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Tuesday, February 26, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 26, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

TRANSPARENCY OF PAYMENTS MADE BY MINING, OIL AND GAS CORPORATIONS TO FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS ACT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-474, An Act respecting the promotion of financial transparency, improved accountability and long-term economic sustainability through the public reporting of payments made by mining, oil and gas corporations to foreign governments.

He said: Mr. Speaker, thank you for reading out the very extended name of that bill. We are calling it, for want of a better term, the sunshine bill, because it is intended to shine a light on the whole business of murky payments that go on in some transactions with respect to the obtaining and retaining of mining licences.

The bill needs to be situated in a worldwide effort to deal with some of these more odious practices that mining companies find themselves in. In particular, the U.S. has passed legislation called the Cardin-Lugar amendment, which is based upon the Dodd-Frank bill. It essentially says that these payments need to be disclosed to the Securities and Exchange Commission, and if they are not disclosed, then that company would be delisted from U.S. stock exchanges.

The U.K., the EU, Australia and others are trying to engage in this international effort, so the bill is to be situated in that entire international effort to close these loopholes and to deal with these kinds of practices.

I look forward to the debate and I look forward to support from my colleagues.

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

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PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION AND ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS ACT

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-475, An Act to amend the Personal

Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (order-making power).

She said: Mr. Speaker, over the past several years Canadians have witnessed what the Conservative privacy agenda has to offer: online snooping bills and inaction on data breaches.

[Translation]

Today I am presenting the NDP's vision of personal information protection. This bill will encourage compliance with Canadian laws and ensure that individuals are notified when their information has been compromised.

[English]

In our increasingly digital world, Canadians can no longer wait for the government to modernize our outdated privacy laws. Inaction means greater risk to the security of the personal information of millions of children, seniors and all other Canadians online.

[Translation]

Canadians and Quebeckers should feel perfectly safe using new digital technology. We can encourage Internet users to be fully involved in the digital economy by giving them the confidence to put personal information online.

[English]

My bill proposes positive and balanced privacy protections that are needed in the digital age.

[Translation]

I hope that all of the members in the House will vote in favour of this much-needed legislation so that the privacy of their constituents, their children and their families will be well protected.

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

* * *

[English]

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.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP) moved:

That this House call on the government to commit in Budget 2013 to a long-term, predictable and accountable federal infrastructure plan in partnership with other levels of government, as recommended by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, in order to: (a) improve Canada's lagging productivity; (b) shorten commute times; and (c) fix Canada's crumbling infrastructure.

She said: Mr. Speaker, across the country, getting to work on time is becoming a luxury. Congestion and overcrowded public transit make it harder and harder to get to work on time. From coast to coast, frustrated commuters tell the same stories.

In Toronto, angry office workers stand in the cold while jam-packed street cars rush by. Even if they get on, they are packed in like sardines. In Vancouver suburbs, impatient mothers who have to drop off their kids at school wait forever for a bus to arrive. In Montreal, frustrated college students are late for their classes and jobs because of delays and breakdowns in the aging Metro system.

The average commute time in the Toronto area has reached 82 minutes per day, which is far worse than New York City and Los Angeles, and Vancouver and Montreal are not doing much better. Eighty-two minutes is more than most parents get to spend with their kids playing and reading. Eighty-two minutes means a missed dinner with a partner for hard-working couples. Eighty-two minutes means less time to study and prepare for class for college students.

Traffic gridlock is costing our economy \$10 billion a year, with \$6 billion in the greater Toronto area alone. At \$10 billion, it is more than the GDP of all three territories and P.E.I. combined. In fact, it is bigger than the budget for six provinces. It is huge. This is \$10 billion that we lose every year because of gridlock and traffic jams.

For companies, it means less productivity and less competitiveness against their American counterparts. Ultimately, it means fewer jobs; 26,000 fewer jobs in the GTA alone. For parents, it means less time to see their kids grow up. For all levels of government, it means less tax revenue. Therefore, gridlock is a problem we can no longer afford.

Canada's infrastructure problems go beyond the lack of public transit and rising commute times. One out of five roads is in poor or very poor condition. That means potholes and car-sized sinkholes in Ottawa. It means damaged car suspensions. Overpasses and bridges in Montreal and Toronto are becoming unsafe. The Gardiner Expressway has rained concrete six or seven times this year alone on the traffic and pedestrians below.

There are also 200 communities struggling with backwater. The water looks cloudy or tastes and smells funny. In half of these communities, one cannot drink the water without boiling it first or one will get sick. How sad is this, given that clean water is a human right in a country that has the world's largest freshwater supply?

We have unsafe water systems and problems with the roads and bridges that we can no longer afford, and these are not isolated cases.

Communities from coast to coast to coast are struggling with lack of transit, potholed roads and unsafe drinking water. They are calling for federal help. They want a long-term federal plan for infrastructure, and they are not alone. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, representing over 2,000 municipal leaders, is calling for a long-term infrastructure plan to be included in the 2013 federal budget, and so is the Canada West Foundation, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Urban Transit Association, Engineers Canada, and the Canadian Construction Association.

● (1010)

From coast to coast to coast, union groups, organizations and municipal leaders are all calling for the same thing, which is a long-term, predictable and accountable infrastructure plan.

Why is it that the Minister of Transport does not want to listen to mayors and city councillors? Why are commuters and working families ignored by the Conservatives? Why does the minister not want to ride the Toronto subway with me at rush hour so that he can experience the crowded trains, see the commuters left behind on the platform and experience their frustration and anger over lost time?

It is curious that even before today's debate, the minister said last night that he would vote against my motion. He said that before he even listened to the motion. He said no without any debate. He said no without listening to Canadians. He said no without listening to parliamentarians. Frankly, that is contempt for the House of Commons.

Maybe I can guess the reason. Perhaps it is because Conservatives prefer to provide on-and-off funding, which frustrates cities that need predictable funding. Perhaps it is because the Conservatives want a photo op every few days, rather than a 20-year plan that would allow cities to make long-term plans. Maybe it is because they want to hand out gigantic cheques to their insider friends as a reward. Maybe it is because the Conservatives are afraid that if we have a fair distribution that uses objective criteria for funding and for measuring success, they will not be able to make decisions based on partisan considerations. That could be the reason.

Business of Supply

The building Canada fund has been too unpredictable and too beholden to partisan interests to really help municipalities. Municipalities now have an infrastructure deficit of \$171 billion. That is a huge amount of money on the shoulders of people who pay property taxes. Someone has to pay; the question is who. The people who are paying are those who pay property taxes, those on fixed income, seniors, those who really cannot afford much more. These are the ones who are shouldering this huge deficit of \$171 billion. That is why municipalities want an accountable and predictable long-term funding plan. They are tired of a grant system that is used like a lottery. They want a merit-based, predictable transfer.

All the federal government has to do is listen to cities and communities across Canada that have been calling for the same thing for years. They want a federal plan with secure supports for at least 20 years, not a two-year funding cycle. That is how long it takes to develop and build and maintain a long-term infrastructure program, whether it is transit, roads or drinking water.

Our cities need funding that is predictable. Our cities need funding that is allocated in a non-partisan way, like the existing gas tax, on a per capita basis. Our cities need a plan whereby funding grows with non-political measures, such as the economy, population and ridership growth forecasts. Our cities need a plan that has clear criteria and clear targets, targets like cutting specific commute times. We know that what gets measured gets managed, gets results and gets built. Our cities need a plan based on partnership among jurisdictions so that funding can reach provincial and municipal levels of government and the private sector. Our cities and companies need a plan that encourages innovation, efficiency and sustainability so that we can make our transit system greener and unleash Canada's creative potential.

We hope that members of Parliament across the way will stand up for a better quality of life, stand up for a stronger economy and support a long-term federal infrastructure plan so that we can get Canada moving again.

• (1015)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to thank the member for Trinity—Spadina for her incredible leadership in this area.

Over the past few months, we have met with dozens of municipal representatives across Canada, and not a single one was opposed to the motion moved by my colleague this morning. It is unanimous. There is something much larger than a consensus on this issue. It would appear that there are anywhere from 150 to 200 people who are prepared to vote against this motion, namely the Conservatives on the other side.

Am I right? Did my colleague find even one organization that has reservations about this motion, or have I understood correctly and people are unanimous in their support? Is there really a consensus about what needs to happen with Canada's infrastructure?

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. No, there is not one organization or municipality, from coast to coast to coast, and no level of government, that has said that it prefers a grant

lottery system. They want long-term, predictable funding. They want a transfer that would help cut commute times. They need to know that three, five, or even ten years down the road, when they have started building one subway, that other subway stations will also be built.

I will give Toronto as an example of what has happened. It dug a hole on Eglinton Avenue to build a subway station. It ran out of money, so it filled up the hole, wasting millions of dollars. Now it thinks that maybe it will have some money, and it is digging the hole again. I am not kidding. It is true. Come and watch it happening on Eglinton Avenue in Toronto. Millions of dollars are being wasted. At least 15 years have been wasted. In the meantime, the commuters are waiting and waiting and are being packed in like sardines.

That is not happening just in big cities. It is also happening in small and rural municipalities. For example, Ontario rural municipalities are meeting today and tomorrow, and they met yesterday. They are talking about infrastructure, roads and drinking water. Every organization, whether a business organization, chamber of commerce, board of trade, foundation, construction company or Engineers Canada has said the same thing. They want a long-term, predictable and accountable infrastructure plan from the federal government.

• (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we recognize that there is a huge infrastructure deficit from coast to coast to coast. Municipalities have a huge demand. Whether it is repairing roads or rapid transit, it is absolutely critical that these municipalities throughout the country have the resources to get some of the work done. The federal government has a great deal more access to a larger pool of revenue that ultimately could assist in facilitating this infrastructure.

My question is in regard to how important it is for the Government of Canada to recognize that whether it likes it or not, it has a role to play in building our country through our infrastructure, especially nowadays, when there is a lot of concern about the infrastructure deficit and how the economy itself is performing.

The government could do two things. One would be to improve the economic climate. The other would be to build needed infrastructure.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, there is really only one taxpayer. For every dollar this person pays in taxes, 8¢ goes to the municipality. Yet the municipality has to take care of 60%, or six out of 10, infrastructure projects across Canada. They just cannot do it.

Business of Supply

For the same taxpayer, from the same dollar, 45¢, almost half of his money, goes to the federal government. We cannot have the federal government walking away and saying that it is not its responsibility. The federal government collects the taxes. The least it could do is transfer a portion of it back to the municipalities so that they can take care of the 60% of the infrastructure that is crumbling right now. It needs \$171 billion. That is the deficit in infrastructure managed by municipalities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel privileged to rise here this morning to speak to this motion, since it directly affects everyone in my riding, all Quebeckers and all Canadians. Indeed, infrastructure has a direct impact on our daily lives, for better or for worse—and for the past few years, it has been for worse.

More and more studies and reports have been done across Canada over the years, and their findings are consistent. Analysts have reached the same conclusions: it is time to increase our investment in infrastructure and establish programs that allow municipalities to plan their investment programs over the long term.

That is precisely what today's NDP motion is calling for, and as my colleague, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, explained so well, this motion contains three key requests: to improve Canada's lagging productivity, shorten commute times and fix Canada's infrastructure, whose condition ranges from good to mediocre.

The beautiful thing about these three requests is that working on our infrastructure will allow improvements in all three areas at once.

As we can see, these requests are very specific. They raise economic concerns, and at the same time, highlight issues that affect the daily lives of millions of Canadians, such as commute times.

Finally, the funding of our municipal infrastructure affects each and every one of us. It affects the quality of the water that we drink and our access to and use of airports and energy facilities.

Canadians expect the Conservative government to take major positive action in terms of their infrastructure. I say “their infrastructure” because the condition of roads, water systems and bridges and the smooth flow of public transit are issues that affect and concern all Canadians. It is the government's responsibility to quickly meet their expectations. Canadians know that it is time to make major, long-term investments in things that make this country run smoothly.

What can the federal government do, or rather, what is the Conservative government not doing that it should be doing?

A recent *Le Devoir* headline aptly stated that Canada's infrastructure deficit continues to grow. What does that mean in practical terms?

There is no question that the federal government's contribution to infrastructure is becoming increasingly meagre. Insufficient funding in this area is nothing new, but nothing is currently being done to catch up to other countries. If nothing is done, the bill will just continue to grow as our bridges, roads and water systems age and crumble. Unfortunately, that is what is happening.

In 1980, the value of public infrastructure was 30% of GDP. It is now down to 22% of GDP. This means that our infrastructure is aging, that it is not withstanding the test of time and that its value is dropping while the country's population and needs are increasing. A modern, competitive country cannot let its infrastructure crumble.

To maintain an acceptable level, close to 3% of GDP must be invested annually. The government must take action immediately.

The federal government has reduced its share of investment contributions, which now falls below 15%. It is not because infrastructure costs less than it used to—quite the contrary. That is clear.

The federal government is sticking municipalities with the bill. Municipalities are responsible for 52% of infrastructure, while the provinces are responsible for about 35%. The issue is not just the federal government's transfer of responsibility or debt to the municipal level; the problem is much more complex than that. The municipalities simply do not have the means or tax leverage to take on this enormous responsibility alone. Without the federal government's commitment, our infrastructure will not be modernized and very few municipalities will have the means to invest in the Canada of tomorrow.

• (1025)

The federal government has spent many, many months consulting over 200 municipal, provincial and territorial representatives. For several months now, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has been talking about a sustainable plan. In his speech to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in November 2012, the minister said:

We can all agree that Canada needs a sustainable public infrastructure investment plan to replace the Building Canada Plan in 2014...A plan that will work well into the future.

For lack of a cabinet shuffle the same minister will be voting against the motion that my colleague moved this morning. I was pleased when I heard the minister's statement, but now I would like to see him take action. A long-term plan is exactly what municipalities and the NDP have been asking for, but the minister has never wanted to specify what he means by “long-term”. It seems that three, four or five years could be considered the long term. Or it could be 10 or 15 years. No one knows.

The NDP's position is clear: we believe that a 20-year plan would provide municipalities with the means to truly plan out their investments and would ensure that Canadians and future generations get the basic services needed by communities. If to govern is to plan—to the best of my knowledge, Clemenceau said that—then we should start planning today, assuming the government really does want to govern on behalf of all Canadians.

Business of Supply

It is always easy to cut infrastructure spending in order to balance the budget more quickly. However, economic studies prove that such cuts and temporary underfunding have a dramatic impact on subsequent generations. Our children will have to pay for the Conservatives' short-term vision. We are hanging an environmental millstone around the necks of future generations, which will have a hard time overcoming the problems they inherit from us. The Conservatives are about to do the same thing with the economy.

Studies clearly show that government programs for municipal infrastructure have helped significantly slow deficit growth since 2008. These programs are effective. We must keep them going over a longer period. The federal government must commit to bringing in predictable, sustainable long-term funding.

When the government provides only ad hoc funding, long-term projects—such as public transportation—are not eligible for funding. Periodic reviews are needed to ensure that targets are met and to adjust funding. In Quebec, the municipalities already assume the vast majority of the financial responsibility for municipal infrastructure spending without any financial return. The federal government recovers nearly 30% of its investments in financial returns, which shows what a big, impressive economic driver this government can be. It is clear that the federal government must play an active role and commit to making the existing programs permanent.

For five years the NDP has been calling for a permanent infrastructure program to take care of this problem instead of dumping it on local governments.

Since I am quickly running out of time, I will conclude by saying that the federal government must act immediately. Since the building Canada fund expires in 2014 and the money has all been spent already, Canadian municipalities need to know now what to expect so that they can plan carefully and efficiently. Since every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure helps create 11,000 jobs, job growth and economic productivity are partially tied to funding from the federal government. Canada cannot afford to ignore this opportunity for growth.

The NDP has heard from representatives of the UMQ, the FQM, the FCM, chambers of commerce, the Toronto Board of Trade, the Canadian Urban Transit Association and Engineers Canada, to name a few, and they all agree that now is the time to play catch-up with upgrading our infrastructure maintenance.

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to emphasize the importance of the infrastructure dollars. For municipalities to make long-term plans, they need to have a sense of how much money they can anticipate.

Let us take a look at a municipality, and I will use Winnipeg as an example, that will often have five-year capital type projects. When making plans for those projects, it has to take into consideration what it can anticipate coming from different levels of government.

That is one of the reasons we believe it is important that there be a tangible dollar figure that would allow municipal governments to plan their infrastructures and the type of programs they would like

to, ultimately, develop or put into place—this whole concept of multi-year budgeting, if we can put it that way.

I wonder if the member would comment as to the benefits of that multi-year planning or budgets that would allow municipalities from across Canada to know they can count on this kind of money going forward, so that they would be able to plan in the long run for these larger, more expensive capital infrastructure programs.

• (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question. My response is simple: it allows them to make smart choices.

Once a stable, long-term, ongoing infrastructure spending program is put in place, then decisions can be made in light of the budget envelope. If I have a specific funding envelope to spread over the next 20 years, I could implement more costly projects, for example.

On the other hand, managing infrastructure improvements on a short-term basis implies that I must choose projects based on the budget envelope allocated for one, two or three years.

I may not commit and I may not lock my community in to more costly projects, even though they are just as necessary. However, if I had the means to look ahead, I could make that commitment.

The government needs to change one key element in its approach. It needs to think of infrastructure improvements as an investment, not as an expenditure. Once the issue is seen in that light, everything changes, I swear.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the members for Trois-Rivières and Trinity—Spadina.

This is a critical motion for Canada. I am extremely surprised to hear the members opposite, the government, say that they will vote against it, even though this issue plagues all of our municipalities.

Over the past three weeks, two major streets—La Vérendrye Boulevard and Gatineau Avenue—in my riding of Gatineau, were completely closed to traffic. There were major problems and potholes as big as craters. The needs are obvious, and Gatineau is no different from other Canadian municipalities. For more than 10 years, I have heard the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies and other groups repeat the same thing over and over. They are telling us to take action because major infrastructure problems will create bigger issues and will cost Canadians.

I want to ask the member for Trois-Rivières why the Conservatives are closing the door on Canadian municipalities. I do not understand.

Business of Supply

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, at this point, we know that the minister will vote against the motion. Perhaps the rest of his party will not, and that would be amusing.

They will vote against the motion out of pure partisanship. Having talked with the minister many times, I would say that, when it comes right down to it, he has no choice but to agree with the motion.

For once, could we forget about the political games and work together to serve Canadians?

[*English*]

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Essex. I thank the member across the way for the opportunity to discuss this important issue and to put on the record many of the things that the government has already done on behalf of Canadians.

It is easy to say that all governments in Canada recognize the link between infrastructure investments and a strong economy. We have made investments for the short term through the economic action plan, which were timely. These infrastructure investments were made at a time when the Canadian economy needed it the most.

We have made investments through our longer term programs, like the building Canada plan, a plan that has seen government invest in public infrastructure at unprecedented levels. These investments are helping to support productivity and innovation, facilitate trade activities and promote local and regional development.

We are supporting and protecting our trade routes. We are making investments in our highways and roads to help goods and people move freely and efficiently.

Canada is a nation of exports. We need an integrated and efficient transportation system to ensure that our economy remains strong. We are investing in solutions that ensure seamless connections between all forms of transportation, including rail and shipping facilities. Our transportation system is not exclusively for business use. Connecting smaller communities to larger hubs helps stimulate local economies and provide citizens with improved access to health services, jobs, education and training.

While we do that, we continue to protect our environment through investments in waste water treatment, energy district systems and solid waste management, to name a few, all with the idea of helping reduce Canada's footprint on the environment.

We will make it a greener infrastructure for our cities, more livable, and contribute to improving the health of our ecosystems.

To support our communities and our economy, we are making investments in efficient public transportation systems. These improved systems help move commuters to and from work, home and play, and help our cities attract and retain businesses and talented people.

Since 2006, our government has made unprecedented investments in Canada's infrastructure. In 2007, we launched the seven-year \$33 billion building Canada plan, which provided long-term support for infrastructure priorities across the country. The building Canada plan supports projects that contribute to a stronger economy, cleaner air and water, safer roads, shorter commutes and stronger communities.

This includes large-scale projects, such as the Summerside wind farm in Prince Edward Island, the Mackenzie Valley winter road in the Northwest Territories, right down to projects in small communities, such as renovations to the Austin community centre in Manitoba or the upgrades to the well house in Bath, New Brunswick.

The NDP, with its doctrine approach, was systematically opposed to any help from our government to those communities.

Included under the building Canada plan is the gas tax fund, which provides predictable, long-term funding for Canadian municipalities to help them build and revitalize public infrastructure. I know this is one of the most important decisions this government has made, and I hear that continuously from the communities I represent. Making it a permanent fixture allows for predictability and enables them to work into the future.

The gas tax fund is stable and reliable, and municipalities can pool, bank or borrow against the fund for long-term infrastructure priorities. I do know that the 3,600 municipalities have benefited from the financial support and flexibility the program offers.

An example is the community of Brackley, a rural farming community north of Charlottetown, which has used gas tax funds to build a multi-use trail along Route 15. This trail promotes physical activity and provides walkers, runners, cyclists and rollerbladers with a safe place to enjoy more active forms of transportation.

In times of crisis, when the need was immediate, we showed we were able to act quickly and deliver on our promises. In 2009, the world was facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and Canadians were facing the most severe economic challenge in a generation.

● (1040)

In response, we launched the economic action plan. In my opinion, the plan was an unqualified success that is still generating jobs, stimulating the economy and providing benefits to Canadians this day. We have done that, and opposition members on the other side voted against it. The plan accelerated existing infrastructure funding and delivered \$14.5 billion in new funding for public infrastructure through programs such as the infrastructure stimulus fund. The program provided funding in the short term, when it was needed most, for projects that were shovel-ready and could begin construction immediately.

Business of Supply

After listing all those investments made by our government, I admit I am confused with the New Democrats' position. If infrastructure is important for them, how is it that they have voted against every single one of our attempts to support the provinces, territories and municipalities with their infrastructure priorities? I cannot explain it. How could they vote against every attempt to support these communities?

I will refresh the opposition members' memory. In 2007, the New Democrats voted against a \$33 billion building Canada fund. In 2009, they voted against thousands of economic action plan infrastructure programs that went all across Canada. In 2011, the New Democrats voted against legislation making the gas tax fund transfer permanent, not once but twice. If infrastructure was important to the New Democrats, they should have woken up and supported the government's position. Never in the history of Canada has the federal government done so much in support of infrastructure.

As members can see, the Government of Canada is concerned about this country's public infrastructure and has done more than any federal government in recent history to advance and improve the infrastructure programming for all of Canada. At the same time, we remain sensitive to the ongoing deficit and the need to balance the budget. As we work with our partners to shape the future of infrastructure and infrastructure funding in Canada, we will be ever conscious of the needs of the taxpayers, the economy and the environment.

• (1045)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every time a car driver pays for gasoline, 10¢ for each litre that he or she purchases goes to the federal government. After the Federation of Canadian Municipalities pitched, pushed and lobbied for many years—at one time under the leadership of its former president, the late Jack Layton—finally the Liberal government and then the Conservative government agreed to send some of the gas tax back to municipalities that manage the roads and pay for streetcars, buses and subways. However, that is only 5¢ per litre.

What is the federal government doing with the other 5¢ per litre that it takes from car drivers every time they pump gas? The extra 5¢ goes to a general revenue, rather than coming back to fix the roads or to help with the transit. What does the government do with this money? Is it to pay for senators' trips? Is it to pay for some kind of expense account? I do not know. The taxpayers deserve to know what happens to the other 5¢ of gas tax they pay each time they pump gasoline.

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, where I live we pump our own gas. It is just something we have become accustomed to doing.

Where does the gas tax money go? As the member has correctly stated, half of it goes to the municipalities. We reached out and we listened to them, and it is permanent. That is something they said to us and it is actually part of the statement that has been made here earlier this morning. Municipalities and provinces want stability. They want to know, going forward, what they can count on year after year. We proposed that we make it, through legislation, a law that they receive it, and regrettably the members opposite voted against it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I talked about the infrastructure deficit across Canada. I want to focus attention on our roads and highways, particularly municipal roads. Driving through Winnipeg, as an example, one finds an enormous number of potholes. There is a huge demand for improving the quality of our streets. I do not think Winnipeg is unique. There is the same need across Canada.

Would the member acknowledge that cities and municipalities do not have the financial capability to deal with the huge infrastructure deficit? In terms of the economic climate, is there not a greater need for Ottawa to play a stronger leadership role in building our infrastructure?

• (1050)

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, if we ask any community or any municipality across Canada, they would suggest that they need more investment in infrastructure. I think that is only natural. We all have needs and desires. Many communities have to make decisions based on the revenues they can generate within their own systems. We continue to meet, negotiate and listen to our counterparts at the provincial and municipal levels. I am assured that we will continue to do that to do what is in the best interests of Canadians.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to discuss our government's record investment in infrastructure to benefit our country, literally from sea to sea, from the northern coast all the way down to our southern coast.

Since 2006, our government has made record levels of investments in infrastructure through initiatives such as the \$33 billion building Canada plan and infrastructure investments made under Canada's economic action plan.

On the one hand, the seven-year building Canada plan is providing long-term funding for small and large-scale projects across the country. Just this past Friday, I was in Lakeshore making an announcement that the federal government will be committing up to \$17.3 million from the building Canada fund, a major infrastructure component, for a new multi-use recreation facility in that community.

On the other hand, Canada's economic action plan was designed to provide targeted, timely, temporary funding during the recession for shovel-ready construction projects in the short term.

In Windsor—Essex, for example, we had the highest per capita infrastructure stimulus in the country to combat the highest unemployment in Canada, leading to projects such as investments in the new Centre for Engineering Innovation at the University of Windsor, the new MediaPlex and a Centre for Applied Health Sciences at St. Clair College, new modernizations and improvements at Your Quick Gateway, YQG, our airport, and a new MURF in Amherstburg. These are projects that were needed in that short-term period that are making a difference in the long term.

Business of Supply

More than 50% of the build Canada plan, some \$17.6 billion, goes to municipalities to fund their priorities through the gas tax fund and through the 100% GST rebate. Through these two initiatives, every municipality in the country is receiving stable and predictable funding.

I would like to remind my colleagues opposite, though they may want to forget, that the NDP voted against this support for Canadian municipalities. By way of fact, the gas tax fund doubled on April 1, 2009, from \$1 billion to \$2 billion per year. The NDP was opposed to that.

On December 15, 2011, Bill C-13, which was entitled Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs Growing Act, received royal assent. This delivered on our government's budget 2011 commitment to legislate the gas tax fund permanently at \$2 billion a year. Municipalities can count on this stable funding for their infrastructure needs now and in the future. However, they cannot count on the NDP, which voted against this on every single occasion.

To date, more than 3,600 municipalities across Canada have benefited from the financial support and the flexibility the gas tax fund program offers. Municipalities can choose to pool their funds and bank or borrow against them, meaning that municipalities can spend their funding when they choose to do so. They do not have to spend it as soon as it comes in. They can save their funds for a few select larger projects or can use them for many smaller ones. As a result of this flexibility, in the period from 2005 to 2011 municipalities earned over \$88 million in interest, which they could then use for additional local infrastructure renewal.

Municipalities can choose to invest all or part of their funding allocations in program categories such as drinking water and waste water systems, solid waste management, community energy systems, public transit, local roads or even capacity building. Since its inception, municipalities across Canada have reported that the gas tax fund has helped them fund over 13,000 individual projects. There is a great interactive map on the Association of Municipalities of Ontario website that shows where all these projects are across Essex County and Ontario, for example.

With each of these infrastructure projects come important jobs and results that improve quality of life in our communities. I remind members that the NDP voted to turn down support for these 13,000 projects. I think that bears some shame.

If we look at Canada's six largest cities, approximately 80% of the gas tax fund allocation is invested in public transit. Toronto, Ottawa and Edmonton devote 100% of their gas tax fund monies to public transit.

● (1055)

Toronto has used its gas tax funding to purchase 204 new streetcars to replace aging light rail vehicles. The City of Ottawa has used its gas tax funds to renew and modify its transit bus fleets. Other regions are also using their gas tax fund allocations to make their public transit services more accessible for their ridership. Peel region, with its TransHelp accessible transportation service, is an example. Some 2,000 new customers and an 8% to 10% annual increase in trip capacity resulted from that investment, with a record 400,000-plus trips reported in 2010.

Of course, public transit is not the only focus of the gas tax fund for Canadian communities. The next largest investment priority for Canadian municipalities is local roads and bridges, followed by water and then waste water. For example, if we look eastward to New Brunswick, the City of Bathurst upgraded its water and sanitary systems using gas tax funds. As a result of these upgrades, the process at the waste water treatment plant has been improved to meet provincial effluent quality standards, and further efficiencies are expected to improve the quality of drinking water.

If we look north, and having a young Inuit daughter I like to look northward, their communities benefit from the gas tax funds as well. In the north, it is a little different. Northern communities receive a base funding amount instead of an allocation based on population. That just means that less populated jurisdictions receive sufficient funds to build and revitalize their local infrastructure.

The Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut will each have received \$97.5 million for community infrastructure from the gas tax fund between 2005 to 2014. The City of Iqaluit was able to use gas tax funds to replace its water pipe system, which has ensured a dependable supply of safe drinking water for residents for years to come.

Gas tax funds are also used to support capacity-building initiatives in northern communities, including long-term community planning. In remote locations, with sparse populations and a difficult northern climate, local infrastructure planning is especially complex and challenging. When combined with limited access to planning resources and expertise, funding for capacity building and planning becomes even more important.

The Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation community used gas tax funds to establish sustainability goals and to develop a community planning program. Through this exercise, it was able to complete two key community infrastructure planning projects that focused on land development and community housing needs. It was able to keep citizens informed through a newsletter and provided opportunity for input. As a result, its integrated community sustainability plan was able to include new areas of focus, covering everything from public transit and walking trails to drinking water, sewage, green energy projects and other community infrastructure needs.

We have given this flexible funding to municipalities in all corners of the country, despite the NDP's systematic opposition.

I would like to point out that closer to home, in the far south of Canada, the gas tax fund continues to modernize important local infrastructure, whether it is reconstruction of the Canard River overpass, repaving on Gesto Road, road reconstruction in the heart of Kingsville or county roads across Lakeshore.

Business of Supply

The gas tax fund will continue to deliver results for local infrastructure priorities for years to come. We look forward to seeing the benefits in our communities. I am pleased to note that a \$2 billion per year gas tax fund is one of our government's largest, and now permanent, programs dedicated to infrastructure funding for our country. From British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador, from the Yukon and Nunavut to Essex County, Ontario, the gas tax fund plays an important role in supporting infrastructure renewal and in creating jobs. Communities, large and small alike, benefit and can continue to rely on this stable, predictable funding.

• (1100)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member going through a long list of investments and initiatives undertaken by this government. Since taking office in 2006, we have prioritized infrastructure. We have certainly brought funding for municipalities to record levels. We have brought the transfers to the provinces to record levels. We have also done something else that is very important.

The member represents Ontario. I do not think any member in the House has done more to further the infrastructure interests of his region than this member in his fight for the new international crossing between Windsor and Detroit. Is the member aware that despite Ontario being 38% of the population and producing roughly 41% of the GDP, it was receiving only 22% of the federal infrastructure investment dollars under the former Liberal government, whereas today, it receives fair per capita transfers right across this country? Does he agree with that?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I have been around since 2004. I started out in opposition to the Paul Martin government at the time.

I would characterize infrastructure funding as not only unfair in its distribution, but it was ad hoc in terms of the lack of an overall strategic direction. We changed that in 2007, particularly when we launched the Building Canada plan with many measures under that \$33 billion umbrella, in a strategic coordinated approach to improve infrastructure and deal specifically with what was a significant infrastructure debt at the time.

We have made significant progress, working with our provincial and municipal partners in that direction. We are continuing that with the community infrastructure improvement fund and many other funds. I suspect we will continue to work in good partnership with all of our partners in a fair way that will help to meet the infrastructure needs in their communities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my Conservative colleague from Essex, and I sometimes have the impression—I am surprised to say it—that he is wearing rose-coloured glasses.

He can cherry-pick the success stories about municipal infrastructure all he wants, but the reality is that most municipalities are at the end of their rope. The most recent assessment pegs the infrastructure deficit at \$171 billion.

Can the member finally tell us if the government will commit to holding real dialogue with municipalities and consulting them? I believe that is difficult for the Conservatives.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I reject that. This government continually consults with our municipal and provincial partners, whether it is on infrastructure or any other issue. I find it offensive from the member opposite and his party.

Quite frankly, the motion today is just a little too late when we look at the real record on infrastructure. On border funding for a new crossing, the NDP voted against it when we brought it forward in 2006 and 2007. When we set aside \$400 million for the new Windsor-Essex parkway, now renamed the Right Honourable Herb Gray parkway, to extend the 401 to a new border crossing, who voted against it? The NDP. That member was not elected at the time so I will not blame him personally, but his party voted against it. In every single way, we are making real tangible progress.

I cannot account for the fact that the Liberals left such a huge debt with respect to infrastructure and took such a scattered approach, but this government has put real money on the table, in a real plan with our partners. We are making tangible results, creating jobs from coast to coast and improving the quality of life in our communities. I wish the member opposite and his party would get on board.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely thrilled to begin my speech by replying to my hon. colleague from Essex.

This debate is far too serious to play the “my dad is stronger than your dad” game. The Liberals invented the infrastructure program and really emphasized it. This is not about what has been done, but what we can do right now, and that is the goal of my colleague's motion. We are not judging what has already been done. We can be critical and partisan. Besides, it was minority Liberal governments that helped bring forward this kind of budget.

What is important today is to reflect appropriately on the federal government's role in relation to the municipalities. We must not get caught up in a constitutional dispute, since some will say that municipalities are creatures of the provinces. The reality is that sharing, funding and pilot projects will help improve people's quality of life.

The Liberal Party and I will be supporting today's motion. We believe that not only is it important to do so, but the motion itself is also consistent with our party's position on infrastructure.

Business of Supply

Indeed, we need an effective strategy and we need to listen to our constituents. As my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher said earlier, we now have an infrastructure deficit of \$171 billion. What is more, we also know that over 30% of existing infrastructure is failing and in deplorable condition. Of course, no single municipality or provincial government will be able to resolve the situation.

At present, we have a serious governance problem. One of the most important measures that we need to adopt is what is known as “dedicated funds”. Now, we have a certain amount of money, we set that money aside and we do not necessarily know where that money will go. If we want to be effective when it comes to transportation, housing and infrastructure, we need to bring back the notion of “dedicated funds” for urban transit and basic infrastructure. When it comes to infrastructure, if we are talking more and more about sustainable development, we also need to do things differently, to do them correctly.

We must find a new way to invest more, particularly in the greater Montreal area, where there are problems with bridges and public transportation. This is the digital age and we have new management methods, as my colleague, the official opposition transport critic, said, and the whole notion of productivity is closely tied to infrastructure.

That is why the Prime Minister at the time, Paul Martin, was the first to talk about bringing back the gas tax. I commend this Conservative government for having the good sense to make it permanent. Just because we are in the opposition does not mean that we must oppose everything. Of the many initiatives put forward at the time, making this tax permanent was a good thing, but we must now double it and index it.

• (1110)

[*English*]

It is an ongoing process. We need to make sure that from now on it is not only permanent, but it is indexed and doubled. This is key.

My colleague from Essex was right when he talked about its importance to municipalities, but it is not a one-shot deal. We need to find a better way with these dedicated funds to provide the right funding for the future. It is a good policy, so we have to go further than that, I would suggest.

[*Translation*]

One of the problems was that we thought we knew the Conservatives' track record since 2007. The reality is that we will renew this plan in 2014. If we want to do so, we must start now to develop benchmarks for the future. We must think in terms of dedicated funds and also long-term funding.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, for one, is talking about planning for up to 20 years. This must be the start of a discussion on governance. We may be able to think about a 20-year span, but with renewals every five years. Do we need benchmarks? They do not necessarily need to be written in stone.

We definitely need to redefine the long-term vision. We can no longer operate only in the short term. In the current context, we also often need to take measures that will give the municipalities the tools they need—updated tools—even if they are receiving money on a

permanent basis. Unfortunately, this is too often not enough. The Liberal Party is supportive of a long-term fiscal commitment to municipal infrastructure.

We have been calling for predictable and sustainable funding for a long time. We need to redefine what we mean by “infrastructure” in order to determine whether we are referring to productivity, housing or other aspects.

[*English*]

When I was president of the Privy Council, I called it “smart regulation”. We need to bring back the notion of smart cities. Smart cities mean smart citizens and smart regulations. It is not just based on mortar; different digital strategies have to be put forward as well.

[*Translation*]

We are proud of our country. However, people identify less and less with their country or continent and, instead, identify with their city. We must go beyond the issue of jurisdiction and share tools interdepartmentally. It is no good to have a department responsible for infrastructure. Human resources, the Minister of Industry and the person responsible for innovation must work together to acquire the necessary tools. The word “infrastructure” must be clearly defined.

For that reason, I think we must consider holding a federal-provincial conference. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister may be meeting with premiers individually instead. It has been too long since the last federal-provincial conference. We need a specific strategy for infrastructure and the future of the municipalities. We must develop tools in order to improve people's quality of life. I am thinking about green infrastructure, digital infrastructure and core infrastructure.

Montreal is having major problems despite all the money invested. We are still losing 40% of our drinking water, despite current investments. We do not need just the money that is currently being invested. We also need to acquire the necessary tools so that the government can invest more. As hon. members know, entities other than the Canadian government are responsible for over 60% of all infrastructure projects.

The government needs to develop a national public transit strategy with funding of its own, and a national general infrastructure and funding strategy.

Above all, I think that the government must avoid partisanship. It has to give itself permission to commend past investments and it has to come up with the right tools. There is still a long road ahead and a lot of work to do.

Business of Supply

Earlier, the hon. member for Essex was talking about all the money from the building Canada fund. Instead of talking in concrete terms about the future, he said that the Conservatives have invested more than the Liberals. I would like to point out that an extraordinary minister, a prominent politician and a great Canadian, Herb Gray, also played a role in his region. We do not need to get into who is better. We need to start recognizing the infrastructure sector.

• (1115)

[*English*]

It is an ongoing issue. It is not just based on what one has done in the past, or if one has invested more than another. It is all about what is in it for the future. The more we invest for the future, the more impact we will have on the quality of our lives, on sustainable development and on other policies. However, we have to realize that if we do not have that kind of strategy, it will have an impact on human resources.

As a former minister of immigration, I was always there to discuss with my counterparts the future within the cities. For example, 87% of all the immigration goes through Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Of course, we need that kind of dialogue. We need the infrastructure. We need the transport because it has a direct impact on quality of life. This is not just an infrastructure debate; it is all about what kind of society we want to live in and what the future should be for our great country.

[*Translation*]

This motion may be the beginning of an interesting debate. As my party's critic for transport, infrastructure and communities, I already started having this conversation on the future of infrastructure at the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I imagine there is a cause and effect relationship between that and the NDP's opposition motion. That is why we are in favour of this motion and why it must be adopted.

I think we need to take this debate further. This is an extremely broad issue. As far as repairs are concerned, we are talking about improving productivity in Canada, as I was saying earlier, and we are talking about partnership and transparent funding for the long term.

There is another important aspect that the government side touched on earlier.

[*English*]

It is important to make sure we are not living in a one-size-fits-all, so for every policy and program we promote, it is also important that we realize it is not just the major cities, but all the communities. If we want to make sure we are inclusive and everyone feels like a first class citizen, we will have to make sure we are listening to them.

[*Translation*]

This is an opportunity to counter cynicism. All political parties in this House must work together on this. It is a motion. We are constantly reminded by this government that a motion is not really binding. In my opinion, this could be the start of a worthwhile debate.

When I go out to speak to the people in my riding of Bourassa and the people of my city, Montreal—I am referring to the Montreal metropolitan area—many people talk to us about this issue. They do not have questions about the Constitution. They believe that we are all part of the solution and that we have specific work to do.

We have talked about social development and sustainable development. However, economic development is extremely important. If we want to be one of the world's great countries, and if we want to ensure that all cities can accommodate more businesses, it is important that our cities have decent infrastructure. Canada is an exporting country and does a huge amount of business with the rest of the world. We have to study what infrastructure can do for economic development and quality of life.

For example, as we prepare to enter into a free trade agreement with Europe, we must ensure that we put this infrastructure in place, because when European businesses want to become established in Canada, they will go to Montreal and have a look at the infrastructure. This is not just about the cities and provinces. When these people arrive, we welcome them to Canada. If we really want to welcome them to Canada, we have to ensure that we build proper infrastructure and that we work towards that.

I am very pleased to have participated in the debate on today's motion and, on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada, I can say that we will support this motion.

• (1120)

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and am very pleased to see that the Liberal Party of Canada supports the opposition's motion. However, I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question.

When the Liberal Party of Canada was in power, why did the Liberals just talk about this issue and make promises? They failed to take real action to support infrastructure in Quebec and Canada. Why do they have the bad habit of constantly signalling left and turning right?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, that question is somewhat unfortunate.

First, I am an extremist of the centre: my heart is on the left and my wallet on the right. Second, one thing is certain: we invented the infrastructure program. As Minister of Sport, I remember I made sure I put forward component 3 so that there could be recreational and tourism development, which made it possible to build the Rivière-du-Loup arena and various sport infrastructure facilities. I can tell my colleague from Sherbrooke that the green and gold is playing football today because your humble servant provided the stadium for the under-17 Canadian Track and Field Championships.

I find it somewhat unfortunate that the member is engaging in partisanship. We are in favour of infrastructure development. We put infrastructure in place. We made massive infrastructure investments. We must invest more.

Despite the curveball he is throwing me, we will nevertheless support this motion because it is more important to invest for people than to score minor political points.

Business of Supply

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech on infrastructure.

I was pleased that he emphasized, for example, the fact that 40% of treated water in Montreal still seeps into the soil. Consequently, failure to invest in infrastructure has a cost, a cost in terms of waste, in terms of the transportation of goods and in terms of the economy and trade. I would like him to tell us a little more about the cost of the Conservative government's inaction.

Second, since we know that the municipalities are being squeezed, that they are responsible for several types of infrastructure and that they do not have a lot of leverage to raise financial resources, I wonder what he thinks about the fact that, with PPP Canada, the federal government is limiting the municipalities' requests for federal government assistance in a highly ideological and obtuse way. All projects have to be PPPs, when the municipalities might want to take the conventional route or go their own way. What does he think about that?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his very pertinent question.

I agree that too often, unfortunately, the Conservative government takes a partisan approach. However, the official opposition should not follow the government's lead either. We currently are experiencing leadership and follow-up problems. In particular, we see what is happening with the Charbonneau commission. One thing is certain: we must not reject the PPP model outright. The Canadian government must assume its role as a full partner, but it must also invest and give itself the tools it needs to resolve certain matters. That does not mean that we have to go this route, but if the PPP model is one possible solution, then it should not be rejected outright.

That said, we should have dedicated funds for transportation, for example. The issue here is sustainable development. It makes no sense for a municipality to lose 40% of its water. Clearly, investing is important, but equally important, leadership must be redefined. As a large municipality, Montreal must play a leading role, but the same also holds true for all Canadian municipalities.

So yes, the government must change its partisan approach. Yes, there must be dedicated funds. Perhaps by having dedicated funds and a genuine national strategy, the government—which unfortunately believes that a government means less government—will be able to address the problems. However, I would advise my colleague not to go to the other extreme and to weigh all of the options. The PPP model could very well be a good option, but that does not mean it is a panacea either.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the answers from my colleague. One of the things I would ask him to re-emphasize or talk about is the importance of infrastructure, in general, and the role the federal government plays, because at the end of the day, municipalities all over Canada do not have the financial resources to meet their needs, in terms of building their infrastructure. I wonder if he would comment on that.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I spoke in French before about when I was the sports minister. I can assure the member that the federal government has a major role to play. When we had the Pan American Games in Manitoba in 1999, it showed a very direct, concrete approach where the federal government could play a role.

Now, that is about sports and recreation and leisure. However, at the same time, if we are talking about sustainable development now, if we are talking about transport, if we are talking about the economy as a whole, I think the federal government has a role to play.

Of course, we can be respectful of our jurisdiction. I know a lot of people would say that the municipalities are a provincial jurisdiction. However, at the same time, I think we have no choice now but to talk to each other, because if the federal government is not included in some of the partnerships, it would have a direct impact upon our citizens. That is why the federal government did that with the gas tax. That is why we have those infrastructure programs.

We have to stop saying look at what we have done in the past. We have to look ahead and send a clear message to our taxpayers that the federal government has a role to play and it would have a direct impact on their own quality of life.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the website of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities says there has been an infrastructure deficit, a backlog of delayed repairs and construction that hurts every Canadian family and business. It says that, for 25 years, Canadians have watched the symptoms of the infrastructure deficit grow—rusting bridges, crumbling roads, crowded buses and subways and thousands of drinking water warnings. It points out that municipalities own 53% of the infrastructure in this country but receive only 8¢ of every tax dollar paid in Canada.

Of course, 25 years is a long time to develop an infrastructure deficit, but it has been estimated at over \$100 billion. Since 1988, we have had successive Conservative and Liberal governments. I am wondering if my hon. friend can comment on how he thinks such an infrastructure deficit was created if Liberal and Conservative federal governments had been doing their job properly, or is the Federation of Canadian Municipalities incorrect about what it is saying?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, perhaps some questions need to be put to the provincial NDP governments.

[*English*]

It is not a matter of labelling; it is a matter of what is for the future. That is the reason why, in 1993, we put up that infrastructure program. It is never enough. Of course we have to recuperate for the sake of our future. We just mentioned in Montreal that we are losing 40% of our drinkable water. So it is not about who we should blame; it is about what are we ready to do together to make things better. I think that is the essence of the motion. It is everybody's business, in a non-partisan way. We have to push forward.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

New structures and funding plan timetables will be just as important as increases in funding. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities is also asking for increased infrastructure funding based on a percentage of GDP, to match levels reached between 1950 and 1970.

Acknowledging that there is a problem is the first step. Yes, solutions have been put forward, but between now and 2014, the infrastructure plan needs to be renewed in keeping with certain parameters and investment strategies. The Canadian government has a role to play, and it needs to invest in our infrastructure.

• (1130)

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Beaches—East York.

I am very pleased to rise today to speak to the motion introduced by my colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina. I sit on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, where, week after week, we witness the Conservatives' failure to do something about the infrastructure-related problem that will arise in a year when the Building Canada Fund expires.

At the start of his speech, the Conservative member said that investing in infrastructure means investing in community development. I entirely agree with him, but I do not see how he can say that, then turn around and say that he will be voting against our motion, because that is what the motion is about. We want a stable, long-term, non-partisan infrastructure investment plan.

When we say infrastructure, we are talking about four classes: roads, highways, the sewer system and water treatment and supply facilities, and bridges. The current application-based process is flawed. We noted that when we conducted a public transit study.

For example, if a community says it needs a better sewer system, it cannot also apply for its public transit system because that would cause several of its projects to compete with one another. What is also unfortunate about individual applications, and we are currently seeing this, is that it is very easy for a majority government such as this one to make partisan decisions, to favour certain communities because they vote for the government and to fund projects that will improve the lives of the citizens of those communities while the community next door, particularly Quebec, will not receive much because it does not vote for the government. That is what I find unfortunate.

I will begin by saying exactly what we want, and then I will cite specific examples of the problems Montreal and my riding face every day, problems that could be solved by agreeing to the motion my colleague is introducing today.

We are asking for the necessary tools to manage infrastructure funding effectively. We want an effective long-term infrastructure plan to be announced in the 2013 budget, a plan based on ongoing consultations with the provinces, territories, municipalities and aboriginal communities. This government consults less than most, even though it has boasted all morning that it is conducting

consultations. We want this to be written down so that we can see it happen.

Like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, we want a 20-year plan, one that permits better long-term planning and support for long-term projects. Ultimately, if a municipality wants to carry out a long-term project—I just heard my Liberal colleague mention a football stadium in Sherbrooke—that represents enormous costs for it. We need to know that there is a federal fund that will help us support that. The federal government is providing a smaller and smaller percentage of infrastructure-related costs. A 20-year plan would enable us to do a better job of planning projects and federal government support for major projects.

Next, we want the plan to include clear targets and funding criteria. We want transparent, accountable, non-partisan funding mechanisms to facilitate the application process. As I explained earlier, partisanship is the order of the day right now, so we want a plan that will prevent that from happening.

As well, we want a plan that encourages the use of innovative technologies for greater efficiency and sustainability. We want to set aside funds for replacing and expanding infrastructure in rural, remote and northern regions, and for public transit, to reduce commuting times between home and work.

• (1135)

Public transit is a major issue for Montreal, so I am going to say a little more about that. I will start with two quotations that support my argument. Quebec's transportation ministry produced a report on traffic congestion that says:

By 2016, the number of trips per day in the Montreal metropolitan area will increase by two million, a 25% increase, and we will have to manage 10.2 million trips per day.

This goes to show that we have a lot of congestion in Montreal. As further evidence, I read about a TomTom GPS survey in *The Gazette*. I quote:

[English]

A North American traffic survey conducted by the TomTom GPS manufacturer found that of the 26 cities studied, Montreal ranked number four when it came to traffic delays. ... Montrealers are delayed a total of 92 hours a year because of traffic jams.

[Translation]

So we are wasting 92 hours of our lives sitting in our cars. That is incredible.

People in my riding are coping with some really serious problems. Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Lachine, Dorval and Montreal West are located on the west side of Montreal. Unfortunately, I do not have a metro station in my riding because I live on the outskirts. We manage with the commuter trains and the bus system, which are unfortunately not very efficient.

Business of Supply

MPs from Montreal met with the STM officials two weeks ago to talk about this. I asked them what was happening. In my riding, when I travel from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce to Lachine by car, it takes me 10 minutes. Walking is not really an option; it would take an hour because it involves crossing highway 20. Buses are rare, and they take about an hour and a half. Some of my employees who live in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, in my relatively small riding, spend over an hour on the bus.

Constituents have called me to say that they would like to come and see me at my office, but that getting there is a problem. The Loyola campus of Concordia University is in my riding. A lot of students find this situation difficult. The 92 hours they spend on public transit means 92 hours they cannot spend studying or working, if they need to work because tuition fees are high, but that is a whole different issue.

This is really a problem. These people who come to see me are families who cannot spend time with their children, or partners who see less of each other. It is sad.

The Train de l'Ouest—the line from Vaudreuil to downtown—is another project in my riding. We have a lot of problems with that line. It is the only train that travels fairly quickly from my riding to downtown Montreal, but not often. There are 16 trains a day, and we are having trouble getting more funding to completely rebuild the western line. It will be very expensive. We do not yet know what is going to happen with this project. The federal government has not promised to provide enough money to improve the situation. This affects my constituents' quality of life.

I find it sad for the people who voted for the Conservatives. Their slogan was: my region in power. If the people voted for the Conservatives, money would flow to the riding. If they did not vote for the Conservatives, then there would be no money. Senator Smith, who at the time was running in Lac-Saint-Louis, said that if constituents wanted the Train de l'Ouest, then they needed to vote for him. Sadly, it seems he was right.

I would like to conclude by mentioning another misguided infrastructure project in my riding, namely the Vendôme metro station. It is not accessible. A person with disabilities cannot access the metro, yet the new Montreal hospital is under construction a mere 20 minutes away.

We want a stable, long-term, non-partisan infrastructure plan, one that addresses problems of this nature. Right now, the situation is discouraging. I hope the 2013 budget contains a plan. VIA Rail was hit with massive cuts, which is very sad.

• (1140)

I hope that the government will continue to invest in infrastructure and give us projects that make sense.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it helps to look at the recent history. Twenty years ago there was no federal funding for municipal infrastructure. Municipalities handled their own infrastructure without federal programs. Throughout the last two decades, programs have formed

to fund capital projects, and we now have the very generous gas tax transfer. Our government made it permanent, and it has drastically increased municipal revenues.

Municipal revenues have grown by over 60% in the last decade, even though inflation and population growth combined have been roughly 30%. On top of that, direct revenue to the municipalities, such as large capital programs like the economic action plan and the building Canada fund, fund one-third of the costs of individual projects.

We have seen a massive increase in federal and provincial resources available to municipalities to fund their infrastructure and a prodigious increase in the direct revenues that municipalities enjoy, yet the NDP still believes that more money is the solution to our infrastructure problems.

My question is this: why did the NDP vote against all of the previously instituted programs that have so dramatically increased the resources available to our municipalities?

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We voted against the omnibus budget bills because in our opinion, they contained hundreds of provisions that were unfair to Canadians. I will answer my colleague's question with one of my own, because he very much enjoys doing the same thing.

Why is Canada the only G8 country without a long-term strategy in place to fund public transit? Why must I tell my constituents that Canada cannot have public transit systems because the government is unwilling to pay for them? Why do northern communities still not have access to drinking water owing to the lack of government funding?

Admittedly, some positive measures have been taken in the past, but we are not talking about the past. We are talking about what will happen in two years' time, in 2014, when funding under the building Canada plan ends. Will we be able to assure municipalities that stable, non-partisan funding will be available for them?

Our colleague opposite is currently keeping mum about that. He claims to have helped municipalities. However, when we look at where the money went in Canada, it is clear that the funding was allocated in a partisan way. What we want is a non-partisan funding process. My colleague opposite has been unable to answer that question.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we listen to members on the government side, it is clear from the way they talk about how perfectly cities work today that they either have never taken a bus or a subway or they have never ventured into a city.

Business of Supply

Just this weekend the United Way and McMaster University tabled a study about precarious work. It stated that roughly 50% of all workers in southern Ontario work in precarious employment. They have part-time jobs or contract jobs. They cobble a living together with a variety of different employment sources. The issue around public transit and gridlock is particularly important to this incredibly precarious group of workers.

We need stable funding and we need a plan. Today's motion talks about a plan. We want government members to take a plan seriously so that we can work through the gridlock.

I wonder if my colleague could make some suggestions as to why the Conservatives are so afraid to sit down with municipalities and work out a plan.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

I know that Toronto and other major cities in southern Ontario have the same issue as Montreal concerning transportation and quality of life. In the report, I read that 92 hours are eaten up by transportation, and that amounts to a lot of days.

Our plan is to sit down with the provinces and territories, aboriginal communities and other communities to see what needs to be done and what direction we should take.

I did not have a chance to mention this earlier, but we want reports tabled on a regular basis so that we can see where the money was invested and determine where improvements can be made.

We need to start by discussing a plan with the provinces and territories, aboriginal peoples and communities.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the NDP opposition day motion put forward by my colleague, a champion of Canadian municipalities, the member for Trinity—Spadina.

The basis for the motion today is fundamentally economic, and it is succinctly captured in the submission from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to the government on this matter last November. The introduction to that submission reads in part:

Municipal infrastructure provides the foundation on which our economy rests. Small businesses need quality roads and bridges to deliver goods and services. Workers need fast, efficient public transit to connect them with jobs. And growing companies count on high-quality community services, from libraries to hockey rinks, to attract skilled workers. Yet today, those foundations are buckling under the strain.

In these terms, support for today's motion seems pretty obvious, and so it is that there is a broad near consensus outside of this House for the motion we are discussing today. As we will hear throughout the day, the call for a long-term, predictable, accountable federal infrastructure plan in partnership with other levels of government is supported by business leaders, trade unions, economists, civil society organizations, experts of all kinds and, of course, municipal leaders.

I say “near consensus” because there are still those who seem to lie outside this consensus. They are, curiously enough, the two

federal parties, the Conservatives and Liberals, who have swapped power back and forth over the last 40-plus years, as they withdrew investment, indeed withdrew the federal government, and watched the foundations of our economy and municipalities crumble.

In seven years of government, the Conservatives have yet to even acknowledge the urban reality of the country we live in, the fact that nearly 80% of Canadians live in cities. They seem entirely incapable of imagining a Canadian economy other than resource extraction or a Canadian economy led by the necessarily social urban process of innovation. Thus, we get the dismantling of federal environmental framework to facilitate resource extraction, in place of a modern and environmentally sustainable economic strategy that sees cities as the place to research, develop, create, innovate and exploit the enormous opportunities to tackle climate change.

The Liberal Party is the same, having reduced infrastructure funding throughout the 1990s. It has never given more than lip service and pennies when real full dollars were called for. More than that, it downloaded federal fiscal challenges to other orders of government, ultimately to our cities, which is the order of government least able to maintain, much less build, infrastructure, collecting, as they do, only eight cents on the dollar in tax revenue.

We can watch the trend line of investment in infrastructure as it goes steadily down from its high of about 3% of GDP in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to bouncing along the bottom through the latest Liberal majority governments at about 1.5%. That difference represents about \$24 billion in missing annual investment in public infrastructure, according to a recent study. That same study shows that net investment in infrastructure was actually negative for two years of Liberal government, as existing public infrastructure stock depreciated faster than new development.

Now, if all else had stayed the same, that would be one thing; that would be trouble enough. However, the technological, political and economic context has been changing as well over the last 40 years. Broadly, we call it “globalization”, but the implication is that old ways of governance have to give way to new ways of governance that recognize the political and economic importance of urban regions and economies. As one observer put it, “A practical implication is that cities have become central to the study of federalism”.

Therefore, this motion takes place in the context of Canadian federal politics that is and has been for very many years out of step with the rest of the developed world in terms of its understanding and respect for the role of our cities in a global economy in generating wealth for our country. In most other developed countries and economies, governments have become major players in the financial, economic and cultural life of their cities, and it is past time for ours to do the same.

Business of Supply

•(1150)

Instead, we are left with this enormous infrastructure deficit, estimated at over \$170 billion. It is a deficit that is so obvious to every citizen of my city, the city of Toronto.

We have famed urbanist and urban economist Jane Jacobs, who could say of Toronto in 1969, “Here is the most hopeful and healthy city in North America, still unmangled, still with options”. By 2004, in her book *Dark Age Ahead*, she described the town that she had made her home as “a city in crisis; indeed, multiple crises”. However, one need not have the keen eye of Jacobs to be frustrated and concerned. As the Conservatives and Liberals swapped power back and forth over the last 40 years, the contours of these crises, to use Jacobs' term, became increasingly obvious.

For those who have not witnessed their emergence, as Jacobs did, the transition over 40-plus years has been amply and convincingly recorded in statistics and maps by University of Toronto Professor David Hulchanski and colleagues. That could take us through 40 years of growing social and spatial inequity and economic decline in a kind of tour de force of time-lapse cartography. The final image we are left with is a Toronto that has been divided into three socially, economically and spatially discrete cities within the city, with great swaths of Toronto's geography characterized by the absence of infrastructure. These are infrastructure deserts of various kinds.

We have in Toronto what the Toronto board of trade calls “a conundrum”, a city of strong economic fundamentals, but not world-leading productivity, GDP or disposable income growth. With the Toronto region providing nearly 50% of Ontario's GDP and 20% of Canada's GDP, solving this conundrum seems imperative. The board of trade itself points to infrastructure as what needs to be addressed first and foremost. It describes it as “the biggest threat to our continued growth and economic prosperity in the Toronto region and Ontario generally”.

While the lack of infrastructure, and the crumbling infrastructure generally, poses an enormous obstacle to Toronto's growth and prosperity, it is public transit that is the top priority of the board's members because of “its outsized impact on the Toronto region's global competitiveness”. This is an analysis and priority shared by many other organizations studying Toronto's economy in the global context.

As of 2006, it was estimated that the cost of congestion to the economy of the Toronto region was \$6 billion annually. That is an old figure now. However, the outlook is even more grim as Toronto continues to grow, with one of the fastest urban growth rates globally. Every year we add about 100,000 people to our city, so that within 20 years Toronto will be 50% bigger. Absent any significant action, the productivity cost of poor public transit will skyrocket to an estimated \$15 billion annually. In terms that are more easy to relate to, that means Toronto commuters, already experiencing the longest commute times in North America, can look forward to spending an extra three work weeks per year stuck in traffic.

We are the only OECD and G8 country without a national transit strategy. At our economic peril, do we continue to be so. It is well past time for the government to drop its aversion to thinking ahead

and put in place, in partnership with other levels of government, a long-term, predictable infrastructure plan. Join the consensus.

The crises that Jane Jacobs referred to are, in her terms, “the tangible consequences of tangible mistakes”. They need not be so forever. We can fix these problems and grasp the great opportunities that lie before us. To start, we should support today's motion.

•(1155)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure the federal government commits to an infrastructure funding plan on a long-term horizon. The important piece is that communities cannot keep going year by year to find out if they are going to get infrastructure dollars.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario states:

Every day, municipal infrastructure provides the foundation that allows our residents and businesses to participate effectively in the modern economy. For example, transportation infrastructure connects people to jobs, consumers to producers and enables businesses to bring their products to market, both locally and abroad. In fact, research by Statistics Canada notes that businesses save 11 cents for every dollar invested in public infrastructure. In manufacturing, a large component of Ontario's economy, costs are reduced by 22 cents for each dollar that is invested.

When we look at the infrastructure dollars, it is not just about the services that are being provided to people in those communities; it is with respect to the economy.

I will ask my colleague to speak a bit more about the important piece that is missing by the current government. Even with the economic action plan, we saw from community to community how some of them found the timelines too tight. They need more flexibility, and long-term funding would do that. Could my colleague elaborate on that a bit more?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, indeed the motion calls for long-term funding that municipalities can rely on. The investments required are so enormous and the planning horizons so long that municipalities are understandably concerned and afraid about making investments in their own infrastructure in the absence of a long-term plan and partnership.

My colleague is quite correct that this is fundamentally about economics. I have seen statistics that show that businesses benefit 17¢ on the dollar for every dollar invested in infrastructure, and of course there are multiplier effects from that. One only needs to look at the appendices to the government's own budget documents to see that investing in infrastructure pays great economic dividends for job growth in this country. Most importantly, it is about connecting workers to jobs. In a city like Toronto, that is a hugely difficult thing to do with the presence of public transit deserts.

Business of Supply

My colleague from Davenport referenced a United Way and McMaster University study talking about precarious work and the need for almost 50% of workers in southern Ontario to stitch part-time jobs together that are not next door to each other. That means workers have to get on buses and travel for two hours to a part-time job, at the end of which they get on another bus or streetcar and travel for another couple of hours. This is not good for the productivity of our city or our country.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from the Beaches on his speech. He covered a lot of issues there. However, I want to outline that the Toronto Region Board of Trade says that gridlock is now the greatest threat to economic prosperity in the region. We know there are six million people in the GTA, which is the largest urban municipality in Canada. People in this House do not generally talk about concerns about Toronto because they think everything is hunky-dory there, but we have a significant crisis, as the member has pointed out.

Could the member comment on why members opposite, who continue to talk about the mantra of jobs, growth and prosperity, may not support what this partnership that is implied in the strategy is all about?

• (1200)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I confess I do not know the answer to my colleague's question. It confounds me. The government purports to be concerned about jobs and prosperity in this country, and yet we see an obvious failure to invest in Canada's largest urban economy, with clear detrimental economic effects.

It is interesting that the board of trade and its members identify public transit as the biggest problem in Toronto. That is the opinion by way of a survey of its membership.

I suggest that the Conservatives stop using the Liberals as the bar that they need to get over because that bar is very close to the ground, if not below ground, and that they start to turn some attention to fixing the economy and the real-life concerns of Canadians.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this opposition motion today. I do not know whether I would use the word “ironic” or “humourous” to describe how, finally, after seven years, New Democrats have realized that we need infrastructure in this country. Hopefully, they will support and recognize some of the things that we have done.

The record of our government on infrastructure is very obvious and very strong. We believe that modern, world-class public infrastructure is vitally important across the country. It provides the foundation for vibrant, prosperous communities while at the same time creating jobs and strengthening our economy.

Our government has made a commitment to develop a new approach to infrastructure. We have developed an approach to infrastructure investments that is providing long-term, predictable funding for both large-scale and local priorities, the building Canada plan. Launched in 2007, a \$33 billion building Canada plan was an unprecedented federal investment in the nation's infrastructure. The building Canada plan provides funding over seven years and includes several programs and initiatives, including the building

Canada fund, the provincial-territorial base fund and the gas tax fund.

Taken together, these and other programs represent a comprehensive suite of infrastructure investments providing funding over a seven-year timeframe. This is the longest commitment that any government in recent history has made to infrastructure. The programs provide the flexibility to meet local needs while supporting national priorities.

I want to highlight how these programs are playing an important role in supporting and renewing public infrastructure across the country.

It is important to underline that when the global economic downturn in 2009 hit the Canadian economy, our government supplemented existing infrastructure funding programs by providing timely, targeted and temporary funding, such as topping up the building Canada fund communities component and launching the infrastructure stimulus fund.

The building Canada fund provides funding through a dual approach. It addresses national and regional priorities as well as community initiatives. The major infrastructure component of the fund focuses on larger strategic projects of national and regional significance that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits; the communities component supports local initiatives through funding set aside for projects in communities with populations of less than 100,000.

I want to point out that I will be splitting my time with the hon. Minister of State (Transport).

The communities component recognizes the unique infrastructure needs of Canada's smaller communities and focuses on projects that meet economic, environmental and quality-of-life objectives. Originally established at \$1 billion, the fund received a \$500 million top-up in 2009 under the economic action plan. To date, that program has funded more than 1,400 smaller-scale projects that improve water, waste water, public transit, local roads and other types of community infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I know that many of those projects were in your riding, my riding and the ridings of many other members in the House. The NDP decided to abandon smaller communities by not supporting that government action.

While the major infrastructure component of the building Canada fund targets larger-scale projects, these projects can be found in both big cities and small communities. They are projects that not only benefit the communities in which they are located but have farther-reaching benefits that are of regional and national importance. Through this fund we are seeing the concrete and lasting results of strategic investments in water and waste water treatment. We are supporting the movement of people and goods through investments in public transit and in our national transportation system.

Business of Supply

For example, residents in Nipigon, Ontario, recently celebrated the completion of upgrades to their waste water treatment centre. These upgrades mean an improvement in the quality of water released into Nipigon Bay on Lake Superior, supporting the health of local residents and helping to reduce pollution in an environmentally sensitive area. This is another example of how we should care about Canada, and if New Democrats care about Canada, they should have supported that action plan.

We are contributing funding toward the completion of ring roads around Calgary and Edmonton. These ring roads will improve traffic flows, lower collision rates and streamline shipping routes in and around the two cities. Reducing traffic does not seem to be a priority of the NDP.

•(1205)

In Pictou County, Nova Scotia, residents are taking advantage of opportunities to get fit and stay active thanks to the recent completion of the Pictou Country Wellness Centre.

Although the building Canada fund was established for a seven-year period, funding will continue to flow beyond 2014 as construction continues on projects.

I want to talk a bit about the provincial-territorial base fund. Through this fund, provinces and territories receive predictable, stable, flexible funding geared toward their priorities. The funding is streamlined, with simplified administrative requirements. Through the fund, each province and territory was allocated a total of \$175 million, receiving \$25 million each year over the seven years of the program. Under the economic action plan, jurisdictions were given the additional flexibility of accelerated access to the funding in support of economic recovery.

Flexibility is not a word in the NDP dictionary, so as a dogmatic party, it also voted against this initiative.

The provincial-territorial base fund is supporting upgrades to Chilliwack's east dike that will increase flood protection to more than 40,000 people residing in the flood plain. These upgrades will help increase protection for critical infrastructure such as rail lines, the Trans-Canada Highway, oil and gas infrastructure, utilities, hospital and care facilities and a waste water treatment plant. The funding is also supporting the widening and paving of the Trans-Labrador Highway between Red Bay and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The Trans-Labrador Highway is the region's primary public road, crossing some of northeastern Canada's most remote terrain. These are significant highway improvements that will create numerous local jobs, drive economic growth and strengthen the communities there.

Just last Friday, together with the Government of Alberta, we marked the completion of 12 important highway infrastructure initiatives that are also supporting economic growth across that province. Communities across Alberta are benefiting from safer roads and improved traffic flow, which is promoting growth, job creation and economic prosperity.

To meet the unique needs and circumstances in the small communities of the three northern territories, the government combined the building Canada fund allocation in the territories with its P-T base fund allocations. The combined funding is delivered

under the terms and conditions of the P-T base fund, which gives the territories considerable flexibility in addressing their infrastructure needs.

In Nunavut, Kugluktuk residents are benefiting from a new two-storey hamlet office. The building brings all hamlet employees together under one roof to increase productivity, improve service to the public and reduce operating costs. This hamlet office will have a positive impact on local residents and businesses for years to come.

Next is the gas tax fund. This is something that I and many others in the House lobbied for while we were in municipal politics. We always felt that it should come back. Even though the NDP voted against it twice, the gas tax fund allocation is now permanent, providing \$2 billion per year in predictable and long-term infrastructure funding to Canada's cities and towns for local priorities. The program provides considerable flexibility. The funds do not have to be matched, they can be banked for future years and they do not require upfront application processes for individual projects. Through the gas tax fund we are providing provinces, territories and municipalities with stable, long-term funding geared toward their priorities. The funding is streamlined and flexible, with simplified administrative requirements.

Our government has a proven track record of providing infrastructure investments that are tailored and targeted to meet specific infrastructure needs. We are providing targeted investments that focus on both community and large-scale infrastructure, supporting priorities such as clean drinking water and transportation infrastructure.

Our government continues to deliver infrastructure funding that is supporting strong communities and strengthening our economy. The last thing the government would do is implement a huge, costly, job-losing carbon tax.

•(1210)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that the member actually believes his party's rhetoric with respect to whether the NDP support infrastructure or not. He knows full well that in 2005, under pressure by the NDP, the gas tax fund set a new bar with predictable funding for five years.

Let us not forget that his government made a promise in 2011 with respect to working with the provinces, territories, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other stakeholders. That promise is still unfulfilled. Will his government commit to doing that?

Business of Supply

As well, I have a letter from the Township of Tehkummah, which I am sure the member is well aware is on Manitoulin Island. It is having a problem with low water levels in the channel of South Baymouth. The letter speaks to the importance of the economy for those communities without the *Chi-Cheemaun*. It states that the immediate participation of the federal government is required to ensure the channel is dredged for safe passage of the *Chi-Cheemaun* ferry to ensure the continued economic viability of the entire Manitoulin Island.

Will the member advocate for that?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, some of the comments by the hon. member from across the way highlight how the NDP members like to live in the past. I think she recollects a dream that she had back in 2005 about their involvement in a coalition with another party. Let us get with the future here. The infrastructure provided over the last seven years that I pointed out is unprecedented in Canadian history.

She talked about the *Chi-Cheemaun*, a ferry that connects the north end of my riding with the south end of her riding. I am quite familiar with it. Since I live on Georgian Bay, I know what the depths of the waters are. All I can say is that a good member of Parliament would see to it that her harbour was dredged up there.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, who sits right behind me, for a great speech on what the government has accomplished and what we have done.

On behalf of Alberta, we can thank this government for those highway projects that were named last week. I know a number of the highways are going into my constituency, some of them into the community of Camrose. It is all very positive spending.

The member also talked about the gas tax rebate. That was another issue that our municipalities brought to members of Parliament; they asked if they could have it a little earlier and as long-term funding so that they could know it would be stable. This government responded to that request.

Also, as a member of Parliament I was able to get out and talk to councillors this past week, as I am sure my colleague did. They thanked me for the infrastructure money, money they had never received in the past but are receiving now from this government.

Would my colleague like to share with the House some examples from his riding of the stable, long-term infrastructure funding that we have provided for projects with long-term ramifications?

• (1215)

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I know my good friend and colleague quite well. The people of Crowfoot are lucky that they have a very hard-working MP. I think he is the second-hardest-working in the country, after the MP for my riding, of course.

With respect to some of those projects, I have been very fortunate to get a number of projects that meant a lot to my riding, and not just for the municipalities that they are based in, but for the region. Two examples are Owen Sound and Hanover, at the south and north ends of my riding, which both built fantastic structures. The City of Owen Sound got money for the expansion of their waste water infrastructure. It was one of the last big municipalities on Georgian

Bay where raw sewage would overflow the odd time during severe rainstorms and the like. We are working to help the City of Owen Sound and doing other projects to make sure that does not happen any more.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to highlight the action our government has taken to support Canadian communities and to create jobs. Our government has played an important role in strengthening Canadian communities. It helped drive economic development well before 2009 when the world's economy took a turn for the worse.

Because of our quick and decisive action, today Canada boasts the strongest rate of employment growth among the G7 countries. The timely support of the Canadian action plan and Canada's solid economic fundamentals have enabled our country and our economy to weather a period of continuing global uncertainty. Our government will continue to focus on creating jobs and growth for Canadians across our great nation.

Thanks in part to our strategic community and economic development programs, we have seen the creation of 900,000 net new jobs since the end of the recession. To continue to encourage economic growth as part of economic action plan 2012, our government announced the creation of the community infrastructure improvement fund, commonly known as CIIF.

CIIF builds on our commitment to further modernize Canada's infrastructure by committing \$150 million over two years to support repairs and improvements to existing community facilities. The program supports the beating hearts of Canadian communities, such as community centres, libraries, parks, museums and sports fields, from coast to coast to coast. They are the places where families, friends and neighbours gather.

It is also an important part of our plan to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians right across the country. In Saskatchewan, my colleague, the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification, announced significant funding for the Kenaston swimming pool. That was made possible thanks to funding from this federal government.

In total, the minister announced \$46 million in funding across western Canada. I am delighted to see that the funding has met with the same enthusiasm right across the country. We are going to be working on approximately 300 projects that have already been announced throughout the west.

As of today, in British Columbia, we have already announced 80 of these projects. They are under way and are benefiting Canadians across the province. For example, Castlegar and District Public Library will have improved energy efficiency through the replacement of the library's heating, ventilation and air conditioning system. In addition, our government has helped the district of North Vancouver rehabilitate Maplewood Farm to increase visitor use and to improve accessibility. Since opening in 1975, Maplewood Farm has become a hub of community activity and is one of North Vancouver District's most popular visitor attractions. It receives over 90,000 visitors per year.

Business of Supply

In Alberta, nearly 90 projects are helping to revitalize key community infrastructure. For example, upgrades to the Walsh and District Community Hall will improve the accessibility of the kitchen for mobility impaired individuals. The renovations will ensure that members of the community can easily and affordably access the hall.

Federal funding under CIIF is also supporting the expansion of soccer turf at Calgary's Foothills indoor soccer centre as well as the installation of protective boards and netting.

In Saskatchewan, there are over 60 jobs, including extensive renovations to the Learning Disabilities Association of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. In addition to mechanical and electrical upgrades, clients and staff will have a new kitchen, automatic doors to the foyer and three new washrooms that meet accessibility standards.

• (1220)

In the village of Paradise Hill, our government is supporting upgrades that will enhance public safety. Renovations to the arena include the installation of new posts and tempered safety glass on the boards surrounding the ice surface.

In Manitoba, my home province, over 70 projects have already been announced. A CIIF investment is helping the Royal Canadian Legion Charleswood Branch in Winnipeg become more energy efficient by replacing its roof, two rooftop heating and air conditioning units, and the lighting system.

We have also invested in the Army Navy and Air Force Veterans facility to improve its parking lot. We are investing in the St. James Civic Centre Pool to help with renovations. We have provided money for the Assiniboia Curling Club and the Charleswood Curling Club. These are all community-run organizations that would not have been able to make the changes necessary if it were not for the grants from the federal government.

While we are on Manitoba, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Plessis underpass. The federal government, through the building Canada fund, has put in a substantial amount of money, fulfilling a local campaign promise to make transit much better for the people of the Elmwood—Transcona area. I would like to thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for all his hard work on that project.

I could go on and on. There has been \$146 million for recreational infrastructure projects in the four western provinces.

Over the last seven years, \$33 billion has been invested in the building Canada fund, which was introduced in 2007 and was Canada first long-term infrastructure plan. It will continue to deliver results until 2014 and beyond.

As my colleague mentioned, we made the gas tax permanent. We have ensured that projects can be accelerated. We have cut down on red tape. We have done many things to ensure that the quality of life of Canadians is improved through infrastructure programs.

RInC, the recreational infrastructure Canada program, members will recall, the communities component, invested \$500 million in recreational facilities across Canada over two years. This was a temporary economic stimulus that helped create jobs while renew-

ing, upgrading and expanding recreational infrastructure in Canadian communities. It was hugely well received, as were the other portions of the building Canada fund and the other infrastructure programs this government brought forward. We brought them forward at a time when Canada needed them. What we have done has been well received. People appreciate it. Lives are better. The NDP voted against it all.

• (1225)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member's speech and noted a lot of different projects here and there. It is little a bit of what Jeffrey Simpson called, in *The Globe and Mail*, slice-and-dice Conservative style, meaning that we give money here and here and there.

We are asking whether the government has a long-term strategic plan for infrastructure, not a slice-and-dice approach. Does it have a long-term infrastructure plan that would address the infrastructure deficit we have in Canada? I do not mean a short-term plan until 2015 and the next election. I mean beyond that, for the next 10 to 20 years. That is what the municipalities are asking for. They are asking for strong financing, predictable financing and a long-term strategy. That is what I would like to ask the member.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, there is only one government that has demonstrated an ability to implement a long-term infrastructure plan, and that is this government. We had a \$33-billion plan at a time when things were very scary in the world economy. Things still are fragile in the world economy.

This member wants to project way out into the distant future. That is irresponsible. We need to be cognizant of changes in world dynamics, such as if, heaven forbid, things go south in Europe as a result of the Italian election. There is a lot of uncertainty in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia. The world is not a certain place. We are dealing with it, and we are creating economic growth in spite of all these difficulties.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the minister.

One of the things I challenge members to give some thought to is the issue of the deficit in infrastructure. It is well into the billions of dollars. The infrastructure we are talking about is roads and bridges, highways and many of our municipalities' sewer lines and things of that nature. There seems to be a never-ending demand for resources for that type of infrastructure.

Does the minister believe that municipalities have the fiscal capability to deal with the demands of today and tomorrow with respect to making the types of repairs that are critically important for municipal infrastructure?

Business of Supply

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. As the member knows, municipalities are creatures of the provinces. They vary in size dramatically, from Toronto to Portage la Prairie. Different size cities and communities have different capacities as far as being able to apply for programs and to receive the funding required. That is a concern.

There also needs to be responsibility at the provincial level. The member and I are both from the same province. We can think of at least one transportation line that could probably be better placed and the money better used.

It is incumbent on all of us to make wise infrastructure choices and to be extra careful with taxpayers' money.

• (1230)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his comments.

It is not just a question of providing stable, predictable funding for municipalities, which we have done through our building Canada fund and the gas tax rebate. It is also about getting out of the way of municipalities and reducing the cost of red tape burdens. One of the most important things I hear, representing counties in the rural area of Alberta, is about the changes that needed to be made to the Navigable Waters Protection Act to get rid of some of those burdens that cost our municipalities millions of dollars that they could be spending on valuable infrastructure rather than on red tape. Can the minister comment on that?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I met with the Alberta association of municipalities, the Saskatchewan association of municipalities, the Ontario association of municipalities, the Manitoba association of municipalities and on and on. By far, the amendments we have made to the Navigable Waters Protection Act have been hugely popular. People appreciate it. We do not have the red tape, but we still have the same environmental protection. It has been a huge success. I would like to thank the member for bringing it to the floor. It has been a stellar, uber-successful program.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, I noticed there is a great interest today in participating in the period allocated for questions and comments, as is normally the case with most speakers. We only have five minutes for these questions and comments and with a greater amount of interest in participating, I will ask members and those who respond to questions to keep their comments as concise as possible so more members will have the opportunity to participate.

[Translation]

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Chambly—Borduas.

I am pleased to rise in the House to support the motion seeking a long-term, predictable and accountable federal infrastructure plan in partnership with the provincial and municipal governments as well as first nations communities.

I moved a similar motion in the fall of 2011. I urged the government to act in a strategic and thoughtful manner to address the pressing needs of Canadian municipalities and communities.

To begin, I would like to focus on my riding, LaSalle—Émard, which is part of greater Montreal. Montreal was booming in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Highways, government buildings and water filtration and treatment plants were being built. Unfortunately, over the years, this infrastructure has been neglected either because no money has been invested in sporadic maintenance or because of increased use. Our cities are based on outdated models, which unfortunately means that people need cars, even today. We still build our cities that way. People living in the suburbs are further and further away from their workplace and from services that should be close by.

That is why it is absolutely crucial that we have a long-term federal infrastructure plan. This plan must be innovative and make our cities and towns places where active transportation is possible and safe. It must also ensure efficient, affordable and environmentally friendly public transit to maximize the number of trips and minimize the number of vehicles. Incidentally, I would like to know what the government's plan is for public transit infrastructure. How will this be coordinated with transit in the greater Montreal area? I think this illustrates why we need a national public transit strategy, as proposed by the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

In its most recent report on the top 10 barriers to competitiveness, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce laments inadequate public infrastructure planning and criticizes the fact that government commitments to infrastructure have been intermittent and the criteria changeable. In a speech given on February 12, 2013, the hon. Perrin Beatty, president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, had this to say:

• (1235)

[English]

One essential element for Canada's long-term economic growth and prosperity is high-quality, modern public infrastructure....How Canada renews and invests in its aging infrastructure will help determine our quality of life. But it will also directly serve the competitiveness of our businesses.

Leadership entails pursuing a vision through innovative and forward thinking in order to achieve progress and ultimately success. Making some tough but necessary choices along the way is not easy but it is necessary. Governing requires the same attributes and we cannot focus exclusively on short term temporary solutions for the sake of pointing to progress and claiming victory at glitzy public announcements.

[Translation]

For instance, we saw this last week, when we were working in our constituencies. That is why we need a predictable, accountable and long-term infrastructure strategy.

Traffic congestion in the greater Montreal area is very costly in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and time. According to a report published in *La Presse* last fall, Montreal ranks fourth out of the 26 major cities in North America with the worst traffic congestion. Also according to that report, trips in the Montreal area now take 40 minutes longer by car than they should during peak periods.

Business of Supply

According to the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, the overall annual cost of congestion in the metropolitan area alone was over \$1.4 billion, or 1% of GDP, in 2008. The report added that a 3% increase in the public transit mode share would cut these costs by \$63.8 million per year.

The report continues:

The development of efficient means of transportation generates economic benefits that contribute significantly to productivity and wealth creation.

We are talking about public transit.

Again quoting the report:

Public transit benefits include more purchasing power for households, easy mobility, reduced congestion costs and increased property values in the area.

During visits to businesses and institutions in my riding, LaSalle—Émard, I have met business leaders who have lost employees who were having difficulties getting to work because of the congested roads. Some employees have to spend up to three hours a day on public transit to get to work in my riding. The many construction projects that are under way and will resume in the spring will not help matters in the short term. For example, the Mercier Bridge, which spans the river from LaSalle to the south shore, was closed in the southbound direction all weekend and will be closed again this coming weekend.

This is an urgent situation. If ever there was a time for all three levels of government to show that they can work actively together for the well-being of Canada's communities, it is now. We need a strategic, long-term plan to truly ensure that the infrastructure that we are building or rejuvenating today meets 21st century requirements with regard to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and will be there for future generations.

Just as the economic boom of the golden years from 1945 to 1975 was made possible by the infrastructure built at that time, with a great deal of support from the federal public works department, Canada was built in this way. Hence, we need to leave a legacy of infrastructure that will enable sustainable development in the economy that future generations will build. This is a golden opportunity for Canada to show its know-how and its ability to face challenges through innovation.

The motion calls for a predictable infrastructure plan to enable well-defined, strategic planning to address communities' priorities. We absolutely must ensure that there is predictable, long-term funding.

With the building Canada fund set to expire in 2014, Canadian municipalities need financial help today in order not to miss this opportunity. Canada's job growth and economic productivity depend on federal funding, since 11,000 jobs are created for every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure. Canada cannot afford to ignore this opportunity for growth.

In closing, need I remind hon. members that our current infrastructure contributed to Canada's economic growth?

● (1240)

The federal infrastructure plan proposed today has to be a predictable, accountable and long-term plan. This is an investment in

the future, which will help build greener, more prosperous communities where no one is left behind.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would like to remind hon. members to keep their questions and comments brief and to the point so that more members have the opportunity to participate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about the need for more money for municipalities. In looking at facts, according to Statistics Canada, in 2001 local government revenue was \$87.3 billion. In 2011, 10 years later, local government revenue was \$149 billion. That is a 71% increase in revenue for municipalities over a decade. In exactly the same period of time there was a 30% increase in the combined inflation and population growth.

If financial resources were the solution to the problem, why is the member across the way voted against them in the past, yet proposes them for the future?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, this motion calls for predictable funding. If we look at what the federal government has accomplished, we see that the funding is still the same. We need predictable funding to resolve the serious problem of Canada's current infrastructure deficit.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The translation is not functioning.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is it working now?

Unfortunately, interpretation was not available when you gave your answer. I am therefore granting you more time so that you can answer the question again.

● (1245)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, in fact, all we are asking for is predictable, long-term funding. We want a strategic plan that will make it possible to eliminate Canada's infrastructure deficit. This is a very positive thing.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the hon. member for her speech. The Conservative member's question does not take into account the reality of the municipalities. Our cities, towns and municipalities receive only 8% of all the tax revenue collected by all levels of government. Eight percent is not enough to meet the major challenge of billions of dollars worth of infrastructure deficit.

Does the hon. member have anything to say about the other points raised by the member opposite?

Business of Supply

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her astute comments and her question. Over the years, for several decades, the federal government has shirked many of its responsibilities, such as being an active partner on infrastructure issues. Over the years, the government has passed off these responsibilities and has not provided for any long-term strategic planning or predictable funding.

The motion addresses this issue and calls on the government to think seriously about reducing the infrastructure deficit in a meaningful way and in partnership with the provinces and communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my city of Toronto, the Conference Board of Canada has pegged the loss in business output, in GDP, at \$6 billion due to gridlock. It seems we need a plan.

Why does my hon. colleague think the government would block a motion like this that really calls for the government to sit down with major stakeholders, with municipalities, with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and work out a plan? This is the prudent thing to do. I would like her to respond to this question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments on the gridlock problem and how it costs the Canadian economy.

We must work with the different levels of government to develop a long-term plan that will help Canada move forward. We must target the competitiveness issues caused by the deficit we have with our aging infrastructure. We must also come up with a plan to make commuting easier. Our country is very large and we seem to forget to put our transportation capabilities and expertise to good use.

We must work together to overcome these challenges. We must also look at the issues of climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to speak to the motion of my colleague from Trinity—Spadina concerning infrastructure and the forthcoming budget. Every member of the House will have something to say because it is one of the few issues that demonstrates local and regional impacts in the field.

I am going to use this opportunity to discuss the problems being experienced in my riding, which have led me to support this motion. I am, moreover, very pleased with our efforts as a political party to ensure predictable and long-term infrastructure funding that is viable and stable.

First of all, people often say that transport is a provincial jurisdiction or that the NDP has its priorities wrong. In fact, what we are asking for in the House today as duly elected representatives was suggested by people who really know what they are talking about because they are experts in the field. I am talking about our elected municipal officials, including mayors, chambers of commerce and the federations under which they operate. I am a member of two chambers of commerce in my area. I also meet regularly with 12 mayors from my riding.

I would like to share a few of their concerns. First of all, a loss in productivity can have a major impact on a region's economic viability. One example that comes to mind is from the keynote address given by the Mayor of Chambly, Denis Lavoie, at a luncheon held at the Chambre de commerce et d'industrie du bassin de Chambly. He remarked that an effective public transit system is important because it encourages local businesses and producers to remain in the region because they can run successful operations. If people are unable to get around efficiently and quickly, they will want to move elsewhere. If they do, then companies and businesses will follow.

It is therefore not only in our interest as elected representatives to encourage people to move to our region, and to provide services for them, but also in the interest of the chamber of commerce, because they will increase their membership and build a strong local economy.

Loss of productivity and public transit are very important subjects. We have only to look at suburban municipalities in the greater Montreal area, in particular those in the CMM, which includes most of the municipalities in my riding as well. They are equally important in the GTA, the Greater Toronto Area, and also in suburban municipalities surrounding Vancouver, Winnipeg and all the major cities of Canada. I would rather not comment too much on these regions, and focus instead on my own region.

As it happens, my region is currently experiencing urban sprawl, a topic I raise frequently in the House. People are leaving the downtown core to live in suburbs, start a family and live in a neighbourhood that is perhaps more peaceful, with all due respect to my big-city colleagues. There are other factors to be considered as well, like population growth in the regions.

I am relatively young, but I can remember when some of the more rural municipalities in my riding were much less urban than they are now. They have become suburban municipalities. The change is remarkable. In Beloeil, for example, there is development along Highway 20. Many of our Quebec companies, like Rona, are locating stores there for the local residents.

I mentioned urban sprawl because the people who live there frequently work downtown. In my case, the people work in Montreal. People who commute have great expectations about the infrastructure they would like to have.

● (1250)

However, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities tends unfortunately to always want to shift responsibility back to the provinces and municipalities, thereby increasing pressure on provincial and municipal elected representatives who come to see us for help.

Ultimately, teamwork is required if we are to provide better results for the citizens we represent. To be sure, we need to respect areas of provincial jurisdiction. Public transit is one example. We are not about to tell the provinces what to do or how to do it. However, the federal government has an important responsibility with respect to funding programs. It must also establish certain standards for these areas of jurisdiction.

Business of Supply

I would like now to return to the topic of urban sprawl. It is very important in terms of highways and public transit, and sprawl also affects bridges like the Champlain Bridge. We naturally heard a great deal of talk during the election and again today. It is an issue that is very problematic for us, the people of the south shore and Montérégie, including my constituents who live in Chambly, Richelieu, Saint-Mathias-sur-Richelieu, Carignan and Marieville, and who travel along highway 30 or highway 10 to the Champlain Bridge. Keeping this bridge viable, particularly in view of the public transit strategy that will be adopted, is essential for people who need to commute.

It is essential for all the usual reasons, such as the fact that public transit is good for the environment and all that, but urban sprawl is moving people farther away from downtown cores. The people of Marieville, for example, need to travel along highway 10 and then cross the Champlain Bridge to work in Montreal. They have a 35 to 40 minute commute when there is no traffic, but this can of course be much longer if traffic is heavy. And the traffic is increasing steadily because of population growth. Building a new bridge would be a good way to address not only these problems, but also to come up with a plan that would be viable over the long term.

At the moment, the government is providing very few details or information about this matter, except for what the minister said in the House yesterday, "If there are no tolls, there will be no bridge". We are not given any more details other than the people of the south shore will have to pay tolls.

My colleague from Brossard—La Prairie recently made a request for a more detailed report about the financial planning and the projects that will be undertaken by the federal government, in collaboration with the provincial government, of course. We are still waiting for that information, which is very important to the people in our ridings.

Let us come back to another subject concerning our motion. It also talks about predictable, long-term funding. That is very important. It is something we often hear from the mayors of municipalities in my riding. The problem is not limited to infrastructure; it is the same everywhere. Our community organizations tell us the same thing, but that is unfortunately another subject. In any event, the problem of unpredictable, short-term funding makes it very difficult to make long-term commitments, and consequently to put plans in place that make sense in the long term.

I put myself in the shoes of a municipal representative. It is a bit difficult when residents come to see me to ask me to do something about our roads, our highways, our bridges, and so on. As a municipal representative, the very little information I have about funding and where it comes from makes the job rather difficult. That is a reminder of why these collaborative efforts are important.

I am being told that my speaking time is up. That is unfortunate, because I could talk about this longer and offer more examples of what we see in our ridings.

I will conclude by saying that we could talk more about the Internet, for example, and the digital infrastructure that really has to be put in place. That is very important for us, on the outskirts of the

city. Perhaps I will have an opportunity to say more about that when I answer questions and comments.

It will certainly be clear from what I have said that this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are a lot of problems in our ridings to do with these issues. That is why I am very pleased to see the work done by my colleagues from Trinity—Spadina and Trois-Rivières. I am very pleased to support this motion, and hope to see a New Democrat government take office in 2015.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way was talking about the Champlain Bridge and about the need for that type of infrastructure spending. Quite honestly, we have stepped up to the plate on that, and he voted against it.

I find it unfortunate that across the way they voted against the \$33 billion we put out in the build Canada fund. They did not support the gas transfer or the GST rebate of \$3 billion a year. That is funding that goes directly to the municipalities. It is not all about dollars, as my colleague mentioned about the excess in revenue that has gone out in comparison to the expenses over the last 10 years. That is significant.

However, what is really important is that through our budget and the navigable waterways, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities came alongside and supported us. Why? It was because we talked to them. Would the member stand up now and say this was good in the budget, even though they stood up and voted against it?

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which covers several points.

I will try to address each of those points briefly. On the first point, we voted against it because, when you have an omnibus bill, it is hard to say that we support one aspect and not another, particularly when the government refuses to divide its omnibus bills into various parts. However, the Conservatives were able to use their majority to put those measures in place, but the mayors in our ridings tell us that this is not working and that something else is needed.

The member also said this was not all about dollars. We agree with him. That is why I pointed out that we were not just talking about amounts of money here, but also about stable, predictable, long-term funding. Elected municipal members often request this because it enables them to plan and make good use of the money the government gives them.

Lastly, the member mentioned navigable waters. I believe the debate on that matter was quite clear. He mentioned the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. However, it supports our motion because we are on the right track.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is fair to say that the Liberal Party, in supporting this motion, has been consistent over the years. One could talk about Pierre Trudeau and the investments in infrastructure that led to the development of things such as The Forks development, the Portage Place development and many roads—the Chrétien government's investment in infrastructure. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars in which we have recognized, not only in the past but also today, that the federal government has a leading role to play in infrastructure and in building the infrastructure of our nation. That means working with our cities.

When we talk about this infrastructure, the financial commitment is absolutely essential, but we need different levels of government recognizing what Canadians know is important, which is our infrastructure, and we need to have long-term commitment from the different levels of government, including Ottawa, the provinces and the cities, in working together so that Canadians have first-class infrastructure. Would the member not agree that such consultation is very important?

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I do agree with him that good cooperation and a show of leadership are essential in this matter because transport and infrastructure involve a lot of shared jurisdictions.

My colleague also mentioned past governments. I will respond to him by saying that the Champlain Bridge, to name one example, was not built yesterday. The Conservatives have been in power since 2006, but some work could have been done before that to avoid an infrastructure deficit such as the one we now have. We could have hoped for a little more work in that area.

However, we are pleased with the Liberals' support, and I agree on the points he has raised.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague about the situation in rural areas. I will give him some examples from my riding, but I know that he also has rural areas in his riding.

In my riding, a municipality called La Reine will have to repair about 10 bridges over the next few years. This municipality has about 400 people, 200 of whom pay taxes. In addition, the people of Angliers have not had drinking water for three years.

Are these situations acceptable? How could a long-term plan help rural communities like some of the ones he represents?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I am glad that she brought up rural areas, because I live in a funny riding that serves as a kind of bridge between the big city and the rural region.

My riding has a few rural areas, but there are not as many as in my colleague's riding. I think I am pretty familiar with my colleague's riding, but I would not presume to speak to her situation. She is right, though, that we must unite our regions. Making it easier to travel from region to region would be good for everyone, not just for the people who have to commute, but also for producers.

A few weeks ago we were discussing a railway bill about the need to have proper contracts between CN and the people shipping our local products. This kind of issue is exactly why today's motion is so important.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to address my hon. colleague's motion about infrastructure. Quite frankly, this motion is too little, too late.

I appreciate the concern of my colleague on the matter. However, if the NDP really cared about the state of the infrastructure in Canada, its members would have voted for the numerous initiatives to help the provinces, territories and municipalities. They should have supported our \$33 billion building Canada fund in 2007. They did not. They should have voted for the thousands of economic action plan infrastructure projects across Canada in 2009. They did not. They should have voted for the increase of the gas tax fund transfer payments. They did not. They should have voted, not once but twice, for the legislation making the gas tax fund permanent. Not once but twice, they voted against it.

For seven years, the New Democrats voted against every one of our infrastructure initiatives. Now they are asking to do what we have already done. They are asking to do something they do not believe in. They have repeatedly voted down our entire proposal to support infrastructure spending, while Canadians know that our Conservative government has delivered big for them over the last seven years.

That being said, building on the comments already made by my hon. colleagues, I would like to focus on three key issues: first, the significant value that P3 generates; second, what our government is doing to move the P3 agenda forward; and third, some of the key successes we have achieved so far.

Before I talk about infrastructure, I would inform my colleagues that strengthening Canada's economic and fiscal health has been the top priority of our government for the last seven years.

With an uncertain global economy, we remain focused on ensuring Canada offers the right environment to attract the business investment necessary to create more and better paying jobs, thereby improving the living standards of all Canadians. We have a strong economic record, one that Canadians can look at to trust as we once again face economic headwinds emanating from abroad.

Contrary to what the official opposition members may believe, our economic policies to date, epitomized by Canada's economic action plan, have worked and placed Canada on the right track. They have provided Canada with a competitive advantage today on which we can capitalize to ensure our prosperity for tomorrow.

Business of Supply

The facts speak for themselves. For instance, Canada has more than recovered both all of the output and all of the jobs lost during the recession. Since July 2009, employment has increased by 900,000 jobs and is more than 470,000 jobs above the pre-recession peak, the strongest job growth among G7 countries over the recovery. Real GDP is significantly above pre-recession levels, and it is also the best performance in the G7.

In short, Canada has weathered the global economic storm well, and the world has noticed.

While it is gratifying to highlight Canada's economic strengths, we all know we cannot afford to be complacent. Today's advantage will not carry into tomorrow simply by sheer luck or good intentions. This is especially true in an all-too-volatile global economy. Although coming from beyond our borders, a number of external threats could have severe consequences for the Canadian economy. Rest assured that our government is cognizant of these challenges and will remain focused and disciplined on the things we can control.

For example, we continue to control the growth in government spending by implementing the savings measures identified in economic action plan 2012. We continue to implement the commitments made in economic action plan 2012 to encourage jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

That brings me to the key point, the importance of P3s for infrastructure projects.

Canadians count on good, reliable and lasting infrastructure. It is important to our quality of life and the strength of our communities. Today, in this uncertain economic environment, we must also view infrastructure through another lens: its contribution to economic growth and improved competitiveness.

• (1310)

During the global economic recession, our government responded with an unprecedented action plan that provided federal funding to help build much needed infrastructure in cities, towns and villages across the country. I stress that this was done in partnership with other levels of government. We may sometimes hold different viewpoints, but there are fundamental priorities on which we can all agree. The importance of infrastructure investment is one of these.

Since 2006, our government has significantly increased its direct support for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure. We have done so as a result of two key initiatives: Canada's seven year infrastructure plan, launched in 2007; the building Canada plan and infrastructure measures found in the 2009 economic action plan.

These include: \$8.8 billion under the building Canada fund, of which an estimated \$5 billion will continue to flow this year and over future years to municipalities, provinces and territories to reflect project timelines; and predictable long-term funding for municipalities under the gas tax fund and the goods and services tax rebate for municipalities. Our government has made a \$2 billion annual allocation under the gas tax fund, a permanently legislated measure municipalities can count on year in and year out.

It also includes investments to strengthen the trade related infrastructure through the gateways and border crossings fund and the Asia-Pacific gateway and corridor initiative.

In total, based on the most recent reports received, more than 30,000 projects have been completed with support from Canada's economic action plan since January 2009, creating tens of thousands of jobs in communities across Canada at a time when they were most needed.

Our government's infrastructure plan is comprehensive and brings our partners on board, including the private sector, for an even greater infrastructure impact.

Of all the components of our plan, the focus on P3s is what I would like to speak to in greater detail in the time allocated to me today.

Governments throughout the world have been increasingly turning toward P3s to deliver much-needed public infrastructure investments. Public investments in infrastructure have grown significantly, but we need creativity and vision when it comes to financing, delivering and maintaining infrastructure.

P3s can and should be used when they make sense, which is when they provide better value for taxpayer money than traditional procurement can. This happens through sharing risk with the private sector, such as design, construction, operating and maintenance.

Through P3s, governments can access private sector expertise, technology and capital to build public infrastructure faster and at a lower cost to the taxpayer. It was an approach we encouraged in the beginning of our mandate when in 2006 the government introduced "Advantage Canada", a strategic long-term economic plan designed to improve our country's economic prosperity into the future. A key element of it was a greater use of P3s in Canadian infrastructure projects.

In 2008 our government announced the creation of PPP Canada to deliver \$1.2 billion P3 funding, one important component of the building Canada plan. PPP Canada became operational in 2009. Four years later, the corporation is making a difference in the Canadian P3 industry.

PPP Canada works with provincial and territorial governments, municipalities and first nations to promote the increased adoption of public-private partnerships in infrastructure procurement.

Business of Supply

As someone who is a strong supporter of the benefits of P3, it is heartening to know that I have many examples to choose from. For example, in the last year alone, PPP Canada has been acting as an adviser to Transport Canada on both the new bridge in Montreal, over the St. Lawrence, and the Detroit River international crossing, two of the largest potential P3 projects under construction in Canada.

The new Detroit bridge will attract investments and business opportunities to boost local and national economies and will result in much-needed jobs for Ontario and Michigan communities. The new crossing will increase border capacity to handle future trade and travel growth and will be built with the security of both our countries in mind. With the co-operation of the Michigan government and with the help of PPP Canada, we will get this important project built.

• (1315)

PPP Canada has also successfully launched four annual rounds calling for applications to the P3 Canada fund from provinces, territories, municipalities and first nations. Their outreach and awareness strategy combined with their expert advice has resulted in the announcement of 14 P3 projects across Canada, totalling close to \$1.9 billion in eligible construction costs alone.

Through these interactions and its work with federal departments and agencies, PPP Canada is gaining hands-on experience and has developed the knowledge and expertise to provide high-quality advice to its clients at all levels of government. In addition, PPP Canada has created a suite of tools and products aimed at sharing this knowledge with other organizations considering the P3 option.

In budget 2011 our government went further, instituting a requirement that federal departments evaluate the potential for using a P3 to deliver large federal capital projects. As a result, all federal infrastructure projects creating an asset with a lifespan of at least 20 years and having a capital cost of \$100 million or more must be assessed to determine whether a P3 may be a suitable procurement option.

Should the assessment conclude that there is P3 potential, the procurement department is required to develop a P3 proposal among possible procurement options. Departments are also encouraged to explore the potential of P3 approaches for other types of projects and procurements of services.

All of these initiatives will mean getting the P3 approach considered more often for more projects across the country.

That brings me to my final point: some of the highlights of the continuing success of the P3s.

Recent projects supported by P3 Canada funding include: the construction of a transit facility and a permanent snow storage decontamination facility in the city of Saskatoon; the Iqaluit international airport improvement project, which will improve existing infrastructure and build a new airport terminal building; a new train maintenance facility for Lachine, Quebec that will provide a long-term solution to public transit development in the greater Montreal area; the construction of the North Saskatchewan River crossing in Alberta to alleviate traffic congestion; and the construction of a new organic biofuels facility in the city of Surrey, B.C.

With projects such as these, it is no secret that Canada has become a global leader in P3s. While still new for some Canadian provinces, territories and municipalities, Canada can and should celebrate this success.

Federal departments and agencies, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Export Development Canada and the Canadian Commercial Corporation, along with PPP Canada and the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships, are sharing their knowledge and experience to help transform the global P3 market in the process.

In conclusion, as we can see, even amidst a volatile global economy we have achieved a great deal in working together in innovative new ways to get infrastructure off the blueprints and into the communities across Canada. P3 plays no small part in making that possible. We know that P3s can save taxpayer money and allow more projects to be built across the country. Quite simply, we need P3s and we cannot afford to overlook their potential as we deal with persistent global uncertainty. I expect P3s will continue to play a significant role in infrastructure investment, helping to connect and strengthen this great country.

The reality is, whether it is building better roads to reduce congestion and keep people and goods moving or public buildings that serve the needs of the community or bridges that link us to each other, infrastructure is key to our success. We believe that the ingenuity and creativity of individual Canadians will create a lasting economic growth and jobs through investment and innovation. In working toward a better Canada, infrastructure will play a key role in connecting Canadians to the world and each other.

Based on the decisive measures our government has already taken to support infrastructure projects in our great country, I feel there is no need to support this motion today, and we will not be lectured by a party that stood in the way of the largest infrastructure investment in Canadian history.

• (1320)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. colleague had a moment of forgetfulness. He forgot the fact that when the economic meltdown of 2008 began, it was the Conservatives who said that there was no problem and they would not do anything. It was only because of the pressure from the opposition that they acted in the first place. I want to remind him of that fact because Canadians have not forgot.

I want to get to the issue of crumbling infrastructure. I listened to my hon. colleague extol the virtues of P3s. Does he want to take a ride on the Finch bus with me and talk to the people on those overcrowded buses about how successful P3s are in building the kind of public transit needed to move people in the 21st century?

Business of Supply

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, our government has put infrastructure money in for a very long time. For the last seven years, the NDP has voted against every federal infrastructure initiative, while our government has delivered unprecedented investments to improve infrastructure, reduce the gridlock and create jobs.

We delivered timely, targeted stimulus when Canadians most needed it. We continue to deliver \$2 billion per year in permanent stable infrastructure funding to municipalities through the gas tax fund and transfer and the GST rebate. Our government supports infrastructure through these actions and I am sure things will improve.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Don Valley East talked about the sustainable funding that the government brought forward. I also want to thank the member for talking about the P3 funding. It forms an integral part of long-term funding for municipalities.

The member made a comment about the NDP members bringing forward a motion in which they did not believe. Quite honestly, that is likely one of the most renowned comments I have heard. Day in and day out they continually talk, but when it comes to vote, they vote no against every initiative that comes forward.

Does the member have a comment about that?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, clearly this resolution is pointless. Our government has delivered unprecedented investments to improve infrastructure, reduce gridlock and create jobs. We continue to deliver \$2 billion per year for permanent infrastructure. Municipalities know they can count on our government for support.

The resolution is nothing but political grandstanding. The NDP has continued to vote against every infrastructure initiative we have put forward in the last seven. It really has nothing to offer.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, let me just set aside for anyone puzzled by the notion that members of the opposition would support infrastructure funding, but find themselves unable to vote for it when it is bundled together with measures that slash employment insurance accessibility, remove environmental regulations and make other moves in one total budget.

However, I am grateful and glad the current Conservative Privy Council made the gas tax money permanent. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities recognizes that, but it also recognizes that the infrastructure deficit is in the tens of billions. The amount of money currently put to use for that purpose is wholly inadequate to protect lives, keep bridges up and deal with the increasing threat of climate events that will wash out our culverts, wash out our roadways and create new threats to our infrastructure, particularly our waterworks.

Would my colleague reconsider his opposition to this motion?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is no. I will not change my mind on this resolution.

It would be interesting to find out why my colleague over the way actually has voted against the green proposals that have been out

there and why she has not supported some of these infrastructures issues as well.

● (1325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I briefly mentioned the village of Angliers, which is located in my riding. It has not had clean drinking water for three years. It is truly disgraceful. I know that residents are really fed up. Can the member tell me when his government plans to take action? Can residents expect to have water one day soon?

This is a critical issue. The village is home to 300 people. I think they deserve an answer. Will they have water anytime soon? Why does the member not support the motion, which calls for a long-term plan that could provide residents with clean drinking water?

These people have not had water since the Conservative government has been in office, and there has been no action on this front.

Will they have water anytime soon?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, I am sure if the members had voted in support of some of these infrastructure developments we put forward over the last seven years, they may well have got that earlier.

I am sure that given the circumstances, local facilities could be put together for it and will come eventually.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised that my hon. colleague from Don Valley East would call this motion irrelevant and unnecessary. He is from the city of Toronto. Surely he has experienced gridlock. Surely he understands that over \$6 billion a year is lost in productivity because of gridlock.

How he can make a statement like that in the House? How can he claim to be representing the people of his riding when he makes a claim like that?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, let me give you a list of some of the projects that we are already doing in Toronto as part of this infrastructure program: Toronto, Spadina subway, \$622 million; Toronto Union Station revitalization, \$133 million. It goes on and on. We have some dozens of projects that are being completed by this infrastructure project.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to ask a question.

Mention was made of the gas tax, a measure that is now permanent. We supported that decision. My colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina, asked a question earlier, but did not get an answer. Therefore, I will put the same question to the member opposite.

The tax is set at 10%, with 5% flowing back to municipalities. What is the government doing with the other 5%? Could it not give the full 10% to municipalities?

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, we have invested in major projects all over the country. Some of that money goes to all those projects. They are projects such as the St. John's harbour cleanup; there is \$26 million for that. As I have said, in Durham, \$46 million has gone for the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant. We have continued to invest in many projects like that right across this country. The gas tax has provided \$2 billion to the municipalities for infrastructure. It is a significant amount of money that they can work with.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, if the government had done all the glorious things the member is saying it has done, we would not have a \$170 billion backlog in infrastructure.

The motion calls for a plan. The government has no plan. It is time the Conservatives got on board, treated the issues of cities seriously and voted with us on the motion. It is sound, it is prudent and it gets the job done. Will they vote for it?

Mr. Joe Daniel: I repeat myself, Mr. Speaker: the answer is no, we will not, because we have done so many projects right across this country. We have invested heavily on this, and the opposition members themselves have not voted once over the last seven years for any infrastructure development. I do not think we need to take any lessons from them.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does my hon. colleague not recognize the fact that cities are where the majority of people live? Many of the projects he previously quoted, such as Union Station and so on in Toronto, were commitments made by the Liberal government that are coming to fruition now. There was already money in place—i.e., the gas tax, which was introduced by the previous Liberal government.

• (1330)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, we have continued to invest in Canada regardless of what happened prior.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on this timely and appropriate motion from the member for Trinity—Spadina. I will be sharing my time with the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

First, I need to take umbrage with the comments from the member opposite just prior to mine, in that he suggested that somehow the NDP was voting against the gas tax. That could not be further from the truth.

Jack Layton was the champion of the gas tax, was the one who thought of the idea in the first place, and was the member of Parliament who brought it to fruition. Without Jack Layton, we would not have a gas tax for the other side to now crow about. Part of what goes on over there is that things get done by members on this side and then get adopted by members on that side as things that they thought of when they did not.

The other issue is in relation to the \$2 billion the member pointed out as being the government's ongoing contribution to the infrastructure deficit in this country. It will take 80 years for that money to actually deal with the infrastructure deficit that this country now faces. If anyone thinks that the bridges, roadways, water systems and sewer systems are going to last 80 years, they have another think coming. It is not possible. That is way too little money,

and it is not the cities of this country that are going to suffer, but the people who live in those cities.

The other part of the speech from the member opposite talked about how we voted against things. It is very interesting that none of the issues that they put forward as things they have done were ever separated out, were ever something that we could have voted for, because they were always buried with things we could not stand, such as the reductions in environmental protections in Bill C-38 and the removal of the Navigable Waters Protection Act from many of the waters in Canada in Bill C-45. Those are the kinds of things that we are forced to vote against.

If Conservatives throw a few crumbs in with that and then later say we voted against it, it is very erroneous thinking. It is not fair for the government to suggest that the NDP is not in favour of infrastructure when in fact we are pushing infrastructure everywhere we can.

The biggest infrastructure deficit facing this country will be the infrastructure deficit caused by our commitments to reduce greenhouse gases and our commitment to deal finally with the problem of global warming and climate change. That infrastructure deficit is something we all should pay attention to.

The situation now is that the previous government signed on to Kyoto and then did not really do anything about it, while the current government abandoned Kyoto and still has not really done anything about it. There have been some vague promises from the Prime Minister that we will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in this country by 2020 by 17%. Right now, by my best guess, we are actually going to increase our level of greenhouse gases by 2020 if we do not start doing things about it.

The other thing he promised was that we would reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 65% by 2050; 65% is a lot. It means that two-thirds of the activity in this country that is currently using fossil fuels must stop using fossil fuels.

There are basically five things that go on in this country. We heat and cool our buildings. We have industry, which requires energy. We have agriculture, which requires energy. We have goods transportation and we have personal transportation. Each of those five is roughly 20% of the use of energy in this country. Are we going to stop doing three of those five things? Are we going to stop moving people? Are we going to stop moving goods? Are we going to stop having industry? Are we going to stop having agriculture? Are we going to stop heating and cooling our houses? No, we are not going to stop doing all those things.

However, if we are to attain the goal of reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases, we have to stop using fossil fuels for all of those things. How do we do that? We do it with electricity. That is currently the only way. The only way we can actually have enough electricity to do those kinds of things is to start building the generating capacity of clean electric power now, through infrastructure programs that will allow it to be delivered across this country.

Business of Supply

• (1335)

In my riding right now there is a giant infrastructure program going on to build new rail lines. Rail is good. It moves people more efficiently than cars and goods more efficiently than trucks. The trouble is that the Conservative government has not signed on to making that rail system electric. It would be a first huge step for the government to show its commitment to reducing greenhouse gases by electrifying our transportation networks across this country—by first building the transportation systems, but by building them electric.

The member for Davenport has suggested that we have \$6 billion worth of gridlock in the city of Toronto every year. That means we are losing \$6 billion, and these guys are throwing \$2 billion at the problem.

We need to build public transit infrastructure and we need to build it quickly if we are to meet that 2050 target of a 65% reduction in greenhouse gases that the Prime Minister has set for himself. We need to have electric transportation across the country to deliver our goods and people safely, quickly and without using fossil fuels. It is the only way we are ever going to achieve that target.

We are not going to achieve that target by regulation. If we think about it, how would we regulate an industry like agriculture into not using fossil fuels? That is not going to happen. How are we going to regulate the movement of goods and people without providing a system whereby the movement of goods and people can be done without using greenhouse gases? This is not something that a P3 is going to solve. It would take actual leadership from the government across Canada to take the bull by the horns to actually deliver on the promised reduction in greenhouse gases.

The way to do that is through the generation of clean electricity from the use of turbines, photocells and other forms of clean electric generation, such as tidal generation in the north and the east. That electricity could be provided across Canada for heating and cooling homes and for transporting people and goods in such a way that we could stop using fossil fuels for those activities.

We cannot meet that 2050 target any other way. If we do not start now with a real commitment to infrastructure in this country, a real commitment to transportation infrastructure, a real commitment to public transit and a real commitment to the kind of money that is necessary to do this, we are never going to meet the 2050 targets.

The Conservatives used to have a green infrastructure fund. However, what did they do in the last budget, which we voted against? They slashed the green infrastructure fund. The Conservative government used to have a home renovation credit, a renovation payment plan, so that individuals could make their homes use less greenhouse gas energy. What did the Conservatives do? They gutted it. They actually cut it off before all the money that was budgeted was spent. There was money in that budget to try to reduce greenhouse gases through infrastructure spending, but it was not spent. That was infrastructure money from the minister, but that money was never spent.

The government talks a big talk but does not actually deliver, and that is what is needed. It is what this motion is all about. It is to say to the government that we need to have a strategy to do this. It is not

just because the cities need it, not just because the country needs it, not just because we say so, but because it is an absolute priority in order to create the kind of Canada that will allow our children and grandchildren to be able to breathe and to live in the kind of comfort that we now live in.

However, that is not going to happen without a significant new input in financial resources from the government. The \$2 billion a year just to cover repairs of existing infrastructure is never going to do the kind of work that is necessary to build the infrastructure that this country needs to move forward into this century.

• (1340)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I am sure my colleague has heard is that many of the municipalities around this country, certainly in my own area as well as his, have talked about the fact that they can avail themselves of eight cents of every tax dollar to create and help sustain the programs within their own communities. Obviously they are relying on more of that, not just on the gas tax or on operating grants.

I was wondering if the member could respond to how certain measures are being put forward by the FCM and other groups in relation to having more tax leverage for raising their own revenues so that they can leverage bigger government programs.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, the system as it is now has municipalities getting 8 cents of every dollar and the federal government getting the lion's share of every dollar of revenue. Over time, municipalities have seen their share of infrastructure grow to where they now have something like 58% of the responsibility for infrastructure with 8% of the revenue. There is something wrong with that math. It cannot be done, and it cannot be done on property taxes.

Is the answer to say to the federal government that it must transfer more money to the cities? That is one answer. However, perhaps the cities have a better answer, and that is to transfer tax points directly to the cities so they can share in the income growth that goes on in Canada all the time. That is another way of doing it.

Whatever the solution, it has to be acted on now. We cannot wait.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech. He spoke very convincingly and pushed the envelope by stressing environmental considerations and the future, something we as parliamentarians need to bear in mind. We have a duty to think about future generations. There is no question that infrastructure and public transit systems help leave a better legacy for our youth.

Does my colleague not agree with me that, sadly, having long-term vision is much too much to ask of short-sighted people like some of the members opposite?

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan: That is so true, Mr. Speaker. It is obvious.

Business of Supply

The transportation committee studied public transit. In fact, the title of the study, until the very end, was the study of a strategy for public transit. Members opposite did not like having a strategy, so they deleted the word “strategy” from the study, and the same is true here. We are asking members opposite to have a strategy on infrastructure and they have said they are going to vote against it. They do not want to have a strategy. They want to bumble along with their eyes closed, but that is not going to save Canada.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we recognize that millions of dollars are necessary for infrastructure in order to be able to invest in our communities. Every region of Canada is in desperate need of infrastructure dollars.

What these municipalities and so forth need is a commitment from Ottawa and a commitment from their provinces. Ottawa and the provinces need to recognize that cities or municipalities do not have the financial means or resources to meet the current demand. As a result, the federal government must play a role in dealing with infrastructure dollars or the cities and municipalities will not be able to do the things they have to do.

Would the member not agree that not only should Ottawa play a leadership role, but all three levels of government have an obligation to come to the table to try to come to grips with how to deal with the huge infrastructure deficit that Canada has today?

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, that is what the motion is all about. I thank the member for getting it.

I would remind the member that these problems have not existed just over the last year or the last six years; these problems have been in existence for the last fifteen or twenty years. Municipalities have discovered that they do not have enough money to deal with their infrastructure. The previous government actually handed over a bunch of infrastructure to the municipalities without money to repair it, and I am talking about the housing infrastructure that the federal government was responsible for. That is not the way to run a society. For the federal government to hand over infrastructure without handing over the money is not sustainable.

● (1345)

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me start with some infrastructure realities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we do not have superhighways. Most of the Trans-Canada Highway across my province is two lanes: one lane going east and one lane going west. We do not even have trains in Newfoundland. They were taken out, beginning in 1988. Labrador has trains to ship iron ore, but there are no passenger trains. Much of Labrador, in the year of our Lord 2013, does not even have paved roads. How is that for an infrastructure problem?

I was in Labrador West before Christmas. The parking lot of the local high school was filled with snowmobiles. The rural way is a different way of life, a more rugged way of life. Rural infrastructure needs are different from urban infrastructure needs. However, both are just as important.

Here is a stark reality of Newfoundland and Labrador life. There are towns in my province with chlorine water treatment systems that

do not operate. They are not turned on because the towns cannot afford to run them.

Here is another stark reality of Newfoundland and Labrador life. There are towns that have had boil water advisories for 10, 15 and 20 years—not months, but years—because the towns cannot afford to fix the problems. On any given day in Newfoundland and Labrador, there could be 100 to 150 towns with boil water advisories because the towns do not have the money to fix the water problems.

The opposition motion before this House today, moved by the tireless member of Parliament for Trinity—Spadina, calls upon the Conservative government to commit in the upcoming federal budget to a long-term, predictable federal infrastructure plan to fix crumbling infrastructure, shorten commute times and improve Canada's lagging productivity. We have traffic gridlock. We have failing water systems. We have pothole-filled roads. We have an infrastructure deficit, calculated as the total amount of investments needed to maintain and replace decaying municipal infrastructure at \$171 billion. These facts are not debatable. They are stark realities of Canadian life.

We need a long-term, predictable infrastructure plan. That is what municipalities are calling for. We do not need an ad hoc budget-to-budget funding model favoured by the current Prime Minister, better suited to photo ops rather than building strong communities. We need strong communities. We are trying to build those strong communities and towns with eight-cent tax dollars. By 8 cents, I mean that municipalities receive only 8% of Canada's tax revenue.

The work of municipalities is critical to our day-to-day life. To put this into perspective, I would like to quote Randy Simms, who is the mayor of Mount Pearl, in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl. He stated:

You can invest in what you want—you can put millions in the fishery, millions into the university, put millions into education, millions into business. You can do whatever you want, but remember this. If you don't invest in communities, in healthy communities, you can't have a healthy province. And if you don't have a healthy province, you can't build a healthy nation. The guys that get the eight cents, they're like the hand that rocks the cradle.

Now that brings the point home. We can argue in this House about new jets. We can argue in this House about pipelines. We can argue about international trade deals. Those are important arguments to have. However, they do not mean a thing if our roads are not fit to drive on, our water is not fit to drink and our bridges are not safe.

● (1350)

This country has to get back to the basics: healthy communities, healthy provinces and a healthy nation. It is simple math, policy 101.

Business of Supply

I had a conversation last evening with the president of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, a man by the name of Churence Rogers. I asked Churence what message he wanted me to bring to the floor of the House of Commons. His message is exactly what is in this motion today. He spoke about long-term predictable funding—there are those words again—with more flexibility on how municipalities, especially small municipalities, spend the funding. He spoke about less restrictions and more dedicated infrastructure funding, as opposed to application-based infrastructure funding, which is where the politics seep into the system and where the rot begins.

When it comes to transportation, one of the biggest problems in Newfoundland today is the Gulf of St. Lawrence ferry link. I recently took the ferry from Port aux Basques, on the west coast of Newfoundland, to North Sydney, Nova Scotia, and it cost me for a round trip, including an overnight berth, a total of \$561.75 to travel about 360 kilometres. If I travelled that far by road, it would cost about a tank of gas, less than \$100. That is our highway, and the cost for passengers and shipping commercial freight on the gulf ferry run is destined to increase on April 1 by another 4%. When we talk infrastructure and transportation, we are talking about business, and the cost of business in Newfoundland and Labrador is continually rising. The ferry link is our highway, and this poor infrastructure is affecting the cost of food, the cost of clothes, the cost of everything.

What do we want from this motion, this infrastructure plan? What should Canadians, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, take away from this? We want a plan that is developed through continuous talks with provinces, territories, municipalities and aboriginal communities. We want a long-term plan that spans 20 years. We want clear funding, clear program targets and transparency. We want the politics taken out of it, if the Conservatives know how to do that.

What have the Conservatives said about a long-term, predictable infrastructure plan? The Conservatives made a promise in 2011 for just such a plan, but it was nowhere to be seen in the 2012 budget. We could only assume they did not change the existing budget-to-budget approach because they like the partisan politics, the photo ops, and putting Conservative Party logos on government cheques and parading them before the media.

I will end with a quote from the MP for Trinity—Spadina. She said:

Canadians are tired of boil water advisories and dodging potholes, and they're tired of being stuck in traffic jams and packed buses. I proposed a practical plan for long-term infrastructure and I'm hopeful that the Conservatives will work with me.

I am hopeful, too. Healthy communities make for healthy provinces, which make for a healthy nation. That is Canadian policy 101.

• (1355)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this member would know full well that our government has made record investments into Newfoundland and Labrador in terms of infrastructure. We have recently assisted with their new hydroelectric power aspirations in Newfoundland and Labrador, and I know that is very important to that province. We bought new ferries to provide for people who need to navigate between Newfoundland and the mainland, and we are proud of that.

The member seemed quite outraged at points in his speech. I know I was outraged and disappointed when I heard his comments about how he thought his pension should be enriched for being a member of Parliament in this place. That is out of touch with most Canadians, but I think he is also out of touch when it comes to infrastructure investment. No party has pledged more in infrastructure dollars than this government under this Prime Minister, and that member's party has voted against it each and every time.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the floor brought up a number of different points. The first point was about Muskrat Falls, the hydro development in Labrador, which we voted for because that is a good clean energy deal that is good for Newfoundland and Labrador, is good for the Maritimes and is good for this country.

The hon. member across the way talks about infrastructure spending by the government; it is failing miserably at infrastructure investment.

I mentioned in my speech about boil water advisories. At any one time, we have between 100 and 150 communities in Newfoundland and Labrador that have boil water advisories because they cannot afford to fix the problems they have.

When the member talked about infrastructure he mentioned new ferries. He did not mention the fact that a round trip for me and my car, including an overnight berth, on one of those ferries costs \$560 and will be increasing by 4% on April 1. He did not mention any of that because it would point to the fact that the Conservatives are failing miserably on infrastructure.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am from Newfoundland and Labrador as well. One of the most common complaints about the system we have regards the lack of flexibility for the smallest of communities to invest. Not only do they have to contend with the fact that they only get 8¢ on the dollar in revenues, but also their municipal grants have been going down. However, when it comes to the gas tax itself, a lot of it is very stringent in the way it is to be spent. Therefore, they do not have that flexibility in cases of need.

Would the hon. member comment on the need for flexibility within smaller communities?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a very good point.

I had a conversation last night with the president of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. I asked him for advice again on points that he wanted me to bring up in this speech. One of his points was the fact that towns want to get away from application-based funding and want to have more flexibility with respect to the funding they do receive.

That is a very good point. The municipalities, and especially the small towns, need more flexibility without so many terms and conditions tied to the money they receive.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl this. Does he see any kind of opportunity for a green, sustainable economy that piggybacks on the emphasis on healthy communities and economic infrastructure?

Could it be that while focusing on infrastructure we also have an opportunity in front of us, where crumbling inadequate systems have to be replaced; in a country where we are in the dark ages when it comes to railway; where energy grids need to be upgraded but we have to do it in a green way; an opportunity for green procurement where we kickstart technology, construction and technology sectors all at the same time? Is there a huge opportunity here as well as a need?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I like to believe that Newfoundland and Labrador is leading the way in this country in terms of green energy and green technology.

In one of my answers a moment ago, I mentioned Muskrat Falls, half of the Lower Churchill development. Basically, the green energy that will be brought on stream is one way in which we are leading the country.

• (1400)

The Speaker: There will be five minutes remaining for questions and comments after question period.

We will now move on to statements by members. The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

TED BROOKS

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a well known community leader, Ted Brooks, passed away on December 4, leaving a huge void in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie.

Ted was the proud owner and founder of Eazy Express, a company that grew to be the largest contractor for Canada Post in Canada.

Ted was fondly recognized in the community through his numerous philanthropic involvements, including sponsorship of Team Eazy Express, who will be representing northern Ontario for the fourth consecutive year at this year's Brier.

Last week I had the pleasure to host community volunteers from Habitat for Humanity and St. Vincent Place at a local Soo Greyhound game in the Eazy Express suite, courtesy of Ted's wife, JoAnne.

Recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and the local Chamber of Commerce president's award for going above and beyond the call of duty in business and community development, Ted was never someone to seek recognition. He was content to work quietly behind the scenes.

I was honoured to enjoy a close friendship with Ted, who was also my campaign manager. I am indebted to Ted. He will be deeply missed.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the new Champlain Bridge will be the most important initiative in my riding and my region. It should include LRT. The mayors of Brossard, Longueuil, Boucherville, Saint-Bruno, Saint-Lambert and Montreal all agree. More importantly, the people are on board.

[English]

The choice of the public transit system is of provincial jurisdiction, but the federal government has a key role to play. Quebec and municipalities must have the necessary funds.

[Translation]

The minister keeps saying, “No toll, no bridge”, but the people in my riding still have many questions. Who gets the profits? Will the toll pay for public transit? Will there be tolls on all the south shore bridges?

The new Champlain Bridge is a wonderful opportunity to build two new bridges at the same time. The first would be a link between the south shore and the island of Montreal and the second, between the federal government and the people.

* * *

SCOUTING MOVEMENT

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you about the video made by people involved in the St-Étienne-de-Lauzon Scouts, an organization in my riding. The video is posted on the official Scouts Canada site.

Every year, more than 125 young people in my riding, and Scouts across Canada, have the opportunity to participate in a movement that emphasizes sharing, respect, adventure, teamwork and family. The Grande tournée du bonheur is an event that reflects the wonderful values of this movement. The scouting movement helps develop leadership skills and a sense of community; it ignites and reignites passions.

The scouting movement was established in Canada 45 years ago. Every year, during Scouting Week, we celebrate the wonderful success of the movement founded by Robert Baden-Powell and his wife, Olave.

I am very proud to highlight the outstanding contributions of everyone involved with the young Beavers and Brownies in Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.

We can never say it enough: our young people are our greatest treasure.

* * *

[English]

YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HUNTINGTON'S DISEASE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Catherine Price from Fortune in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

Statements by Members

When Catherine was 10 years old, her grandmother passed away after a long battle with Huntington's disease, a neurodegenerative genetic disorder. Ten years later, a student at Memorial University, she actively fundraises and promotes awareness of the disease as a member of the organization, Young People Affected by Huntington's Disease.

After volunteering with the national organization for a year, Catherine created a provincial wing.

In June 2011, she put her leadership skills to work as one of five members of YPAHD representing Canada at the Huntington's Disease Society of America's national convention in Minnesota. While there, Catherine attended the first international youth meeting with 21 other young people from 10 countries.

Catherine has received the Dean Crain Memorial Award for her unique and lasting contributions to the development of the Huntington Society of Canada.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing the tremendous advocacy work by Catherine Price.

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OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate our Prime Minister for keeping our Conservative government's promise to create the Office of Religious Freedom. This office will stand up to the terrible cruelty of religious persecution.

Around the world, violations of religious freedom are widespread, and they are increasing. In Iran, Baha'is and Christians face harassment, imprisonment and, in some cases, death.

In Pakistan, Christian, Sikhs and Hindus are vulnerable to persecution and violence.

In China, Christians who worship outside government-approved boundaries are driven underground and their leaders are arrested and detained, their churches burned down.

Shia Muslims in Iraq, Coptic Christians in Egypt, Christians at worship in Nigeria, the list appallingly goes on and on.

Elsewhere we watch in horror as sanctuaries are destroyed and believers are attacked and, in some cases, slaughtered. In the face of these injustices, Canada has not been silent. We wish Canada's first ambassador of religious freedom, Dr. Andrew Bennett, success monitoring and promoting religious freedom around the world.

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● (1405)

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no one should leave their home in the morning wondering whether today is the day that they die at work, but in our country three people are killed on the job every working day. Tragically, left behind are families and friends who are devastated by the loss of their loved one.

Thankfully, since 2003, they have been able to turn to Threads of Life, a national charity that is dedicated to helping Canadians who have been affected by a workplace fatality, life-altering injury or occupational disease. Threads of Life provides a network of hope and healing to more than 1,200 families and champions of workplace health and safety.

On May 5, in more than 30 communities across Canada, people will walk in Steps for Life to support Threads of Life families. I am thrilled to be the honorary chair of the 2013 Steps for Life walk in Hamilton. My hope is that soon such walks will not be necessary. We all know there is no such thing as a workplace accident. Every single occupational fatality and disease is preventable.

What we need is labour legislation with teeth. I urge the Conservatives to act on that now. I hope all MPs will visit stepsforlife.ca to see how they can help. It is a matter of life and death.

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SCOUTS CANADA

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to stand and mark Scouts Day on the Hill.

Scouts Canada is the country's leading youth organization, offering exciting programs for boys, girls and young adults from age 5 to 26. The Scouts' mission is to contribute to the education of young people through a value system based on the Scout promise and law to build a better world where people are self-fulfilled and play a constructive, meaningful role in society.

Scouts Canada is also developing Canada's leaders of tomorrow. It empowers youth by providing opportunities to take on leadership roles, starting as young as eight years old.

Scouts also volunteer to build their communities. Whether it is a food drive, painting a community centre or helping out at a shelter, a Scout is there to help.

Today Scouts Canada is a highly diverse, co-ed organization with more than 100,000 members nationwide, representing every religion and culture.

L'Association des scouts du Canada provides scouting activities to more than 17,000 francophone youth from coast to coast to coast.

On behalf of Scouts Canada, I remind all members of the reception being hosted today by the hon. Speaker—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has taken strong steps to ensure that dangerous individuals are kept behind bars where they belong.

Statements by Members

Canadians agree with our common sense reforms, like ending the misguided practice of giving two-for-one credit for time served before trial. However, not content to simply oppose these measures, the NDP made wild allegations that one bill alone would cost \$19 billion because of the new prisons that would need to be built.

[*Translation*]

Clearly, nothing could be further from the truth. We announced the closing of two prisons in order to save taxpayers' money.

[*English*]

Yesterday, in main estimates, there were significant reductions in the cost of prisons due to the influx of new prisoners not materializing.

The thrust of our tough on crime agenda is to ensure that dangerous and repeat offenders are kept behind bars where they belong. We are not creating new criminals; we are simply stopping the revolving door of the justice system.

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KIZUNA PROJECT

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Friday, 20 students from Malvern Collegiate are headed to Japan, courtesy of the Japanese government.

The Kizuna project is intended to promote a better understanding of Japan's post-quake recovery efforts and seal the bonds of friendship between our two countries.

To the kids, I offer my respect for embracing this opportunity to see and understand not just the devastation but, importantly, the triumph of the Japanese people over that disaster.

I offer my thanks, too, because what they learn from the Japanese people about their spiritual and political resilience in the face of adversity will be invaluable to all of us when it is the students' turn to lead here at home.

I offer my thanks to Principal Pinard, Vice-Principal Santos and Mr. Jonathan Jones for their obvious love of teaching, education, kids and adventure.

I reserve my deepest thanks for the Government of Japan and the people of the Miyagi prefecture for providing this invaluable opportunity to these young Canadians.

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● (1410)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as our economy continues to rebound from the global economic downturn, it is important to note that nearly 65% of Canada's economy depends on trade, and one in five Canadian jobs are generated through exports.

That is why our government is advancing the most ambitious pro-trade plan in Canadian history, to help create jobs in Canada and grow the Canadian economy. This includes looking at alternative markets for our energy products and making sure that our energy products are developed in an environmentally responsible way, but

also understanding that Canada's economy benefits from trade, benefits from increased markets for our products.

I think it is so important, and I implore my colleagues opposite, while they talk about how trade agreements might not be in the best interest of our country, to seriously consider supporting our trade agreements.

This is so important and vital for Canada's economy. Rather than opposing agreements, such as the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement, I encourage my colleagues opposite to support free trade in this country.

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[*Translation*]

AWARDS FOR HEROISM

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some people show remarkable courage and heroism in the face of life-threatening danger. This is true of four people in my riding who were recognized for their bravery by the Quebec justice minister at yesterday's prix Hommage au civisme ceremony.

In May 2011, Marie-Ève Paquin, Robert J. Brown and Lucien Flamand did not hesitate to risk their lives to help a 12-year-old girl who was being attacked by three pit bulls in the streets of La Sarre. The two men were seriously bitten many times, but they still managed to save the young girl's life.

In August 2011, Marjorie Caron jumped into the water to save a teenager from drowning, without any thought for her own safety.

Under difficult circumstances, these brave individuals risked their lives to perform these extraordinary acts of courage. On behalf of Abitibi—Témiscamingue and the members of this House, I would like to thank them and commend them for their bravery.

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[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government in history has provided more investments to improve infrastructure, reduce gridlock and create jobs than our government. It was us who delivered timely, targeted stimulus when Canadians most needed work. It was us who rolled out the historic \$33-billion building Canada plan. It was us who doubled the gas tax fund from \$1 billion to \$2 billion and made it a permanent annual transfer to our provinces and cities. It was us who invested over \$5 billion in transit infrastructure in cities and communities from coast to coast to coast.

Statements by Members

Our unprecedented action is absolutely with no thanks to the NDP. In fact, New Democrats have voted against every infrastructure investment in Canada over the last seven years. Quite frankly, their motion today is a little too late, and we refuse to be lectured by a party that stood in the way of the largest infrastructure investment in Canadian history.

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[Translation]

CLAUDETTE BOYER

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was with great sadness that I attended a funeral service today honouring Claudette Boyer, a friend and ally for 35 years in both the Francophonie and Liberalism. She passed away on February 17 at the age of 75.

She began honing her skills in education as a teacher and a committed activist. She was the first francophone woman elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. A tireless worker and committed volunteer, she helped many community organizations and headed up the Association des communautés francophones d'Ottawa, or ACFO, from 2007 until her death.

Sadly, she passed away just four days before ACFO Ottawa's Bernard Grandmaître awards gala. This annual event recognizes remarkable francophones and francophiles. At this year's event, however, the most glowing tribute of all was paid to Claudette.

On behalf of the residents of Ottawa—Vanier, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the children of Claudette and her late husband Jean-Robert Boyer—Pierre, Michel and Julie—as well as their grandchildren and her entire family.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the NDP is scheming to ruin our economy by implementing a \$20-billion job-killing carbon tax for Canadian families, our government is focusing on what matters to Canadians: jobs and economic growth.

Thanks to our Conservative government, Canada has the lowest debt burden by far, and we have the strongest job creation record in the G7, with over 900,000 net new jobs since July 2009. No wonder the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters Association recently said, “The government’s policies with respect to taxes, technology, trade, training, and transformation are extremely important in setting the stage for the growth of advanced manufacturing industries in Canada”.

While we are working on making our economy stronger, the NDP's job-killing carbon tax would raise the price of gas, food, electricity and everything else. Our government will continue to protect Canadians from the NDP's reckless economic policies.

●(1415)

[Translation]

THE SENATE

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are cutting public services like crazy. Aboriginal Affairs will be cut by \$480 million and CIDA by \$471 million. VIA Rail Canada will lose 60% of its budget.

In the meantime, the budget of that relic we call the Senate continues to increase. Just ask any Canadian, regardless of their age or province, whether it is better to spend money on services and job creation or on an outdated institution like the Senate.

No one would choose to squander public funds on people who are unable to fill out a form and who just approve Conservative policies without even reading them. In fact, only the Liberals and Conservatives continue to feel entitled to have their parties' fundraisers subsidized by taxpayers.

While the Conservative expense scandal is heating up, with Senator Wallin—who did nothing wrong in the Prime Minister's eyes—having to pay back thousands of dollars, the Conservatives are nonetheless going to increase the Senate's overall budget while reducing that of the office of the Senate ethics officer.

The NDP has had enough of senators who cheat. In 2015, we are going to put a stop to this.

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[English]

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the days grow longer and temperatures slowly get warmer, we can feel the optimism of Canadians around us that spring is finally on its way. However, despite the warming of their spirits and the air around them, Canadians are still as cold as ever to the idea of a \$20-billion NDP carbon tax. Who could blame them?

A new tax would literally raise the price on everything, cutting into the budgets of Canadian families from coast to coast to coast, families that are already feeling financial pressure. A new tax would diminish disposable income, limiting the choices of Canadians and what they could afford. A new tax would place a significant burden on our seniors and veterans who are living on fixed incomes.

That being said, there is one idea that my constituents and Canadians across the country are warm to. It is the government's low-tax plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***ETHICS**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when a Conservative minister in the Mulroney government phoned a judge about a case he was considering, he was dropped from cabinet. When a Liberal minister wrote to the CRTC about a case before it, he was dropped from cabinet. Recently, when the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs wrote to the Tax Court about a case before it, he was dropped from cabinet.

The Ethics Commissioner has made a determination that the Minister of Finance used his title as finance minister to write to the CRTC about a case before it. What excuse has the Prime Minister come up with to not apply that strong tradition of this Parliament to the finance minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the NDP knows well, there was an administrative error in that case. The Ethics Commissioner has required a compliance agreement from the Minister of Finance, which he has agreed to. In the meantime, he continues to be the best minister of finance in the world.

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*[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 1, the Minister of Human Resources told the House: "Departmental employees do not have individual quotas."

She said that allegations of a quota system were "absolutely false". The problem is that they are absolutely true. Just because she used her thesaurus to find a synonym for quota does not mean that a quota system is not being used.

When employees are faced with a target of \$500,000 that will affect their careers if they do not meet it, that is a quota.

What excuse does the Prime Minister have to justify the behaviour of his minister, who is not telling the truth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian workers contribute to the employment insurance system so that it is available to them when they need it.

Clearly, HRSDC is trying to ensure that workers who contribute to the system have access to it should they become unemployed.

Any abuse of the system only hurts unemployed workers who really need that help.

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● (1420)

*[English]***ETHICS**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, allegations of corruption in the Senate continue unabated. We have two more senators under investigation as of today.

What is interesting is that last week, the Prime Minister told the House that he had personally reviewed the cases of Duffy and Wallin and that there was nothing wrong, which is all the more interesting given the fact that they have decided to reimburse hundreds of thousands of dollars they were not entitled to receive.

There has not been one word yet, formally, from him on how much money has been repaid or on which senators are currently under investigation. Instead of just talking about taxpayers' money, would the Prime Minister finally stand up and say that he is going to defend Canadian taxpayers and hold the unelected Senate to account?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear, as has the Senate and as have all senators. They are reviewing all of their expenses to ensure not only that the expenses are appropriate but that the rules in the future for governing such expenses are appropriate. That is a commitment that has been made on this side.

As far as taxpayers' interests are concerned, that is always our focus, which is why, of course, we reject a \$21-billion carbon tax.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is still a common thread in these different exercises: one set of rules for some people and a different set for others.

When a minister is given the right to tell the opposite of the truth in the House, it shows a lack of respect for our democratic parliamentary institutions.

How are the Conservative senators who are members of his caucus supposed to come to a decision other than the one that was already announced by the Prime Minister himself? The Prime Minister said in the House that he looked over the Wallin case and that there was no problem.

Does he really believe that the investigation will be objective?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we just said, our senators and the Senate are reviewing all of their expenses to ensure that they are appropriate. That is a clear commitment that the government and the Senate have made.

As far as our democratic institutions are concerned, our party is the one proposing Senate reforms that will allow for senators to be elected. It is the NDP that is resisting the idea of a reformed, elected Senate, which is what Canadians want.

* * *

*[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is rich coming from a party that used unelected senators to overturn Jack Layton's climate change bill duly enacted by the Parliament of Canada.

In 2009 the international community failed spectacularly to prevent atrocities committed against Tamil civilians in the final months of the Sri Lankan civil war. The government of Sri Lanka has refused to accept accountability for these events ever since.

Oral Questions

If no investigation occurs, as being asked for right now in the United Nations, will the Prime Minister commit to stay away from the upcoming Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Colombo?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. It is this party that is trying to get the Senate elected; it is that party which is resisting Senate elections. We all know why. It is not because of abolition because those members have never actually seriously proposed it. It is because we know, as we knew during the 2008-09 coalition exercise, that they want to appoint their own senators. That is why.

In terms of the question on Sri Lanka, as the House knows, I have indicated that unless changes occur in Sri Lanka, I will not attend the Commonwealth summit there. I am concerned with further developments since I made that statement, which are taking that country in a worse direction.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government may have Inspector Clouseau in charge in the Senate, but it is clear that it has Inspecteur Javert in charge when it comes to employment insurance.

This two-headed monster and this double standard means that for the first time inspectors are going out to talk to Canadians with respect to employment insurance whether or not they have any reason to believe there has been any instance of fraud or of misleading in the case of the person they are interviewing. This is the first time in Canadian history that this has been done.

Could the Prime Minister confirm that managers will be receiving bonuses, depending on the performance of those agents who are going out.

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance fund is paid into by honest Canadian workers so it is there when they lose their job and cannot find a job in their region. A million and a half Canadians collect from that fund every year. It is the government's legal responsibility. The Auditor General and others will insist that we take all necessary steps to ensure that those who are entitled to the money are the ones who get the money. When people who are not entitled to the money get the money, the only losers are the unemployed and the workers who paid in, and we are determined to protect their interests.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the Prime Minister has not denied that bigger bonuses will be going to the system managers thanks to the work of inspectors in the provinces, particularly provinces where the government is looking for so-called problems.

The question remains. These inspections are happening for no reason. Bonuses are being paid, and that is part of the government's agenda.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a legal responsibility to ensure that the employment insurance fund is being used by people who are truly

unemployed. Unfortunately, every year, illegal or inappropriate payments are made. It is our responsibility to make sure that those who really are out of work receive their benefits. It is our responsibility to protect the workers who have paid into the fund for their protection.

* * *

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the same time that we continue to read in the estimates with respect to the cuts that are being made in front line programs, in foreign aid programs, in foreign affairs budgets, we now see that the CIC is increasing its advertising budget by \$4 million, the Department of Finance is increasing its advertising budget by nearly \$7 million and the Department of Natural Resources is increasing its advertising budget by \$4.5 million compared to the mains of last year.

How can the Prime Minister justify again this double standard where front line services are being cut but propaganda is being increased?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those front line services are not being cut. What is being done is ensuring that the people of Canada are aware of the programs and services that are available to them. This Parliament votes billions of dollars every year of taxpayer money for the benefit of the people of Canada. It is up to us to ensure they are aware of the services and the programs they can use to better their own lives.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when I asked the Minister of Public Safety if he would meet with chiefs on the issue of first nations police funding, he told the House that he had already been doing so. Today, chiefs from Quebec and Labrador have confirmed that he has not met with a single one of these chiefs whose tripartite funding agreements expire March 31.

Therefore, let us try again with the minister. Will he meet with these chiefs who are here today, seeking assurance that their police services can continue to operate after March 31, and will he agree to negotiate new arrangements for stable, long-term funding for first nations policing, yes or no?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, policing is primarily a provincial responsibility. The federal government has long invested in first nations policing to help keep communities safe. In fact, I am having discussions with a number of chiefs this very afternoon on that very topic.

A funding decision itself will be made in the near future. Spending on first nations policing has increased substantially under this government, as opposed to the actions of that member when he was on municipal council, cutting policing in his own community.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Conservatives presented the cuts that will be in the next budget. VIA Rail will be cut by \$290 million, Infrastructure Canada will be cut by \$1.8 billion and the Canada Revenue Agency will have its budget cut at a time when basic tax services for Canadians are being slashed.

Which organization will see a budget increase? The Senate, of course.

Why are they giving more to their friends, who are under investigation, and cutting services provided to honest Canadians?

● (1430)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the matters referred to by the member opposite are budget matters. The budget is being prepared now. We are working hard to get it ready. I look forward to being able to announce the date for the budget in a while.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will see if we get any accountability on that this year.

Let us continue with the estimates: \$1.1 billion cut from infrastructure; Transport Canada cut almost 30%. However, at the same time, the unaccountable, unelected Senate actually increased.

The senior bureaucrat to the President of the Treasury Board is now saying she should have the right to vet PBO reports.

Why are Conservatives trying to seize power over the PBO? Why are they hiding from real fiscal accountability?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House look forward to the process that is entrained right now to get a non-partisan, credible person as the parliamentary budget officer.

I would only say that the deputy minister, the secretary to the Treasury Board, who the hon. member referred to, was doing her job to correct some inaccurate information that the Parliamentary Budget Officer was in fact purveying. Her job is to correct the record, to give the PBO the facts that he requires. That is a good exchange of information and points of view.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have decided to further diminish Canada's influence in the world. The estimates show that there will be hundreds of millions of dollars in cutbacks at CIDA and Foreign Affairs. The Conservatives will be terminating a peace and security program that operates in such places as Colombia, Haiti and the Congo.

Why are the Conservatives bent on getting rid of our tools for conflict prevention and peacekeeping, one of our best global investments?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report to the House that Canada is meeting all of its international development commitments. We are spending significant amounts of money to help pull people out of poverty. Canadians can be tremendously proud of the leadership of this government, the leadership of the Prime Minister, particular on the newborn and child maternal health initiative, an initiative that is achieving some of the best results of any international development mechanism anywhere, and it all comes from Canadian leadership.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the first anniversary of the deadly train crash in Burlington. An automatic braking system would have prevented this tragedy. The Transport Safety Board has been recommending this positive train control be made mandatory, just like in the United States.

Instead of making safety a priority, why is the Conservative government cutting VIA Rail's funding by more than half?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts remain with the families of the victims who lost their lives. It is a shame that the opposition member is playing politics on the anniversary of this tragic accident.

Where there is a clear safety benefit, our government will not hesitate to take action. We are monitoring the implementation of positive train control in the United States, but it is currently experiencing technical challenges that will likely delay the implementation, and we are following that.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister confirmed that each of her inspectors must cut half a million dollars in benefits and that her employees are evaluated based on their ability to make cuts to EI benefits.

This means that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development misled Canadians and the House, since the revelations in *Le Devoir* confirmed the existence of these quotas, which the minister calls "performance objectives".

If an unemployed worker does not tell the truth, he loses his benefits. What will happen to the minister?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working to ensure that employment insurance will be there for the people who follow the rules and pay their premiums. Unfortunately, the NDP only cares about people who cheat or defraud the system, people they call victims.

If the opposition prevents us from identifying these individuals, the only people who will lose are Canadians who follow the rules.

• (1435)

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives accept no ministerial accountability, no Senate accountability and have no respect for the unemployed. Yesterday, the minister would not even use the word “unemployed”. She called it “transitioning to another job”. She did not call them “quotas”. She called them “performance objectives”. All this from the same minister who called the EI program “lucrative”. Playing semantic games does not answer the legitimate concerns of Canadians.

When will she take accountability for her department's quotas, targets and objectives and finally admit that she misled the House?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working to ensure that EI is there for individuals who play by the rules and who pay into the system. Sadly, the New Democrats are only worried about people who are trying to cheat the system, people they call victims.

The only people who will lose if the opposition prevents us from rooting out those who would cheat the EI system are Canadians who play by the rules.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to say that the employment insurance reform will have no impact on workers or on regional economies is completely false.

According to Martin Prescott from Saint-Barthélemy, the reform will impoverish the Lanaudière region and many people will have to move away and look for work elsewhere.

The reform is a direct attack on qualified workers in seasonal industries. This will have a terrible impact on productivity, because businesses in the regions will lose their competitive advantage.

Why is the minister attacking the productivity of seasonal businesses and regional economies?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have repeated several times, if there is no work for seasonal employees in their region in their field, employment insurance will be there, as always.

To help them find a job, we are offering an enhanced job alert service as well as help learning how to look for work. The employment insurance system will be there for the unemployed if there is no other work.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives imposed quotas because they think that all unemployed workers are fraudsters. That is why the minister calls them “bad guys”. HRSDC employees are being forced to make honest

people who happen to be unemployed look like fraudsters. The minister is even sending her employees to knock on people's doors to spy on them and intimidate them.

What does the minister have planned next—electronic bracelets? Why will the minister not simply cancel her reform instead of causing so much stress for these poor people who are simply trying to find a job? What will be next—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are helping people find jobs, but if there are no jobs in their field in their region, employment insurance will be there. However, it is very important to protect the integrity of the EI system, which workers pay into, in order to ensure that the system will be there for all eligible unemployed workers.

* * *

[*English*]

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year the Minister of Finance blamed the deficit for cuts to vital programs like food safety, but that did not stop him from doubling his own advertising budget. This year he is at it again. According to the main estimates, the increase in expenses for the finance ministry belongs to “government advertising”, with an increase of \$6.8 million. These same estimates show a cut to food safety of \$30 million.

Why is it a Conservative priority to waste tax dollars on Conservative propaganda instead of investing in vital programs like food safety for Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we do all of that. The issue, as the Prime Minister indicated earlier, is our obligation to communicate with Canadians about programs and services that are available to them.

I would indicate to the hon. member that only 0.03% of government spending is used for advertising, and communication of all sorts. Last year, our advertising budget was \$83.3 million, which is well below the last full year under the former Liberal government of \$111 million.

Oral Questions

● (1440)

*[Translation]***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the federal government, the staunch defender of public protection, decided to cut the budget for public safety on aboriginal reserves.

These cuts translate into a reduced police presence in some communities that find themselves in difficult circumstances because of their remote location and because of rampant crime.

Did the government account for the social costs of this decision in its main estimates?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while policing is primarily a provincial responsibility, the federal government has long invested in first nations policing to help keep communities safe. A funding decision will be made in the near future regarding this matter. However, I can say that spending on first nations policing has increased substantially under this government, as opposed to that government when the Liberals were in power.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the Conservatives are cutting \$270 million from foreign affairs, including human rights programs. That is on top of eliminating \$11 million for Rights and Democracy, protecting human rights abroad.

However, it has increased \$5 million to create a new bureaucracy for only religious rights. Why the shell game? What about other human rights? What about the deadly attacks on women and the LGBTQ community, or does this government not care about their concerns?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite regrettable that the member opposite chooses to take the view of affairs that way. This government has made human rights the cornerstone of our foreign policy. Promoting Canadian values is something that is tremendously important. No country has spoken more loudly on human rights, religious freedom, or on the important rights that women and gays have right around the world, than this government.

We are very proud of our Office of Religious Freedom. It is a fundamental freedom. It promotes pluralism, which is a fundamental Canadian value, and we make no apologies for standing up for this important human right.

* * *

*[Translation]***ETHICS**

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the NDP asked the Prime Minister to provide an explanation for Senator Wallin's residency and expenses, he said that she spent the money to travel to and from her home province, as any other parliamentarian would do.

The problem with that answer is that it is untrue, according to CTV's information. The Senator has already secretly paid back a large portion of her excessive spending.

Since there is no reason to defend her anymore, will the Prime Minister force her to make public all documents regarding her recent reimbursements? Will he do that?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I already said, we are committed to ensuring that all expenses and the rules governing them are appropriate. We have also committed to reporting back to the public on these matters.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Senator Wallin is not the only one trying to hide things. Duffy and Patterson are being reviewed, and there are allegedly two new additions to the list of those who are dipping into taxpayers' money. And it is not just the ones we keep hearing about.

The problem with the Senate and its supposed transparency is that the reviews will still be done behind closed doors, in secret. People will never know who misused their money and how.

Will the Prime Minister commit to demanding that all of these reviews be made public?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that I already answered that question. We want the Senate to report publicly on this issue.

Our government is moving towards a more democratic and responsible Senate by demanding clarification from the Supreme Court of Canada. The government has also introduced a bill, in this chamber, to make the Senate truly democratic. Yet the NDP is opposed to it.

Why is the NDP against real, progressive Senate reform?

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the great Canadian rip-off continues in the Senate. We learn that more senators are under investigation, but the Senate is keeping it secret. Mike Duffy is having to pay back oodles of money, but the Senate is keeping the amount secret.

Now we learn that Senator Pam Wallin is the latest senator looking for a back kitchen door to get out of because she apparently has to pay back a substantial amount of money.

When will the government come clean with taxpayers and call on the Conservative-dominated Senate to tell us, how many times has she been investigated, how much money has she had to pay back, and what are the consequences to be for her ripping off the taxpayer?

Oral Questions

● (1445)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made it quite clear that we want to see the Senate review all these matters in terms of expenses, which it is doing, to ensure that the rules they have pertaining to expenses are appropriate, and of course to report publicly on that.

The real question is, why does the NDP continue to resist real reforms toward a democratic Senate? Why does it not put forward a plan of its own, if it has a different plan?

The fact is, NDP members may have a plan, but they are not telling us. The member for Timmins—James Bay was asked what the NDP would do about the Senate and his answer was, “I cannot say what the NDP leader will do after the next election”.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I reach out my hand in reconciliation. Let us put it to the Canadian people and let them decide, and not hide behind patronage appointments.

My God, the glaciers are melting faster than the Conservatives are being accountable to the Canadian people.

Speaking of which, we now know that Mike Duffy has ripped us off for, what, \$40,000, \$50,000, \$100,000? Who knows, because the Liberal and Conservative Senators are telling taxpayers it is none of their damned business what Mike Duffy took.

It's a simple question. How much money did he take, and when are we going to—

The Speaker: Order, please. I think we can avoid words like that during question period.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question was put to Canadians in 2006, when we proposed an elected Senate; in 2008, when we proposed an elected Senate; and in 2011, when we proposed an elected Senate.

None of those times did the NDP support it, but Canadians did. They elected a government committed to delivering Senate reform. We brought forward legislation on Senate reform and the NDP has blocked it every step of the way.

What is the real agenda of the NDP? Appointing its own senators. That is the agenda of the NDP.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, British Columbia is developing its resource potential while ensuring the environment is protected. B.C. is known across Canada and the world for its vast resources in forestry, mining and hydroelectricity.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River has the floor.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, B.C. is now embarking on a new path by moving forward on exporting liquefied natural gas, or LNG. These new developments will create jobs and economic growth in B.C. and across Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin has to come to order. The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River has the floor.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, these new developments will create jobs and economic growth, in B.C. and across Canada.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell this House how our government is supporting this important industry?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources is in B.C. today to discuss the creation of jobs, expanded economic growth and long-term prosperity.

Canada is ideally positioned to become a major source of natural gas to the fastest growing economies in the world. We will be working with the provincial governments and the private sector to increase markets for Canadian LNG, while at the same time introducing new and practical environmental protection.

The benefits of natural resources, including liquefied natural gas, extend to all Canadians through tax revenues. Those tax revenues support our social programs, including health care and education. That is why we support this industry. That is why we support market diversification.

* * *

PRIVACY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was a minute of propaganda jingle, if I ever heard one.

The more Canadians learn about the government's handling of private information, the more concerned they get. It not only lost the private financial information of more than half a million Canadians who had student loans, it also lost information on Canadians with disabilities. There is more. Another department is now implicated.

I am not asking about what barn doors the government has closed now that the horses are gone, but what other private information has been lost, floating around out there on a non-encrypted USB key.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the loss of this information is totally unacceptable, particularly as it was avoidable. That is why steps have been taken to change all of the processes and the procedures dealing with the data of individuals so that their privacy and their data are protected going forward.

● (1450)

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a bunch of baloney. It is ridiculous.

We have learned that the Privacy Commissioner will broaden her investigation into the loss of personal data to include the Department of Justice. A lawyer for the department was carrying unencrypted information on approximately half a million Canadians. The Conservatives' lax attitude toward privacy protection is unacceptable.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us whether or not his department allows staff to waltz around with personal information on USB keys?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the loss of this information is totally unacceptable, particularly since it was preventable.

The department has been instructed to change all of the processes and systems for handling Canadians' data in order to prevent this type of incident in future.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is not just about the personal information of Canadians. It is a much larger and more chronic problem that the Conservatives are unable to fix.

Last October, a computer and USB key were stolen from a car. They contained information about more than 700 people under surveillance by an officer responsible for stemming the flow of money to criminal and terrorist organizations.

Can the Conservatives explain the loss of these sensitive documents?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the incident the member is referring to was a FINTRAC incident that happened, I believe, last November. The federal agency responsible contacted the local police and the Privacy Commissioner, as well as all affected businesses and individuals.

Some months ago FINTRAC took corrective steps to ensure this never happens again, including changes to the ways it stores and transports information.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, protecting the private information of Canadians should be a priority, but the Conservatives have repeatedly bungled these breaches. They have lost hard drives, lost USB keys and exposed the private information of thousands of people.

Now the federal agency charged with preventing the flow of money to organized crime might have actually allowed this information into the hands of the very criminals it is trying to stop.

Why did the government keep these serious privacy breaches secret? Where is the transparency?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, FINTRAC is an independent arm's-length agency and specific questions should go to FINTRAC.

However, FINTRAC did take action immediately when this occurred, which I believe was in November. It hardly kept things secret. It called the local police. It called the Privacy Commissioner. As I have already said, it contacted all of the affected businesses and individuals.

Oral Questions

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago the Royal Canadian Legion launched a public campaign calling on the Conservatives to increase funding to the Last Post Fund.

Yesterday, the Royal Canadian Legion got its answer. It is buried at page 382 of the estimates. It shows that the Last Post Fund will be cut next year by \$1.4 million. At the same time, the Conservatives will increase their advertising spend by 10 times that amount.

Why have the Conservatives put self-promotion ahead of a dignified burial for our veterans?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House we will not cut like the Liberals did. To the contrary, while we are finding some—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs has the floor.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals cut the Last Post Fund program, but—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs has the floor.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I was just saying, Mr. Speaker, that the Liberals cut the Last Post Fund program, and we are maintaining this funding while finding administrative savings. Ten thousand veterans are benefiting and have benefited from this program. This program, actually, is being maintained and is fully funded.

Will the Liberals support the \$130 million I will be seeking for veterans?

* * *

• (1455)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of National Defence lost \$4.9 billion off DND's base budget. This is the same minister who cannot line up the fiscal cycle with the procurement cycle and has lapsed billions of dollars in previous budgetary allotments. He is the same minister who has lost military procurement to Public Works and Government Services following the F-35 fiasco.

We have a minister who cannot protect his budget, who cannot spend what he is given and cannot manage his core procurement responsibility. When will this decade of debacles end?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me inject a little reality into the House. In fact, the Conservative government has seen increases of roughly 34% in the defence budget since 2005-06. Let us roll the clock back to when this member was part of the government that presided over a decade of darkness that saw the Canadian Forces rusted out.

Oral Questions

Whether we have increased funding for procurement, for infrastructure, for salaries, or for programs for soldiers, this member and this party have a sad, sorry record of not supporting the Canadian Forces.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the 21st century and companies have regulatory obligations and social responsibilities. These responsibilities also apply to the Northern Gateway and Keystone pipeline projects. Yet, rather than establishing clear and specific regulations, the Conservatives have chosen inaction and improvisation.

When will the government show that it is serious about protecting our commercial and environmental interests and the health of Canadians? When will it present clear regulations for the sustainable development of natural resources?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he knows full well that the Northern Gateway is being reviewed at this point, but I would like to point out a little bit about the NDP.

[Translation]

The NDP is opposed to all oil and gas development projects. It is opposed to mining projects, clean energy projects and nuclear energy. The NDP even speaks out against the forestry industry.

[English]

Is there one sector in natural resources the NDP actually supports?

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): We support environmentally and economically sustainable development, Mr. Speaker.

These guys have been warned. They have been warned by the environment commissioner that failing to make sure that environmental protection keeps pace with resource extraction will endanger Canada's economy. They have been warned by the American ambassador, who hinted at the huge political and economic cost of continued climate inaction, and they have been warned by Canadians from coast to coast to coast, who are standing up against Conservative attacks on environmental protection.

When will the minister get the message to stop making it up as he goes along and to start protecting our environment and our economy?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when is the NDP going to join with us in trying to create good, skilled, well-paying jobs in communities across Canada? We want to do that while maintaining science-based environmental reviews. We have made that clear.

Our economic action plan has made Canada a leader in a troubled global economy. The NDP has opposed that at every turn. We have the lowest debt burden by far. We have the strongest job creation in

the G7, with over 920,000 new jobs created since July 2009. Why does the NDP oppose all of that?

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on what matters to Canadians: jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. That is why our government made the strategic and historic decision to support the Canadian marine industry, to revitalize Canadian shipyards and to build ships for the Navy and Coast Guard right here in Canada.

It has been estimated the national shipbuilding procurement strategy will contribute 15,000 jobs from coast to coast to coast and over \$2 billion in annual economic benefits over the next 30 years. Can the minister provide the House an update on this key job-creating strategy?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his support for the Vancouver Shipyards workers.

Our government is very proud of our historic decision to build our ships for our navy and Coast Guard right here in Canada, in Halifax and Vancouver. Great progress is being made. Both shipyards are investing hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade their yards. This Friday, I announced a series of contracts for our joint support ships, our polar icebreaker and our offshore fishery science vessels with the workers at Vancouver Shipyards.

The national shipbuilding strategy means stability for the industry. It means good jobs and vital equipment for the navy and Coast Guard.

● (1500)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I asked the same question, twice, about shipbuilding costs, and each time I got the same non-answer from the minister, so I will give it another try.

Does she accept the 7% to 11% industry estimate of military shipbuilding inflation? If so, what is it going to be? Will she increase her shipbuilding budget by \$14 billion, or will she build 10 large combat ships instead of 15? It is a very simple question, and it deserves a serious answer.

Oral Questions

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we have allocated \$33 billion for the procurement of new ships that will be built in Halifax and Vancouver. The member also knows that those cost estimates come from military planners. In fact, I believe that the member posed that question to those very experts on this issue at committee, and he was satisfied at that time with their answer.

However, I will reiterate that those cost estimates do come from military planners. They involve the oversight of auditors and cost estimators at the Department of National Defence and, of course, oversight by Treasury Board Secretariat.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 8, when I asked a question about the government's chronic undervaluation of historic sites, I was told that I would be given an answer in a week. It has now been two weeks.

I would like to remind hon. members that, on June 15, 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of the City of Halifax. The government has to compensate the municipalities for the loss of tax revenue. With regard to Fort Chambly in my riding, this problem is depriving the city of half a million dollars a year.

When will the government comply with this ruling and how is it going to do so?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we are reviewing that, but as the hon. member knows, we have made significant investments in arts and culture across the country and have been working very hard with the Minister of the Environment to make sure our national historic sites are preserved. Through all of our economic action plan, we have made sure that historic sites, arts and culture lead to positive outcomes for Canadians. We know that it creates jobs and economic opportunity across the country. Unfortunately, the NDP has always voted against that.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government knows that veterans' mental health can be either a gateway or a barrier to transitioning back to civilian life. Those Canadians who have served our country and are dealing with mental health issues need our support if those issues arise as a result of their service.

Could the Minister of Veterans Affairs please inform the House about a new tool that will soon be available to help our veterans?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Durham for the great question. He is a man who is serving in the House and who has proudly served in our Canadian armed forces.

Yesterday I was pleased to announce a new tool that is being piloted with veterans to help identify and treat post-traumatic stress

disorder. This new self-assessment tool builds on our partnership with the University of British Columbia. It is a soldier-to-soldier, veteran-to-veteran approach. It is happening here, now, in Ottawa.

PTSD Coach Canada is one more step forward in our veterans transition action plan that continues to deliver concrete results for our great Canadian veterans.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada's latest report shows that consumer costs in the north have risen twice as fast as elsewhere in the country. The report shows that the major factor increasing the price of food is the Conservative's own nutrition north program. This flawed program has stuck northerners with overpriced, over-packaged, poor-quality food. Clearly, the government has to take action to reduce the high cost of living in the north.

The NDP has long called for a 50% increase to the northern residence tax deduction. Will the government include such a measure in its upcoming budget?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that there is no government in the history of this country—

An hon. member: In the world.

● (1505)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Yes, in the whole world, that has done as much for northern Canadians.

Let us just look at the example of the northern jobs and growth act, which is geared especially to trying to improve the situation of people living in northern Canada. Instead of opposing that legislation, the opposition should support us.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, recently tabled numbers put before this House by Environment Canada make it clear that by 2020, Canada will totally miss the Copenhagen target adopted by the Prime Minister. It will not even be close.

Here are the numbers: 17% below 2005 levels by 2020 is 126 megatons. Environment Canada is now projecting that it will have achieved only 20 megatons, which, amazingly, is more than current emissions.

Will the government accept that the so-called sector-by-sector, piecemeal, smoke-and-mirrors approach is not working and that we need real climate action?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, this is the first government in Canadian history to actually reduce emissions of greenhouse gas.

Business of Supply

The Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and my colleagues have taken a number of important actions, including the announcement on truck harmonization standards, just recently. We will continue to look at ways to move forward on this important file.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Elaine Taylor, Deputy Premier, Minister of Community Services and Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission, the Women's Directorate, and the French Language Services Directorate for the Yukon.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the President of the Treasury Board overstated the advertising spending of the last Liberal government during its last year in office by 125%. He has done that repeatedly. In fact, it was—

The Speaker: Order, please. All I heard there was a continuation of debate. Perhaps the hon. member can wait until a future question period to make that point, but question period is over for today.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS[*Translation*]**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight our Conservative government's unprecedented support for infrastructure initiatives across the country. No federal government in Canadian history has invested as much in infrastructure as we have. The provinces, territories and municipalities have never had a better partner than our government.

The same cannot be said of the opposition. For seven years, the NDP have voted on ideology alone. They have voted against all of our government's measures to support our partners. I would like to remind the House that it was our government that, despite the NDP's opposition, implemented the first long-term infrastructure plan in 2007. The building Canada fund has an envelope of \$33 billion over seven years. Our government also—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would ask members wishing to have private conversations to please step outside. I cannot hear the minister's speech.

The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government also implemented Canada's economic action plan in 2009 to stimulate the economy when the country needed it the most. We have supported 28,500 projects. Every time, the NDP opposed our government's work.

[*English*]

These achievements speak for themselves as testimony of our government's commitment to public infrastructure.

As the member for Trinity—Spadina specifically cited commute times, I would like to underline our government's continued support to public transit. We have been working in collaboration with all orders of government to support public transit across the country. Keeping in mind that public transit systems are managed and operated by municipalities and provinces, the Government of Canada has acted as a funding partner, respecting the roles and responsibilities of all.

Public transit systems support the prosperity of Canadian communities, and we are a supportive partner for helping to fund capital costs associated with the renewal and the expansion of transit infrastructure.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind the NDP that our government has made record investments in public transit since 2006. If public transit is so important to them, they should have supported our government's work. I would like to refresh the memories of many of my colleagues who were not with us before the last election since the list of measures we have implemented is rather impressive.

[*English*]

Under the \$8.8 billion building Canada fund, a key component of the building Canada plan, public transit was identified as one of the five national priorities. Infrastructure Canada has committed over 40% of that program spending to public transit projects. This includes \$622 million for the Toronto-York Spadina subway extension in addition to \$75 million given under the public transit capital trust, a \$108 million package of transit investment in Vancouver, including upgrades to the SkyTrain system, and a \$100 million investment in public transit in Edmonton.

Under Canada's economic action plan, the government has invested over \$240 million in public transit projects through the infrastructure stimulus, including \$39 million for various projects in Calgary and \$101 million for projects in the greater Toronto area.

Business of Supply

Furthermore, under the Canada strategic infrastructure fund, since 2006 more than \$260 million has been committed to public transit projects. Additional funding was also provided for public transit initiatives through various envelopes, such as a \$400 million public transit fund and a total of \$1.4 billion under two public transit capital trusts.

[*Translation*]

Our government has invested \$5 billion in public transit infrastructure across the country since 2006 through various programs. It is disappointing to see the NDP be so inconsistent. Although the NDP always professes to be the champion of public transit, it always votes against our government's reasonable initiatives to support the development of public transit. We will continue in this vein because our government's work on public transit does not stop there.

[*English*]

Indeed, in addition to these investments, the \$2 billion federal gas tax fund also provides a substantial source of funding for transit projects on a yearly basis.

Some of Canada's largest cities—Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary and Edmonton—have directed either all or most of their federal transfers under this fund to public transit projects.

All in all, municipalities across Canada have used close to \$1.7 billion of their federal gas tax fund allocations for transit investments since 2006.

We do more than provide infrastructure funding. Thanks to our public transit tax credit, Canadians can also claim costs of monthly public transit passes or passes of longer duration, such as an annual pass for travel within Canada on public transit. These public transit investments have been bettering the lives of Canadians residing in large urban centres and smaller communities alike.

Important transit projects have been funded in all parts of the country, thanks to federal support. For instance, in eastern Canada over \$3 million was committed to a bus service in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Government of Canada also worked with the Province of New Brunswick to realize the Codiac transit facility in Moncton, providing \$12.5 million in funding.

[*Translation*]

Our government also supported commuter train improvement projects in Quebec, including those in Dorion-Rigaud, Delson-Candiac and Blainville-Saint-Jérôme.

[*English*]

Close to \$2.1 billion was committed to public transit initiatives in Ontario in the last five years.

In western Canada, federal commitments of close to \$220 million in Alberta and \$500 million in British Columbia have been made for public transit infrastructure initiatives like the south light rail transit platform extension in Edmonton, the new park and ride facility and new transit exchange in Langley, and the 7th Avenue rehabilitation of stations and track work in Calgary.

The NDP always voted against all of the funding to support these projects.

All these projects were made possible through our strong and successful partnerships. We have been working together to leverage investment from all levels of government and the private sector to ensure value for taxpayer money and to address the specific needs of each community.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

In a country as big as ours, public transit needs differ from one region to another. Unlike the opposition, we believe that the provinces, territories and municipalities are in the best position to know what they need in terms of public transit and to develop plans to meet those needs.

That is why our government is giving its provincial, territorial and municipal partners the flexibility they need to determine their needs within these programs.

We will continue to respect provincial and municipal jurisdictions in our support for public transit. That is the way we do things.

[*English*]

We will continue to promote a collaborative approach to work with provinces, territories and municipalities to ensure that Canadian communities remain among the best in the world to live in.

Our record speaks for itself. Our government recognizes the importance of public infrastructure. It has made unprecedented and ongoing investments through its existing programs.

The opposition's record also speaks for itself. Every time it had to vote on a budget item to support the transit system, the NDP always voted against it.

We will continue to build on the success of the economic action plan and the building of Canada plan while we remain focused on creating the right conditions for long-term economic prosperity.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will always vote against budgets that cut Canadian jobs.

That said, the estimate that was tabled in front of the House yesterday cut over a billion dollars in infrastructure funds. It also cut over \$270 million to Via Rail, which is more than half of its current funding.

This will lead to increased commute times and more crumbling infrastructure. It will mean that the water system will continue to age and that there will be even more boil water advisories.

Can the minister explain this deep cut in infrastructure and whether he plans to have a long-term infrastructure program in the upcoming budget?

Business of Supply

He should answer those questions directly rather than resorting to the blame game and old talking points, because Canadians deserve a clear answer.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, this MP knows that assertion is wrong. That is cash management, and we repay bills to many provinces when they send us the bills. We cannot pay bills before we receive them. She already knows that. That is completely wrong.

We have invested more than any government in the past. Some were not there before 2011. They asked for a long-term plan. Now the gas tax is permanent. I think something that is permanent is there for the long term, and the NDP voted against that. We have delivered more than ever for this country and we will continue to do that.

With respect to jurisdictions, that is very important. They want to decide on behalf of municipalities. I am a former mayor; maybe someone wants to become a mayor too, but we will respect the jurisdictions of municipalities and provinces.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not about what the government has done. We voted for that measure and even proposed it before the infrastructure programs. Now we need to talk about what is next. In 2014, the infrastructure plan will be renewed. The \$131 billion infrastructure deficit is a fact.

The Canadian government will tell us that the municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction. When he was mayor, I was minister at the time and I made announcements in his riding for the Roberval airport. I know that the federal government has a role to play in this.

Is the hon. member prepared to move forward with a long-term plan? The gas tax is one thing, but it is not enough. Will he ensure that we can make plans for sustainable infrastructure?

• (1520)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the reference to my time as mayor. Perhaps others aspire to that role, but that is another question, and only time will tell.

We have doubled the gasoline excise tax from \$1 billion to \$2 billion a year. Mayors in cities across the country want predictability; they want to know what is coming down the line. We travelled the country last summer. We held thirteen round tables to look at and gather comments from the provinces and municipalities. No decisions have been made yet.

The global economy is fragile and any decisions we make will take into account the ability of Canadian taxpayers to cover the costs in addition to the global economic situation.

We welcome the member's comments. We know how important infrastructure is for the country, as much for the municipalities as the provinces.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to sincerely thank the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for his work; it benefits his region, Quebec and Canada as a whole.

Could the minister tell me whether this motion is actual useful?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, as I just said, never before in Canadian history have the municipalities and provinces had a partner as involved in infrastructure as our government. We have said that we will continue to be involved at a level that Canadian taxpayers can afford. As we have said many times, we will balance the budget.

While we want to balance our country's budget, the official opposition wants to create a \$21 billion carbon tax and then hand out a few goodies to show that they are good managers. We would rather leave as much money as possible in the pockets of Canadian taxpayers. We have lowered taxes 140 times since we came into power. We want to keep going in that direction.

In response to my colleague's question, I will say that this motion is completely useless. Our government is hard at work and the NDP has voted against every single one of our measures for seven years. It is time for them to walk the talk and start voting in favour of measures on topics they say are important.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition motion gives me an opportunity to tell the House about the many initiatives and achievements of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec when it comes to infrastructure.

Since 2006, the Conservative government has made infrastructure one of its top priorities. An excellent example of this was our economic plan, advantage Canada, which included plans to develop modern infrastructure.

We kept our word and we delivered, as evidenced by the infrastructure programs and initiatives brought forward to help communities and to stimulate our economy.

The most recent initiative currently under way is producing meaningful results. I am referring to the community infrastructure improvement fund, or CIIF, which was launched as part of the most recent budget. The NDP opposed that initiative.

With an envelope of \$31.2 million for Quebec, the CIIF, in place until March 2014, is meant to fund projects for rehabilitating, improving and expanding existing community infrastructure. Improving communities' quality of life is a priority for our government, and residents in communities across Canada are already enjoying the benefits of the CIIF.

Business of Supply

The first call for proposals ended in the fall of 2012, and 542 projects were submitted from across Quebec, 542 projects that would not have happened if it were up to the NDP. The success of the first phase of the CIIF across the country confirmed the program's merits.

Priority was given to existing infrastructure, which is often administered by non-profits or municipalities. This includes marinas, sports fields, playground and park buildings and community centres.

In fact, I was in Drummondville just last week to announce our government's contribution to Le Centre communautaire Pierre-Lemaire for its project to upgrade its facilities.

This centre is an important part of community life in Drummondville. It offers a wide range of services and activities. Our government's contribution will help renovate and refurbish reception rooms and some common rooms. The CIIF improves quality of life in communities through partnership projects while contributing to growth, prosperity and job creation.

Just recently, my colleague, the Hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec was in Quebec City to announce funding for Patro Roc-Amadour. The Patro is an important recreation centre that serves thousands of children, teens, adults and seniors from all backgrounds every year. Such organizations are the heart of community life for our constituents.

By opposing the creation of the program, the NDP opposes our government's support for these organizations. If we go back a few years, other major infrastructure projects have been started since 2006, including the building Canada fund—Quebec in partnership with the Government of Quebec, municipal governments or, in some cases, non-profits or the private sector.

This fund is part of the building Canada fund, which has a national budget of \$8.8 billion and was created under the building Canada plan to fund projects from 2007 to 2014. The fund addresses national, regional and local priorities.

Canada Economic Development implements two components of the building Canada fund—Quebec: the communities component and the large urban centres component. The latter finances projects in communities of 100,000 or more. Our government's contribution to 18 major projects in Quebec totals \$157 million, with total investments of almost half a billion dollars.

● (1525)

These projects include construction of the future Complexe sportif de Saint-Laurent, the Centre multiservice de Shipshaw in Saguenay and the Centres de foires in Sherbrooke and Quebec City, to name only a few.

The communities component of the building Canada fund—Quebec, in which we originally invested nearly \$200 million, has made it possible to carry out 125 projects. Those projects have generated total investments of nearly \$565 million. The NDP opposed every one of those projects.

In 2009, our government adopted Canada's economic action plan to counter the impact of the global economic slowdown on Canadians. For infrastructure alone, the plan provided \$11.8 billion

for projects to be implemented across the country, but that was \$11 billion too much in the NDP's view.

Consequently, the communities component of the building Canada fund—Quebec was enhanced. With supplementary assistance of \$105 million, we contributed to the implementation of an additional 104 projects. We are talking about modernizing public infrastructure in communities of fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, projects ranging from the modernization of water supply systems and water treatment stations to cultural and sports centres. Among many examples, I am thinking here of the construction of the Pat Burns Arena in Stanstead, replacing the old, obsolete arena. Opened in 2001, the new arena benefits Stanstead residents and Stanstead College students as well as the populations of surrounding municipalities.

Our government has invested a total of more than \$461 million in the implementation of 247 infrastructure projects out of the building Canada fund—Quebec. Those 247 projects have received total investments of more than \$1.4 billion. The NDP did not want those 247 projects to see the light of day.

We also established the recreational infrastructure Canada program in 2009 under the economic action plan. As part of that program, the purpose of which was to increase construction activities for recreational infrastructure and to create jobs, the Government of Canada invested more than \$68 million in Quebec alone.

As a result, 208 recreational infrastructure projects received federal assistance. The NDP did not want those 208 projects to see the light of day. Here we are talking about projects to renovate and improve recreational facilities such as arenas, gymnasiums, pools, sports fields, parks and fitness trails.

Whether it be renovations to the Centre civique de Matagami pool, the development of a bicycle path in Lévis or the installation of a synthetic surface on the soccer field of Collège Montmorency in Laval, these are, once again, exciting structural projects that are good for the economic health of communities and the physical health of our constituents.

In addition to all these infrastructure projects, there is the municipal rural infrastructure fund, the MRIF, to which our government has contributed since 2006, investing more than \$213 million, making it possible to carry out 227 projects.

Whether it be the construction of a youth centre in Cap-Chat or the restoration and redevelopment of the Masson-Angers train station here in the region, the MRIF also helps enhance quality of life in the communities and supports economic growth by improving community infrastructure.

Business of Supply

Our infrastructure record since 2006 speaks for itself. Across Quebec, our government alone has contributed to the implementation of 682 projects through the programs and initiatives I have just mentioned. Our financial involvement in those projects amounts to nearly \$743 million, and total investments generated have reached approximately \$2.5 billion. We will continue to promote infrastructure projects for the benefit of our constituents and our communities, and for the good of our economy, despite the NDP opposition's eternal objections.

• (1530)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's speech, I was also present in the House when the government produced an economic update in November 2008 that projected a surplus for 2009 and completely failed to see coming what it now refers to as the "great recession" and had to be pressed into making investments to help save the Canadian economy by the New Democrats and this side of the House. It is interesting to hear this retelling of history.

I want to ask the member about the RInC program he is boasting about. The Conservative government created a program that would give money to municipalities of less than 100,000 in population to refurbish arenas and curling rinks. I tried to access those funds for my riding in Vancouver but was told we had to have a population of less than 100,000, which of course excluded all the major cities in this country. We also saw the Conservatives giving out big cheques with the Conservative logo on them, proving that they regarded this program as a way to shovel pork off the back of trucks. They could not understand the difference between the Conservative Party's and taxpayers' money.

What was the reason for having a 100,000 population limit on those funds? Why did the Conservatives not make those funds available to all communities in this country that needed help with their community centres, rinks and curling facilities and not just the ones in rural Canada? Why was that?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, if my colleague opposite had actually read the program, he would have known that there were funds for municipalities with a population of under 100,000.

How does my colleague opposite explain his inability to recognize that our government has made unprecedented investments in infrastructure improvement nationwide over the last seven years? How could the NDP vote against all of these investments in our country's infrastructure over the last seven years?

I would like him to have the opportunity someday to answer that kind of question. Quite frankly, this motion is completely pointless. It serves no purpose now, because our government has done excellent work on infrastructure in communities across Canada, in co-operation with the provinces, municipalities and non-profit organizations.

• (1535)

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting in this House with my colleague for years, and I hope that one day he will lose the recorded message and answer for himself. I will

quietly ask him a very simple question, so that he can understand it clearly. What is more, a simple yes or no will suffice.

Is the parliamentary secretary in favour of dedicated infrastructure funding? I do not want to hear that the Liberals voted against infrastructure. Liberals are in favour of infrastructure.

Is he for or against dedicated funding?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague from Bourassa that our government set up the Canada-Quebec building Canada fund, which boosted infrastructure initiatives, in co-operation with the municipalities and the Government of Quebec.

I urge my colleague from Bourassa to cheer up. If his dreams come true, one day we will be able to work together in the interests of the Montreal region.

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things this government did was make the gas tax funding permanent in our budget. Municipalities across Canada can now count on that money and know exactly how they can plan for their capital expenditures. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could speak to how this is creating jobs and long-term planning opportunities for our municipalities.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague for this interesting question.

The municipalities are very happy that the Government of Canada is taking steps to make the gas tax transfer permanent. This is a very significant \$2 billion initiative that enables them to obtain recurrent funding and plan for their long-term infrastructure requirements.

We will have appropriate funding for these infrastructure requirements, and it is going to create long-term employment for Canada as a whole.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Western Arctic.

I am incredibly pleased and proud to speak to what I think is one of the most excellent motions ever presented in the House this session, and that is the opposition day motion drafted by my colleague from Trinity—Spadina.

For all Canadians watching right now, I will read the motion and I would like them to consider whether they think this is something they would like their federal government to agree with and vote for. The motion reads:

That this House call on the government to commit in Budget 2013 to a long-term, predictable and accountable federal infrastructure plan in partnership with other levels of government, as recommended by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, in order to: (a) improve Canada's lagging productivity; (b) shorten commute times; and (c) fix Canada's crumbling infrastructure.

Business of Supply

I would venture to guess that when Canadians from coast to coast to coast hear the motion they would be hard-pressed to see how anybody could disagree with a single word in there. Yet the federal government has indicated that it will vote against the motion, and we have heard a variety of reasons for that, none of which make sense. I will leave it up to the Canadian public to pass judgment on whether they think the motion is worthy of support or not.

Canada is facing an unprecedented infrastructure deficit. This is an assessment that has been confirmed by numerous studies and various sources from a variety of perspectives: business leaders, academics, experts, media reports and municipal leaders of all types across the country. They point to the realities of traffic gridlock, failing water systems and potholed roads. It makes it clear that a concerted effort by all three levels of government is needed to tackle the growing infrastructure crisis in earnest.

I have mentioned a couple of the real life services that Canadians get and expect when we use the term infrastructure. Let me itemize what we are talking about. We are talking about roads that Canadians drive on and that businesses use to transport their products, bridges, public transit of all types, buses, skytrains, metros, rail service, water and sewer systems. We are talking about the very guts of the Canadian economy, the very fabric of our cities, municipalities, towns and highways across the country that make life, business, employment and growth possible.

Population growth and increasing urbanization are outpacing investment in infrastructure. The persistent funding shortfalls prevent municipalities from performing crucial maintenance tasks needed to fix this crumbling infrastructure.

The ad hoc budget to budget funding model favoured by the government is better suited to photo ops and pork barrel politics than it is to building strong, dynamic communities, which is what the New Democratic official opposition is committed to. We are committed to building strong, dynamic communities in partnership with provincial, municipal and rural governments across the country so we can make life better for our citizens and we can make commerce easier for our businesses.

The reality is that much of post-war infrastructure in Canada is reaching the end of its lifespan. Canada's infrastructure deficit calculated as the total amount of investments needed to maintain and replace existing decaying municipal infrastructure is estimated at an astounding \$171 billion. The Conservative government, prodded by New Democrats in previous Parliaments, finally has made permanent a certain portion of the gas tax that amounts to funding of \$2 billion a year. We have a deficit just to fix existing decaying infrastructure of \$171 billion. Therefore, I think Canadians watching get an idea of the magnitude of the problem and the insignificance of the Conservatives' solution. We need more.

For five years the New Democrats, as responsible legislators, as responsible parliamentarians, have been calling for a permanent infrastructure program to deal with this current deficit, rather than downloading responsibility to local governments, as the previous Liberal government did in the nineties.

I will pause and just say that the Liberals repeatedly stand in the House and tell us not to talk about the past, let us look at the future.

If I had the record that the Liberals have of downloading infrastructure costs onto the provinces, of slashing budgets and dumping the problems of federal financing onto the backs of provincial and municipal governments, I would not want to look at that record either. However, it is a reality and it should be noted by Canadians. Because if we do not know where we have come from, we will not know where we are to go.

•(1540)

A long-term, predictable and accountable federal infrastructure plan, in partnership with other levels of government, will help our cities adapt to the 21st century economy, sustain economic growth, reduce commuting times and improve Canadian standard of living.

Again, business leaders, and I have already referred to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, municipal leaders, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which is the pre-eminent body in our country that represents cities and towns across Canada, academics and economists are joining the NDP in calling for long-term sustained and predictable investments in public infrastructure to improve economic productivity, quality of life and the competitiveness of our towns and cities.

Anybody who is opposed to this motion would have to be opposed to a wide variety of Canadian sources calling for what is obviously an intelligent and thoughtful economic plan.

However, I want to talk about a few of my constituents because, frankly, I think the Canadian population is ahead of politicians quite often. Here is what some of them have said to me.

In a letter from November 2012, Joshun Dulai says:

Canada needs a cohesive plan and comprehensive investment in our public transit infrastructure. The federal government has an important role to play in making this happen....A national strategy would help make public transit more accessible and affordable. Our current public transit systems are chronically underfunded patchwork and would greatly benefit from a more co-ordinated approach.

As a member of Parliament, you have the ability to make important changes that would increase the quality of life for millions of Canadians, reduce traffic congestion in major urban centres, and upgrade public transit in both urban and rural areas. These steps would improve air quality and cut greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

That sounds pretty intelligent to me.

Here is a letter from Debbie Longley from March 2009, in which she states:

Another thing that I think would have a huge impact on the amount of carbon emissions in Vancouver is to make the buses [more affordable] to ride. I believe [investments] should be covered by tax dollars to encourage people to take public transit. I think it would even encourage many people to choose not to have a car. Others would use their cars less. I am a single mother, and it can be expensive to take the bus with children. This could also help unemployed people to be mobile to find work.

Again, I think that is pretty devastating logic.

Chardon Labrie states in a letter:

i am fed up with the transit system since the snow started. the amount of money i have had to fork over for cabs to get me home at 11:30 p.m. from work is obscene.... the...buses just can't do the job. there is an endless stream of...buses for other areas but [none for my area]. i have paid for a yearly transit pass and feel as if i am not getting my money's worth....we should be able to expect the buses [in Canada] to run in all weather. someone should step up to the plate and fix this problem.

Business of Supply

Again, I think that is a pretty accurate assessment.

These people are calling on the federal Conservative government to step up to that plate.

I want to talk for a moment about the mayor of Vancouver and city council, which is doing an excellent job in Vancouver. Mayor Gregor Robertson, joined by city councillors, Tim Stevenson, Raymond Louie, Geoff Meggs, Andrea Reimer and Heather Deal, all came to this Hill at various times in the past several years to beg the government to devote more money from the gas tax to give them a bit more money to invest the capital funding that they knew was needed.

We know that cities and towns have the bulk of responsibility for delivering public services in Canada. We also know that they receive only 8¢ out of every dollar of taxes collected. Therefore, it only stands to reason, onerous responsibility light revenues, we have to change this mismatch.

What is being called for by my hon. colleague is nothing more than common sense: long-term, predictable, stable funding. That is something we need to do to fix our roads and highways, improve our sewer systems and water supply, get our waste water and drinking water treatment facilities up to snuff, fix our bridges.

I am the critic for international trade. I cannot tell members how many witnesses have come to our committee and said that Canada needs a 21st century infrastructure if we are truly to take advantage of greater trade opportunities. We need to have ports, rail and roads that can move our imports and exports across the country. We need to have facilities that attract businesses here. If the government is really serious about attracting investment to Canada, then we better have the facilities that will make that investment profitable for those companies.

● (1545)

I call on the Conservative government to put ideology aside, do the right thing, listen to Canadian taxpayers, listen to the bodies across the country, listen to common sense and support a motion that is intelligent, needed and well drafted.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last September, in northern Ontario, the provincial Liberal government decided to kill passenger train service on the Ontario Northlander, a passenger train service that was essential for the communities of our region.

The provincial Liberal government's idea of infrastructure is to sell it off, to have fire sales, to walk away from it and leave people without the basic methods of communication and travel that is essential to have a growing economy.

Now the federal Conservative government is refusing to work with the New Democrats on a national infrastructure plan to ensure that we have proper public transit, proper trains, proper municipal infrastructure because it would prefer to keep downloading it to our communities.

What does my hon. colleague think of this short-sighted view of what infrastructure is, where the government seems to think it is something that can be downloaded to the municipalities and to the

taxpayers at the municipal level, rather than have a national strategy to ensure transit and proper housing?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's intelligent and thoughtful question gives me an opportunity to point out the other forms of infrastructure that are important to Canadians such as broadband Internet, hospitals, schools, airports, power lines, dams, wind farms and energy plants. Those also make up a wide array of the public infrastructure of Canada.

Canadians want to invest in their country. My hon. colleague hits the nail on the head when he talks about the Conservatives who ideologically believe in small government. They do not believe in building up public enterprise and public facilities in the country. They believe in reducing, shrinking and selling them off.

Right in my home town of Vancouver, we see the decision of the government to close the Kits Coast Guard station. We are starting to find paperwork that suggests the federal government is really interested in selling off the land on which the Kits Coast Guard station sits.

We know the government has sold foreign embassies and residences. It is selling the farm to pay the mortgage. That is why Conservatives are among the worst financial managers in the history of our country, with the largest deficits in the history of Canada. The one by the Minister of Finance last year is only eclipsed by the one by Michael Wilson in the Mulroney government. That is a fact.

I hear snickering on the side. Those members should check the numbers. Largest deficits and adding \$100 billion of debt to Canada's debt is the legacy of the last five years. The Conservatives do not know how to run the economy.

● (1550)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought it was interesting. In the previous question, the member made reference to the Liberal government in the province of Ontario. The first thought that came to my mind was the NDP government in Manitoba and its many failings.

In terms of looking at infrastructure, we need to see provincial governments working with the federal government in co-operation with our cities, our municipalities, which have their feet on the ground in terms of much of that infrastructure that has to get done. Many would argue that they could potentially play the lead role in terms of ensuring that the tendering, contracting and so forth are done. We are talking about streets, sewers and infrastructure such as back lanes, those sorts of things.

As the cities do not have the financial capability to do the work that is necessary, they rely not only on the provincial governments but the federal government. This is where Ottawa needs to step up and provide the leadership to bring the three stakeholders together to ensure we have proper infrastructure dollars going to these needs.

Business of Supply

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats believe that a long-term effective infrastructure plan should be included in the 2013 budget, which is developed through continuous consultation with provinces, territories, municipalities and aboriginal communities and which would span a period of 20 years to allow for better long-term planning and support of long-term projects, sets clear funding criteria and program targets, uses transparent accountable and non-political allocation mechanisms to facilitate this process, something from which the Conservative government can learn.

It encourages the use of innovative technologies to get better efficiency, to provide dedicated funds for replacing and expanding rural, remote and northern infrastructure, to provide dedicated transit funds, to reduce commute times and to provide regular, frequent and transparent progress reports to Parliament.

Those are the priorities of the NDP. Those are the priorities of the cities, business groups and Canadians across the country. That is exactly what they are going to see in 2015.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this tremendous resolution that has been brought forward by our member for Trinity—Spadina.

When we talk about infrastructure, most Canadians, depending on where they live, think of the needs of big cities. However, Canada's rural and remote municipalities have infrastructure needs just as great as, or greater than, those faced by cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, but are quite clearly without the same political leverage or resources needed to accomplish those things.

As a member from one of the most remote parts of Canada, a former long-term mayor and the president of the NWT Association of Communities, I know just how great the infrastructure challenge is to northern communities. It is composed of a number of different things.

Appearing before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs in 2009, David Austin, representing the Association of Yukon Communities, stated:

...we need to recognize that it is not possible to construct infrastructure in Yukon at costs approximating those of southern centres. The shortness of the season and the lack of skilled trades people in some specific trades are factors. The distance from major markets...transportation costs for materials, and economies of scale are difficult to achieve in the Yukon's relatively small economy.

His comments can be applied to the rest of the north: to the northern territories, to the northern aboriginal communities across the country and to northern parts of all the provinces. Probably 300 communities across Canada could be called rural and remote.

Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories, currently has a well-documented infrastructure deficit of approximately \$67 million, meaning that there is this much infrastructure that is in dire need of replacement. We live in a very difficult environment where the costs are high and where replacement becomes necessary because of climate change and the nature of where we are living.

Yellowknife mayor Mark Heyck recently stated:

...I believe we need to invest more in maintaining our municipal infrastructure than we have in the past, and we need to carefully prioritize our capital projects to put more emphasis on critical infrastructure....

We are not talking about things that are just for the sake of esthetics or simple things like that, but things that are absolutely required to run a small city.

He went on to say:

We also need to be active in territorial and national lobbying efforts through the NWT Association of Communities and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to ensure the territorial and federal governments are adequately assisting municipalities with the cost of addressing our infrastructure deficit.

Just as Yellowknife probably helps out the rest of the country with its great mining industry located there, with the value per capita of the gross domestic product so high, right across northern Canada we are expected to be shouldering the burden of the GDP in this country to a greater extent than any other part of the country. We need to have proper infrastructure to accomplish that.

The 2008-2012 business plan of the Northwest Territories Department of Public Works and Services is even more direct about the infrastructure needs in the territories. It stated:

The fiscal reality is that the GNWT's infrastructure needs exceed, by a wide margin, its financial ability to address them. Therefore, the GNWT is challenged to explore broad and innovative approaches to infrastructure planning, acquisition, usage and maintenance.

The only trouble is innovation can only go so far, meaning that we simply need to invest.

To meet the NWT's infrastructure need, the territorial government has had to borrow. Because of the borrowing limitations imposed by Ottawa, it ran into serious difficulties.

The NWT Minister of Finance stated in this year's territorial budget address a week or so ago:

...every dollar spent on infrastructure is borrowed money, bringing us closer to our borrowing limit and leaving no flexibility to respond to a potential economic downturn or make strategic investments to support economic development and grow our economy.

Therefore, the NWT is in a robbing Peter to pay Paul situation, and the future is not well taken care of.

In Nunavut, the infrastructure deficit is just as great. The Nunavut government estimates that it will require \$6 billion over the next 20 years to meet its existing infrastructure needs.

● (1555)

It has a need for 3,600 more housing units. It needs a deepwater port at Iqaluit and other communities. We had a tremendous presentation this morning at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on the incredible lack of transportation infrastructure in Nunavut.

Nunavut needs to find alternate sources of energy. It is currently using 33.4 million litres of diesel for electrical generation. That is unaffordable to that area and will continue to be unaffordable for the future.

Iqaluit, a city of 7,000 people, has a \$160 million infrastructure deficit. They may be able to scrape together, as the mayor said, the \$20 million for badly needed upgrades, but they cannot even come close to addressing the issues that are in front of them.

Business of Supply

Earlier this month, the Premier of Nunavut was here in Ottawa lobbying for \$500 million over five years for only two projects. That did not go very far.

Those are the kinds of situations our communities and our governments across northern Canada are in. We are expected to be the economic generators of the future, but the investment has to be made now.

It is unfortunate that politics comes into infrastructure investment. We need a clear strategy to move Canadian infrastructure into the 21st century. I served for five years on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' green municipal fund investment, and there was an opportunity across the country to identify good investments that made sense for the environment and made sense for the long-term costs to communities. That information is still available through this great organization, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. We can make a difference with our infrastructure, but we have to take the proper steps.

Improving infrastructure is more than just roads, more than ditches and dumps, more than those things. It is setting our communities up so that they can move to a green future. That is really important. When we invest in something that is not sustainable, that investment hangs around for 40 years making trouble, so we do need to be smart and clever and invest in the proper things.

Our municipalities across this country have taken the effort to understand how those investments are made and are likely to be the best ones to lead us forward in the future in making investments. It is incredibly important for the federal government to recognize the partnership that should be in place with the municipalities when it comes to investment in infrastructure.

I want to quote the former mayor of the City of Yellowknife, Gord Van Tighem, who spent many years in the position. He said, "In towns that have good water, affordable housing, power, and jobs, people can live healthy lifestyles." Healthy lifestyles should be the goal for all Canadians.

The government could take real action on meeting Canada's infrastructure deficit if it would only take a strategic approach instead of funding projects politically to gain the most political advantage. We really have to move away from that. We have to move to a system that allows municipalities to make logical, rational choices about the future according to the best possible practices that have been identified for accomplishing our goals.

Sustainability is so important. We cannot leave our grandchildren with this infrastructure deficit. We cannot accept that our grandchildren will still be trying to go to work in situations that are not cleverly thought out by this generation. This generation has a responsibility to leave something better than we have to date. That should be our goal.

I hope the Conservatives will support this resolution and that we can work unanimously to build a better Canada.

•(1600)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Western Arctic for his presentation and I

agree with every word. I am looking forward to voting for this motion.

Sometimes I think art imitates life. Many of us have enjoyed Terry Fallis' book *The Best Laid Plans* and its sequel *The High Road*, which was premised on the collapse of a bridge and with a good policy background suggested quite a number of successive governments had transferred a fiscal deficit to an infrastructure deficit.

I raise that point because in the debate today there is a really big elephant in the room, which is that we have ignored our infrastructure in ways that have left it crippled and crumbling.

Generations in the past used to invest in the future and think in the long term. If we do not pass this resolution and put new funds in place for infrastructure and take it seriously, we are condemning future generations to a crumbling third world status for Canadian municipalities.

I wonder if my friend has any further comments on that theme.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure of the country is like the clothes we wear. It is like the shoes on our feet. If we wear cheap shoes, they wear out quickly and we end up with foot problems later in life. If we do not dress properly and conserve energy, we might find ourselves getting sick more often.

Everything we do in our lives is important. We are facing challenges now that go beyond the borders of Canada and apply to the whole world. Therefore, we have a responsibility not only to Canada to fix our infrastructure and to do a good job, but we also need to set examples and join the rest of the world in working very hard come to grips with what the proper infrastructure is and how we can live our lives in a better fashion so we will leave something for our grandchildren to work with.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask the member to recognize the degree to which we have this huge infrastructure deficit, no matter in what region of the country. In the Atlantic region, the northern region, the Pacific region, the Prairies, in Ontario or Quebec, all municipalities, big and small, need to invest more in things such as roads, sewer lines, and so forth.

I would ultimately conclude that unless the federal government is prepared to get serious, and unless the provinces to a certain degree also play a role in this, there is no possible way that our municipalities and cities will have the resources to address the real need. Would he not agree with that assessment?

•(1605)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, we are in the House of Commons. We are not shopkeepers. We are not counting our pennies and handing them out to people one by one. We are here to think for Canadians. We are here to provide an integrated plan for this country.

We are not here to simply be concerned about whether we took \$2 from here and put it over there. We have to think about the future. If Parliament cannot live up to that, we should go home. We should not be here unless we care deeply about what the future means to this country.

Business of Supply

It is not a question of making sure we get jobs this year. That is important, there is no doubt about it, but we have to have an idea of where this country needs to go in the future so that it works for Canadians. Without that, we are lost.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to address the NDP motion today. I believe that it is a motion worthy of support. As the previous speaker representing the Liberal Party has indicated, we will be voting in favour of the motion.

Liberal prime ministers, such as Pierre Trudeau and Jean Chrétien, emphasized the importance of infrastructure. If we look back to the 1970s, we will see that a lot of seed money and ideas led to many successful projects in Winnipeg, for example. It takes a government that has the interest and strong leadership from ministers of the crown who believe in infrastructure and want to be engaged with our municipalities and cities.

Look at some of the things the Liberals did in the past. I think of individuals such as Lloyd Axworthy, who was a champion who fought for infrastructure dollars and looked at ways the federal government could support municipalities, particularly for development in the city of Winnipeg. The Forks project is an example. Today it is Manitoba's number one tourist attraction. If it were not for federal dollars, it would not be there.

We could also talk about the development of North Portage. Again, if it were not for federal dollars, it would not have occurred. The impact it has had on the city of Winnipeg is phenomenal. If one saw what North Portage used to look like, prior to the investment and Ottawa coming to the table, one would be surprised by the degree to which North Portage brings people downtown, especially with the Winnipeg Jets and the beautiful MTS Centre. Different levels of government made that happen.

I made reference to the Forks and the federal dollars coming in. Today it is the most visited destination in the province of Manitoba. That would not have been possible had it not been for the recognition that the federal government had a role to play.

I could talk about Reg Alcock in the Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin governments. Reg fought for the Kenaston underpass. It was not an easy fight. Ottawa, the province and the municipality agreed that we needed to have a pool of money. Consultations took place. The city had its priorities. The province had its priorities. Reg, representing Ottawa, said what he thought some of the priorities of the federal government would be. From that, the Kenaston underpass was built.

If we canvassed Manitobans, particularly those who live in Winnipeg, we would hear that the underpass has been a godsend. In fact, IKEA has just located in Winnipeg. Everyone is saying that Winnipeg is doing so much better. If it were not for the role of the federal government investing in that infrastructure, we would not have the Kenaston underpass. The city definitely was not going to do it alone. It was too big a job. It did not have the tax base to sustain it. Today the whole southern corridor is being developed, in good part because there is better traffic flow. It is one reason IKEA moved into the location south of that underpass.

A great deal of construction is taking place. In the north end is the twinning of Inkster Boulevard and CentrePort. Ottawa has a role to play. If Ottawa does not play a role, it is not going to be developed the way it needs to be developed. If we deny that development from taking place, we are preventing other economic opportunities that would generate wealth for Winnipeg, the province, and all of Canada. With the investment and participation of the federal government, we will recognize the dream of CentrePort. These are the types of infrastructure programs that make a difference.

● (1610)

I remember the 2007 provincial election. I was sitting on a street with my then leader, Jon Gerrard, talking about the potholes. We agreed that the City of Winnipeg could not do it alone. It did not have the resources to improve the infrastructure. The province needed to come on board to provide some of those necessary funds.

Ottawa also has an important role to fill. If it does not do that, we will see more of our streets and our back lanes crumble. Everything I said could be applied to every province and territory in Canada.

All of these investments would provide the opportunity for economies throughout our country to prosper. However, it takes political will. It takes courage. It takes leadership for the government to recognize the importance of infrastructure and to start investing not only resources but time. The Government of Canada needs to sit down with the provinces and the municipalities and come up with a strategy.

The Liberal Party has been calling for a transit strategy for years. I hear from rural communities and from my colleagues from the 905 area, who talk about train transportation or subway development and the need for Ottawa to pony up and become engaged. There is a need for a transit strategy.

We have talked about a housing strategy, because housing is part of infrastructure. The Government of Canada has virtually thrown its hands up and has said that it does not necessarily have any role. I have not seen any real sign of the national government wanting to play a role in a national housing strategy. Our housing stock is infrastructure. Infrastructure is more than a brand new building one might stand in front of to cut a ribbon and have that ideal photo op.

As I said, it is the pothole on the street, the sewer system and providing good quality water. Last year we introduced an opposition day motion calling for clean water for all communities across Canada. How many communities do not have access to clean running water? I would suggest that this is the core infrastructure we need to invest in.

We have water advisories in the province of Manitoba, and I do not think Manitoba is unique. In Atlantic Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador, communities have water advisories. What role does Ottawa have to play?

Municipalities cannot afford this. Look at the overall costs. The revenue base for a municipality is property tax and a few other taxes here and there. None really amount to the dollars that are necessary.

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We hear a lot about infrastructure and dollars and how much is really necessary. I would suggest that there are two numbers one could actually take into consideration. There is one big dollar amount, well into the billions and billions of dollars. In an ideal world, this is what we would want to spend. Then there is absolute need. It is hundreds of millions of dollars, well into the billions, that we need to invest in infrastructure.

● (1615)

If we are not prepared to invest in that infrastructure, there will be individuals who will not be able to drink water from their taps. They will have to purchase bottled water. Individuals will not even be able to bathe properly because of water advisory notices.

Cities and municipalities throughout our great nation will not be able to invest the type of money necessary for roads.

That is the reason it is so important. Infrastructure includes roads, highways, sewer lines, hydro, public transit, housing stock, the environment and water. That is some of the basic infrastructure we need to look at long term. It is not good enough for the government to say in budget 2013 what it going to do and to say in 2014 that it will think about it and let us know as we get closer to the 2014-15 budget year.

For years we have been saying that we want sustainable funding for many years. That is the way plans can actually be implemented. Cities across the country would present a five-year capital plan for infrastructure. Now they do not have any real sense of what they can absolutely count on coming from the federal or provincial governments. There needs to be more certainty, because that certainty allows for better planning.

I heard one member make the statement that Toronto spent millions of dollars digging a hole for transit and spent more money filling the hole. Now it has more money to hopefully do the project, so it is digging the hole again. I suspect that we could find stories all over Canada about infrastructure projects that were started and put on hold. They might have been cancelled outright. That is not to mention the ones that were imagined for which requests for proposals were put out.

Imagine the tens of millions of dollars that have gone to waste because we do not have a long-term strategy. That is something we believe is absolutely necessary. That is why I started off by saying that no one should be surprised about what the Liberal Party is doing on this issue. Whether governing the country or in opposition, we have consistently advocated for infrastructure, and we are prepared to invest in infrastructure.

The government crows a lot about some of the investments it has brought in. I should remind the government that it had a minority situation. Many of the investments it brought in were brought in because the opposition forced it to. That is the reality.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: They might not necessarily like that, but that is the reality. The proof is in the pudding. At the end of the day, you needed opposition support to sustain yourselves. I believe that led to more infrastructure—

● (1620)

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to remind the member that he is to address his comments to the Chair, not to the other side of the room or to other members of the House.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep my eyes focused on you and just kind of have that listening ear, because I know that at times the Conservatives will be a little sensitive because of all the generosity of ideas we provided the government when the Liberals were in opposition. We are the only political party that has been in government that has consistently argued that investment in infrastructure in Canada is the way to go, and that is because we believe in it.

Now we are challenging the government to take it to the next level, and that means recognizing that it has to have a strategy and be prepared to look at long-term investment. That means the Conservatives have to start meeting with and talking with the stakeholders. I have only been challenged on that particular issue. This is the only Prime Minister who has not had a premiers' conference where he has actually sat down with all the premiers. At least, I do not think he has actually met with all the premiers around one table. He prefers one on one.

There is something to be said for meeting with all of the premiers and saying that infrastructure is important to our nation, and by having that group meeting they bring in their supports and staff for the premiers' offices. We should be incorporating our first nations and our territories in this discussion. There is phenomenal infrastructure that needs to be dealt with in regard to our first nation reserves, but the government should bring them to the table and actually come up with a larger plan, like the Kelowna accord was a larger plan. We need to develop a larger plan. We need to see the Prime Minister demonstrate that he is prepared to pony up in terms of money and resources, but also demonstrate that he is prepared to commit the time that is necessary and to work with other levels of government and with our first nations and other stakeholders and see what we can do to address this infrastructure.

As I have indicated, if Ottawa does not come to the table, is not prepared to play that leadership role that is so badly needed today, we will never be able to deal with the infrastructure deficit we have. That is why it was encouraging to see the opposition day motion and why we believe it is worthy of support.

I have talked about some of the other projects we have done and seen in the past, but there is so much more. Over the weekend I had someone bring up the need for a Kenaston underpass. I can recall individuals like Reg Alcock and many others, individuals not only in Winnipeg but outside of Winnipeg, who have talked about a Kenaston underpass and asked what the future is for a Kenaston underpass. Right now there is no such thing, but there is a huge demand for it. Without the federal government coming to the table, the likelihood of work taking place is greatly diminished.

We are talking about significant dollars and if the government were to canvass the many different municipalities that are out there and canvass the needs of our first nations, we would find it getting well into the billions of dollars.

I conclude my remarks by appealing to the Prime Minister and suggesting that he needs to take the issue of strategic planning more seriously; he needs to start working and consulting with the different stakeholders who are out there. At the end of the day we are denying positive economic and social activity by not investing in our infrastructure. I highly recommend that the government support this motion and I look forward to having the opportunity to put it to a vote.

• (1625)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my Liberal colleague talked about strategy and long-term investment, but that is really strange. Let us not forget that it was under the Liberal government that the cycle of investment in infrastructure declined during the 1990s, which has created an infrastructure gap, and the Conservatives have continued that infrastructure gap.

We need long-term funding for infrastructure, especially for small and rural communities that do not have the luxury of having engineers at the ready, because it takes them a little longer. We have to look at a plan that not only takes us up to the next election but goes longer.

Let us consider places like Chapleau, where the water pipes are deteriorating so badly that the water is coloured and there is sediment present when people open their taps. We can also consider Little Current where, because of the government's inaction with respect to the low water levels in the Great Lakes, the water level is dropping so much that people are having trouble with their pipes in the lake and cannot get water or their lines are freezing or they have to put out another 100 feet of pipe. The township of Little Current could use some of that money to provide much-needed water to those communities. Unfortunately, it does not have the money.

Maybe my colleague could speak about the importance of this to small rural communities, especially those in northern Ontario.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am not too sure if the member caught my opening remarks when I talked about consistency. Actually, there is only one party in the House of Commons that has consistently supported infrastructure investment —

Mrs. Carol Hughes: The NDP.

• (1630)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: —and it is not the New Democrats. I can assure her of that.

Even during the 1990s when the Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien team balanced the books, were able to guarantee health care funding and ultimately built sustainable long-term health care, we still invested in infrastructure. We can talk about the Wellness Institute and others. There were many different infrastructure projects that went ahead.

To answer the specific question from the member, we need to recognize that many of the municipalities do not have anywhere near the tax base it would take to bring up their infrastructure to the degree that they would be able to perform at peak. We could say an infrastructure project is needed in a small rural community, but in

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order to get to another community, we have to go through that community. It is not just the immediate community that benefits. The broader community benefits even if there is a smaller investment in a smaller community. It is about economic development.

The Liberal Party has consistently looked at infrastructure investment as a way to not only achieve economic improvement but also facilitate social improvement and many other improvements as a direct response to investing in infrastructure.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague across the way for his dissertation, but I do not agree with much of what he said.

An interesting point he made is that the Liberal Party is taking credit for things we are doing on this side of the House. I would point out that in 2011 Canadian voters decided we were doing the right thing and believed in what we were doing. They put the Liberal Party in the third party status in the House believing in what it was saying. Clearly, voters have decided who was moving the country in the right direction.

My simple question is this. The Liberal member was talking about a long-term infrastructure plan. Infrastructure plans cost billions of dollars, not millions but billions and billions of dollars. There are three ways to pay for infrastructure, in my view: raise taxes, raise debt or reduce services in other areas.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You guys have done all three.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I am asking the member who was speaking which approach the Liberals would take. Would they increase taxes, increase debt or reduce services?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is the problem with the Conservatives. They wear blinders and they think it has to be one of the three. They do not realize that there are other benefits. By investing in infrastructure we are creating other economic opportunities. Our overall economy will perform that much better, which will generate additional revenue. If they keep the blinders on, they will not see the side benefits. They have to recognize at the beginning that if we invest in infrastructure in a wise fashion, we will see a more productive economy. We will see social benefits, and when I say social benefits it could be, for example, like the Wellness Institute that is attached to the Seven Oaks Hospital. The institute would not be there if it were not for infrastructure dollars.

We have to take a bit more than just increased debt, increased taxes or reduced services, because those are not really the only options available.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am disheartened to see that the Conservatives are once again reluctant to support this motion, especially since Canada has a serious infrastructure deficit and this sector is plagued by chronic delays.

Although the Liberals had nothing to do with this deficit or delay, I thank my colleague for supporting this motion. I have a question for him about the idea of a long-term infrastructure plan. The NDP thinks that obviously, this is an investment in the economy and not an expense.

What does the member think?

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[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Let me pick up on that point, Mr. Speaker. One of the things I tried to emphasize is the importance of being able to see the different levels of government participate in developing a long-term strategy.

One of the greatest resources in Manitoba is water and hydro development. It becomes much more difficult for Manitoba to develop its grid line unless it can get more support from Ottawa. Today any real support going toward the grid line is marginal. The role Ottawa could play ultimately is to come to the table and work with the Province of Manitoba in developing that grid line, and doing that would have a positive economic impact for the province and Canada. If Manitoba could manage its hydro properly, it would be in a better position to become a have province, which means it would then be able to contribute to other provinces' wellbeing.

Having said that, we also need to recognize that building the hydro Bipole line on the wrong side of Lake Winnipeg could be a billion-dollar mistake. If Ottawa took an interest in helping to build the line, hopefully the line would be built either on the east side or under Lake Winnipeg. Either option would be a lot better, and the taxpayer would benefit and there would be a lot more economic activity. It is a good infrastructure development.

• (1635)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the member for Halifax West, Foreign Investment; the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, Canadian Heritage.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to this motion on an infrastructure plan that is truly essential to economic and community development and improving the well-being of Canadians.

I would like to take a few moments to read the motion for people who are watching and who may be wondering what we are talking about today. The motion says:

That this House call on the government to commit in Budget 2013 to a long-term, predictable and accountable federal infrastructure plan in partnership with other levels of government, as recommended by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, in order to: (a) improve Canada's lagging productivity; (b) shorten commute times; and (c) fix Canada's crumbling infrastructure.

I would like to talk about the current state of infrastructure in Canada. Every Canadian, in every riding, can identify these problems. Yes, the realities may differ from one riding to the next, but we all have a problem with the state of our infrastructure.

Canada has an infrastructure deficit to deal with. That deficit amounts to \$171 billion, which is a huge sum. Our congested highways, the weaknesses in our drinking water supply systems and our potholed roads: it is all truly shameful for a country that is a member of the G8 and the G20. We are a developed country, and we should not have such a huge infrastructure deficit merely because we do not have a plan.

It is all very well to see the Prime Minister and his minister standing in front of a building and cutting a big red ribbon to make a funding announcement with a big cheque, but that is not planning. Those are just announcements here and there, most often made in Conservative ridings rather than other places. Nevertheless, that is not planning. They are not sitting down with the community and with the provinces. They are not sitting down together to see what is needed. That is the duty of the federal government, the duty of anyone considering infrastructure investment.

I would like to provide some explanation of the situation we find ourselves in on the north shore of Montreal. The population has increased over the last ten years, and the result is that getting into Montreal normally takes 30 minutes, if everything goes well. Morning and evening, however, you can sit in your car for two hours. Sometimes it is even longer, depending on road conditions. If you add it up, that makes four hours a day, or 20 hours a week, that a person—a mother or a father—spends doing nothing. It reduces productivity. Trucks carrying products for delivery are kept waiting. It also reduces revenue. It inevitably affects an individual's quality of life. When a mother, perhaps a single parent, has to wait for hours in traffic, it affects her quality of life and what she can do for her child. Truly, therefore, this is a very serious situation.

A number of projects are pending. Promises have been made at the provincial level, but unfortunately nothing ever happens. We have Autoroute 19, of course. I can talk about people from Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, who have to travel as far as Montreal on a two-lane highway, one lane in each direction. It is really dreadful. There are hopeless bottlenecks. People are frustrated.

Why can people not just sit down, develop a plan that works for everyone in order to improve the transit system, the bridges and the freeways and see to it that more funding is available? In many cases, that is the problem. We have provinces that no longer have the budget, and communities that have even less. I could point out that the city of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines is a small community of 14,000. These people do not have the money to do it all themselves. They need support from their government. That is exactly what this motion is asking for.

• (1640)

I have referred to the benefits of this kind of infrastructure plan for the economy, for people's well-being and improved quality of life, for safety, and for the quality of the environment. I would like to expand on that last point. On the north shore, we do not have a lot of options for public transit. There is the train from Blainville to Montreal, but most of the time, people still need to take their car to get there. Terrebonne is still waiting for its train. There are buses, but they are expensive, and again, you have to take your car to get to the bus.

This is not for lack of will. Everyone in my community would agree to use public transit. It is important; it is good for everyone. But money does not grow on trees. Everyone has to sit down together to figure out a plan; otherwise, we will be moving in the wrong direction.

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I would also like to talk about the importance of non-traditional infrastructure. Usually, people think of infrastructure as drinking water and sewage treatment, highways and bridges, but I would like to talk about another increasingly important kind of infrastructure in our modern era: access to high-speed Internet. In spite of significant efforts, there are still Canadians and Quebeckers who do not have access to affordable high-speed Internet. They are essentially excluded from the digital economy, which is becoming increasingly important.

As well, while members of Parliament are making increasing use of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, people without Internet access do not have an opportunity to communicate directly with their MPs via those tools, or even to communicate with the government to claim employment insurance online, for example. High-speed Internet access has become an essential service. Unfortunately, we have no plan for this either. The government made promises—it promised a digital strategy three years ago—but we have seen absolutely nothing so far. Everyone is angry and is waiting for this digital strategy. Rural and remote communities in northern Canada and Quebec are affected by the lack of an infrastructure plan, especially when it comes to high-speed Internet access.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and all the ministers concerned say they are holding consultations for the budget. That is fine, but can they consult the right people? I know it is not the norm for this government, but would it be possible for it to listen to what people want, for once? The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the leading advocate for municipalities, has asked for this.

This motion is our way of asking the government to listen to the communities and sit down with all the stakeholders, provincial and municipal alike, to see what we can do and what sort of leadership we can provide to give Canada an infrastructure plan and a permanent program that includes the involvement of all levels of government.

● (1645)

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her wonderful speech.

The government is displaying utter arrogance when it acknowledges the need for \$100, when it maintains that in the past it gave \$1 and now it gives \$2, so it has done enough. It claims to have restored stability to municipalities, to be handing over 8¢ for every dollar and to have accomplished amazing things. How arrogant!

Meanwhile, the situation has deteriorated to the point where people no longer even have clean drinking water. The sewer system has collapsed completely. One need only visit any large municipality to observe firsthand crumbling buildings, roads and infrastructure everywhere. The situation is urgent. We need to invest in this area.

I really liked what my colleague had to say. She talked not only about traditional infrastructure, but also about new infrastructure like the Internet. We are not even talking about environmental considerations, which are essential, but about the economy and the future.

Would my honourable colleague care to comment further on this matter?

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. As the member for the riding adjacent to mine, he obviously has a clear understanding of the issues facing our region and of the concerns voiced by our constituents.

Regarding new technologies, we need to look ahead and make sure that the plan includes developing infrastructure for high-speed Internet access. All of these things must be taken into consideration. Merely talking about one area of the economy and making an announcement in a region because it involves a nice building project is not really a plan.

We need to think about the Internet, sewers, bridges, roads and highways. Everything that comes under the heading of infrastructure must be developed. We need to think ahead and include new technologies because they are increasingly prevalent.

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to what my esteemed colleague said and made the connection with what we often hear the government say about creating jobs and so forth.

This is indeed a golden opportunity to create quality jobs, not just minimum-wage jobs in fast-food outlets.

Does my colleague agree that if the government truly intended to work with other levels of government, it could be an engine for economic growth, which in turn could lead to the creation of quality jobs, thereby helping Canadians build a better country for their children and for everyone?

● (1650)

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, that is true. We should not think of the proposed plan as an expense because, in the long run, it is an investment in improving our infrastructure. In terms of the economy, it will create direct jobs.

It takes people to build infrastructure. Workers will be able to find good jobs with good wages. This plan has only benefits. I do not understand why the government is not taking action.

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it sounds like there is the same situation in many parts of Canada as we have in my riding, where we have extreme traffic congestion.

Over the last 15 years, as a community association president and as a city councillor, we have worked on two alternative projects: the E and N Rail Trail, and commuter rail on the E and N corridor. In each of those cases, the municipalities have had to spend a lot of time applying for funds, again and again. Under the Liberals, we got nothing. Finally, under the Conservatives there was some funding for these projects, but it was broken into various parts. They have to keep redoing the project and redoing the application. It has been a real burden on local municipalities that have had some very good ideas on how to address the infrastructure deficit.

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[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent point, because we have seen projects broken into parts. Developing a project and then redoing the application takes a lot of energy. It is very complicated.

We are asking for a permanent program so communities can make long-term plans. That way, if they have a project, they can start planning right away. All that will be left to do is hope that the project is approved, but at least they can start long-term projects, and that is the important thing.

[English]

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every summer in my riding of Scarborough Southwest there are some very familiar sights. Many are beautiful, images of the Scarborough Bluffs, beautiful gardens like Rosetta McClain, parks like Warden Woods and the wonderful murals along Kingston Road, to name a few. These sights are traditional and enduring.

However, in Scarborough Southwest we now have a new sight that we associate with summer: the dumpster in front of the house. These dumpsters are not there because people are doing renovations to their homes; they are there because residents are cleaning up their flooded basements after rainstorms. The reason they are having to clean up is because of faulty and decaying infrastructure in Scarborough.

Every summer in Scarborough, far too many people experience flooding due to inadequate and decaying infrastructure. For many, this means raw sewage and stormwater spurring out through their toilets, sinks, shower heads and floor drains. In the past two years, over 1,000 homeowners in Scarborough Southwest have been victims of basement flooding due to inadequate infrastructure.

The impact is not limited to homeowners. In June 2011, less than two months after my election, the basement of my constituency office flooded. That cleanup cost the city thousands of dollars to remediate the damages.

More importantly, in talking about infrastructure today, Variety Village is an exceptional facility in my riding that serves people of diverse needs. Many of Canada's Paralympians train there. People from all across the city make use of the facilities at Variety Village. It is largely funded through private donors, memberships and the generosity of citizens and volunteer labour.

Variety Village made an application to receive some infrastructure funds. Sadly, it was turned down. Then, this past summer during the rainstorms, its roof collapsed. It cost \$250,000, which it had to raise. It had to make insurance claims and go through all of that hassle. Rather than focusing on servicing the needs of its members, people with disabilities and people from all over Scarborough, it had to focus and dedicate its efforts toward fundraising for the money to repair the roof.

That is why the current infrastructure funding and plans do not add up. There is not enough there. It is not stable. It is not long term, and of course the build Canada fund is going to be expiring in 2014.

Having said that, my area of Toronto is not even designated as a chronic basement flooding area, like many other parts of Toronto.

Most of the homeowners I spoke about must trash their belongings, make insurance claims and spend thousands of dollars fixing their basements. Many ask, how did this happen? Why us?

The answer is that much of our infrastructure is reaching the end of its lifespan. Some sewers in Toronto are 100 years old. In fact, the investment needed to maintain and replace our decaying infrastructure nationwide has ballooned to a stunning \$171 billion. That has only grown in the last seven years under the leadership, or lack thereof, of the government.

Current federal infrastructure funding is too little and too beholden to partisan interests and backroom deals. The ad hoc budget-to-budget funding model favoured by the Conservative government is much better suited to photo ops than it is to resolving this serious national crisis. For five years now, the NDP has been calling for a permanent infrastructure program. The federal government needs to get serious and step up to the plate, dedicating significant resources to tackle Canada's serious infrastructure program.

People in Scarborough Southwest, and indeed across Canada, are counting on the federal government to act on this issue and to act now. There is simply no more time to waste. Our cities face debilitating gridlock. Our water and sewer systems are failing at an alarming rate. Our roads continue to deteriorate, and our bridges are literally falling apart around us.

Canadians are counting on the government to act, and to act quickly. The time to act, as I said, is now. The NDP is simply asking the federal government to commit in its budget of 2013 to a long-term, predictable and accountable federal infrastructure plan. We ask that this plan be in partnership with other levels of government, as recommended by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

● (1655)

Developing a plan that would start to relieve the enormous infrastructure crisis facing all Canadians requires a government with political will. Playing politics with the fate of our infrastructure, and ultimately the fate of Canadians' quality of life, is offensive, objectionable and dangerous. What we need in budget 2013 is a long-term infrastructure plan. This plan needs to be developed through continuous consultation with the provinces, territories, municipalities and first nations communities. It should span a period of at least 20 years, allowing for better long-term planning and support for long-term projects. The plan should set clear funding criteria and program targets, as well as use transparent, accountable and non-political allocation mechanisms to facilitate the submission process.

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The New Democrats would like to see a plan that encourages the use of innovative technologies that allow better efficiency and sustainability. The plan should also provide dedicated transit funds in order to reduce commuter times. In the GTA and around the city of Toronto, we are facing a loss of productivity that adds up to over \$6 billion per year because of the gridlock caused by inadequate transportation infrastructure. Such a plan should contain provisions for regular, frequent and transparent progress reports to Parliament.

It is interesting to note that business groups, such as Canada West Foundation and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, agree that public infrastructure investment is the missing link to correct Canada's sluggish productivity and that those investments must be strategic not political. These groups also highlight the fact that gridlock is a major threat to economic prosperity in metropolitan regions. This is why reducing commute times is a critical component of any long-term infrastructure plan. Instead of one-off funding through an application process that is beholden to partisan interests, clear-cut funding formulas like per capita allocations would ensure reliable, predictable funding for provinces, territories and municipalities.

The federal government must commit to an infrastructure funding plan with a long-term horizon. A budget-to-budget approach is structured so that longer-term funding projects like transit do not qualify for funding. Regular reviews are needed to ensure targets are being met and investment volumes adjusted. During times of economic hardship, a dedicated infrastructure bank can be used to make strategic investments that will stimulate our economy, lower unemployment levels and make use of lower interest rates. A federal long-term infrastructure bank can give municipalities access to federal low-interest rates, keeping costs low and saving taxpayers money.

That is right. It is us on this side of the House who want to see taxpayers' money spent wisely and not wasted on things like the Senate.

The time for the federal government to act, as I said, is now. With the Building Canada fund set to expire in 2014, Canada's municipalities need immediate funding support to avoid missing a vital construction season. With 11,000 jobs being created for every \$1 billion in infrastructure investment, job growth and economic productivity hinge on federal infrastructure funding. It is a crucial opportunity that Canada cannot afford to waste.

Going back to my riding of Scarborough Southwest, we have been around for well over 100 years. Where Scarborough was built up over time, much of our infrastructure was built around Canada's centennial, 1967, with many projects happening during that time. One such project was a large water tower that was built at Warden and Eglinton. A few years ago, that tower was in disrepair. It was having all kinds of problems and the water quality for local residents was put at risk. The City of Toronto made the remediation. It put well over \$1 million in scaffolding around this water tower in order to make the corrections and fix the problems. Now that the investment has been made and those jobs created, the water supply for residents in Scarborough Southwest is secure for another 50 years. This is the kind of investment we need to see in areas like Scarborough, and indeed all across the country, in order to ensure we maintain a safe and prosperous society for the future.

As my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville was talking about, we need to look into the future for new technologies and new forms of investment. However, we also have to look at new areas that are being developed and their needs down the road, and perhaps one of my colleagues will give me the opportunity to talk about that later on.

● (1700)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, interestingly, I found myself agreeing with the member, on a number of points. The member suggested that the creation of an infrastructure bank in Canada might be a way to move forward, and I agree with him on that. I think there is a role for large public and private pension funds and so forth to participate in the investment of long-term infrastructure. We have seen that in other places.

However, there needs to be an acknowledgement that the federal government is simply a partner in these things. When we were making record investments in infrastructure over the last number of years, we have been a partner, such as for GO transit in the member's region. We have partnered on many upgrades, with over \$1 billion going into Union Station.

I am curious. If we put this on the table, is the member suggesting he is going to vote in favour of infrastructure investments? The NDP did not vote for it in the past.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, like any other piece of legislation or proposal that is made, I will read it before deciding whether I will vote for or against it. Of course, if the government decides to wrap it up in a whole bunch of other things in the budget, such as cuts to EI, front-line services, food safety and other programs, I would find it very hard to vote for it. However, if they were to split it off and have it as an independent bill, that might make it far easier to do.

The member raised the issue of GO Transit. There have been lots of upgrades, but unfortunately they do not help the residents of Scarborough Southwest because during rush hour the trains bypass all the stations in Scarborough. They do not actually service Scarborough. In fact, if the member wants to see more improvements, then that would be one I would like to see.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question on an infrastructure need that is near and dear to my province.

In 2005, the Liberal government announced a plan to place a third subsea cable from Prince Edward Island to New Brunswick in order to replace the two existing cables that are at the end of their useful life. However, this project was immediately cancelled when the Conservatives came to power in 2006, and we are still waiting. We have a problem. As I said, the cables are at capacity and at the end of their useful life.

Business of Supply

This project is important, for three reasons. First, if we were to succeed in attracting an industry to Prince Edward Island that was heavily dependent on electricity, we would not have the capacity for it. Second, Prince Edward Island produces 20% of its electricity from wind; however, if we are going to be able to feed into the grid, we need this third cable. Third, in terms of energy security, invariably we are looking at brownouts and blackouts as a result of the age and capacity of these cables.

It is a big project. It is a \$90 million project, but our province cannot do it alone. We have been waiting for six years for some sort of partnership with the federal government to get this done.

The member talked a lot about the benefits of an infrastructure plan. I would like to flip that around and ask him to comment on the downside of not doing it.

• (1705)

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I illustrated some of the downfalls of not doing it when I talked about gridlock and other issues. Subsea cables, whether we are talking about electrical cables or fibre optic cables, are an important part of our long-term infrastructure program.

I had the opportunity several years ago to visit the wind turbine test sights at North Cape. It was phenomenal to see the different types of wind turbines being tested there as part of the sustainable energy development that we need in the future.

The fact that the program was cut when the Conservatives came to power was a sad day, but it is not the only program the Conservative government cut. There was the national child care program, which is a different form of investment in our future. Certainly the cancellation of that program had a wide impact all across the country. It affected the ability for parents to get adequate child care so they could go to work and contribute to our economy.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the motion before the House today. I have heard a lot of rhetoric from the other side, but there are some facts missing in many of the speeches I have heard from my colleagues across the way.

I do not know how Canadians view it, but I think they would find it difficult not to find the NDP's position today hypocritical, in that the NDP has a record when it comes to investments in infrastructure across this country. Unfortunately, it is an embarrassing record for the NDP.

In the last seven years we have seen significant investment across this country in important and vital infrastructure from coast to coast. This government has dedicated itself to seeing investments go into all kinds of infrastructure, leading to growth and productivity, hope and prosperity, for communities across this country. However, if we look back briefly at the record, we see that the NDP has opposed every single investment that this government has made in infrastructure across this country.

It started in 2007, when the NDP voted against a \$33 billion infrastructure plan to begin with. In 2009, it voted again against the economic action plan for infrastructure investments across Canada. In 2011, it voted against making the gas tax transfer permanent. The NDP did not just vote against it once: it voted against it twice.

The NDP continued, time and again, to vote against infrastructure investments. In the case of the economic action plan, this infrastructure investment led to over 7,500 different investments across the provinces and territories, over 4,000 additional infrastructure stimulus fund projects, and over 1,900 recreational Infrastructure Canada projects.

We recognize that while the NDP might talk a good talk, it has left Canadians wanting. Canadians recognize that and see it as somewhat hypocritical today for the NDP to have finally seen the light.

We are glad the NDP has finally seen the light. I am hopeful, and maybe I am just an eternal optimist, that the NDP will change its ways and vote in favour of investments that would lead to productivity, hope and prosperity for all Canadians moving forward. The NDP has an opportunity when the next budget comes forward.

However, I can tell members that over the last seven years, what I have learned is that the NDP has a plan that is different from the plan our government has.

As a matter of fact, I believe the NDP plan is to raise taxes. We see that, of course, in its constant advocacy for a \$21 billion carbon tax. We see that in its opposition to investments that would lead to growth and hope and prosperity in investment projects in municipalities across this country. We also see its increased desire for additional red tape in building infrastructure and moving infrastructure projects forward.

We have had completely the opposite plan. Our government has dedicated itself to reducing taxes, to reducing the burden on job creators and on local families to ensure that there is more prosperity and more development in our communities across this country.

We have also increased investments in infrastructure across the country to build sewers, to build roads, to build tunnels and bridges and all the other vital infrastructure that is necessary for more growth, jobs, hope and prosperity.

We also have moved to reduce red tape to ensure that municipalities can build the necessary infrastructure without additional and unnecessary costs.

Of course, as I said, the NDP has voted against all of those.

What has our plan led to? As a result of the Conservatives' plan of investing in infrastructure and investing in Canadians and setting Canadians free to do what they do best, which is move forward and build this country, we have seen since the bottom of the recession that Canada has led all other countries in terms of job growth, investment and all the things that Canada is now known for. We are a shining light when we are compared to any other jurisdiction in the world, with 900,000 net new jobs, 90% of which are full-time and 90% of which are in the private sector.

Business of Supply

• (1710)

I hear my colleague from across the way laugh. It shocks me and it horrifies Canadians that NDP members would laugh at job growth, that they would laugh at the development, the growth and prosperity of our country when every other country is looking at Canada with envy. Every other country, every other jurisdiction is looking to Canada as to how, during the time of international economic devastation, Canada was leading in job growth while continuing to drop taxes and continuing to see prosperity. Canada is highlighted in every country as a jurisdiction to emulate.

The NDP has a different plan, and that is why the NDP members laugh at our plan, but Canadians are not fooled. We believe that building together with municipalities and the provinces is an important thing. Our country has dedicated itself over the last seven years to doing that, and we will continue to do that over the budgets to come. However, we will do it in a prudent way, to ensure that we move toward balanced budgets and toward continuing to see this country move in the direction of prosperity, hope and opportunity for every Canadian.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there was often a chronic lack of intellectual honesty in the presentations made today by the Conservatives.

Let us put this into perspective. The party in power tables a budget and the opposition votes against the budget, quite often because it sometimes finds that it lacks initiative, for example, with respect to infrastructure. That has to be clear. In my riding, just about every constituent I meet thinks this is a bad strategy. They see what the Conservatives are doing. It is ridiculous.

Are any of my colleagues opposite aware that this strategy is failing and that it lacks any intellectual honesty?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I think the record speaks for itself. It is frightening that the hon. member across the way thinks he can convince Canadians that history does not matter.

We will have an opportunity in the coming months to see if the NDP members will stand with their past practices of desiring increased taxes, increased red tape and no investment in municipalities.

I call on the members opposite to change their ways and finally side with Canadians.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I request that the division be deferred until tomorrow, at the expiry of time provided for government orders.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the vote on the motion will be deferred until tomorrow evening.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

OPPOSITION MOTION—MISSING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The House resumed from February 14 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to the order made on Thursday, February 14, 2013, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

• (1800)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 617*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Ashfield
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Baird
Bateman	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bevington
Bezan	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Brisson

Privilege

Brosseau	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Rafferty	Raitt
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinoooge	Rajotte	Rankin
Butt	Byrne	Ravignat	Raynault
Calandra	Calkins	Regan	Reid
Cannan	Carmichael	Rempel	Rickford
Caron	Carrie	Ritz	Saganash
Casey	Cash	Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Charlton	Chicoine	Schellenberger	Scott
Chisu	Chong	Seeback	Sellah
Choquette	Chow	Sgro	Shea
Christopherson	Clarke	Shipley	Shory
Cleary	Clement	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Coderre	Comartin	Sitsabaesan	
Côté	Cotler	Smith	Sopuck
Crockatt	Crowder	Sorenson	Stanton
Cullen	Cuzner	St-Denis	Stewart
Daniel	Davidson	Stoffer	Storseth
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)	Strahl	Sullivan
Day	Dechert	Sweet	Thibeault
Del Mastro	Dion	Tilson	Toet
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly	Toews	Toone
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeshen	Tremblay	Trost
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Trotter	Truppe
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseauit	Turmel	Tweed
Dykstra	Eyking	Uppal	Valcourt
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Valeriote	Van Kesteren
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty	Van Loan	Vellacott
Fletcher	Foote	Wallace	Warawa
Fortin	Freeman	Warkentin	Watson
Fry	Galipeau	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Garrison	Genest	Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère	Wilks	Williamson
Gill	Glover	Wong	Woodworth
Godin	Goguen	Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Goldring	Goodale	Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 278
Goodyear	Gosal		
Gourde	Gravelle		
Grewal	Groguhé		
Harper	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)		
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)		
Hawn	Hayes	Nil	NAYS
Hiebert	Hillyer		
Hoback	Holder		
Hsu	Hughes	Nil	PAIRED
Hyer	Jacob		
James	Jean		
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)		
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)		
Kellway	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)		
Kent	Komarnicki		
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake		
Lamoureux	Lapointe		
Larose	Latendresse		
Lauzon	Laverdière		
Lebel	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)		
Leef	Leitch		
Lemieux	Leslie		
Leung	Liu		
Lizon	Lobb		
Lukiwski	Lunney		
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie		
Mai	Marston		
Martin	Mathysen		
May	Mayes		
McCallum	McColeman		
McGuinty	McLeod		
Menegakis	Menzies		
Merrifield	Michaud		
Miller	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)		
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)		
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)		
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair		
Murray	Nantel		
Nash	Nicholls		
Nicholson	Norlock		
Nunez-Melo	O'Connor		
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz		
O'Toole	Pacetti		
Papillon	Patry		
Payne	Péclet		
Penashue	Perreault		
Pilon	Plamondon		
Poillievre	Preston		
Quach	Rae		

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The hon. Minister of Human Resources is rising on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question of privilege raised yesterday by the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I have been clear over the past two days, just as I was on February 1. Service Canada does not have individual quotas for staff.

As I have also said before, there are performance targets to help protect the benefits of the unemployed from fraud.

There is a clear difference between a quota and a target, and that is simply that there are no negative consequences for staff who fail to meet targets.

As with any business organizations, managers work with their staff to set out general expectations or indicators over the course of the year. Within the federal public administration, career progression is clearly set out by the Public Service Employment Act and is established through a merit-based process.

Private Members' Business

The documents referenced by *Le Devoir*, which were cited by the official opposition House leader, are not used as part of the merit process.

As I have said before in this place, Service Canada was able to stop almost half a billion dollars in ineligible payments last year. However, the employment insurance program still lost hundreds of millions more due to fraud. This is why we continue to work on behalf of Canadians and employers who pay premiums to ensure that their money is used properly.

This is no contradiction. Service Canada and I have been clear that Service Canada does not have quotas for staff.

The House leader for the official opposition cited your ruling on May 7, 2012, where the Chair set out a three-part test for establishing a contempt for deliberately misleading the House.

The first part of that test is that it must be established that the statement was misleading. In this case, the statements are not misleading because they are not contradictory. Therefore, I respectfully submit that the analysis must stop here.

Before concluding, let me quote page 510 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, which states:

In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue.

In fact, this approach seems to have guided your immediate ruling on February 4, 2013, when the Chair addressed a point of order from the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst on one of my February 1 question period responses.

At page 13629 of the *Debates* you stated:

I think what we have here is a question as to an interpretation of what was said or how it was said. It is not for the Chair to rule on.

One final authority that I would cite is the ruling of Speaker Milliken from January 30, 2008. At page 2434 of the *Debates*, your immediate predecessor stated:

...as I have mentioned before on various occasions in this House, any dispute regarding the accuracy or appropriateness of a minister's response to an oral question is a matter of debate; it is not a matter for the Speaker to judge.

Therefore, I would like to submit that this dispute about my response to an oral question is likewise a point of debate and certainly not a prima facie case of privilege.

• (1805)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will look carefully, because she cited a number of references. We will reserve the right to comment further, if it feels appropriate and if there is something in her argument that changes the nature of our point of privilege and that this is a prima facie case.

I have a couple of initial reactions. The minister is trying to make a distinction between “performance objectives” and “quotas”. If included in the way employees are measured or the way their acceleration within the public service is monitored and measured by their superiors, it seems to me that the quotas or performance objectives have some bearing on the employees' advancement and the way their managers consider whether they are effective.

The second point is that in her comments today, she said that as much as \$500 million was recouped from fraudulent employment insurance claims, which we in the official opposition would encourage, because that money should be recouped from those who fraudulently claim EI benefits they are not entitled to. She then goes on to say that there are hundreds of millions of dollars more in fraudulent claims out there that they simply cannot get. That seems to be what the quota program is about. If she has these facts in front of the House, then she clearly can make a case that there is a need for this quota system. However, she is trying to have it both ways, suggesting that there are many hundreds of millions of dollars more in fraudulent claims out there, hence the quota system, which she then later denies. The door-to-door efforts of her ministry have apparently, we have now heard, since been suspended. We do not know.

The fact remains that under your ruling, there is the three-part test. The first part is whether there was an intention to mislead. We asked the minister very clearly: Is there a quota system in place for employees of Service Canada? She said flatly “no” and wants to somehow change the definition of the word, from “quota” to “performance objectives” and the like. Well, an objective and a quota are the same thing if the effect is the same. She is entitled to her own opinion but not her own facts.

We will look at her submission today and see if there is anything further we need to add on the substance of the rules that guide the House. However, initially we cannot suggest that we are moved by a further interpretation and opinion, when, in fact, her intention was always clear, which was to essentially mislead Canadians as to the existence of a quota program that is obviously well in place in her department.

The Speaker: I thank both the minister and the House Leader of the Official Opposition for their further interventions on this point.

It being 6:10, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

LANGUAGE SKILLS ACT

The House resumed from December 10, 2012 consideration of the motion that Bill C-419, An Act respecting language skills, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to stand in this place today to speak to the government's response to Bill C-419, An Act respecting language skills.

The Government of Canada believes that occupants of the 10 positions listed in the bill, persons whose appointment requires parliamentary approval, should be proficient in both official languages. We therefore support the intent of the core provision of Bill C-419. There are, however, a number of technical issues in the bill that need to be addressed before it can be implemented.

Private Members' Business

Our recognition that going forward, occupants of the 10 positions listed in the bill should be proficient in both official languages is a major step forward in our continuing support for Canada's linguistic duality. Members will recall that our government reaffirmed in the 2010 Speech from the Throne that Canada's two official languages are an integral part of our history and give us a unique advantage in the world.

• (1810)

[Translation]

The official languages are central to our identity and contribute to our historical and cultural wealth. Canada's linguistic duality is part of every sphere of our society and is without a doubt a social, cultural and economic asset for Canadians at home and abroad. The official languages contribute to our prosperity and long-term growth. They increase the competitive advantage of Canadian businesses and enhance their ability to access markets in and outside Canada.

Our official languages are also an asset to Canada's economy and the employability of Canadians. The progress achieved in official languages over the past 40 years has made it possible to keep Canada's promise of equality for many of our citizens today.

Parliament passed the Official Languages Act in 1969, more than 40 years ago. Thinking back to that time, we remember that most of the country's communities had to communicate with federal institutions in the language of the majority. Only limited government services were available in French. Today more than 90% of official language minority communities have access to federal services in the official language of their choice.

In short, we can definitely be proud of the progress that has been made, and we know we have an excellent foundation on which to build.

[English]

Our government is building on this strong foundation through our Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality, which we adopted in 2008. We recognize that official language minority communities contribute to our country's cultural and economic vitality and our government is proud to support their development.

The roadmap reflects our strong commitment to promoting Canada's linguistic duality and the development of official language minority communities across Canada. It represents an unprecedented investment of \$1.1 billion in the preservation and promotion of Canada's official languages.

The roadmap builds on the solid foundation laid with the Constitution and the Official Languages Act. It also builds on more recent federal efforts to encourage the use of English and French across the country and to improve the conditions that will enable official language minority communities to flourish for the benefit of all Canadians.

It complements federal official languages policies, programs and investments aimed at ensuring, for example, that Canadians can access federal information and services in the official language of their choice.

The roadmap charts course for a more vibrant official language minority communities across the country. Most important, it is built upon the suggestions and ideas put forward by Canadians right across the country, notably official language minority community members expressed throughout the public consultations held in 2007 and in 2008.

[Translation]

On that note, I would like to take this opportunity to mention that our round of public consultations on Canada's linguistic duality was conducted last year. Last summer, the government met with nearly 400 Canadians in small groups across the country to hear their views on the priorities and challenges associated with Canada's linguistic duality.

More than 20 separate consultations were held involving community stakeholders, representatives and leaders of different communities working in various fields such as health, education, immigration and the arts. Canadians also expressed their views through online consultations. The progress we have made to date confirms that our achievement of the objectives of the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality is helping to enhance the vitality of official language minority communities and the involvement of Canadians in linguistic duality.

The communities are benefiting from coordinated initiatives in the areas of youth and education, economic development, justice, immigration and health care services already available to Canadians in the official language of their choice. These investments enhance Canadians' ability to live, work and prosper in their preferred official language.

• (1815)

[English]

For example, Health Canada's training networks and access to health services initiative is improving access to health services for official language minority communities. It is also improving the availability of bilingual health professionals who can meet the needs of all Canadians, and it is providing specialized tools required to measure and improve the health of official language minority communities.

A total of 155 health access projects will have been launched during 2010 to 2013 under the Health Canada roadmap initiative, and I would to highlight a few of them. One of the projects is designed to coordinate recruiting efforts of regional stakeholders in order to fill the needs of bilingual workers in the Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine region. Another concern is the English translation of health information documents in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. A three-year project, from 2010 to 2013, is facilitating the delivery of health care services in French in retirement homes and providing support to family caregivers in three French-speaking communities of Newfoundland and Labrador. Another three-year project from 2010 to 2013 is creating and distributing public health education and awareness tools for French-speaking and Acadian pre-school children in Nova Scotia.

Private Members' Business

The strength of this momentum has not gone unnoticed. Health Canada's initiatives were recognized in the 2009-10 annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages for its commitment to community consultation. This is just one area where the government is doing excellent work.

[Translation]

The Annual Report on Official Languages, which we recently tabled, underscores the progress we have made in communications with and services to the public in the official language of their choice. It also provides details on the important work involved in creating and maintaining workplaces that foster the use of English and French.

I will conclude by emphasizing once again that our government has shown leadership, as may be seen from our commitments and the measures we have taken to meet those commitments. We are capitalizing on the many achievements of the past four decades. We have definitely come a long way over the past 40 years. We have come a long way since the time when federal services were offered in English only, in many cases even in Quebec.

Our task is to maintain the extensive progress of the past four decades and to build on it because our two official languages contribute to our national identity. They are an integral part of our history and enable us to strengthen our economy. They enhance Canada's competitive advantage both domestically and internationally.

[English]

They have contributed to Canada evolving into an open society that is able to attract people from different cultures around the world. In fact, our official languages enable Canadians who come to our country to participate more fully in our society, in every way.

In short, our official languages allow us to build a united, prosperous Canada together.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House, not only to talk about Bill C-419, but also to restate the support of the Liberal caucus and to congratulate the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. I share her joy in the fact that her beautiful riding will continue to be called Louis-Saint-Laurent. It was good news that we received yesterday.

[English]

The bill provides that persons whose appointment requires the approval by resolution of the Senate, the House of Commons or both Houses of Parliament, must understand English and French without the aid of an interpreter and be able to express themselves clearly in both official languages.

Of course, the Liberal caucus supports the bill. For some time now, all officers of Parliament have been bilingual, and rightly so. The successful applicant must not only demonstrate a grasp of the complexities and nuances of national issues, but she or he must also have the ability to study matters in both official languages.

This is the only way to ensure fair and credible investigations and decisions.

● (1820)

[Translation]

Moreover, these officers of Parliament must be able to communicate with parliamentarians, who are in many cases unilingual. You cannot provide satisfactory service to Parliament if you can speak to some of its members only through an interpreter. These officers of Parliament must also be able not only to communicate with all Canadians, but also to listen to them and follow what they are saying.

The role of officers of Parliament is not only to be competent public servants: they must also be competent communicators. They must communicate the conclusions of their research with accuracy and subtlety in both languages. Ideally, they should even be able to detect errors that even the most competent translators miss: errors that sometimes completely distort the message in one language as compared with the other.

There is another consideration to be borne in mind. If the head is not bilingual, there is a good chance that the body will not be either. If the Auditor General does not understand French, let us have no illusions: almost everything will be done in English in the Office of the Auditor General. This sends the wrong message to young Canadians.

On the contrary, we must state and demonstrate to young Canadians that some positions with national responsibilities in this country require a mastery of both official languages. Moreover, those languages are international languages, and provide an excellent window on the world. The truth is that Canada is fortunate to have two official languages that are international languages, and provide access to an entire cultural universe. Let us therefore do everything we can to promote this splendid asset we possess, instead of trying to weaken it.

The reason this bill is before us today is that the government made the mistake of appointing a unilingual auditor general. The media tell us that the Prime Minister has acknowledged it was a mistake. Well, it was so a mistake.

[English]

In October 2011, the Liberal Party publicly opposed the appointment of a unilingual auditor general because he did not meet the job description of the auditor general, regarding proficiency in both official languages.

When the Prime Minister wrote a letter to opposition parties on August 31, 2011, making his decision known that he was appointing a unilingual as auditor general, the Liberal Party put the request in for further study in committee. However, this request was not acknowledged by the government.

I hear some of our Conservative colleagues express a concern that the requirement for bilingualism may trump that of competence. However, the point is that bilingualism is indeed one of the essential competences for the job.

Private Members' Business

I would ask the following question of my colleagues who are hesitating. Can they imagine one of these officers being unable to understand English? Which one? Would it be the Auditor General of Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, the Commissioner of Official Languages, and that would be nice for anglo Quebecers, by the way, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, the Information Commissioner of Canada, the Senate Ethics Officer, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada, or the President of the Public Service Commission of Canada?

Which one would they be okay with if she or he would not understand English? Would they be satisfied if this unilingual adult of, let us say, 40, 50, or 60 years old, were to say not to worry, that he or she would learn it over the next months or over a couple of years? Or would they take that as an insult and complete nonsense?

Imagine all the hours spent every day to learn English when, as a top parliamentary officer, he or she has on his or her shoulders the pressing and heavy responsibility to run an office, to prepare the next elections, to assess the last estimates, to understand the needs of the anglophone minority in Quebec, to protect privacy rights in Canada, rights to information in Canada and to protect ethics and good governance in general. These are tremendous responsibilities. We want these competent people on the job right away, full time.

•(1825)

[*Translation*]

The government has stated that it supports the primary goal of this bill. There is reason to fear that this support in principle may not be translated into genuine support. The government remains evasive. We have just heard our colleague talking about everything except the bill. The government talks about some technical problems to be resolved, yet the bill is very simple. We have to keep an open mind, I agree. If there are good amendments to be made, they must be considered. At the same time, however, we must be sure that the government is in earnest in this matter. It is in the government's interest to support this bill, otherwise it may find itself in court.

The appointment of a unilingual officer of Parliament has earned it a stream of complaints and a strong rebuke from the Commissioner of Official Languages. Hon. Jean-Jacques Blais has initiated a court proceeding, arguing that the Official Languages Act, which is a quasi-constitutional statute, must be respected.

Rather than force this matter into the courts, why not do the right thing here in Parliament, among the representatives of the people, and honour the bilingual character of our Parliament and our country by supporting Bill C-419?

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this evening I have the great pleasure of taking part in the debate on Bill C-419, introduced by my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent, whom I would like to thank for her work. It is an honour to speak today.

Bill C-419 deals with officers of Parliament: the Auditor General of Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Privacy Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Senate Ethics Officer, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Commissioner of Lobbying, the Public Sector

Integrity Commissioner and the President of the Public Service Commission. These are officers of Parliament who report to Parliament, to parliamentarians of all political parties.

When we think about the case that triggered all of this, the people who know me know that I had introduced a bill about justices of the Supreme Court of Canada. I strongly believe that in a country that has been recognized as bilingual for 40 years, the judges of the highest court should be bilingual. They are judges who will be judging Canadians. So it starts at the top. It cannot start at the bottom. The topic tonight is not Supreme Court judges, it is officers of Parliament.

The invitation for applications to replace the auditor general was published in the October 2 issue of the *Canada Gazette*. The notice said that proficiency in both official languages was essential. How is it, when proficiency in both languages is essential, that we suddenly find ourselves with a person who is not bilingual?

I want to be sure that Canadians understand that I am not saying that an anglophone or a francophone should have the position. What I am saying is that the person must be bilingual. Pardon my language, but frankly, I don't give a damn who gets the position. I just want the person who does to be bilingual. As Antonine Maillet once said, we do not want all the anglophones to become francophones or all the francophones to become anglophones. What we want is for service to be provided in both official languages. This is a question of respect.

Earlier, I listened as my Conservative colleague listed all the good things his party has done when it comes to the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality. For example, the Conservatives did a national tour last year. What he did not say, however, is that a complaint had to be filed with the Commissioner of Official Languages, and that the Commissioner upheld our complaint. The Conservatives would have been in violation of the law if they did not do their tour. They wanted the Standing Committee on Official Languages to do their work for them.

In part VII of the Official Languages Act, section 41 is very clear: the government must consult the communities before making changes.

After the official opposition, the NDP, lodged a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages, the government suddenly decided to embark on a national tour.

Last October, in a statement to the House, the Conservatives maintained that they had complied with the legislation. However, on October 2, 2010, the name of the new auditor general was announced. They claim to respect both official languages, but they hired someone who was unilingual. Each time the government does something like this, instead of bringing people together, it drives a wedge between them. Rather than unite our country, it divides it.

An important public discussion is now under way. People are telling us that it is not up to us to tell them who can fill certain positions. They are wondering if it means an anglophone cannot get the job, or whether a francophone is ineligible. Come on. There should be no room for this kind of debate in a country like ours. If we acknowledge that there are two official languages, then we need to recognize and respect them both.

Private Members' Business

•(1830)

Prior to the 2011 election, we embarked on a tour that cost taxpayers \$100,000. While this government likes to say that it is careful about how it spends taxpayers' money, it spent over \$100,000 travelling to Canada's north, to Yellowknife and Whitehorse. We went back to these communities. After the election, we argued that the researchers, clerks and other people who attended the hearings along with us could write up what the francophones who appeared before us in Yellowknife and Whitehorse said. However, the government said that this was not possible because there had been an election.

Yet, when this same government was returned to office with a majority, it was unwilling to refer the bills to committee because we had been debating them since 2006. It was unwilling to have its bills examined in committee. Yet it refused to release our study and table it in the House, even though \$100,000 was spent consulting francophones.

We conducted a study of new immigrants to Canada to help communities and regions. In Acadia, for example, we said that if the government ever sought to attract immigrants to New Brunswick, we would like them to be francophones who would contribute to the growth of our communities and ensure the survival of our culture and language. We did a wonderful study. Some Conservative MPs had even recommended that such a study be done. After the election, the government rejected it. We tabled some motions, but the Conservatives voted them down in committee.

Today, they want to take the credit for respecting both official languages. Is it not enough to appoint unilingual judges to the Supreme Court and a unilingual auditor general? This is precisely what the government has done. Today the Prime Minister is admitting his error. At least someone is willing to own up to his mistakes. I do not often give him credit, but I will in this case. He is saying that officers of Parliament must now be bilingual.

It is not enough to have appointed someone unilingual. In 2010, during a minority government, most parliamentarians voted against the appointment of the auditor general. I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Ferguson. This had nothing to do with the person himself, but involved the principle of having someone bilingual. It is not the auditor who does the calculations and checks the figures. That is done by a team of professionals. The auditor is the spokesperson who speaks in public.

Imagine if the government appointed a francophone who could not speak a word of English. When he issued his report to the nation, the entire speech would be in French and the English-language media would be unable to convey it. Imagine such a situation. I am just asking you to think about it.

If the government respected both official languages, it would stop making mistakes like this—mistakes it has acknowledged—and we would have a finer country. If it could recognize our two peoples, or three if you include the aboriginal peoples, we would be one of the finest countries in the world. In some countries, they speak five or six languages, and here in Canada, we are still squabbling over two. How sad.

Everyone here in Parliament wants to work hard for this nation and build the economy throughout the country. All I am asking, from the bottom of my heart, is for the government to recognize our two peoples—not blindly, and without making waves as it has done—and to respect both languages. I would not want a francophone to be appointed to such a position if he did not speak English. I would be against the appointment, and I would say so publicly. Anglophones are entitled to the same services as francophones.

In this respect, I am proud that the government supports this bill, and I am proud of my colleague for introducing it.

•(1835)

I now want the bill to go to third reading, so that we can be done with it once and for all. I also want respect for both official languages to be established in Canada, once and for all.

[English]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to provide the government's response to Bill C-419, An Act respecting language skills.

[Translation]

As you know, this bill was introduced by the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent nine months ago. I would like to commend and congratulate him. I support the intent and the core objective of this bill, and the government that I support in this place will support it also.

[English]

However, there are some technical issues that need to be addressed to strengthen it as the legislative foundation for linguistic duality among the 10 positions listed in the bill.

[Translation]

Our approach is a practical one that demonstrates both our agreement with the spirit of the legislation and our desire to make it an effective legal foundation for something we all believe in.

Linguistic duality is one of the pillars of Canadian history, culture and democracy, and this government is determined to strengthen it in our public institutions. We believe that the individuals occupying the 10 positions listed in the bill should be proficient in both of Canada's official languages.

[English]

However, there are a number of technical issues with this bill that need to be examined more closely in committee before it can be implemented. If passed as currently drafted, the bill would require that persons whose appointments require the approval of the Commons or the other place or both chambers must, at the time of their appointment, understand English and French without the aid of an interpreter and be able to express themselves clearly in both languages.

[Translation]

In addition, the bill provides the Governor in Council with the ability to add officers to this list.

Private Members' Business

[English]

It also provides that in the case of an incumbent's absence or incapacity, the person appointed in the interim would also have to meet these requirements.

[Translation]

We would rather give the language-skills requirement a stronger legal foundation.

[English]

Let me provide our objections to the bill as it stands.

First, the preamble indicates that the bill is grounded on the principle that the 10 officers of Parliament identified herein need to communicate directly with parliamentarians in both official languages. We believe this does not take into account the constitutional right of all Canadians, including the officers listed in this bill, to speak in the official language of their choice in Parliament.

• (1840)

[Translation]

Our second objection is that the bill, to be meaningful, should also specify the type of language skills required, which it does not do now with sufficient clarity. This requirement, as it is currently proposed in the bill, does not distinguish between written and oral expression. Without specifying the type of language skills required, it would be difficult to evaluate whether or not a candidate meets this requirement.

[English]

Third, we believe that due to the constraints the bill imposes on the selection process of senior officials, the ability to add to the list of officers should lie with Parliament rather than the Governor in Council.

[Translation]

Our fourth concern is that the language-skills requirements would also apply to interim appointees.

[English]

This could hamper the government's ability to make timely and effective interim appointments to ensure the continuity of an institution's operations. In addition, this requirement could create a de facto language skills requirement for those people occupying other senior positions within the 10 organizations listed in the bill.

[Translation]

When this bill goes to the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the committee will need to examine how to mitigate the risks associated with these issues. We believe that the bill needs a stronger basis for the introduction of these requirements for the 10 positions listed in the bill.

We are committed to promoting linguistic duality in Canada and strengthening the use of our two official languages. We understand that linguistic duality is at the heart of our identity as a nation, and it contributes to our historical and cultural wealth. It empowers official

language minority communities across the country and contributes to Canada's economic vitality.

[English]

It strengthens the resilience of our federation through the provision of services in both official languages.

[Translation]

Indeed, linguistic duality permeates all fields of our society, and is a social, cultural and economic asset for Canadians not only at home, but also abroad. Bilingualism, for example, opens Canada to la Francophonie.

[English]

Through this international organization, Canada promotes fundamental Canadian values, such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

[Translation]

At the same time, we benefit from the political, cultural, scientific and other contributions made by other members.

In fact, this government's long-standing commitment to bilingualism was shown in 2008 by the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013: Acting for the Future.

[English]

The roadmap laid out the path to build on Canada's linguistic duality for the future with an unprecedented government-wide investment of \$1.1 billion over five years.

[Translation]

This investment represents a 40% increase over the previous roadmap and is proof of our government's commitment to Canada's official languages.

[English]

Clearly, as we reaffirmed in the 2010 Speech from the Throne, Canada's two official languages are an integral part of our history and give us a unique advantage in the world. The government has not wavered from that.

[Translation]

By recognizing that the individuals occupying the 10 positions listed in the bill should be proficient in both official languages, we are acting on our beliefs and strengthening Canada's linguistic duality for the future.

Our position is consistent with the spirit of the bill, and we want to ensure that the introduction of these language requirements has a solid basis in law.

[English]

As for the appointment of the 10 positions listed in the bill, there are many relevant considerations in addition to language skills to be taken into account. These include formal education, practical experience, abilities, personal suitability, knowledge and expertise. We will continue to consider all the criteria that allow us to appoint the most suitable candidate.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

We look forward to working with the members of this house to pass this landmark legislation, which will be good for Canada and all Canadians.

• (1845)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some days it does a body good to rise in the House, and today is one of those days. It is rare to feel this sense of optimism and excitement that leads us to believe that we are close to a broad consensus that would finally allow us to move forward on an issue that should have been resolved ages ago. Better late than never.

I am therefore pleased to speak about a common-sense bill.

In fact, one has to wonder why we are still discussing such a bill in a country that recognizes two official languages.

However, given the growing likelihood that many members of the government and the other opposition parties will get behind this proposal, I would like to talk more about the areas that unite us rather than those that divide us so that this bill can be passed.

In passing, I would like to commend the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst who, long before I arrived in this chamber, had already been fighting for years for the House to treat this country's anglophones and francophones equally.

I would also like to sincerely thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent who, through her bill, is strengthening the rights of francophones in every province and territory. Passing this bill will further strengthen francophone communities.

So, what does this bill say? Since the key message of the bill is contained in just a few short lines, I would like to read it for the benefit of all those who are watching these proceedings via CPAC or elsewhere.

The bill's short title is the Language Skills Act. In my opinion, it could not be any clearer.

The bill simply states:

2. Any person appointed to any of the following offices must, at the time of his or her appointment, be able to understand English and French without the aid of an interpreter and to express himself or herself clearly in both official languages...

I will spare hon. members the rest since the list of the agents of Parliament that should have these skills has already been read out by many of the other speakers.

Once it has been established that Canada has two official languages, everything else should just fall into place naturally.

First, the same level of service should be provided to both language communities since the Constitution protects that right.

Second, people whose appointment is approved by resolution of the Senate, House of Commons or both houses must be able to communicate with parliamentarians in both official languages.

Third, French and English must have equality of status as to their use in all institutions of Parliament.

Equality of use highlights the idea behind the original wording that candidates must have the language abilities before they are appointed to be an officer of Parliament. It seems obvious to me that a unilingual anglophone or francophone, even with the best intentions in the world, will not be able to provide equal service in both languages before learning the second language, something that can often take years.

There is a glaring inconsistency between the services offered to one language community over the other. As I mentioned earlier, in the past, more often than not, it has been francophone communities that end up losing out when the principle of official language equality is twisted.

I have been talking about principles since the beginning of my speech because prejudices in everyday life can become quite significant.

So what kind of service would a Canadian receive if he or she contacted the information commissioner, the privacy commissioner, the chief electoral officer or the auditor general if that government official spoke only the language that the Canadian did not speak?

• (1850)

It is easy to picture the fruitless discussion that would take place, despite the goodwill of the participants. That simple example illustrates the need to support Bill C-419, which was introduced by my colleague.

The entire francophone community is watching the members from every party to ensure that we address this issue once and for all and do not try to hide behind excuses or half-measures.

In his preliminary report on the investigation that resulted from the complaint filed by the member for Acadie—Bathurst, the Commissioner of Official Languages—who is bilingual, thankfully—concluded that the Privy Council Office failed to meet its obligations under the Official Languages Act when it appointed Mr. Ferguson as Auditor General.

As I said earlier, this bill is vital to all of Canada's francophone communities. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention that Bill C-419 on bilingual officers of the House, Bill C-315, which was designed to recognize the language rights of Quebec workers employed by businesses under federal jurisdiction, and the bill to recognize Quebec's political weight within the federation are all opportunities to recognize the Quebec nation. There was political will to recognize the Quebec nation within Canada, but there has not been any political will to grant the rights that should be part of that recognition.

Unanimity is a rare event in this House, I agree, but I am asking the few members not yet convinced of the rightness of this bill to try to walk, from now until the day of the vote, if only for a week, or at least a day, in the shoes of a Canadian living in an official language minority situation. If they do not have the good fortune to be bilingual, let them ask to be answered in the official language they do not know. They will quickly discover what lies behind the drafting of this bill.

Private Members' Business

The goal is not to make all Canadians bilingual, although such a dream can be a fine thing, and such an accomplishment is undeniably an advantage in the international world we now live in. The goal of this bill, rather, is to leave no one behind because of a communication problem arising from ignorance of an official language on the part of an officer of Parliament. It is a question of job skills and requirements.

I must therefore insist: let us never again be told that out of 34 million Canadians across this country, we cannot find a Canadian man or woman who is both bilingual and qualified for the job we are trying to fill. Bilingualism, after all, is an integral part of the skills or qualifications such a person should have.

Our language is much more than a work instrument; it is also a part of our identity. If Canada has chosen to recognize two official languages, for reasons that are historically highly defensible, it should now ensure consistency in its decisions and acquire the means to realize its goals.

The NDP has always been a fervent defender of the official languages in the public realm, and this bill is a conclusive example. We will fight relentlessly for every Canadian man and woman to be able to receive services and interact with officers of Parliament in the official language of their choice. We will soon have an opportunity to send a clear message to all Canadians by voting in favour of Bill C-419.

I implore parliamentarians in all parties in this House, let us not miss this historic opportunity. I will close by thanking all of my colleagues in this House who, in their heart and soul, have already decided to support the bill. I would suggest most humbly to those who still have doubts to drop by the Standing Committee on Official Languages. There they will definitely find food for thought and colleagues who ask nothing better than to discuss with them the wisdom of this measure.

•(1855)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, I will let him know that we do not have quite the full 10 minutes because we need to keep five minutes remaining at the end for the member who moved the bill.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Member spoke in Cree*]

By speaking Cree, I wanted to remind the House that my mother tongue is neither French nor English, but rather Cree. I would have liked to be able to rise in the House today to debate the possibility of making Cree, my mother tongue, an official language of Canada, but I hope this will be the subject of another debate in the future.

I am delighted to rise in the House. I would like to begin by commending my hon. colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for all her hard work on this file, and I wish to warmly congratulate her on having introduced this bill.

Considering the short amount of time I have, I will not bother repeating the objective of this bill, but I think it is important to note that we have two official languages that are recognized here. I spoke in Cree earlier because I believe that I have a constitutional right to speak in Cree in this House. As I said, I will leave that for another day.

It is unfortunate that we have to debate this bill, because French and English have equal status in this country. We should not have to debate this. Some people oppose that very notion, believing that one should not have to speak or understand both official languages in order to do one's job. They believe that a bill like this one could disqualify many very competent candidates. I do not agree with those arguments, but I recognize that they deserve to be debated. However, I believe that this would be misguided, because the question here is not who is providing the service, but rather who is receiving it.

The people who receive the services should be given priority. This means that those positions must be filled by candidates who can serve the public in both official languages.

[*English*]

At this point I think it would be useful to remind people that we are not talking about the entire public service being bilingual. We are not talking about requiring every postal worker in Red Deer to be fluent in French or English, nor are we talking about requiring every front-line EI worker in Lac-Saint-Jean to be completely bilingual. We are only talking about 10 of the highest positions in the Canadian public service. To put that in perspective, there is an estimated 300,000 people who work in the Canadian public service, and we are talking about legislating that 10 of them be required to be fully bilingual.

[*Translation*]

My speech today is in both official languages. I wanted to point that out because neither of these languages is my mother tongue.

I was a representative on the Grand Council of the Crees for many years, and because I speak French, English and Cree fluently, I was better able to represent the interests of my people in Canada, Quebec and around the world. My skills took me to the United Nations, where I represented my people and participated in negotiations on international agreements, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I think that bilingualism is something that is accepted across Canada. Parents are increasingly recognizing that it is necessary for their kids to be able to speak both official languages. This is even the case in aboriginal communities. Take my community, for example, the James Bay Cree in northern Quebec, where most young people today are able to speak in English, French and Cree, their mother tongue.

We are not the only ones who feel this way. The *Edmonton Journal*, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Ottawa Citizen* agree that the Auditor General of Canada should be bilingual. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Société nationale de l'Acadie also support this bill. Even the hon. member for Beauce agrees with us. For these reasons, I will support this bill.

Private Members' Business

• (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent has a five-minute right of reply.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank all those who believe in this bill and have expressed their support.

I am very proud that I can count on the support of so many of my colleagues from all parties. To my colleagues in the governing party in particular, I would like to reiterate the fact that we remain very open to discussion and co-operation regarding any amendments they would like to propose in committee. We think it is very important that this bill pass and we are open to co-operating with them regarding any technicalities they might like to improve.

[*English*]

Language is a fundamental part of identity. Our language is the structure upon which our thoughts are built. Language is an essence of the self. It is intimate, because it lies hidden in all corners of the conscious mind. In a way, we are the language we speak. It has programmed us. We spend our lives trying to defeat its mastery over us.

I love language. It is the field I studied, and one day I will go back to it.

Language has political consequences. Our understanding of nationhood is mostly based on linguistic differences. Where the language changes, often, with time, a border has appeared. Then there are the wonders of the world, bilingual countries, such as Finland, Belgium, Switzerland, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco and Canada. All these countries came to adopt official bilingualism because of different historical and political realities. Arab countries on the shores of the Mediterranean have French from France's former colonial empire. The kingdom of Belgium is a country with borders defined by ancient wars of succession. Switzerland is a patchwork of little and gorgeous cantons that each enjoy a great amount of political independence. Canada is a huge chunk of land left over from British imperial might that has succeeded in becoming one political entity.

History quite literally shapes countries, and it shapes our lives, however detached from it we may feel. Let us talk about history a bit.

In Canada, over the last 40 years, we have come to terms with many aspects of language issues. A great amount of energy has been invested by extraordinary people to make sure that both English and French are respected in Parliament. We have come a very long way from when we were practically a uniquely English-speaking environment. A strong prejudice was once felt by French-speaking minorities scattered across the provinces that saw English as a language ruthlessly imposed by a majority.

Political sensibilities in the 19th century were very different from what they are now. Canada was an imperial colonial experiment from the get-go, so naturally, it carried in its very structure the will to impose. We do not need to try to imagine what that was like. Aboriginal people are still being imposed upon and treated as if they are colonized. This is one thing we still have to fix.

The Parliament of Canada is a bilingual institution. I am often amazed at the quality of the work done by the translators who make sure that every single line of legislation, every last sentence jotted down, is made available in both languages. The task is huge, and it is carried out effortlessly, like it was no more demanding than a stroll through a park. However, translation takes a lot of time. Parliamentary translators work around the clock to make sure that everything is translated.

I am lucky. Even though I still have an accent, I am bilingual. When I sit here in the House, I do not have to listen to the translation. I listen to each person directly. I read papers as they come to me in whichever official language.

Officers of Parliament need to access all kinds of information quickly, and that means without delay. Their job is very important, as they make sure that Parliament does its job properly. They are the eyes of Canadians in the core of the institution. They make sure that everybody is accountable. They are the safeguards in the system. As such, they need to understand exactly what is happening. We cannot possibly tolerate an officer who needs to deal with French-speaking Canadians through a translator.

I would like to remind the members and the public at home that my bill is only consecrating in the law something that is already an established habit. Officers of Parliament need to be bilingual. Institutional bilingualism is something Canada cannot go back on. The only way is forward, and this bill is a decided step in the right direction.

• (1905)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The time provided for debate has expired.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Adjournment Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 27, 2013, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance tonight to follow up on a question I asked before Christmas concerning the takeover of Nexen by the Chinese company, CNOOC. That has actually happened. CNOOC officially took over Nexen on Monday. As we know, it was a \$15.1 billion deal, and it was very controversial in Canada. There was a lot of interest in that deal, and it was finally completed on Monday. It is China's largest foreign acquisition ever.

We know the deal generated a great deal of discussion and debate over how much foreign state-owned control there ought to be of industries in Canada, for example, in the oil and gas sector, which is what Nexen is in, and particularly how much foreign state-owned control of our resources in Canada is acceptable. A lot of people felt very strongly about that issue, and they still do.

Although the deal is done now, it does not mean the debate is over. The debate certainly continues. Many Canadians are still concerned about the lack of clarity from the government in terms of how it is going to decide in the future on proposals to take over Canadian companies.

There really is a need for greater clarity on investment issues like this, which impact billions of dollars in investments. They affect our economy, and they affect thousands of Canadian jobs, as we have seen in the Nexen case and others.

The Conservative government's "make it up as it goes approach" is really not acceptable to most Canadians. While Canada must remain open for business, we should not be for sale. Canadians want to have clarity about our foreign investment policy. They do not want a minister who makes decisions late on a Friday night after having some sort of seance or using a Ouija board, or whatever it is. The decision on Petronas came at almost midnight. Canadians do not want decisions made by a Prime Minister who decides on a whim.

The Conservatives have promised for years to bring greater clarity and transparency to this process of reviewing foreign investments, but like so many other issues they have failed to deliver. I think Canadians are disappointed by their performance on issues like this.

That is why the Liberal Party continues to call for more clarity on what constitutes the net benefit test, which is the test that any proposed transition has to meet under the Investment Canada Act. It also calls for greater transparency regarding the issues that are being discussed between the companies and the government. The

government could at least tell us a little about that. There should be disclosure of any conditions that are attached to proposed deals. We do not have any idea because the government has not told us what conditions they imposed on CNOOC. What kind of transparency is that from a government that has been promising it for years? It does not make much sense.

We need stronger enforcement mechanisms to make sure the conditions that are imposed are lived up to. We need a clear role for affected provincial governments. We need specific ways in which the public can actually have a chance to express their views. We do not have those things.

I think this shows how confused the Conservatives are when it comes to this foreign investment file. Today the Minister of Industry was in Spain speaking on foreign investment, asking for people to come and invest in our wireless sector. He is basically admitting what a mess he has made of that sector, and what a mess he has made with the spectrum auction rules. We have seen no interest from any small companies in becoming the kind of big companies that could compete and create a better, more competitive system in Canada for wireless.

•(1910)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my hon. colleague from the Liberal Party and I welcome him to the file. I thank him for his interest in international trade and in particular for his interest in foreign investment in Canada, something very important for the future of our country, and in particular the CNOOC-Nexen deal, which certainly did raise a lot of interest. I think the government handled it as well as any government could.

We look at foreign investment with a different opinion, quite frankly, than the former Liberal government had during the hon. member's time in government. Not one single foreign investment deal was turned down by the Liberal government. That is certainly not the record of the Conservative government.

I know my hon. colleague follows politics, but he got a little mixed up on the Ouija board, because that was actually Mackenzie King. When he was not using the Ouija board, he was talking to his dog, which was another Liberal Prime Minister.

In all seriousness, foreign investment in Canada is important. It is important to the future of the country. It is important that we do it correctly. I disagree with the hon. member's opinion on whether or not we are doing it correctly.

I want to talk a little about Canadian opportunities for growth, expansion and foreign investment. Much of that investment will come from China or from the Asia-Pacific Rim, and it certainly would be the wrong signal to send if we turned that investment away with the first big deal that China was going to make.

Adjournment Proceedings

The other issue the hon. member wants to ignore is the fact that we have managed to sign a FIPA with China, one of 24 FIPAs that we have signed. That is something his government was not able to do in its time in office and something we were able to do to protect Canadian investment in China and give our companies the same rules and the same protections that Chinese investors automatically have in Canada. We have a clear set of rules for investment in both directions.

That is just with China. We have 23 other FIPAs with other countries to make sure Canadian investment abroad is protected and to encourage a clear set of ground rules for investment in Canada. To back that up, we have the Investment Canada Act.

The rules are clear, but we need to look at the opportunity not only for Chinese investment in Canada, but for Canadians investing in China. Canadian goods and exports rose by 15% last year to \$19 billion. Not only that: our exports to China have nearly doubled under our Conservative government. A 15% increase in exports to any one country is tremendous. It is a huge asset to our workers and our manufacturers, and there are tax dollars generated through that trade.

We are looking at dynamic, high-growth markets, not just in China, but in other countries—in India, all the BRIC nations and the Pacific Rim countries, the mature economies like Japan and the growing economies like Vietnam, as well as other mature economies like South Korea and other growing economies like Indonesia and those countries that will continue to grow and continue to offer opportunity for Canadian businesses.

• (1915)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for his comments and his welcome to the file, although I am sure he recognizes that the file of CNOOC-Nexen was not handled by the Minister of International Trade but was in the hands of the Minister of Industry.

I presume that this evening, as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of International Trade, he is here because his colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, is perhaps not available, and that happens sometimes. I have had that experience myself, as a matter of fact.

I am not surprised that he had quite a bit to say about trade, and that is fine, but I notice he did not really respond to the concerns about the net benefit test, for example, and the government's commitment in repeatedly promising to reform or change the Investment Canada Act, its commitment to revise and clarify it to provide greater transparency to all this.

He talked about a different approach from the one the Liberal government took. Maybe he could tell me in the minute he has to respond to my comments which of the deals that were approved during the time of the Liberal government with Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin had half the public interest or comment as the potash deal or the CNOOC deal, and which of them the Conservative Party or the Reform Party opposed.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my hon. colleague is correct in that at least one of us is responding to the wrong question, but the question that was on the order paper was on the FIPA, not on

the CNOOC-Nexen deal. Therefore, I answered part of his question on CNOOC-Nexen just to set the record straight. However, the order paper question was on the FIPA.

The FIPA with China is important for the future of the country. It is tremendously important for our relationship with China, this huge emerging economy that is going to be a marketplace for Canadian exports and for manufactured goods, for raw materials and for resources. This is a tremendous opportunity.

I appreciate that the hon. member is not suggesting we should not trade with China because the New Democrats suggest that very thing. They look at China with its huge population and tremendous demand for resources and some of the largest reserves of foreign currency in the world and say that we should not trade with it, which is absolutely wrong. At least my hon. colleague from the Liberal Party understands that trade is important.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to come back to the question I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage. I wanted to know whether or not an important museum in my riding, Exporail, the Canadian Railway Museum, would be given the status it deserves as a national Canadian museum. In response to my question, the parliamentary secretary gave some vague explanation that the Canadian government supports museums, and so on.

I would like to take this opportunity today to ask the government again if Exporail will be given the status it deserves and recognition as a national Canadian museum.

There are a number of reasons for giving Exporail the status I am asking for today, and there was even a motion to that effect a number of years ago. Exporail focuses on protecting and promoting our railway heritage. It is vital that we recognize Exporail in order to ensure the sustainability of its collection. This museum is responsible for preserving the Canadian Railroad Historical Association's collection of national interest.

It is important to note that Exporail is the largest railway museum in Canada and that, in the opinion of many museum professionals, it is one of the best museums in the world, if not the best. On July 21, 2011, Exporail celebrated its 50th anniversary, which coincided with the 175th anniversary of the advent of Canada's first public railway between Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and La Prairie 177 years ago now. This was the first public railway in Canada.

In order to ensure the long-term survival of Exporail's collection and the museum's participation in the festivities surrounding the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, it is vital that it be designated a national museum as soon as possible. That way, Exporail can make a significant contribution to this happy event planned for 2017. Such a designation will also show that Canada recognizes the railway's historic contribution to our country in a more official capacity. I would like to remind the government that the construction of a railway from one ocean to the other was one of the conditions on which a number of provinces joined the Canadian federation.

Adjournment Proceedings

This is not the first time that this issue has been raised in this chamber since, on February 27, 2007, the House voted in favour of a motion to recognize Exporail as a national museum. Unfortunately, the government did not follow through and, in the months that followed, it contacted Exporail's management to say that it did not have the budget required and that it did not want to set a precedent by designating a museum outside the nation's capital as a national museum. However, a few months later, the government designated two other museums—the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg and the Canadian Museum of Immigration in Halifax—as national museums.

I mentioned a few items that we, as parliamentarians, must follow up on, and we must recognize Exporail as a national museum.

● (1920)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot say how excited I am to hear my colleague talk about celebrating Canada's 150th anniversary in his remarks. We have known that since the government decided it was going to make 150 a turning point, one of those times when we could celebrate all the people, places and things that have helped make our country spectacular, the NDP has been against almost everything that we have said in that vein. We talked about celebrating events such as the War of 1812. The NDP said that it was something we should not be celebrating.

When we talk about Exporail, here is the good news. I am even more excited to hear that the member wants to make Exporail part of a national museum because we recently announced the new museum of Canadian history. This was a \$25 million investment that we were making in helping Canadians better understand their history. It was going to help repurpose the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Part of that is an opportunity for museums across the country, including the Exporail, to become part of Canada's national museum, part of that structure.

We heard, unfortunately, that the NDP has already said that it will not support the new museum of Canadian history, that it thought it was a waste of time. I hope the hon. member will do what he says he wants to do, work with us, work with his colleagues to help him understand how important it is to create a national Canadian museum of history network across the country, which could include Exporail, should it choose to come on board to this very important initiative.

He also mentioned some of the other things we did. He is quite correct. We have brought in two new national museums. One is the Museum of Immigration, Pier 21, in Halifax, which is a spectacular new museum. It was a great investment and we are very proud of that. The Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg is another great museum.

We increased funding for our national museums and through our economic action plan we have actually stabilized and have ensured that the funding is guaranteed going forward.

It is not just in our museums; it is across heritage. The Minister of Canadian Heritage has done some spectacular work in helping promote arts and culture across the country. We have made very important investments because we understand on this side how

important it is to invest in arts and culture. It is an important economic driver in our country. It is responsible for thousands of jobs and a lot of economic activity.

Therefore, I am really excited to hear how important the member thinks Exporail is to his community, and it is. It is very important that we work to help people understand Canadian history. We can also work through the Museum of Science and Technology, which also has a responsibility in helping preserve our rail history.

Ultimately, I hope he will work with us, support the new museum of Canadian history, support that \$25 million investment and ensure that Exporail becomes part of the national museum network. He is saying that he thinks that would be important for Exporail. It would be a good idea. I encourage Exporail and the member to work with us to ensure it becomes part of that network.

● (1925)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to some of the comments made by my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Each time I hear a Conservative MP or a member of the government say that the NDP never supports government measures, I want to laugh. The measures the Conservatives are talking about are always hidden in a budget or in omnibus bills. I want the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage to know that the NDP is not opposed to all of the measures mentioned by the Conservatives, when these are taken separately, but it does oppose them when they are taken as a package. I am a little disappointed to hear these same comments over and over.

In point of fact, the government spent \$55 million to commemorate the War of 1812. An important battle of this war was fought along the shores of the Châteauguay River in my riding. Several historians in my riding claimed that this battle was merely a minor skirmish and that the government twisted history to praise the war. That is deplorable.

Let me say again that the House of Commons supported a motion recognizing Exporail and awarding it the status of a national museum. That is all I have to say. I am asking once again that it be awarded this status. It deserves it and it is important to my community.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me that the hon. member is troubled by the fact that he has to vote against so many great initiatives that this government brings forward in our budgets and economic action plans, and I get that. There have been very many good things in the economic action plans when it comes to arts and culture, creating jobs and investing in communities, and I can understand why he would be troubled and upset that he is forced by his whip and his leader to vote against those things.

Adjournment Proceedings

Here is a different initiative. If the member does not like the budgets, here is the new museum of Canadian history with a \$25 million investment that will encourage museums across this country to become part of the national museum network celebrating Canadian history. It is a stand-alone bill, a \$25 million investment that will obviously do good things for Exporail in his community. If he really supports that, I hope he will do what his leader and the critic has said and vote with us and not against us, as they have already said they would do.

I understand how upset the member has been. Here is his opportunity to do what the rest of his party will not do: support arts

and culture, support his local museum, vote in favour of this bill, vote in favour of that \$25 million investment and let all Canadians share in Exporail.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:29 p.m.)

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