation's Bees Indian Reserve No. 6 to move forward. This natural gas facility will provide Canada's energy producers with a doorway to overseas markets, in addition to creating well-paying skilled jobs and economic opportunities for the Haisla First Nation and the entire northwestern region of British Columbia.

[Translation]

These economic development projects obviously have economic spinoffs for all sectors of the Canadian economy, and especially for first nations communities. That is why it is important for Canada to do what is necessary to attract international investments in the provinces and territories. This includes regulatory reform north and south of the 60th parallel.

Regulatory processes that are simplified and clearly laid out will give businesses the confidence they need to take advantage of economic opportunities and maximize the use of the resource sector to create jobs for Canadians across Canada, including aboriginal peoples, while still protecting the environment.

• (1525)

[English]

In 2009, the government fundamentally changed the way it does business with aboriginal peoples. Instead of promoting economic development using an outdated, ad hoc approach that we had seen used by prior governments, we are focused on forging strategic partnerships with willing partners and developing innovative ways to overcome the traditional structural barriers to economic opportunity in aboriginal communities.

Business of Supply

This includes growing private sector partnerships and investment; strengthening aboriginal entrepreneurship; having small business centres on reserves, including isolated and remote first nation communities; developing the aboriginal labour force through skills and trade investments in HRSDC; and enhancing the value of aboriginal assets.

[Translation]

Through this approach, our government is working with its partners to ensure that aboriginal peoples benefit from the same job, income and wealth creation opportunities as other Canadians.

[English]

On average, we have created or contributed over \$45 million annually to support aboriginal business development, aboriginal participation in large-scale energy and resource development projects and improved access to capital for aboriginal business development opportunities.

We are also working with aboriginal peoples to remove the structural barriers that are holding them back from fully participating in the economy. For example, just this past month the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development announced that eight more first nations will soon be operating or developing their land codes under the First Nations Land Management Act. These eight first nations joined the 18 first nations that were added last January, bringing the total number of first nations benefiting from this regime to 69 first nation communities. This regime gives first nations freedom from the 34 land-related sections under the Indian Act, and provides them with greater autonomy by taking the minister out of the equation and giving them back control over their reserve lands and its resources. More specifically, first nations can now determine how they want to develop, protect, and use their own land on reserve.

The benefits of this regime are clear. First nations operating with their own land codes are successfully taking advantage of more and more economic development opportunities because they are able to operate at the speed of business. Imagine that.

For example, Whitecap Dakota First Nation in Saskatchewan has been operating under the First Nations Land Management Act since 2004. Since that time, over 700 jobs have been created in the community and currently generate approximately \$90 million in revenue annually. It is incredible.

Last spring, Bill C-38 amended the FNLMA to enable first nations operating under the act to further unlock the economic development potential of their reserve lands. These amendments simplified the process of developing their own land codes, further removing the legislative barriers that were preventing or delaying first nations from taking full advantage of the benefits of assuming full responsibility for their lands under FNLMA.

More recently, as part of Bill C-45, the Jobs and Growth Act, 2012, our government introduced amendments to the land designation provisions of the Indian Act that will allow first nations to more quickly pursue economic development opportunities through leasing portions of the reserve land while retaining full ownership of their lands. These amendments respond to many first nations who have expressed frustration at the cumbersome and time-consuming

process that existed previously and which had negatively impacted their ability to attract and retain investors at the speed of business.

Unfortunately, there has been a lot of misinformation spread in the media and in the first nation communities as to what these amendments involve. I want to reiterate that these amendments have nothing to do with land surrender. They have to do with the leasing of land for economic development purposes through a decision-making process that takes place in first nation communities by their citizens and their government. It really is as simple as that.

● (1530)

[Translation]

Our government is working with our aboriginal partners as well as with the provincial and territorial governments and the private sector to increase aboriginal participation in key sectors of the Canadian economy.

For example, in 2010, we launched the strategic partnerships initiative, which helps aboriginal Canadians take advantage of complex, market-driven opportunities for resource development, particularly in priority economic sectors such as forestry, fisheries, mining, energy and agriculture.

[English]

To this day the initiative has supported more than 60 aboriginal communities and some of the largest resource development opportunities across Canada, including the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario and the lower Churchill energy project in Atlantic Canada.

However, we are not only focused on resource projects south of 60. We also know that Canada's north is home to world-class natural resources, representing tremendous economic potential.

During his trip to the north this past August, the Prime Minister stated that our government is committed to ensuring that northerners benefit from the tremendous reserves of natural resource found in their region. For the benefits to flow, it is necessary to get resource projects up and running in an effective, responsible and sustainable way, to put agreements in place with territorial governments and first nations to ensure that revenues generated by these initiatives are to their direct benefit and stay where they belong, up in the north.

To this end, our government has taken significant steps to reduce red tape and streamline regulatory requirements in the north. We introduced Bill C-47, the northern jobs and growth act, in the House of Commons on November 6, 2012. This bill is currently before committee and if passed into law will increase certainty and help create a better climate for private sector investment and development across the territories. The bill includes the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act and the Northwest Territories Surface Rights Board Act. It also includes amendments related to the Yukon Surface Rights Board Act.

Business of Supply

These measures fulfill outstanding legislative obligations under the Nunavut land claim agreement, as well as the Gwich'in and Sahtu land claim agreements. They also respond to calls from aboriginal groups, government and the private sector for improvements to regulatory processes in the north.

[*Translation*]

Improving the regulatory regimes for the abundant natural resources in the north could help Canada prosper and could create billions of jobs for decades. The meaningful action we are taking in the Northern Jobs and Growth Act will help release this potential.

Our government will continue to develop Canada's abundant natural resources to benefit Canadians, including aboriginal peoples. We have a vision of a future in which the aboriginal peoples are autonomous and prosperous, manage their own activities and make a significant contribution to the well-being of the entire country.

[*English*]

Our government continues to take concrete steps to build the conditions necessary for aboriginal communities to participate more fully in Canada's economy.

In closing, we remain committed to working with willing partners to improve the long-term prosperity, health and sustainability of aboriginal people, their communities and all Canadians.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the parliamentary secretary's speech, and I have two questions.

The first one is that, after the January 11 Crown-first nations meeting, the Assembly of First Nations issued a press release that indicated it did not want to be drawn into a programmatic discussion and did not want to waste time going over rhetorical ground or listening to a number of statements from the minister, but what it really wanted was to see a fundamental change in the machinery of government including direct political oversight. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could indicate when that dedicated cabinet committee with the secretariat from the Privy Council would be put in place.

Second, will the Conservatives be supporting our NDP motion?

• (1535)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, the general consensus from all stakeholders and participants in the important meeting that we held during the winter break was it was a productive, collegial, cordial discussion that lays out the path moving forward for partnerships. Obviously there are a couple of meetings that will take place. We know that within the Assembly of First Nations and first nations leadership across the country they are working through a process that will ensure they are clear on their objectives moving forward, what their inputs are like to the extent that this process is going to move forward, and we are doing the same thing.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment. First nation people and Inuit face serious health challenges such as high rates of chronic and infectious diseases and a shorter life expectancy than other Canadians. Some 15% of new HIV and AIDS infections occur in aboriginal people. Compared to the general Canadian population, heart disease is 1.5 times higher. Type 2 diabetes is three to five times higher. Tuberculosis infection rates

are 8 to 10 times higher and 185 times higher in Inuit populations. Suicide rates are 11 times higher in Inuit populations and among the highest in the world.

How can we accept this in Canada?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm of the member. It bears noting that I spent a great deal of my career through the nineties as a nurse living and working in isolated first nation communities where these statistics were unfortunately put together.

The reality is that healthy and sustainable first nation communities depend on being fully integrated in economic development in their respective regions. That is a key determinant. There are health facilities working and great nurses in the extended role offering myriad different programs, a full partnership with health authorities that are transitioning and identifying their priorities in key areas. The Minister of Health, who comes from the north, has done a great job in this regard and we are going to stay on that track, working with willing partners and improving the health and sustainability of first nation communities moving forward.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would really like to acknowledge the hard work the parliamentary secretary, the member for Kenora, has done. I really appreciate his personal commitment to making the lives of aboriginals better.

My question is in regard to the streamlined designations in the provisions of the Indian Act. Could the member please explain the importance of land designations to us tonight?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, of course, lands designations allow first nations to collect property tax, lease land to third-party businesses and develop their mineral and oil and gas resources.

Some of the most successful first nations in Canada, such as the Osoyoos Indian Band and the Tk'emlups Indian Band, could not have achieved their success without designating their lands. Oil and gas-producing first nations collectively generated more than \$1 billion in royalties over the last five years.

The recent amendments to lands designation will make it easier for communities interested in pursuing these kinds of commercial and industrial economic development opportunities.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my friend's comments and his speech. He was asked a direct question by the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan just recently. I wonder if he can answer it.

The opposition day motion the New Democrats put forward:

calls on the government to make the improvement of economic outcomes of First Nations, Inuit and Métis a central focus of Budget 2013, and to commit to action on treaty implementation and full and meaningful consultation on legislation that affects the rights of Aboriginal Canadians, as required by domestic and international law.

It sounds exactly like the hon. member's speech.

Our motion says to improve the lot of first nations and to follow the law. Our motion says many of the things the hon. member said in his speech.

The question is simple: Will the hon. member support the New Democrats' motion on first nations and their economic and social success in this country?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, the government is very pleased with the trajectory we are on in working with willing partners. Like economic action plan 2012, in 2013 we will be focused on jobs and opportunities for all Canadians, which includes first nations and their communities.

Obviously the protection of aboriginal treaty rights and consultations with aboriginals are recognized in our constitution, in statute. While the declaration is not legally binding, of course Canada endorsed the aspirational document as a significant step forward in strengthening relationships with aboriginal peoples.

We have made unprecedented investments into things that will make a concrete difference in people's lives. Every single time, on the issue of whether they support something or not, the NDP members vote against it.

• (1540)

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the First Nations Land Management Act. I want to ask my colleague a question.

When participating first nation communities get involved in the First Nations Land Management Act, it gets rid of one-third of the Indian Act. Economic opportunities improve in business up to 40% with willing partners and communities on first nations reserves.

I would like to point out some numbers. First nations attracted approximately \$53 million in internal investment and close to \$100 million in external investment.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development please give the House some examples of concrete steps by which the Government of Canada is working with willing first nations to improve economic opportunities in the north and across Canada?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member not only for his question but for his important work on something for which there is broad consensus in this place, which is to work away at removing, in a responsible way, parts of the Indian Act that no longer apply to the modern circumstances of our country, and for first nations people and their communities. He is taking an important step down that path through his private member's bill.

Importantly, the First Nations Land Management Act puts communities out from underneath more than one-third of the statutes in the Indian Act. This is seen as progress, from first nations communities, their leadership and the government. It gives them the

Business of Supply

opportunity and flexibility to focus on the economic priorities of their community, which of course has a positive impact on the social health and sustainability of their respective communities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the parliamentary secretary that since we began debating this issue—and I have been paying close attention to the debate—members of his government, particularly the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, have told us how important it is to negotiate with and consult first nations before forcing anything on them. Yet his government has done exactly the opposite of that. Both of the omnibus bills they introduced have directly affected first nations rights.

Does the parliamentary secretary not think that his government could follow the example of what Quebec did with the peace of the braves, where the government consulted first nations and negotiated with them before reaching an agreement? Things are not perfect in Quebec, not all of the issues are resolved, but at least there has been some progress, and maybe the federal government could follow that example.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question.

Our government has consulted aboriginals on many issues, including potable water and waste water.

We are now beginning a process focused on education, and we will be working with aboriginal communities and our provincial partners across Canada to ensure that aboriginal children and youth have the same opportunities as children in southern Canada with respect to education outcomes.

These are two good examples of how we are working with aboriginal communities to improve education, health and sustainable development in their communities.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with my esteemed colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona.

[*English*]

It is with some pleasure that I enter the debate, because as I read out to the parliamentary secretary, the New Democrats, the official opposition to the government, have asked the House to confirm the government's commitment to follow the law. We have asked the government's commitment to actually begin and fully implement treaties and consult first nations before the government enacts laws that affect first nations.

For Idle No More and the concerns that have happened across the land on specific resource projects or any of those disruptions, the government only has itself to blame. Time and time again, the Conservatives say the words we hear in this place about consulting and respecting first nations' rights and title, then they bring in another law without consulting first nations' rights and title and wonder why first nations from coast to coast to coast rise up against the government and say that they expect and demand better.

Business of Supply

I come from northwestern British Columbia, and 35% to 40% of the constituents I represent are from first nation backgrounds. Not only are the first nations a profound part of our history and culture, but a crucial and critical part of our future. First nations are informing the way that we work, the way that we live, the way that we think about our land and our communities. This is an important lesson the government would do well to serve.

I remember the Prime Minister visiting in his Challenger jet with all his security into the northwest at one point. He flew in for an exclusive fundraiser at a lake that was very nice. By some coincidence, the same day, the first nation territory was raising four totem poles. It was the first time they had done such a thing in almost a century.

Being a good parliamentarian, I extended an invitation to the Prime Minister through his office to say, "Why do you not come down? There is a feast happening. The first nations there will treat you with honour and respect, even if they disagree with your policies, because they know what honour and respect actually look like". The response of the Prime Minister's Office was, "Not a chance, ever".

The Prime Minister went to his exclusive fundraiser while the first nations were raising four totem poles. While the extension of the offer and the invitation had come from the first nations themselves, the Prime Minister's Office, and one would only assume under the direction of the Prime Minister, felt that it was not an appropriate way for a Prime Minister to spend his time.

There is a problem that happens too often in politics, and particularly with Parliament and first nations, where we only hear the negative stories, the hard stories, because there are so many of them. In first nation communities, we are all too familiar with the statistics and the realities of first nation people. We know about the elevated suicide rate. We know about the depression and the economic backwardness in which government after government has left first nations. We know that first nation students going to school this morning received one-third less funding than non-first nation students, students who do not live on reserves.

It seems to me that there is also an important conversation to have about the successes, and not the cherry-picked successes. The government likes to play favourites and say that all we have to do is free up property rights. Then places such as Kelowna, Kamloops, downtown Vancouver and the oil patch will be the examples that all first nations can use, because obviously all the reserves around Canada are situated on such absolutely high-value property as the ones outside of Kelowna or in the oil patch in northern Alberta. That is in fact not the case for the vast majority of reserves that the Canadian government saw fit to place first nations on. That is a fact.

The success stories that I talk about, coming from the northwest of British Columbia, are homemade success stories. They are success stories that pushed and fought and struggled against government doctrine, against the ignorance of the government of the day.

I think of the Haida First Nation, who fought on the line with the Government of Canada and British Columbia to defend their island of Haida Gwaii. They fought to establish a regime in which land management is a co-management process, where half of the boards

on land management use in Haida Gwaii are Haida and half or non-Haida. They find ways as neighbours, as partners, to develop the land but not the way the Canadian and B.C. governments wanted to do, which was to strip-mine the soul of the island. They actually foresee a future in which our children have an opportunity.

I think of the Tahltan First Nation in northern B.C. faced with the prospect of Shell Canada, this government and previous governments wanting to drill for gas and frack at the very heart of the Sacred Headwaters of the Stikine, the Skeena and the Nass rivers, three of the most critical rivers in all of British Columbia. They wanted to drill and frack for gas at that very same place and had no ability to actually confirm that there would not be poisoned wells coming up everywhere.

• (1545)

The Tahltan First Nation, without any money, without big support and without any help from people in the government, stood up against one of the most powerful companies in the world and got it to see reason, to see that there are better prospects and better places to be. Just recently, Shell, against all odds and against the advice of the government, decided to forgo its leases in the Sacred Headwaters. The B.C. government finally came on side and said that maybe it was time to protect certain places, that drilling for oil and gas everywhere might not be such a great idea. It was the Tahltan First Nation that led that.

I think of the Kitsumkalum and the Kitselas nations that just recently signed a deal with CN. This was quite an amazing day. On a day just next to the day of national action for Idle No More, I was at an event in Kitsumkalum, just outside of Terrace, B.C. We stood on the railway track of a new railway spur, with the first nations in full regalia standing across the railway line in front of a train. They stopped that train. The RCMP and the broader community were in attendance. We were there to cut a ribbon because CN had negotiated with the first nations to have a revenue-sharing agreement to allow that rail spur to be built to a quarry that is now building jobs for the entire community.

It was somewhat ironic to see a model of what it looks like if the parties actually negotiate in good faith with first nations. All seem to benefit. I think of the Haisla First Nation that has stood up against the northern gateway even though money gets splashed around, even though the government tries to bully anybody who happens to have an independent thought on putting an 1,100-kilometre pipeline from Alberta to the port at Kitimat, and then driving 250 supertankers through some of the most narrow and treacherous waters in the world.

When the Haisla First Nation stood up, they said they were open for business but under their management. They were able to sign deals with resource developers on their terms. They will not be bullied. They lawyered up. They invested in their young people and got education going a generation, two generations, three generations ago, despite all the adversity of the residential school and the travesties that government after government set upon first nations.

Business of Supply

I think of the Nisga'a signing the first modern-day treaty. They are still pleading with the government to actually have a relationship. The government talks about respect. It talks the talk but will not walk the walk. It will not even meet with the Nisga'a, who are a model for first nations across this country on how to develop a full first nation governance and constitution. The government simply washes its hands of the entire experience.

The Canadian government and the Crown's relationship with first nations is well documented as a dysfunctional relationship. I sat in the House as the Prime Minister welcomed in first nation, Métis, Inuit leaders to this place to express what I believed was a sincere apology to the first nation, Métis and Inuit people of Canada for the travesty of residential schools.

We can all agree, whatever our political persuasion, that when such a thing is prosecuted upon young people and families as an official policy of the Canadian government, generation after generation, there comes a time to face up to that reality and that history and apologize. An apology often means that behaviour will be corrected. If someone apologizes to me and they mean it, then I suspect that the thing that they did that brought on the apology will not be continued.

However, what was the very next thing the government decided to do? It was to cut the funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which had been established to help people deal with the effects of residential school experiences. That was the next thing it did after it apologized.

The Conservatives wonder, as they are attacking first nation leadership, why the first nations are so upset. Why will they not trust the government when it only wants to be friends? Yet time and time again when first nations come to the table with their hands extended to try to reason and negotiate with the government of the day, the government has other voices in its ear, other friends it would like to listen to first.

If there is some inconvenience for the oil companies in environmental assessments and first nation law, then it will try to shuffle those out of the way and create profound uncertainty in the resource sector. I have heard this, not from first nation leaders alone but from those in the oil and gas sector. They say that the government hands them, time and again, a poisoned chalice where they cannot acquire the social licence to build a project because the public watches the government in action, watches it strip down environmental laws, watches it treat first nations with total disrespect, calling them radicals and enemies of the state.

What do first nations and people who have any concern for first nations' rights and title, and the environment do? They stand up to that bullying. They stand up and resist and join hands, community to community, family to family, friend to friend. That creates the very uncertainty that the Conservatives think they are somehow not a part of, but they are implicated.

● (1550)

We must be allies in the true sense of the word. We must find a way to get over the arrogance and inability of Canadian governments, Liberal and Conservative, consistently down the line to listen and understand the realities of first nations. The government must

not just talk the talk, but walk the walk. It means not bringing in legislation that overrides first nations' rights and title and the duty to accommodate and consult, or forcing first nations into courts and costing the Canadian taxpayer untold millions of dollars fighting court case after court case and making lawyers rich, when the Constitution and Charter of Rights and Freedoms clearly defines what is going to happen at the end of the day.

Now we find out from government lawyers in the Department of Justice that in fact the government consistently gets advice that legislation the Conservatives bring in will end up in court because it is fundamentally unconstitutional and would not pass a charter challenge. Thereby the government knowingly brings in things for politics that ultimately cost millions of dollars. It serves to make no one better, but helps the Conservatives score a cheap point for some photo-op for a minister they think is on the ropes again.

This has to stop, and it will stop when a government actually sits down, listens and attends that pole-raising ceremony and attends the feast with respect and humility as one does nation to nation. Until that happens, all of these kind words and sentiments of economic development and prosperity for one and all do not mean anything because they will not happen. The way they will happen is with respect, sincere friendship and finally the Canadian government, if we can imagine the day, acting as an ally to first nations rather than what it is.

● (1555)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to the member opposite for his speech. It is revealing of the NDP position on today's motion, which has important objectives behind it. We get a sense from the opposition House leader of where the emphasis is within those objectives, which are, after all, defined in a few lines in the motion.

The member mentioned the need to negotiate and the importance of fighting for this and that on the part of aboriginal groups and first nations. There was quite a bit of anger in his speech at various points. However, there were two items missing from his speech that I think would go a long way toward underpinning a coordinated approach in the House, which is what aboriginal communities want. One is acknowledgement of what has been achieved first and foremost by first nation communities in education, in terms of the protection of children and in terms of the improvement of drinking water in recent years by all of us together, but at the initiative of this government. The other is the complete absence in his speech, and in many speeches by those opposite, of the word "accountability".

Would the House leader of the official opposition remind the House and all Canadians that the NDP attaches importance to the word "accountability"? We would not have results on education or any other front for first nation communities without progress on that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I will address the last point first in terms of accountability.

Business of Supply

“Do as I say not as I do” might be the motif for the Conservative government. When the official opposition or the Parliamentary Budget Officer seeks basic accountability for, at times, many billions of dollars, we get obfuscation from a government that seems to be keen on hiding the truth, misplacing the numbers and not finding the facts. Therefore, to lecture first nations about accountability, from a Conservative government that the Ethics Commissioner, Information Commissioner, Auditor General and Parliamentary Budget Officer have all said is among the most secretive governments in Canadian history, which is saying something when compared to what we used to have, it is the pot calling the kettle black.

Second, the member asked if there were times when I felt passion and anger. Well he better believe it. I would invite my friend to come and visit some of the communities and families I represent who feel the frustration of constantly going up against governments that seem to have tin ears and no sensitivity to their realities. Of course, one gets angry, one gets passionate and one should. That is a natural reaction to the state of affairs of many of the families of first nation descent who live in this country.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for that very passionate and informed speech. I have a quick question for him.

One of the things we saw from coast to coast to coast over the last several weeks was first nations, Inuit and Métis rising up to say that the Conservative government does not get it. The government's policies, regulations and consultations are not working.

Just yesterday there was a court case to have the government release documents from the Library and Archives Canada to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Of course, the government is once again delaying those documents. I wonder if the member could comment on how this is just one more indication of a failed relationship between the Conservative government and aboriginal peoples across this country.

• (1600)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, here is the process the government has gone through. It issued an official apology to first nations for the residential schools. Then it set up the truth and reconciliation process in order to allow healing to happen, which requires truth, and in this case truth means documents, finding out what happened to who and when.

The fact that the very judicial review the government set up has to take the government to court in order to get access to documents that it promised it would give in all of its issuance on this speaks volumes to the government's intention. If the government's intention is to really seek reconciliation, then it is all put out on the table, there is no fear. The minister says that the government has given a million documents and there are so many million more. Why hide the truth if hoping for reconciliation?

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to share this time with the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. I share his passion for this topic.

I also share the passion of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan who has tabled this motion. On behalf of the first nations

who I am in consultation with, I wish to thank her for bringing forward this matter to the House.

I absolutely stand in support of this motion that calls for greater action and the improvement of the economic outlook for first nations Inuit and Métis, particularly in the coming budget, to commit action to treaty implementation and full and meaningful consultation.

The proof will be in the pudding when the next budget is tabled. We have heard lots of promises from across the floor. I can assure members that it will not just be the official opposition or other opposition parties will be watching that document carefully, but also all of the indigenous peoples of our country.

On treaty implementation, which I will get to in a minute, certainly the government has been falling down. Even though some mechanisms were put in place to resolve specific claims, the actions by the government have in fact not resolved the matter and have made things worse.

First, I want to reiterate the call by my colleague, the MP for Timmins—James Bay, who called for Parliament to step up and finally take serious action on the economic, social and moral deficit in respect for and taking action to lift our aboriginal peoples from a century of discrimination and poverty. It is very important we reiterate that we should not just talk about economic strategies and the implementation of treaties, but that we should talk about the basic issue of why it is critical to move forward on those matters.

Second, he reminded us that we were all treaty people. There is one thing I have heard over and over again over the last year, including when I had the honour of being the critic for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. It is the reminder which has come from the elders, the chiefs and council members, the aboriginal youth and National Chief Shawn Atleo, which treaties were entered into by both sides. We have responsibilities under the treaty in the same way as the first nations. We are treaty people.

Third, concrete action is needed to restore a good faith relationship. We have heard that over and over again today.

The government claims that the real issue is real engagement in the economy and jobs. Engagement in the economy requires equitable access to education. How does one get a well-paying job unless he or she has access to advanced education, or even to get through grammar school with a 35% graduation rate as National Chief Shawn Atleo has frequently pointed out? He is a great advocate for greater support for indigenous education. He has said that there is a higher rate of incarceration of aboriginal youth than graduation from high school. Clearly, they cannot get a job that is well paying and contribute to the economy unless they have equitable access.

With respect to safe living conditions, how will those youth study if their houses or schools are full of mould and they do not have a steady supply of electricity, heat or safe drinking water?

These are simple facts that we Canadians take for granted.

Business of Supply

We should concentrate actions to provide jobs to the hardest hit. We hear lots of examples, as my colleagues have pointed out, of the success cases. When I was a critic and I participated in the committee review of the initiatives, the changes to the land management regime, many of the first nation leaders came in and said that it was not the same for all of them, that they did not all have the fortune of having a reserve immediately adjacent to a major industrial centre or municipality. It is very hard for the isolated communities. Frankly, their particular concern was with respect to a fair benefit agreement on the traditional lands, not necessarily developing their reserve lands.

The parliamentary secretary pointed out Fort McKay. Fort McKay First Nation in northern Alberta, right in the centre of the oil sands development, by necessity has forged agreements with industry so it can benefit, and it has had a number of contracts. However, it is important to recognize that even Fort McKay is drawing a line in the sand. The last of its important lands, which are specifically designated for traditional practices, are about to be hurt. They are about to be completely circled by oil sands development.

• (1605)

They, like all the other first nations that have come forward, want not just a piece of the pie, not just a job. They want a say in the decision making about the resource development in their territories and in areas next door to their territories where they might be impacted.

The engagement process in the economy also means that they need to have equitable benefit agreements. We hear time after time where some isolated first nations, on their own, are left to try to negotiate fair agreements with major corporations. In some cases, they do well. In other cases, they do not. Where is the federal government's responsibility to ensure they are supported in those endeavours?

What is the starting point for measuring progress?

We hear all the time from the government about all the money it spends. Any question that is asked, whether it is with regard to education, safe drinking water, the right to be consulted, or the right to a job, the government replies with, "Look at all the money we have spent".

What is the starting point for measuring progress? Is it the date of the signing of the treaties? Is it over 100 years back, with the historic and the numbered treaties? Is it the date of the signing of the modern treaties?

We have been hearing ongoing concerns in committee and in delegations meeting with members of Parliament about the failure of the government to live up to and implement the treaties.

Is it the date of the addition of section 35 to the Constitution? Is it the repeat calls by the Auditor General to take action on better protections for first nations?

In the last audit issued by then Auditor General Sheila Fraser singled out the conditions on first nation reserves and said that the federal government had taken some action but simply not enough. In her words:

It's no secret that their living conditions are worse than elsewhere in Canada. For example, only 41 percent of students on reserves graduate from high school, compared with 77 percent of students in the rest of the country. And more than half of the drinking water systems on reserves still pose a health threat.

As has been pointed, there are still more than 100 boil water advisories in the 21st century.

Sheila Fraser then said:

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

My colleagues on the other side were saying that it was the Liberals. It is important to note that the succeeding two auditor generals after Sheila Fraser raised exactly the same issue, so still not a lot of progress.

Is it the date of the 2012 First Nation-Crown summit, where a lot of undertakings were made? Is it the unanimous vote for the Shannen's Dream motion, calling for equitable access to education? Is it the promise to expedite settlement of languishing specific claims? Is it the recommendations of the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education?

There are many points of juncture where we could begin measuring progress. Sadly, we are still not seeing a lot of substantive progress across the board.

It is very important to point out that what first nations peoples, Métis and Inuit are calling for are substantive rights and procedural rights, both of which are guaranteed in the Constitution and legislation.

What is appalling is this continued reference by the government of the day to "willing partners, willing first nations". The question has to be raised. We know fully its disregard for any first nation that resorts to the courts. They are being forced to resort to the courts because of the government's abject refusal to properly consult. There have been a number of actions filed just in the last month by first nations in northern Alberta and in Saskatchewan, lambasting the government for failure to consult on its budget.

The first nations people view the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as carrying that obligation even further, that they should have the right to consent.

I would like to share that I was profoundly impacted by the opportunity of participating in some of Idle No More gatherings, and I say gatherings. These were not protests. These were gatherings, led by elders, including youth, including chiefs in regalia. I had the opportunity to talk to many youth who desperately wanted to participate in the economy, who desperately wanted to have their voices heard. I have been approached by the treaty chiefs and councillors in my province, in Treaty 6, 7 and 8, asking for my advice on how they can get the government to open up the budget, to reverse its decisions on undermining the environmental laws which protect their traditional lands.

• (1610)

I look forward to the government supporting our motion, but more than that, actually moving to take action.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite for her opinion about some of the actions that the Harper government has taken to address the important and pressing issues. In particular, I would like to ask the member if she would acknowledge that the government has made progress—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would remind the hon. member for Mississauga South that we try to stay away from mentioning the names of other hon. members in the course of our remarks.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I would ask whether the member would acknowledge the actions this government is taking. Will the member acknowledge that the government has made progress on some of the concrete priorities in health, education, economic development and housing? For example, since 2006, there have been 30 new schools built on reserves and 200 more that have been renovated. Also, this government has built over 10,000 new homes and renovated thousands more on reserves. We have increased funding for child and family services by 25%, introduced legislation ensuring that the Canadian Human Rights Act applies on reserves and settled 80 outstanding land claims. I would say these accomplishments are very impressive.

Will the member opposite admit that this government is very sensitive to the realities of Canada's first nations communities?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question put forward by the hon. member. It is not for me to respond. The individuals and communities that the Conservatives are accountable to are the first nations, Inuit and Métis communities. We are simply standing up for and being a voice for the very peoples who are not being given a voice. It is those peoples who are taking to the streets, holding round dances, calling for meetings, asking how they can persuade the government to change its closed door process and excluding them from consultations. It is not for me, as an individual member, or for colleagues on this side of the House to respond. It is for the government to ask the first nations, Inuit and Métis whether it has done enough and whether it is taking the right path.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my friend could help me understand the government's position today. Again, looking back at the motion we presented to the House, the foundation is based on two things: one, is to respect first nations, Métis and Inuit people and help them develop their economies, and the second one is to follow the law. Yet, we cannot seem to find a government member who says whether the government is going to vote against or with the motion. Conservatives have had all day with this issue. It is not very many words, and it says something they seem to repeat in their speeches and yet will not confirm.

The reason I think this is important is that often the Conservatives ask why first nations do not simply trust them, since they are doing the hard work and saying the nice things. Yet, when we try to pin them down to ask whether they are good for this or that, they seem to have a struggle uttering the words yes or no. I am wondering if this speaks to a deeper culture within the government, a deeper suspicion in this conversation. First nations seem to be treated with a very different brush than the approach with industry, or crime and justice issues. The first nations has a different tone, a different angle from

the government. A direct question rarely gets a direct answer. I am wondering if the member has any opinions or insights into that?

• (1615)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, one thing I mentioned earlier that troubles me is that, almost to the letter, on every single question we have put to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs in the House, the same response has come back. The member across the way who put the question to me seems to be alluding to the same thing: it is all about money. It is not all about money. That is not what I have been told by indigenous peoples from Canada. It is about respect, about obeying the law and the Constitution.

Unfortunately, I do not have time, but if I did, I would read the letters that have been provided to me and forwarded to the Prime Minister from the Treaty 6, 7 and 8 chiefs and councillors. Every one of them says the same thing. They feel they have been silenced by the parliamentary process. They are calling on the government to rescind the laws that were passed, which impact their lands, waters and peoples, without due consultation and without a hearing on their constitutional and legal obligations.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, the Environment.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for St. Paul's.

[English]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the Christmas holidays our family went to see *Les Misérables*. It was almost impossible to watch that movie without feeling strongly the parallel situation taking place here in Canada.

In the song *Do You Hear the People Sing?*, the question is asked:

When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums
There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!

The drums have been beating strongly in Canada and around the world to draw attention to the greatest social injustice in this country. As a doctor, when I hear the drums I hear a heartbeat. It is the same sixty beats per minute that I heard through a stethoscope years and years ago. The sound is very familiar.

Over these past weeks, it has been very poignant to hear the drums. There was a time we worried that the heartbeat of Chief Theresa Spence was going to stop. I want to thank the Liberal leader for the leadership he gave to that life being saved. I also want everyone to know that the tipping point in the relationship between first nations and the government meant Chief Theresa Spence felt she had to take drastic action. This has to change.

Business of Supply

On December 21, January 11, and Monday, as we returned here to Parliament Hill, hundreds of people gathered on the Hill as part of Idle No More, and in solidarity with them, across the country. These protests were about the government's sweeping changes to environmental oversight and to urge real action on aboriginal rights issues.

Again, it has been this feeling:

When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums
There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!

This is about young people, optimism and how things have to change.

[*Translation*]

Tomorrow begins today. This motion calls on the government to make the improvement of economic outcomes of first nations, Inuit and Métis a central focus of budget 2013.

[*English*]

I urge the government to support this motion from the hard-working hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

The government caucus met yesterday. The Prime Minister did not say one word about the issues facing aboriginal people. It has not been a priority for the government. I hope that voting for this motion will be a signal that it will take this issue seriously.

It is time for government members to understand that building human capital is the key factor in improving economic success for aboriginal people and communities, but also for all Canadians. Urgent collaborative action is needed to unlock the human and economic potential in aboriginal communities across this country.

At a time of unprecedented skills shortages, an estimated 400,000 aboriginal Canadians will reach the age to enter the labour market over the next decade. Yet, the significant education gap that exists between Canadian first nations and non-first nations populations high school graduation rates remains a major obstacle to full participation of aboriginal people in the workforce.

Members know that education is the key to success. Appallingly, the high school graduation rate is getting worse under the Conservative government. The Conservatives promised to close the disgraceful education funding gaps. Yet, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs followed that promise with confrontation and actually denied that the per student funding gap exists at all.

According to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the high school graduation rate for first nation students living on reserve is 35%. By comparison, 77% of non-aboriginal people in Canada have a high school diploma. Further, the number of aboriginal post-secondary graduates lags way behind the rest of Canada. For example, fewer than 10% of aboriginal people in Canada have a university degree compared to the national average of 23%.

● (1620)

The Conservatives goal for improving first nations on reserve high school graduation is an 8% increase over the next five years, as our

leader pointed out today in question period. They have no targets for increasing first nations post-secondary education enrolment or graduation. As the Auditor General has noted, at the current rate it would take 28 years for first nations communities to close the high school education gap.

We have asked the government to address this gap in the next budget by working with first nations to bring graduation rates up to the national average on an urgent basis. This was the 10 year target of the Kelowna accord and should be our goal moving forward. Yet, after seven years we have seen zero progress on this from the Conservative government. Talking points cannot change the facts. Idle No More means talking points no more. We actually need action and the truth.

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards has noted that raising educational and labour market outcomes for aboriginal Canadians to the same level as non-aboriginal Canadians would increase the GDP by \$36 billion, increase government revenues by \$3.5 billion, and reduce government expenditures by \$14.2 billion, by 2026.

As the Senate reported in its 2007 study on aboriginal economic development, there is a need to strengthen investments in aboriginal governing capacities that support economic success. However, the government has opted to make significant cuts to aboriginal governing capacities as part of the 2012 budget reductions. Even resources that directly contribute to economic success for aboriginal people are not above being cut from the government's strategy.

Shockingly, on February 12, 2013, the government plans to close the aboriginal Canada portal website, a single window to first nations, Métis and Inuit online resources for government programs and services. The portal includes links to government and non-governmental sources that pertain to employment and human resources. It links employment opportunities and jobs available for aboriginal job seekers across Canada. Employers can even post the job openings for free. The aboriginal Canada portal does not just provide one-stop shopping for employment; it also provides, at very little cost to taxpayers, essential information on topics ranging from claims and treaties to economic development, business, justice and policing. The closure will make it even more difficult for Canadians to navigate an already complicated federal bureaucracy.

This compilation of information on all matters aboriginal in government, currently maintained with a small expenditure, will now be scattered, making it even more difficult for all Canadians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, to use. One need only look at the statement on the website, which shows all of the places an individual has to now go to find the information that was once there in one-stop shopping.

Business of Supply

Clearly one cannot even think about economic development when people are living in third world conditions. The first nations, Inuit and Métis education gap has been widening, as we have said, in terms of both funding and outcomes. Housing shortages are becoming more acute. Water and waste water systems are in crisis, and tragic gaps in terms of first nations health outcomes are continuing unabated.

The Conservatives defend their refusal to deal with the on-reserve housing crisis by claiming they have built 10,000 homes over the past six years. The fact is that they are trying to take credit for falling short of what should have been 13,800 homes built under funding levels predating their government. The government also defends its appalling record on first nations water and waste water by noting that it conducted the largest assessment of safe waste water in this country so we can move forward with prioritization. Yet, almost two years after the federal assessment, 117 first nations communities across Canada are under drinking water advisories, which is an increase of over 23% since 2006. The government has no long-term plan to get a handle on this crisis.

The government study showed it would take \$6 billion, over 10 years, to fix this problem. Right now, there is \$1.2 billion in investment that is urgently needed. What did we see? We saw \$330 million in the last budget, and then the minister had the audacity to re-announce that \$330 million the day after the supposedly important January 11 meeting. Talk about hypocrisy. That is insulting.

What more is there? Too many resource development projects are moving forward without aboriginal people receiving a fair share of the economic benefits or being partners in their development.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

This motion also calls on the government to commit to action on treaty implementation and to engage in full and meaningful consultation on legislation that affects the rights of aboriginal Canadians, as required by domestic law.

[*English*]

The Conservatives signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which requires free, prior and informed consent, and then in every piece of correspondence they refer to that pledge as “aspirational”. This was the whole basis of the Crown–first nations gathering in January 2012, where they stated that they would commit to work toward the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation. Absolutely no work has been done with the provinces to honour those treaties or to ensure that first nations are able to share in the prosperity that is Canada.

The failure of the government to even begin to deal with the imperative of sharing Canada's natural resource revenues fairly has resulted in relations with Canada's indigenous population reaching a dangerous tipping point. First nations are pursuing their rights and winning almost every time in the courts, as the leader pointed out in a recent speech. Thousands of aboriginal and non-aboriginal people are demonstrating, as we are seeing, across Canada through Idle No More and online. Almost every resource development activity in Canada, the Conservatives need to remind themselves, that is currently operating or planned is occurring within 200 kilometres of

a first nation community or on traditional lands. Despite this, the settling of comprehensive claims agreements between aboriginal people and the government, which address the critical issues surrounding economic development including resource royalties sharing, has proceeded at an astonishingly slow pace.

The Canadian Council of Chief Executives has said that aboriginal people must be true partners in resource and energy projects. Yet the President of the Treasury Board alienated first nations by dismissing their calls for a joint review panel on the Ring of Fire resource development, arguing it would only bring up “irrelevant issues”. Even the Prime Minister's own former senior cabinet minister, Jim Prentice, has chastised the government, saying, “The Crown obligation to engage first nations in a meaningful way has yet to be taken up”.

The number of comprehensive claims settled by the government has fallen steadily since 2005, despite the promise from the Conservatives to revolutionize the land claims process in 2007. As of today, more than half of the nearly 100 agreements under negotiation have been ongoing for at least 16 years. These delays are often the result of the government's negotiation strategy, which embraces a take it or leave it approach rather than flexibility and fairness, and it is quite clear that the negotiators do not have the mandate to compromise.

The frustration of aboriginal people is understandable, given the complete lack of progress on their issues and the refusal of the government to fulfill its legal obligation to consult them on matters that may impact their inherent and/or treaty rights and the fact that we find in government documents that the Conservatives actually see first nations, Inuit and Métis in this country as adversaries.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

More recently, that frustration has manifested itself in the failure of consultation about the changes to environmental protection on aboriginal lands and navigable waterways contained in the two latest budget implementation acts.

Business of Supply

[English]

This type of unilateral action has created a fracture in the relationship between the Conservative government and first nations. It has led to the formation of Idle No More, which precipitated the hastily organized January 11 meeting between the Prime Minister and aboriginal leaders. The fact that coming out of that meeting the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development indicated his belief the government had fulfilled its duty to consult on various controversial bills shows that the Conservatives still do not seem to grasp what true consultation means. There was no consultation with aboriginal people on Bill C-38 or Bill C-45. The minister admitted in committee that there had been no consultation on the aboriginal governance bill. There was consultation on the private member's bill but no consultation on the government bill and even the chief, previously supportive, viewed it as a kind of bait and switch opportunity.

We believe the government should work with aboriginal leaders to establish an arm's length legal advisory committee that would evaluate all draft legislation with the potential to affect aboriginal rights and provide an opinion on the federal government's duty to consult before the legislation is tabled. Given that the aboriginal population is the youngest and fastest growing in Canada and that almost every natural resource development is occurring on aboriginal territorial lands, we believe that if the government truly wants to put all its economic eggs in a natural resources basket, it had better just get with the program and turn this around.

The Prime Minister must understand the gravity of the situation and the potential impact on all Canadians. It is time for action. It is time for the government to work with aboriginal people in Canada toward a new nation-to-nation relationship based on the spirit of partnership, respect and the co-operation for mutual benefit that characterized our original relationship. We are all treaty people. There were two signatories to the document. The 96% of Canadians not from aboriginal backgrounds need to understand the gravity of the situation, and we need to go forward in the House and make sure that happens.

Idle No More will not go away. The young people can see what needs to be done to right past wrongs and to deal with the greatest social and economic injustice facing Canada.

In the week before Christmas I was at the native men's shelter in my riding. It was quite clear. These young men, who had been homeless the week before, were asking me what an omnibus bill is and if it affects their treaty rights. The next night in North Bay, at the Idle No More teach-in with the member from North Bay, we could not believe it. There were a hundred people in the friendship centre going through the PowerPoint presentation of every bill that has affected them that has not had consultation. They are now armed with information and they are ready to fight.

It is really important that we understand that this is difficult. However, the government ignores it at its peril. I ask the government: Can it hear the people sing? When the beating of their hearts echoes the beating of the drums, there is a life about to start when tomorrow comes. That tomorrow is today, right now. The government could show some decent faith by voting for this motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Those are great words from my colleagues. I agree that it is time for action. I appreciate that they will support the motion, but at the same time, I think it was time for action in 1993. It was time for action in 1997 and it was time for action in 2000, when the Liberals were a majority government. It would have been so easy, especially around the 1997 and 2000 mandates, when there were huge surpluses. There could have been so many things being done by the government.

What I fail to understand is why the Liberals waited until the mandate of 2004 to 2006, of which I was part, to come at the last minute with the huge Kelowna accord, when they were a minority government and they were going to absolutely face the wall.

● (1635)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity to explain to the member that the Kelowna accord was begun with a majority government. It was begun in a way that first nations, Inuit and Métis leaders asked for, and it was done in concert with the provinces and the territories. That meant that from the time the former prime minister, Paul Martin, was sworn in as prime minister, a committee of cabinet was formed, like in the declaration from Chief Spence. Eighteen months went on with the six priorities chosen, with real targets, and then \$5.1 billion was assigned to do that. It required the accountability of a first nations auditor general, the accountability of all aboriginal ministers meeting once a year and a first ministers' meeting every two years to see how they were doing on these goals. Still, wherever we go in Canada people talk about Kelowna as though that was the way to go, not only in process, but in results.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. There are a number of members who wish to pose questions to the hon. member for St. Paul's, so we will have to watch our time on questions and comments.

The hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to be here since 2004. I remember the Liberals being in power at that time and talking a lot and going through the motions of settlements and land claims, etcetera.

During that period of time when they were in majority governments, for most of that time, the Liberals settled very few claims. In fact I think it was somewhere around 10 or 12 claims in 13 years, in essence one a year or possibly a little more.

I wonder if the member knows that we have actually settled more than 80 land claims in the six years the government has been in power, more than 80 land claims that are permanent settlements. One in particular in my riding, the Bigstone Cree Nation, the second largest nation in Canada, is one of the largest claims in history. That was done about three years ago.

Business of Supply

I would invite the member to come up to my riding in northern Alberta to see the success of first nations that have the economic conditions to change their lives and change their futures. It is a wonderful thing to see. I have many family members in that area. Their success is true and real. They are successful and very happy people.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but remind the member that it was the Reform Party that filibustered through the whole of the Nisga'a agreement.

This was one of the most important things that has come to this House, and the Reform Party made a complete mockery of it and actually filibustered. We voted for three or four days in a row, because these people just do not get it.

It is really important when we hear what is happening at the negotiating tables across this country, that the negotiator does not have the mandate to change anything and it is a take it or leave it, this is our bottom line, style of negotiation, and it is just not working.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, being the human rights critic for our party, I take particular note of the United Nations' view of Canada.

Canada has a very high rating normally in regard to the human development scale but, according to the United Nations, that would dramatically drop if it was based solely on the economics of our first nations and their social well-being. We would drop to 48 out of 174 nations if that had been included.

That low position is something that should be an embarrassment to this country. The reality is that other places and other people are measuring us, and we have failed. We continue to fail. As long as we do not dialogue, nation to nation, directly with the first nations, we will continue to fail.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the member is so right.

In 2004, when the WHO struck its commission on the social determinants of health, I was very proud to have appointed Monique Bégin and Stephen Lewis to represent Canada on that panel.

I was also very honest when I went to the launch of that commission in Santiago, Chile, to explain the third world conditions that our first nations, Inuit and Métis live in. It was viewed to be very unusual for a country not to be going and saying everything was perfect.

That commission was only going to look at the south. I implored it to come to Canada as well. They did come, mainly to British Columbia. They saw some good examples but also some bad examples and heard from our first people. It is really important, what was brought out.

The disaggregated data is what we have to work on. We need whole of government solutions, through all jurisdictions, if we are going to fix this. The government is denying these gaps exist. It cannot fix what it will not admit. That is the problem—

• (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always listen intently to my friend down the way.

For her to suggest that government is not acknowledging gaps is simply false. Of course there are gaps. That is why we are trying to do what we are trying to do. That is why we are trying to do it collaboratively and co-operatively. It is not easy when not everybody has the same view of what that means.

We have talked about nation-to-nation negotiations and nation-to-nation dialogue and so on. What is the hon. member's definition of that? Does that mean Canada to first nations, 631 different times? How does she envision that nation-to-nation dialogue happening?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to explain to the hon. member that he needs to have a look at the press release and press conference of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, which took place at exactly the same time the Assembly of First Nations and National Chief Atleo were meeting in Gatineau on education.

The minister actually tried to show that the per student funding for students on reserve and off reserve was the same if not better. Every single first nation chief knows that is not the case. By misrepresenting that, by throwing in the departmental numbers plus the money bands have to pay to send their students off reserve to high school, he can pretend there is not a gap. That is what the government does all the time.

To answer the question on nation-to-nation dialogue, I would commend to the hon. member dusting off the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, commissioned by Prime Minister Mulroney, and for him to look at the work done around the Charlottetown accord. Even in the Kelowna accord, there was going to be one member, one vote—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Joliette.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my earlier remarks, I said that for hundreds of years, people have sought to annihilate aboriginals. Everyone knows the residential school story.

I would like to thank the member for her passionate speech, but I would like to know why, during all the years, all the decades the Liberals were in power, they did not close aboriginal residential schools. Surely people were asking them questions, were telling them about what was going on.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I agree. It is too late.

Still, negotiations between the federal government and the church began under the auspices of the Liberal government. It took too long. The negotiations were nearly complete when our government fell. My own view is that the NDP is responsible for killing the Kelowna accord and the Kyoto protocol and for harming children.

Considering the Prime Minister's apology, I am very sad about residential schools. Residential schools were not part of the accord. I am very sad about that.

Business of Supply

•(1645)

[English]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Churchill.

I rise today to deliver my first speech as the member of Parliament for Victoria. I am anxious to contribute to this historic debate on the plight of aboriginal peoples, but before doing so please permit me to begin by sincerely thanking the people of Victoria for giving me the opportunity to serve in this role.

As everyone in this place knows, there is no greater honour or privilege than to serve our fellow citizens. Being part of the Canadian democratic process up close and personal as a candidate recently was without doubt one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. I did so with the support not only of my family but also with the help of virtually hundreds of dedicated and selfless volunteers. I want to pay tribute to them for their tireless work because I will never forget that without them I would not be here today.

I must also acknowledge the constant support of the former member of Parliament for Victoria, Denise Savoie, who was so well respected on both sides of the House. Not only was she a very successful Deputy Speaker, but her behaviour in this place was also a true example of the kind of civility and respect I desire to follow. On the basis of conversations with countless members, I can say for sure that she will be greatly missed in this place.

I wish to place my remarks today in context and tell members a bit about why I am so honoured personally to speak about the continuing quest of aboriginal people for justice.

I had the opportunity to work for governments, industry and first nations in consultation efforts before becoming an MP. I was a treaty negotiator for over a decade on Vancouver Island, representing the Province of British Columbia, and I have visited virtually every first nation community on Vancouver Island. I also worked with first nations and Inuit in Nunavut, as well as first nations in northeastern British Columbia in negotiating economic development agreements. I think this work has given me some familiarity with the sense of desperation that marks the lives of so many of our fellow citizens, not only those who live on remote reserves but also those who live in poverty in our major cities.

There is probably little value in repeating the litany of shocking statistics that we all know so well: the suicide rates, the dropout rates, the infant mortality rates, and the deplorable conditions of those living in communities like Attawapiskat or closer to my home in Victoria, the Pacheedaht First Nation.

In trying to come up with solutions, I also believe there is little utility in bringing up the failures and disappointments of the past. It does not help to bemoan the fact that the Kelowna accord was never implemented or that so little seems to have been done with the sweeping and excellent recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Instead, Canadians of good faith must work together urgently to seek fresh solutions, solutions that are grounded in the work of the past and the blueprint of the Dussault-Erasmus report, but only as a

point of departure, because the time for action is certainly long overdue. Fresh ideas are desperately needed, grounded in the recognition of the constitutional rights of first nations to meaningful consultation and recognition of a nation-to-nation relationship between the Crown and first nation peoples.

It is about the word “respect”. All first nations I have been privileged to work with constantly remind us of the need for respect. For example, the language of the Nuu-chah-nulth people uses the word *eesok* to connote that concept of respect. First nations have demanded that we establish a new relationship grounded on this bedrock principle of respect.

There are two things I would like to speak to today in this context that are essential to meaningful, ongoing economic development that will work for the Inuit, the Métis and first nation peoples in Canada. They are consultation, and the recognition of self-government. The Conservative government simply must do a better job on consultation.

•(1650)

We all know the constitutional duty to consult and, where appropriate, to accommodate aboriginal and treaty rights. However, it is not through endless lawsuits that the concept of consultation will be determined. It is not through these rote exercises of counting how many meetings one attended or seeing who was there, tallying it up and seeing if a court will later say it was satisfactory. That is not what it is about. It is about respect. It is about communication and it is about establishing long-term relationships. These are the three things that will ultimately make the difference.

Courts are not going to accept going through the motions and lots of words. They have not in the past. They will insist on meaningful consultation and, as they have reminded us recently, this is grounded in the honour of the Crown. This will always be the touchstone of our relationship with first nations going forward.

As the recent Idle No More movement and aboriginal leadership has so passionately argued, the current government has weakened the environmental protection laws on which first nation communities depend.

The regrettable omnibus budget bills have failed to take into account treaty rights, the basis of the historic relationship between the Crown and first nation people.

In some parts of the country, notably British Columbia and the north, there were no historic treaties, and so it is section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, that is the basis of aboriginal rights and aboriginal title, as enshrined.

Aboriginal communities simply have a right to participate in the management and disposition of lands and resources over which they have asserted claims, even if those claims have not yet been recognized by the courts or finally resolved.

Business of Supply

In more modern times in British Columbia, the duty to consult and accommodate has simply not been observed by the government. For example, the application by Enbridge to build its bitumen pipeline from the oil sands to Kitimat has attracted vociferous opposition from first nations across the province. They are joined by the majority of non-aboriginal British Columbians in saying they oppose this deeply flawed proposal.

The vast majority of first nation communities have said no to this kind of dangerous pipeline and tanker project, as have the people of British Columbia by majority. The risks we are being asked to assume are simply unacceptable. As a recent candidate in a coastal community like Victoria, there is enormous opposition to this project by aboriginal and non-aboriginal people alike. I think it is time for the government as well to say no to the kind of shortsighted development that Enbridge represents. It simply has to do a better job with consultation.

Turning to self-government, what does that mean? It means, according to Stephen Cornell of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, three things: that jurisdiction counts, self-government matters, that effective governing institutions are essential and that these governing institutions must be appropriate for the cultures in which they are situated. In short, good government matters.

That is why I would like to salute the excellent work being done by Miles Richardson, former president of the Haida nation, who is now working as a senior associate with the Institute on Governance. The objective is to improve governance arrangements for first nations so they can be more effective partners in economic development.

As I mentioned, the government institutions have to be culturally appropriate and have the support of the people. As Professor Cornell states:

Institutions that match contemporary indigenous cultures are more successful than those that don't.

In conclusion, I know that the Conservatives will simply say that budget 2013 is all about job creation and economic development and that first nations will benefit as other Canadians do. That is the mantra.

However, without the real application of the constitutional requirements of meaningful consultation and a recognition of self-government and government-to-government relationships, this economic development will not occur and will not be meaningful on the ground of first nations.

• (1655)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for his speech.

I have two questions for him off the top. First, this is an opposition motion. It calls for joint work by all of us here in Parliament to improve the economic outcomes for aboriginal peoples. How does the member opposite, new to the House, square that objective, set in a motion by his party, with his opposition to the building of pipelines? Is it really by shutting down the development of Canada's

natural resource sectors that we will improve economic outcomes for aboriginal peoples? That is the first question.

Second, would the member acknowledge that consultation and treaty relations have advanced under this government as never before, in that we have concluded 400 such agreements with first nations in only seven years?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, when the member says that this party and this member is opposed to the building of pipelines, that grossly overstates what I said. I had reference to only one pipeline, a pipeline that has been, if not universally, by a vast majority of people, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, rejected in British Columbia. It has been rejected because the kind of consultation that the government has undertaken has simply fallen short of the mark. That seems to be the key point to make in this regard.

Consultation has to start with the kind of meaningful recognition, the kind of respect of which I spoke during my remarks that I find lacking. Yes, there have been a process because the courts have demanded that there be process that is meaningful and that progress has occurred. It is simply not adequate as Idle No More and other first nation leadership have made so obvious to the government of the day. Yes, there has been a process and progress. Has that been adequate? Absolutely not.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Victoria on his inaugural speech, which was wonderful, informed and inspiring. I also want to thank the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for her motion which we are debating today.

As the opposition finance critic, I have very close knowledge of the omnibus bills that the government has brought in to implement budget measures which include a vast array of legislative changes that have absolutely nothing to do with budgets. It gets to the fundamental issue the member for Victoria raised about respect, respect for democracy, respect for the process of Parliament and ultimately, as he said in his speech, respect for first nations.

I know he was not here through much of the budget debate, but could he comment about the importance of respect for first nations and what that means for strengthening democracy in Canada, that nation-to-nation respect?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, the omnibus bills address matters far beyond the purview of a normal budget measure. That is well known to all Canadians and a precedent that would seem to me to be retrograde.

The kind of legislative changes to environmental legislation, which are so critical in protecting the land, air and water on which first nations depend, integral to their culture, is something that obviously was faulty. The courts have said increasingly that legislation can also attract the kind of duties to consult and accommodate. The fact in particular, as I emphasized the treaty rights, not just aboriginal land rights, not just aboriginal rights that are founded in section 35, but the historic treaties on which first nations joined Canada and the royal proclamation of 1763 and the basis on which they became part of our national fabric, they were simply ignored in that process.

Business of Supply

It is a matter before the courts and I would say the courts would find likewise. I suggest this lack of consultation applies to legislation of this kind when it is so integral to first nations, their culture and their way of life.

● (1700)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to follow my colleague, the newly elected member for Victoria, who I know has a proud history of work with aboriginal people. It is certainly a pleasure to work with him in the House.

It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to the NDP motion, a motion that truly reflects the principles of the NDP and a motion that also truly serves as a test for the government.

This opposition day motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, and supported by all of us really goes beyond the day-to-day actions of the House and the day-to-debates of the House. It gives the chance to the House, to the government, to other opposition parties, to stand with us and recognize that we need to change course, that Parliament needs to change course and that first nations, Métis and Inuit people deserve better from Parliament.

We are recognizing the broad-based demand for action, and that is fundamental to who we are as New Democrats, recognizing that the people who have started Idle No More, who have been part of the rallies, who have been part of the flash mob round dances, who have been part of the workshops and information sessions, who have been to Parliament, demanding meetings with ministers and, of course, with the Prime Minister, are saying that things need to change.

I am also honoured to rise as the MP for Churchill in support of the motion. I have the pleasure of representing 33 first nations across northern Manitoba and many Métis communities.

I come from a vibrant part of Canada, with tremendous diversity, with a very rich history and tremendous opportunity. However, there is no question that the challenges we face in the north are tremendous, and those challenges are even greater and more extreme for many aboriginal people in northern Manitoba.

Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba and across Canada face extreme levels of poverty and high unemployment. In my constituency alone, 42% of aboriginal people have less than a high school diploma. Many of them live in conditions that can only be characterized as third world.

In fact, we know that at the international level, first nations in Canada are rated 63rd on the United Nations' human development index. That reality is not just in numbers. It can be seen clearly if one visits any of the first nations in northern Manitoba and so many across Canada. People will see substandard housing, with 10, 15 and over 20 people sharing one home because there is inadequate housing. People succumb to illness, like the basic flu, in much greater numbers because there is no running water in their communities. Young people reach the point of wishing to take their own lives and many unfortunately we lose to suicide because they feel they have no hope and nothing to live for. So many people from communities unfortunately fall through the cracks and end up in the correctional system, making it so Canada has some of the highest

rates of indigenous people in its correctional system, disproportionate to the number of indigenous people in Canada.

As many of us know, this is the result of a dark history of colonization and oppression. Unfortunately, government after government, at the federal level, have not managed to break free and chart a new course. Despite promises to do the opposite, they have shown, through their actions, that they are willing to continue the paternalistic, colonialist relationship that has been around for so long.

One need not look any further than the last few years in Parliament. The Prime Minister of Canada rose and gave an apology some years ago for the atrocity of the residential school experience.

I remember being at the offices of the Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak, the head office of the northern chiefs, and sharing with so many people who were moved, survivors, families of survivors, non-aboriginal people as well, by this apology, an apology that I am proud our late leader Jack Layton helped realize.

● (1705)

Instead of truly standing by those words of changing course and committing to a new relationship with first nations, Métis and Inuit people, the government did more of the same.

Bill C-38 and most recently Bill C-45 came up with a tremendous attack on treaty rights of first nations people and aboriginal rights more broadly. There was a lack of consultation at every step along the way, particularly when it came to control over treaty lands and the lands that aboriginal people hold title to.

Aboriginal peoples' voices, despite the constitutional responsibility to consult, were silenced and ignored by the Conservative government.

One wishes that was the end of the story. However, in the last few years there have been unprecedented cuts to organizations and institutions that truly speak on behalf and with aboriginal people. I would like to mention some of those: Sisters in Spirit; the First Nations Statistical Institute; the Aboriginal Healing Foundation; the National Centre for First Nations Governance; the Assembly of First Nations; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; Native Women's Association; the National Aboriginal Health Organization; Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada; and the list goes on.

In the fall of 2012 we heard that tribal councils and aboriginal political organizations, like in my region, the Keewatin Tribal Council, the Swampy Cree Tribal Council, MKO, SCO, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, would be cut disproportionately.

These are the voices of aboriginal people. These are institutions that look out for housing, education, advocate on behalf of communities, work in conjunction with band councils and fight for aboriginal communities that are, in many cases, remote and do not have a voice at the table.

Business of Supply

The other side of the coin is that first nations, Métis and Inuit people have had enough. There is no better example than the last few months in our country, where we have witnessed what is singularly one of the most historic events in aboriginal people and their leadership in recent history. We have seen an unprecedented approach to fighting back against the government through the Idle No More movement, through the leadership and courage many leaders have taken, and through immense sacrifice.

I want to take a moment during my speech to recognize two people I can call friends: Grand Elder Raymond Robinson of the Pimicikamak Cree Nation, who joined Chief Theresa Spence on Victoria Island to commit to a hunger strike in order to call the federal government to action, and Wilson Hartie from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, who also was on a hunger strike, calling for the Prime Minister to act. These two men, their families and their communities took a stand. These two men made an ultimate sacrifice, asking all of us to act.

I also want to recognize the organizers of Idle No More in my home community, in Thompson: Lisa Currier, Clint Saulteaux, Val Charlette and the many people who helped to raise awareness and to worked with young people who said, “We’ve had enough”.

The opposition day motion today reflects those voices. Not only should the budget of 2013 commit to economic outcomes for first nations, Inuit and Métis people, but the government needs to commit to action on treaty implementation and full and meaningful consultation on legislation that affects the rights of aboriginal Canadians.

This has gone on long enough. We have a chance to stand with aboriginal people across the country and make history, to chart a new course that respects the treaties and truly honours the anniversary of the royal proclamation of 250 years, which we will celebrate this year. This is a chance to do much better and show the international community that in a country as wealthy as Canada its first peoples must live in dignity.

I want to share the words that both Wilson and Raymond shared with me on many occasions. They said to me, “I’m doing this for my children and my grandchildren. I’m not doing it for politics or for attention. I’m doing it for things to change”. I want to thank them. In their words and honour, I would like to ask the government and Parliament to finally change course, support the opposition day motion and commit to building a better day with aboriginal peoples in Canada.

● (1710)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Churchill for her speech, but also for her continued excellent work on the aboriginal file. I know that in the days when the funding was sunset for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the member for Churchill led the charge to try to have that funding reinstated, and that is just one of many things she has undertaken over the years that I have known her in this House.

My question for the member is specifically on relationships. We have heard today the government members get up time after time and talk about the bills they have put forward and the schools they have built and the investments in education. Yet what we know is that over the last months and years, what we consistently heard from

first nations, Inuit and Métis is that the Conservative government does not get it. In fact, over the last several weeks we have had people from coast to coast to coast do teach-ins and round dances and blockades, trying to bring to the Conservatives’ attention that their approach is simply failing.

Could the member comment on how this really does need to be a reset of a relationship, that it needs to be a relationship built on respect, on trust and on true partnership? Could she comment on how she sees that relationship moving forward?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, a strong advocate and somebody who is doing tremendous work to bring us to this opposition day motion that we are debating today.

It really is, at its most fundamental level, a discussion of relationships. Earlier this week I spoke to an activist who said that one of the most important things, when we talk about working with indigenous people, is truly the sanctity of relationships and a relationship of respect. Unfortunately, the federal government has broken any initial trust that may have existed. Certainly many people in my neck of the woods would not believe the Conservatives anyway.

However, the government does have a chance to press the reset button, to sit down and listen and to commit to a longer-term plan that is founded on treaty implementation and on respecting treaty and aboriginal rights, and that ultimately recognizes that, when building a relationship founded on respect happens, only then can we move forward. Unfortunately, the Conservatives have yet to show that kind of a commitment. One way of beginning to show it would be by supporting an opposition day motion, but the reality is that first nations, Métis and Inuit people want to see action. They want to see investments made when it comes to education. They want to see a discussion on resource sharing. They want to see a discussion around sustainable development and protecting the environment and treaty lands. Unfortunately, the current government is not there.

Certainly, many people I have the pleasure of working with are proud of the NDP’s leadership and its solidarity with aboriginal people in this country, and I look forward to the day when we can be in a position of government, where we can truly implement the kind of relationship that aboriginal people in this country have deserved for so long.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, February 5, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

● (1715)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that we see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT****Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, a government loan guarantee to the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project is: (a) an important part of a clean energy agenda; (b) an economically viable project that will create thousands of jobs and billions in economic growth; (c) regionally significant for the Atlantic region, which will benefit from a stable and sustainable electricity source for decades to come; and (d) environmentally-friendly, with substantial greenhouse gas emission reductions through the displacement of power from coal-fired and oil electricity sources.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in the 2011 Speech from the Throne, our Conservative government committed to developing Canada's extraordinary resource wealth for the benefit of all Canadians. Our desire to foster the development of major new clean energy projects of national or regional significance and to create long-term economic growth and energy security for all Canadians was outlined at the outset of our majority Conservative mandate.

With these goals in mind, we are very pleased to see that the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia are moving forward with the lower Churchill River projects, which are being undertaken by Newfoundland and Labrador's Crown-owned energy corporation, Nalcor Energy, and by Emera Inc. of Nova Scotia.

As members know, the lower Churchill River projects comprise the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric generating station and three transmission lines: one between Muskrat Falls and Churchill Falls, another between Labrador and the Island of Newfoundland, and a sub-sea transmission line connecting Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

These projects offer substantial economic and environmental benefits to the entire Atlantic region. The clean, renewable hydroelectricity that will be generated by the Muskrat Falls could reduce carbon emissions by up to 4.5 megatonnes every year. In fact, once the projects are fully operational, the Newfoundland and Labrador electricity supply will be 98% emissions-free.

This will further contribute to Canada's already impressive supply of non-emitting electricity. As all members know, three-quarters of our current electricity supply is produced by non-emitting sources, and much of it comes from hydroelectric projects. Indeed, the projects will allow Newfoundland and Labrador to achieve complete energy independence using a clean and renewable source.

As well, the power generated from Muskrat Falls will contribute to Nova Scotia meeting its renewable energy targets and displace coal-fired electricity generation in that province.

In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by up to 4.5 million tonnes annually, which according to estimates is the equivalent of approximately 1 million cars off the road, the lower Churchill project will also generate \$1.9 billion in revenue for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This brings me to the motion that we are debating today. Clean energy is an important issue to my constituents, as it is to all Canadians across the country. In my role as the chair of the all-party

clean tech caucus, I feel that a motion affirming our government's support for these renewable projects is appropriate.

Private member's Motion No. 412 offers all members of the House an opportunity to express their support for the lower Churchill River projects, both in terms of what they mean for greenhouse gas reductions in the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, and in terms of their enormous economic potential.

The benefits of these specific projects include energy self-sufficiency; a clean, renewable and reliable source of electricity that will lead to substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as coal- and oil-fired power generation are displaced; stable electricity rates for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia; thousands of jobs created during the construction phase; economic spinoffs for other industrial sectors; and a maritime transmission link that will provide stable, sustainable energy throughout the region.

The Government of Canada has agreed on the terms and conditions for a federal loan guarantee, giving these vital energy projects a solid endorsement, and today we stand by this endorsement. Muskrat Falls will help meet the energy needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the electricity needs of many Nova Scotians.

The Government of Canada believes that the lower Churchill River projects are fully justified for the following fundamental reasons. They will provide enormous economic and environmental benefits as they are truly in the best interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Nova Scotians and in fact all Canadians.

● (1720)

Unfortunately, in yet another attempt by the opposition to stop development of any kind, the leader of the Green Party has spoken out against this project saying that it should be reconsidered because renewable forms of energy other than a large hydroelectric plant should be pursued.

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has looked at other options for new sources of energy. They carefully considered the potential for wind power and they looked at the possibility of natural gas generation. However, every analysis of these options favoured the development of hydro power. It is reliable. It is a steady and secure source of clean energy and is available at an affordable cost, which is exactly what the lower Churchill River projects will deliver.

Furthermore, the member should know that her statements have been contradicted by the findings of several independent third-party analyses commissioned by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and by Nalcor. Numerous analyses indicated that the projects are economically viable, even with the increased cost estimates, that they will substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that they will create jobs across Atlantic Canada. Specifically, the lower Churchill project will result in an average of 1,500 jobs during each year of construction, with a peak employment during construction of approximately 3,100 people.

Private Members' Business

For these reasons, on November 30, 2012, the Government of Canada announced an agreement with the governments of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia, on the terms and conditions for a federal loan guarantee for the lower Churchill River projects. This project will further benefit all of Atlantic Canada.

Nalcor intends to use 2 million megawatt hours of renewable energy from Muskrat Falls to replace the 490 megawatt Holyrood oil-fired plant. In addition, the connection to the North American grid, coupled with the increased backup capacity resulting from the projects could strengthen opportunities to further develop other renewable energy sources, such as wind or solar. These projects will certainly contribute to the Government of Canada's objective to reduce Canada's greenhouse gases by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020, comparable to U.S. efforts.

It is well-known that Canada is halfway to meeting our goal due to the measures and regulations implemented by our Conservative government. The project will also bolster Canada's good standing internationally as a world leader when it comes to energy. In fact, the International Energy Agency recently called for a doubling of the world's hydro power by 2050 in order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Canada, with operations such as the lower Churchill River projects and other hydro developments in Manitoba, Quebec and B.C., is in a very strong position to help support this ambitious environmental goal.

In conclusion, there is no question that renewable energy is a large part of Canada's economic advantage in the global economy. There is no question that Canada's status as the world's third largest producer of hydroelectricity puts us in a position to continue to lead in the development of hydroelectricity. With this in mind, and with the many benefits that it will bring to Canadians, I strongly support private member's Motion No. 412 and our government's commitment to these projects. I look forward to the day when the ribbon is cut on the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric power generating station and I look forward to all members of the House supporting Motion No. 412.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree that Canada could become a world leader in renewable energy. The NDP believes that the federal government must make this transition a fair one for all of the provinces, including Quebec.

I would like to ask my colleague the following question. Why is it that the governments of this Prime Minister and his Liberal predecessors ignored the economic opportunities of a green transition for too long?

[English]

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, our government is all about jobs and growth in the economy. This opportunity is not only about jobs and the economy, but about a cleaner environment as well. It is a win-win situation.

This particular opportunity is regional development. It is accorded to all provinces to work hand in hand. This development would have regional significance for power in the region. We invite

all provinces and regions to get together to create similar opportunities.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians currently pay the highest electricity rate in Canada. High electricity rates are a job killer. They hurt our competitiveness and make it difficult for many Nova Scotian families struggling to make ends meet.

As the Utility and Review Board conducts its review in Nova Scotia and considers various options for hydroelectric power, if it is determined, for example, that there are also opportunities to access Hydro-Québec power through an upgrade of the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick connector, which we are told would be about \$200 million, would the federal government provide a similar loan guarantee to that connection?

It is absolutely fundamental that Nova Scotians have access to the most competitive hydroelectric power. We certainly want access to hydroelectric power and we want the best deal for Nova Scotian ratepayers. Will the federal government, in the same spirit as this private member's motion, also potentially upgrade the connection between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to access Hydro-Québec power as part of this?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my previous answer, our role as government is to create jobs and economic development. If we can further environmental concerns in the process, that is great. We are providing this regional development in a way that all provinces and regions are welcome to produce whatever proposals they have. Hydroelectric power is the most affordable, greenest and cleanest power. That is why we want to move in this direction.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member has said already, this project is important to all Canadians, especially those in Atlantic Canada.

Also, as the member mentioned, from the first Speech from the Throne on our majority Conservative mandate, we will support any clean energy project that is economically viable, substantially lowers GHG emissions and is of regional or national significance, and certainly this project is that.

Can the member please share with the House the expected benefits of this particular project?

• (1730)

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned in my speech, the lower Churchill project will provide significant economic benefit for the whole Atlantic region. At peak employment, we are talking in the order of an estimated 3,100 jobs for the Atlantic region, which is a region that certainly needs employment. In addition, this project will substantially help reduce greenhouse gases by 4.5 million megatonnes, which is the equivalent of over one million cars.

Our government is signing the term sheet for this loan guarantee. This shows our government's support for Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and indeed the entire Atlantic region.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also look forward to the day when the ribbon is cut on the Muskrat Falls project. This project means a lot to my province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The member spoke about how hydro is reliable, affordable and clean. What is the government prepared to do to advance the cause of a national power grid while, of course, respecting the rights of provincial governments? I would see this as a first step toward a national power grid. What is the next step?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, the member is right that this could be the first step toward that particular arrangement. I would like to give particular credit to the member for Labrador for his advocacy on behalf of this particular project with the government. It will certainly create a lot of jobs in the Atlantic region and he deserves a lot of credit for his support.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming for presenting the motion to the House. As he pointed out, it does give members an opportunity to offer their comments and make speeches, and also to show their support for what is a proper and helpful federal role in supporting the kind of project identified in the lower Churchill hydroelectric development.

I noticed in his speech that he mentioned projects in the plural. I do not know whether that is advance notice that they are prepared to support other projects on the lower Churchill River, but the Muskrat Falls project is, as he says, an important part of the clean energy agenda.

I first want to make sure that he and those paying attention to this know that the New Democratic Party has been on record, going back as far as 2005, as supporting a federal role in providing a loan guarantee for the development of the lower Churchill as an alternative energy project.

As the member pointed out, one of the results of this in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador would be to change Newfoundland's large dependence on an oil fired generating plant to a situation where it would be using 98% alternative energy instead. That would obviously be a first for Newfoundland and Labrador. It is very important to cutting out greenhouse gases—I think a million tonnes alone in the case of the Holyrood generating station. I spent a lot of time criticizing it in my years as a member of the provincial legislature in Newfoundland, not only for its greenhouse gas emissions but also for its other significant pollutants, including sulphur dioxide, dioxins, furans and other chemical emissions into the air. It is a terrible example of industrial pollution. It will be taken out of the mix to the tune of a million tonnes of greenhouse gases and all these other pollutants I mentioned.

The project has terrific benefits as well in terms of co-operation between provinces. We will see the makings of a regional power grid in the Atlantic involving the partners, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, as well as a flow through to the power grid through New Brunswick and accessibility to Prince Edward Island, which is very interested in the Muskrat Falls power as part of its power needs. Therefore, we see that degree of interprovincial co-operation, which is a very important feature of this project.

This project is not without controversy, both in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. There are debates about alternatives, power costs and any number of aspects of the project. That is right and proper. We live in a democratic society and we are going to have these agreements and disagreements. However, at the end of the day, if those provinces decide that this is a project they want to proceed with, then it is a proper and appropriate role for the federal government to support that through the loan guarantee.

What does that guarantee do? A loan guarantee in this case allows this project to have the benefit of the credit rating of the Government of Canada. I believe it is AAA, and maybe plus, plus, plus. I am not sure, but it is up there. It is certainly a lot higher than Nalcor or Emera could get on their own, or the Newfoundland and Labrador or Nova Scotia governments could get on their own. That is the advantage. It allows access to markets where they can get cheaper interest rates to the tune of a \$1 billion over the life of the project. That reduces the cost of the project and the cost of electricity to consumers as a result.

As all of the decision processes go through, if at the end of the day this is a project the provinces want to do, the obligation is there for the federal government to help.

I want to agree on the record and to confirm our party's very clear position that we not only support the role of the Government of Canada in providing a loan guarantee in this particular circumstance, but also that this is something we would support and encourage other jurisdictions and provinces to develop.

● (1735)

We need to have a greener economy. We need to have alternate energy. We need to have opportunities for the east-west north-south national power grid so we work together for a greener future. That is a very important step for Canada and I would like to see greater federal government involvement. Our party is certainly committed to not only a green economy, but the positives of that in terms of economic clout.

The member spoke of the benefits to Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, but there benefits throughout Canada for this. The power generating plant in Muskrat Falls will not be made in Newfoundland and Labrador. There is already an engineering design contract awarded to the well known SNC Lavalin in Quebec to design the power project. The transmission towers will not be built in Newfoundland and Labrador. They will be manufactured probably in Ontario. The steel for the cables and so on are part of an industrial plant that we do not have the capability for in our province because that is the centre in other provinces where this happens. The money that is spent is part of the industrial benefit to Canada therefore it is right and proper that the Government of Canada should support this. That is an important point to make.

Private Members' Business

We are very proud of what our government has done in Nova Scotia in setting targets for renewable energy. That is one of the reasons why this project is attractive to it. It has set hard targets for the reduction of fossil fuel electricity production and this is one way of helping to meet that. It would take coal-fired power out of production in Nova Scotia. That is a significant benefit, again not only in greenhouse gas production, but also in terms of pollution and the greater dependence on fossil fuels.

It is not certain this electricity will be any cheaper, in fact it will probably be more expensive. However, as electricity costs go up, the greater the dependence on fossil fuels, the greater the likelihood of electricity going out of control without control over it. One of the things that hydroelectricity brings to the mix is a long-term stable price for electricity. That is important in this mix.

For Newfoundland and Labrador, the participation for the island for the first time in a power grid that is not limited is a very positive thing for the opportunities for other forms of renewable energy. Wind energy, for example, and I am no expert on this, but I am told by people who know that an isolated grid has only a certain amount of wind power it can handle. When the wind blows, electricity can be produced and sent across the grid to places that need it and the hydroelectricity can be built up in dams so that when the wind stops blowing that can be used. Hydro and wind power go hand in hand. They fit like a glove, so that is another advantage from our point of view as an island, not so much for Labrador. I am looking at my friend, the member for Labrador, who shall remain nameless because we are not allowed to mention his name, not because we want to insult him. It is an issue for the island of Newfoundland because we have an isolated grid right now.

The more opportunities there are for wind power, the more chance there will be wind power put into that grid. We also see that in the case of tidal power in New Brunswick, so we will have a grid that works. That kind of interprovincial co-operation is also a technological advantage.

On balance, the idea of the Government of Canada being a backer of this as the loan guarantor is extremely positive. We hope to see the Government of Canada playing a strong role in this and other jurisdictions, whether it be Quebec, Manitoba or British Columbia, which are doing projects like this. There should be federal leadership and there should be federal support. We are pleased to see that in this project. Our party will be supporting this motion.

• (1740)

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a valuable exercise to provide some input into the Conservative government's recent decisions in terms of providing a loan guarantee to the lower Churchill project. I will note, though, that this is a 40-year endeavour. This is a project that transcends many decades. The ambition and the dream of having the Churchill River provide hydroelectricity has been a dream for over 40 years.

I will note for the drafter of this particular motion, there are four key points contained within it. The fact that the lower Churchill project provides clean energy. It is economically viable because of the amount of energy and the vast value of that natural resource, the water resources there. It is indeed economically viable and has been for about a 40-year period.

It is regionally significant to Atlantic Canada. That is absolutely true. What would actually be even more true is to extend that to all of Canada, because as the member just mentioned, the value of goods and services going elsewhere beyond Atlantic Canada is indeed quite significant. Finally, it is, of course, environmentally friendly. With no greenhouse gas emissions as a result of the production of hydroelectricity, it is obviously a key component of any future energy strategy.

However, there is something missing, which the mover may have intended, and that is any reference to the project as defined by the December 17, 2012 sanctioning. What he is referring to in the motion, as we all understand to be true in Newfoundland and Labrador, is the 40-year project, the ambition of developing the lower Churchill.

This is why it is very easy to support the motion because it is the right thing to do. For all those reasons, for those four points outlined by the mover, this project is worthwhile. The motion does not reflect, and I can only assume is not meant to reflect, the actual project as defined by the December 17, 2012 sanctioning, which is a very in-depth project indeed. This is about what the lower Churchill could provide us. That said, I think it will be very easy for all members, hopefully with unanimous consent, to pass the motion.

I will speak a little bit about what the motion does not intend. It could be argued, and I do not mean to be too critical here, that this might have been meant as a self-congratulatory message. It might be argued that this was meant as, "Now that we have provided the loan guarantee, this is what the government has been done all along".

This is a 40-year project, and while many may not agree with the current project as defined by the sanctioning document that was inked on December 17, I would hope that everyone could agree that the development of hydroelectric resources for Canada and for our particular region of Atlantic Canada and particularly for Newfoundland, and most particularly for Labrador, is always a beneficial thing.

Here is what the motion does not talk about: how the government can advance the cause even further. Because while there is Muskrat Falls, which is being developed, there is also Gull Island in the future. There are other hydroelectric resources that are encompassed within the lower Churchill hydroelectric project that are not a part of the motion. The lower Churchill is a much larger entity. It is a much larger project.

What does the government not have in the motion? It does not speak about its future ambition to provide, under the general agreement on internal trade, a completion of the energy chapter. I have often wondered why there has been little to no attention paid by the government to completing the provisions of the general agreement on internal trade, which actually has a specific chapter on the internal trade, the province-to-province trade, in energy resources.

Private Members' Business

• (1745)

Some work has been done. A proposed agreement was near completion a few years back, but apparently one province did not want to sign on. Therefore, without a unanimous consensus, the general agreement on internal trade regarding energy, the energy chapter as it is known, could not proceed.

In terms of delivering on the full lower Churchill project, it would be helpful if the government completed that necessary chapter to have unanimous consent, by all provinces, in the wheeling rights and wheeling tariffs for hydroelectricity. What I mean by “wheeling rights” is the ability for provinces to take electrical energy across provincial borders under a rules-based system that outlines the tariff system, which can then be arbitrated and judged to ensure it is fair. This is one of the big things we are missing in Canada, encouraging and promoting a true electrical strategy and true energy strategy for our country.

We are often considered an energy-rich country. Yet, we still have tremendous barriers to export from one province to either an international client or an entity within the country in a distant province: an east-west grid. We still have no free trade in energy products. While the government has said those who want to propose an energy strategy for our country are looking backward, it is the Conservative government itself that has said it would be helpful if we had an agreement on the trade of energy across provincial boundaries as part of a national energy strategy. However, we do not. We do not because not enough attention has been placed by the government on this critical key component of promoting investment, development, and economic benefits from our energy resources.

To be clear, those who think the lower Churchill project is Muskrat Falls are wrong. The lower Churchill project is a very large project that is not yet complete.

I wish the motion were a little more in-depth in providing a full and complete picture of what is required, but it is not. However, I applaud the mover for presenting it to us. It does allow us an opportunity to affirm that we support, not only the elements of the project that are currently proceeding, but the 40-year vision for developing this project. That is really what the motion speaks to, and it is worth our support.

I hope there is an opportunity for the government in the future to provide further clarification instead of an arguably self-congratulatory message, which it may not have thought through because it did not understand the full context of what the project represents. If there is an opportunity for the government to come forward again, I hope it would be to update the House on the general agreement on internal trade, chapter 11, the chapter on energy. How far along are we? When can we see a signed agreement that would create a rules-based approach to the wheeling of hydroelectric resources across provincial boundaries with full unanimous provincial consent? That is an element that is still missing. I wish the government would fulfill its commitments.

• (1750)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things we can be proud of with this motion is that we are fulfilling our commitment. It is good to see,

today, the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming bring this forward and to see it is supported so strongly by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the member for Labrador, as well.

I have been the parliamentary secretary for natural resources now for a number of years. It is good to be able to come into the House and to be able to work on an initiative like this that has the support of the major parties. Hopefully, as the Liberal member opposite indicated, we can get unanimous support for this motion.

Our government's support for the Lower Churchill River projects demonstrates our strong desire to work with the provinces and territories. That is all about Canada's sustainable energy resources being used to create jobs, being used to create long-term economic growth and being used to create energy security for Canadians.

On November 30, 2012, the governments of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia announced that they had reached an agreement on the terms for a federal loan guarantee for the lower Churchill River projects. This agreement is a clear indication of the Government of Canada's strong support for vital, renewable energy projects. The signed term sheet will position the proponents to engage capital markets for arranging the financing for the lower Churchill River projects.

The Government of Canada has agreed to guarantee the loan for a period of 35 to 40 years from the time project debt is raised, which will apply to the construction and operating phases of the projects. By backing the lower Churchill River projects with Canada's strong credit rating, the loan guarantee will significantly reduce borrowing costs. My colleague in the NDP noted that. It is estimated that the loan guarantee will save over \$1 billion for the projects and, in turn, for ratepayers in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia.

Private member's Motion No. 412 offers all members of this House an opportunity to show their support for an important renewable energy project. Our government stands behind the lower Churchill River projects on their merits: a significant source of clean, renewable energy, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and economic benefits for all Atlantic Canada.

In addition, it should be pointed out, and just in the context of our discussion today, that this important energy initiative fits well with the broader plans for growth of Canada's economy.

The Conservative government knows full well that Canada's economic growth requires innovation, and it requires investment and education, as well as skill development, all of which have been the focus of our economic action plan 2012, a plan for job creation that is working out.

Since July 2009, employment in Canada has increased by more than 900,000 jobs. Members here would be familiar with the numbers. This is the strongest job growth among G7 countries. While the parties opposite often refuse to support our job-creating policies, we are going to continue to get the job done for Canadians.

In addition, both the IMF and the OECD forecast that Canada will continue to have among the strongest economic growth in the G7 in the next year.

Private Members' Business

While we are focusing on growing Canada's economy and jobs, we would suggest that the Liberals have no economic plan and the NDP continues to push dangerous high tax schemes, like its \$21 billion carbon tax. I understand if we add all of its tax proposals together, it comes closer to \$54 billion. That is quite a different perspective than we have.

Over the last several years, a large part of Canada's economic success has been due to our resource industries. In 2011, these industries contributed 20%, and employment is close to 1.6 million Canadian jobs.

With the potential, over the next decade, for more than \$650 billion to be invested in more than 600 major resource projects in Canada, our government is moving forward with our plan for responsible resource development, which is a plan that would allow us to develop our resources, bring them to market and bolster investment and job creation, all while protecting Canada's environment.

Newfoundland and Labrador has certainly seen the benefits of resource development. Offshore development has made enormous economic contributions and completely transformed the province's economy. Not long ago, it was receiving the highest per capita equalization payments in the country. Today, the province is among our strongest provincial economies. Offshore energy development has supported Newfoundland and Labrador jobs, lowered taxes and created new investments in services and infrastructure, all while contributing to stronger local communities.

There is no doubt that these benefits from the energy sector will continue to grow. There is no doubt, also, that the lower Churchill River projects will make significant and lasting contributions to the economies of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia.

I wish I could say that I was surprised that the leader of the Green Party has spoken out against these projects, but it is clear that she is insistent on opposing development in all forms.

● (1755)

The Green Party says the project should be reconsidered because renewable forms of energy other than a large hydroelectric plant should be pursued. I suggest that is a strange position and I would ask the member and those who share that position to review the independent third-party analyses commissioned by Nalcor and by the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. These analyses strongly support these projects for the reasons that we mentioned earlier.

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador strongly considered alternatives to the projects, including wind power and the possibility of natural gas generation. However, every consideration favoured hydro power. It is safe to say that for Newfoundland and Labrador, the Green Party is wrong and that hydro generation is as good as it gets and provides a source of electricity that will be steady, reliable, clean, renewable and affordable.

The same can be said of Canada as a whole. As the members of the House are aware, hydro power plays a tremendous role in our nation's economy, not only generating electric power but also in job creation, economic prosperity and supporting our quality of life. Canada is the third-largest hydro power producer in the world. We

are blessed in the quality of our power as well as in its quantity. Canada's electricity supply is one of the cleanest in the world with 75% of our electrical supply coming from non-emitting sources, including about 60% from hydroelectricity.

As I indicated in my earlier remarks, Canadians are very fortunate to have a wealth of natural resources. Our hydro power industry is a key part of our energy sector. It is destined to grow even more and provide even greater contributions to our economic and environmental goals. The lower Churchill River projects are a significant part of this expansion, as are several other large hydro projects already in various stages of development in British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba. With these advances, Canada will continue to contribute significantly to the world supply of clean energy.

The International Energy Agency has called for a doubling of the world's hydro power by 2050 to limit emissions of greenhouse gases and contain global warming. The IEA says that hydro currently provides only 16% of electricity worldwide, with oil, gas and coal-fired generation contributing 67% of all electricity.

Today's debate is about ensuring a more prosperous future for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. That is exactly why our government's endorsement of the lower Churchill River projects is as strong today as it was when we first indicated our support. For these reasons we are supporting these projects: a clean, renewable and reliable source of energy; electrical self-sufficiency for Newfoundland and Labrador; stable electricity rates for families, businesses and communities in the region; thousands of jobs during construction and millions of dollars in economic spinoffs. It is for these reasons that the Government of Canada is very proud to support this important clean energy initiative, and we remain fully committed to the success of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia's lower Churchill River projects.

With this in mind, I reaffirm our support for the lower Churchill River hydro projects by proposing the following amendments to the motion. I move that the motion be amended by:

1. replacing the words "government loan guarantee to the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project is: (a) an important part of a clean energy agenda; (b) an economically viable project that will create thousands of jobs and billions in economic growth; (c) regionally significant"

with the words

"loan guarantee provided by the federal government for the Lower Churchill hydroelectric projects—consisting of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric generation facility, the Labrador Transmission Assets, the Labrador-Island Link, and the Maritime Link—will be an important and valuable step in advancing Canada's clean energy agenda, as it will support an economically viable, regional energy project that will (a) provide economic benefits";

2. replacing the words "and (d) environmentally-friendly," with the words "(b) create environmentally-friendly electricity.,"; and

3. adding after the words "oil electricity sources" the words "; and (c) create thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in economic growth".

Private Members' Business

• (1800)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Colleagues, it is my duty to inform hon. members that, pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to the motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming if he consents to the amendment being moved.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes I do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The amendment is in order.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the motion we are discussing today, Motion No. 412, is of the utmost importance to Canada if it wishes to become a world leader in sustainable development. Sustainable development implies that there has to be a balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects of a project for it to be given the green light. It also means that a project supported by a government that believes in sustainable development should offer the same benefits for future generations as it does for this generation.

I have a hard time believing that the Conservative government, which has repeatedly turned its back on our international commitments—most notably by pulling out of the Kyoto protocol—and that went so far as to distort reality by creating green oil, has this view of development.

If we look into the story behind this loan guarantee—which represents the federal government's participation in the Muskrat Falls project—it quickly becomes clear that it was likely a bit of electioneering and was in no way a reflection of the federal government's desire to become a leader in renewable energy. If that had been the case, we would not be discussing this motion, but rather an actual bill that would set out specific criteria for all the partners in the federation to ensure that each one contributes to achieving a common, global environmental goal.

However, it is no secret that climate change knows no borders. We must work together to introduce measures to ensure that the two degree increase in global temperature is not reached. Some scientists say that it is practically too late already, but I continue to be optimistic and maintain that, if we quickly work together, we can do it.

Other than the two degree temperature increase, it is quite difficult for climatologists to suggest models that would allow us to anticipate the consequences of this warming on our lifestyle and our economy. Nevertheless, I would like to point out the interesting aspects of the motion in order to inform all parliamentarians, my colleagues and my fellow citizens of the work we still have to do to move into the 21st century and face the challenges.

The NDP believes that consistency must prevail. The leader of the NDP is defending the position of his predecessor, the late Jack Layton, on how important it is for the federal government to take a leadership role in the fight against climate change and in the

development of green energy. It goes without saying that this loan guarantee should meet specific criteria that could result in all provinces and territories submitting their own applications. The unique and somewhat improvised nature of the loan guarantee has led to some confusion in Quebec. I will take a few minutes to try to clear this up.

First of all, Quebec objects to the project because it believes that the federal government is competing with Quebec's own taxes. Let us be clear. This is a loan guarantee and therefore Quebec taxes or any other province's taxes sent to Ottawa, will not be used to finance a Newfoundland project. Newfoundland is leveraging Canada's economic strength to lower its borrowing costs, but the province will be covering the full cost of the project, if it chooses to go ahead with it.

The second source of confusion we often heard about has to do with the federal government's interference in provincial jurisdictions. We heard that again this afternoon during question period from our Bloc Québécois friends. I must say, when an application for a loan guarantee comes from the province itself, I would hardly call that interference. I know that comparisons are always clumsy, but this is like the youngest child in a family asking his father to co-sign a car loan, while his older brother, who never thought of asking, accuses the father of being unfair. Furthermore, I would repeat, it is clear that the provincial government will remain the one in charge of the project.

The third source of confusion has to do with unfair competition on foreign markets. If the federal government had directly funded one project at the expense of another, we probably could have been talking about unfair competition.

• (1805)

As long as we ensure that all provinces and territories can obtain the same loan guarantees for green energy projects, I think this is a step in the right direction. Nothing is stopping the other partners in the federation from submitting similar applications, and the NDP will be there to ensure that all of these applications are processed equitably.

Regarding one final source of confusion, Hydro-Québec appears to be the biggest loser with this agreement. As the expression goes, "what is good for the goose is good for the gander". Hydro-Québec has every right to apply for the same loan guarantees, and once again, the NDP will be there if any rights are trampled on.

Besides, when it comes to energy development, there is a history of collaboration between the federal government and Hydro-Québec, which we often forget. For example, consider the federal funding provided to help build Gentilly-1 at a time when people strongly believed that developing nuclear energy was a form of green energy despite the radioactive waste produced because thermonuclear plants do not emit any greenhouse gases.

Adjournment Proceedings

In short, Quebecers' concerns may have been understandable but I hope that I have shown that they were not justified, especially since the Muskrat Falls project offers the potential for significant economic spinoffs for Quebec. Over the years and through the projects that have been implemented, a solid expertise in hydro-electric infrastructure and distribution networks has been developed in Quebec.

In keeping with the way that the NDP looks at these major development projects, we cannot talk about big money or even loan guarantees unless serious environmental studies have shown that these projects are environmentally responsible. In the case of Muskrat Falls, the project passed the test. In March 2012, it received the green light based on the results of a federal-provincial environmental assessment.

What can we say about how this project will help our fight against climate change? If Newfoundland chooses to go ahead with its project, the following improvements will result. I will address them quickly since the previous speakers have mentioned them already. There would be a huge reduction in carbon dioxide gas emissions. We are talking about 16 megatonnes a year. It is difficult to measure megatonnes on a scale but it is equivalent to taking about three million cars off the road. Three million cars in a population of 34 million who do not all own vehicles constitutes significant progress.

The closure of a thermal generating station constitutes even more progress, as does the increase in renewable energy to over 90% of all Newfoundland's total energy. This would be another contribution that is just as significant as the progress Nova Scotia has made in terms of renewable energy. These are other things that deserve recognition.

Sharing income from natural resource development must improve the quality of life of all Canadians, from one generation to the next, first nations included. As such, the Quebec model for sharing the economic spinoffs generated by such projects could be an approach worth looking at.

Many economists believe that investing in our infrastructure is an effective way to put people to work and stimulate the economy, and at the same time provide an equal—if not better—quality of life for future generations. What kind of jobs could such a project generate? We are talking about 8,600 person-years of direct employment for Newfoundland and Labrador, 18,400 person-years of indirect employment, multiple engineering contracts that can and will extend beyond Newfoundland's borders, as well as multiple industrial manufacturing contracts. Take, for example, SNC-Lavalin, which has already signed a technical design contract for the Muskrat Falls project.

I have been going on for 10 minutes now about a sustainable development policy that balances the economy, the environment and an increased quality of life for Canadians, while the Conservative motion unfortunately mentions only a loan guarantee. Experience has shown us that we obviously cannot expect the Conservative government to develop such a vision for the future. However, 2015 is not far away, and now is the time to start preparing.

That is why I am proud to belong to this political party that will form the next government for the greater good of Canadians. Our leader, the member for Outremont, has demonstrated again and again his ability to balance economic development and environmental issues. Canadians will identify with the style of governance we are proposing for the next election and they will be respected, since Canadians clearly deserve more than half-measures.

• (1810)

The NDP always steps up when measures proposed by this government are pragmatic and will benefit all generations. We must act responsibly today to ensure that our country is a good place to live for our children and grandchildren.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's debate about aboriginal rights reminds us that we need to respect the environment. First nations could teach us a lot about that respect. The natural resources we have today are not unlimited. If we blindly exploit them, what will be left for future generations? How will they feed themselves? Will they have access to potable water?

With Bills C-38 and C-45, the government is endangering the quality of the water in our lakes and rivers. The changes to the environmental assessment process are dismantling all of the mechanisms that allowed us to develop projects while ensuring that environmental risks were minimized. The amendments to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act are expediting project approval and depriving the government of insight from subject matter experts. By approving projects that could have serious consequences for the environment, we are saddling future generations with environmental, economic and social debt. What is more, these laws limit the participation of civil society and aboriginals. It is unacceptable that the first peoples of this country, with whom Canada has signed multiple treaties, are not consulted when oil, mining and gas projects are under consideration.

We are already starting to pay for this government's mistakes. Years of inaction on climate change, increasingly lax laws, the clear lack of political will to enforce standards—all of these things have an impact on our lakes and rivers.

For instance, water levels in the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes continue to drop. Lake Superior's water level has dropped 34 cm and Lake Huron's has dropped 71 cm. Michigan's governor has taken emergency action. What is the federal government doing? Nothing.

Adjournment Proceedings

This situation has an impact on navigation, on tourism and on the economy in Quebec and Ontario. In the Arctic, studies have shown that pollution is contaminating the ocean, and therefore fish, seals and all marine mammals. This situation is having a serious impact on Inuit health and the Inuit way of life.

With Bill C-38, the government eliminated the protection of fish and other habitats. With Bill C-45, it did away with the environmental assessment of millions of rivers, not to mention that 95% of our environmental assessment process has disappeared.

What will happen to our fishery after all of our lakes and rivers have been polluted? We are fortunate to live in country that is rich in freshwater resources. Canada has nearly 18% of the world's freshwater supply. Are we really going to spoil it all?

My colleagues and I, and experts as well, have been sounding the alarm for months. In the past few weeks, aboriginal peoples have also expressed their concern. What is it going to take to spur the government to action? People want to be consulted before a project goes ahead, not after.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples stipulates that:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

Canada should apply the principles of this declaration to all legislation it enacts. My colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou introduced a bill to that effect on Monday in the hope that the government will honour its commitments.

I am therefore asking the government if it intends to protect all of Canada's lakes and rivers.

•(1815)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will protect all of Canada's lakes and rivers. The Navigable Waters Protection Act was never actually an environmental law.

The hon. member should read the act to learn more. If she does, she will see that words like “environment”, “nature”, “fishing” and so forth are not even in it. Why? Because it is not an environmental law and never was.

It is a law about navigation. It provides a framework for construction and transportation on navigable waters. For example, it regulates the construction of bridges in such a way as to enable a ship or boat to navigate the waters to which the act applies.

Given that it is not an environmental law, the changes we have made cannot have consequences for the environment.

The hon. member asked whether all lakes and rivers will be protected. I said yes. How can I say that? Because environmental laws will continue to apply. Changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act will have no impact on the seven or eight environmental laws that protect bodies of water. The Fisheries Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act will remain in force.

•(1820)

[*English*]

If we have the Fisheries Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and all the other acts related to the protection of wildlife habitat and the environment that are untouched by the amendments, those acts will continue to protect all of the waters of Canada.

The changes we have proposed are to limit the application of navigation laws to bodies of water that actually have navigation. In other words, if there are small bodies of water on which boats do not or rarely travel, we do not need to protect their right to travel. We do not need to protect the right of a ship to travel down a small stream because that right is taken away by the shallowness of the water. In other words, that ship was never meant to travel there in the first place. Therefore, the application of the law is currently misplaced on areas where it does not belong. The amendments stipulated in the budget legislation fix that problem.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, the government keeps saying that Bill C-45 deals only with navigation and not the environment. I am having a really hard time understanding the logic of that argument. Navigation is done on waterways. Water contains living organisms. Water is safe to drink when environmental laws are followed. Navigation is therefore closely related to the environment.

Yet, under Bill C-45, many projects will no longer be required to undergo environmental assessments because they will be considered minor. This includes, for example, the construction of pipelines, bridges and other structures that had to undergo such evaluations in the past.

We are not operating in silos. The air we breathe and the water we drink are part of our environment, and human activity has an impact on that environment. By failing to take these factors into account, the government is playing a very dangerous game. The government is jeopardizing the quality of our water and waterways.

I would like to know how the government decided to protect only 97 lakes and 62 rivers, which are mostly found in Conservative ridings.

What is the logic behind these laws? What criteria did the Conservatives use to choose these lakes and rivers? Why are they neglecting thousands of others?

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member said that water contains organisms and therefore that navigation, which also touches on water, should protect organisms. Those organisms and all of the ecological and environmental implications of our streams, rivers, and lakes are protected by different statutes. They are protected by environmental laws.

Adjournment Proceedings

The law on navigation is focused on balancing the rights of someone who wants to build something over a body of water and someone who wants to travel on that body of water. Right now the law has resulted in small cottagers, for example, who want to build small docks on Lake Wabamun having to wait two years to do it because the government has had to study whether or not a ship would travel down their little lake.

That is not the purpose of navigation law. We are circumscribing it to fulfill its real purpose, which is navigation, while leaving environmental laws to protect the environment.

•(1825)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:25 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, January 31, 2013

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Statutes Repeal Act

Mr. Nicholson 13481

Succession to the Throne Act, 2013

Mr. Nicholson 13481

Bill C-53. Introduction and first reading 13481
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 13481

United Kingdom's Succession to the Throne Legislation

Mr. Nicholson 13481

Committees of the House

Procedure and House Affairs

Mr. Preston 13481

Tamil Heritage Month Act

Ms. Sitsabaiesan 13481

Bill C-471. Introduction and first reading 13481
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 13481

Committees of the House

Procedure and House Affairs

Mr. Preston 13481

Motion for concurrence 13481
(Motion agreed to) 13482

Petitions

Sex Selection

Mr. Benoit 13482

Pensions

Mr. Lamoureux 13482

Sex Selection

Mr. Warawa 13482

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski 13482

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Aboriginal Canadians

Ms. Crowder 13482

Motion 13482

Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North) 13484

Mr. Lamoureux 13484

Mr. Saganash 13484

Mr. Lamoureux 13486

Ms. Crowder 13486

Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North) 13486

Ms. Crowder 13489

Mr. Rae 13489

Mr. Norlock 13489

Mr. Saganash 13490

Mr. Rae 13490

Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North) 13492

Mr. Angus 13493

Mr. Scarpaleggia 13493

Mr. Genest-Jourdain 13493

Mr. Lamoureux 13495

Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue) 13495

Mrs. Hughes 13495

Mr. Rousseau 13497

Mr. Hsu 13497

Mr. Wilks 13498

Mrs. Hughes 13499

Mr. Valeriote 13499

Mr. Del Mastro 13499

Mr. Warkentin 13499

Mr. Angus 13501

Mr. Valeriote 13501

Mr. Angus 13501

Mrs. Gallant 13503

Mr. Nantel 13503

Mr. Cotler 13503

Mr. Sullivan 13504

Mr. Alexander 13505

Mr. Lamoureux 13505

Mr. Seeback 13506

Mr. Bevington 13508

Mr. Lamoureux 13508

Mr. Warawa 13509

Mr. Sullivan 13509

Ms. Borg 13509

Mr. Norlock 13509

Mr. Bevington 13509

Mr. Saganash 13511

Mr. Lamoureux 13511

Ms. Raynault 13511

Mr. Lamoureux 13512

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Saskatchewan Economy

Mr. Hoback 13513

Quebec Association for Social Integration

Mr. Boulerice 13513

Citizenship Act

Mr. Shory 13513

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

Mr. Cotler 13513

BlackBerry

Mr. Woodworth 13514

Professional Development School

Mr. Larose 13514

Canada's Space Program

Mr. Hawn 13514

Resource Development	
Mr. Shipley	13514
Government Priorities	
Mr. Donnelly	13515
Forestry Industry	
Mr. Rickford	13515
Black History Month	
Ms. Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	13515
The Economy	
Mr. Calandra	13515
Diane Marleau	
Mr. Rae	13515
Robbie Burns Night	
Mr. Holder	13516
Minister of Veterans Affairs	
Ms. Michaud	13516
Youth Unemployment	
Ms. Leitch	13516

ORAL QUESTIONS

Aboriginal Affairs	
Ms. Leslie	13516
Mr. Harper	13517
Ms. Leslie	13517
Mr. Harper	13517
Abortion	
Ms. Leslie	13517
Mr. Harper	13517
Employment	
Ms. Nash	13517
Ms. Leitch	13517
Ms. Nash	13517
Ms. Leitch	13517
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Rae	13517
Mr. Harper	13518
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Rae	13518
Mr. Harper	13518
Mr. Rae	13518
Mr. Harper	13518
Aboriginal Affairs	
Ms. Crowder	13518
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	13518
Mr. Genest-Jourdain	13518
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	13518
Mr. Saganash	13518
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	13519
Ethics	
Mr. Boulerice	13519
Mr. Clement	13519
Mr. Boulerice	13519

Mr. Goodyear	13519
Mr. Angus	13519
Mr. Goodyear	13519
Mr. Angus	13519
Mr. Van Loan	13519
Ms. Laverdière	13519
Mr. Clement	13520
Ms. Laverdière	13520
Mr. Clement	13520
Employment Insurance	
Ms. St-Denis	13520
Ms. Leitch	13520
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada	
Ms. Sgro	13520
Ms. Leitch	13520
Mr. Cuzner	13520
Ms. Leitch	13520
Abortion	
Ms. Boivin	13521
Mr. Nicholson	13521
Health	
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	13521
Mrs. Aglukkaq	13521
Search and Rescue	
Mr. Donnelly	13521
Mr. Ashfield	13521
The Environment	
Mr. Julian	13521
Mr. Anderson	13521
The Economy	
Mr. Adler	13522
Mr. Paradis	13522
Employment Insurance	
Mrs. Day	13522
Ms. Leitch	13522
Ms. Charlton	13522
Ms. Leitch	13522
Mr. Toone	13522
Ms. Leitch	13522
Mr. Godin	13522
Ms. Leitch	13523
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada	
Mr. Brison	13523
Ms. Leitch	13523
Taxation	
Mr. Brison	13523
Mr. Menzies	13523
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mrs. Groguhé	13523
Mr. Kenney	13523
Ms. Sims	13523
Mr. Kenney	13524

Royal Succession	
Mr. Lunney	13524
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	13524
Veterans Affairs	
Ms. Foote	13524
Mr. Blaney	13524
Canada Revenue Agency	
Mr. Rankin	13524
Mrs. Shea	13524
Public Safety	
Mr. Gill	13524
Mr. Toews	13525
Employment	
Ms. Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	13525
Ms. Leitch	13525
Natural Resources	
Mr. Bellavance	13525
Mr. Anderson	13525
Business of the House	
Mr. Cullen	13525
Mr. Van Loan	13525
Motion	13526
(Motion agreed to)	13526
Business of Supply	
Ms. Turmel	13526
Motion	13526
(Motion agreed to)	13526
Privilege	
Access to Information	
Mr. Bélanger	13526
Mr. Van Loan	13527
Mr. Cullen	13527

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—Aboriginal Canadians	
Motion	13527
Mr. Rickford	13527
Ms. Crowder	13530
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	13530
Mr. Hoback	13530

Mr. Cullen	13530
Mr. Clarke	13531
Mr. Bellavance	13531
Mr. Cullen	13531
Mr. Alexander	13533
Ms. Crowder	13534
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	13534
Mrs. Ambler	13536
Mr. Cullen	13536
Ms. Bennett	13536
Ms. Boivin	13539
Mr. Jean	13539
Mr. Marston	13540
Mr. Hawn	13540
Ms. Raynault	13540
Mr. Rankin	13541
Mr. Alexander	13542
Ms. Nash	13542
Ms. Ashton	13543
Ms. Crowder	13544
Division deemed demanded and deferred	13544
Mr. Hawn	13544

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Hydroelectric Project	
Mr. Aspin	13545
Motion No. 412	13545
Mr. Jacob	13546
Mr. Brison	13546
Mr. Zimmer	13546
Mr. Cleary	13547
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	13547
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte)	13548
Mr. Anderson	13549
Amendment	13550
Mr. Aspin	13551
Mr. Aubin	13551

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

The Environment	
Ms. Quach	13552
Mr. Poilievre	13553

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>