



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 228 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, March 25, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 25, 2013

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

BAN ON SHARK FIN IMPORTATION ACT

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of the motion that Bill C-380, An Act to amend the Fish Inspection Act and the Fisheries Act (importation of shark fins), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has four minutes remaining to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to this important issue. I want to thank my colleague, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, for bringing this important issue to the attention of members of the House. Frankly, tens of thousands of Canadians have responded in an incredibly positive manner by agreeing with him and many members of the House that the finning of sharks at sea is an intolerable practice that needs to stop.

I talked at some length in my earlier comments about how approximately 100 million sharks are being killed each year primarily for their fins, shrinking the international shark population and resulting in the near extinction of dozens of species. The last time I was on my feet I spoke about the porbeagle shark, which has subsequently been listed as an extinct species. It is found off the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia. The problem with that species is primarily the damage that is done as a bycatch. However, there is still a small directed fishery, and there was some attempt made at an international conference last fall to try to get Canada to recognize that it was another species nearing extinction and controls were required to be put on the fishing effort. Unfortunately, at that time Canada decided not to act, though there have subsequently been some efforts in this regard.

There has been a fair bit of polling done of the general population of Canada, and I believe over 80% of Canadians are opposed to this practice and would support a ban. Likewise, the majority of the Asian community also support the measures proposed by this bill. The question that needs to be asked and that is being posed by the

member who sponsored this private member's bill is this. Why do we not show some leadership on this important issue, move forward, take action, and respond not only to the international nature of this problem but recognize the will of the Canadian population by proceeding with a ban?

Several municipalities have done that. It is not without its controversy, but New Democrats believe that it is time to act because it is the right thing to do. Surely, members in the House can agree to act on the basis that it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to this bill.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour or the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam for a minute. I have the honour of serving on the fisheries committee with them, and their dedication to fisheries conservation is well known.

I would like to start by making it very clear that the practice of shark finning, defined in this bill as the practice of removing the fins from sharks and discarding the remainder of the sharks while at sea, is a deplorable activity. There are up to 100 million sharks a year that are killed, mostly for their fins, according to the UNFAO.

I think I can say that from past discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, there is agreement that sharks play a critical role in our ocean ecosystem and the practice of shark finning as defined above is abhorrent.

In 2007, Canada released its national plan of action for the conservation and management of sharks in response to international calls on states to do so within the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Three shark species are listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora: the whale shark, the great white shark and the basking shark. As a party to this agreement, often known as CITES, Canada takes seriously its obligation to prevent the import of products made from listed species.

Private Members' Business

This having been said, it is important to make the distinction between shark finning and shark fishing. The practice of shark finning is already prohibited in Canada and has been so since 1994. On the other hand, shark fishing does occur in Canada and has been occurring in Canada for over 80 years in many areas. Canada's shark fisheries are clearly sustainable and based on sound scientific advice. In fact, the Pacific spiny dogfish fishery recently became the first shark fishery to be certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council, a testament to the efficacy of the controls placed on that fishery by DFO.

We have controls in place to manage shark fishing, just as we have controls in place for all commercial fisheries. These controls fulfill the government's duty to manage Canada's sea coast and inland fisheries on behalf of all of us.

In case anybody is tempted to ask, I will digress and talk a little about the budget that just came forward. We were very pleased to see that a new program is beginning for the conservation of fisheries through community partnerships. That is a testament to the government's action on behalf of fisheries conservation. Again, the dedication of the entire Pacific salmon stamp to Pacific salmon conservation is another milestone in Canadian fisheries conservation.

With regard to sharks, all licence holders for Canadian shark fisheries and for fisheries where sharks are landed as bycatch are subject to licence conditions that prohibit them from engaging in shark finning. For example, licence conditions, pursuant to subsection 22(1) of the fishery general regulations, are attached to porbeagle shark licences. Conditions clearly state that while fishing under the authority of these licence conditions, "Finning (the practice of removing only the fins from the sharks and discarding the remainder of the shark at sea) is strictly prohibited".

Canadian fishermen can also sustainably harvest sharks on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts through directed fishing conditions for spiny dogfish and allowed bycatch of blue, shortfin mako and porbeagle sharks. However, annual landings of these sharks are very small.

Further, if the licence holder removes fins from any sharks that he or she has retained, the weight of the fin so removed cannot exceed 5% of the weight of the corresponding dressed shark carcasses that have been retained. In other words, a licence holder who has legally caught a shark can remove the fin of the shark as part of the normal dressing of a fish. Finally, to ensure compliance, all shark fins and carcasses must be unloaded at the same time. These measures are specifically to ensure that shark finning is not taking place.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is also responsible for setting the quotas and for enforcing licence conditions that ensure sustainability. As mentioned earlier, shark fins cannot make up more than 5% of the overall weight of a shark that is on board a Canadian fishing vessel. In order to enforce this, all landings are subject to 100% monitoring by dockside observers to ensure compliance. Non-compliance with a licence condition constitutes an offence under the Fisheries Act, as enforced by Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, CFIA, is the federal department dedicated to safeguarding food, animals and plants, which enhances the health and well-being of Canada's people,

environment and economy. CFIA regulates the import of food products, such as shark fins. CFIA is already exploring what can be done on the importation of shark fins.

• (1110)

Shark products for human consumption fall under regulations that address the importation of fish and seafood products. These regulations set standards for quality, safety, identification and are enforced by CFIA. It is not illegal to sell shark fins in Canada, and banning the use of shark fins would damage legitimate sustainable fisheries that supply fins but also other shark products.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans promotes the full utilization of sharks. I would note that shark fins are a specialty food product and a treasured food resource for many of Canada's communities. The fact remains that shark fishing is a legitimate fishery and its products are found in numerous places. Shark meat is available in restaurants and supermarkets under many names: fish strips, stockfish, and rock salmon. It is also in fish and chips or imitation crab meat. This is probably more than anybody ever wanted to know about sharks.

In the health sector, shark cartilage powder is marketed as a healthy food supplement. Shark liver oil is rich in vitamin A and is frequently an ingredient in every child's favourite food, cod liver oil. Some even market shark cartilage as an anti-cancer medicine, though evidence is still being sought in this regard.

Shark products are found in dog food, fish meal and even in fertilizers. Some people may even have shark skin wallets or boots. Collagen from shark cartilage is used in creams and other collagen preparations, and it is even considered kosher.

The Convention on International Trade and Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, CITES, at its triennial conference in Bangkok, on March 3 to 14 of this year, took decisive action for the protection of a wide range of other plants and animals in order to improve the world's wildlife trade. At this meeting, Canada fully supported the decision to include protection for five commercially valuable shark species: the oceanic whitetip, the scalloped hammerhead, the great hammerhead shark, the smooth hammerhead shark and the porbeagle shark, which are harvested in significant numbers for their valuable fins. This decision means that they can only be traded with CITES permits, and evidence will have to be provided that they are harvested sustainably and legally.

Private Members' Business

In fact, the only criteria for fisheries management should be the sustainability of the fisheries resource, not polls. The regulations governing the trade of these products will come into effect in 2014. These new listings join those for three species already under CITES protection: the great white shark, the whale shark and basking shark.

I would like to quote the CITES Secretary-General, John E. Scanlon, who said:

This is a big day for CITES and for the world's wildlife. It takes enormous effort to negotiate treaties and then make them work. The international community has today decided to make best use of this pragmatic and effective agreement to help it along the path to sustainability in our oceans and forests.

Requiring CITES export permits will ensure that international markets are supplied by fish from sustainably managed fisheries and, again, sustainability should be the only criteria.

What has happened as well, given the CITES agreements, is that China, one of the world's biggest markets for shark fins, is already seeing the impact of the world campaign. Shark fin imports to China dropped off dramatically last year, to 3,351 tonnes, from 10,340 tonnes in 2011.

Canada believes that working through regional fisheries management organizations to ensure strong management and enforcement practices globally is the most effective way to prevent unsustainable shark fishing practices. A complete trade ban would penalize responsible and legitimate fishing practices.

Bill C-380 can be seen as interference in the legitimate natural resource management policies of other countries. We must be very careful here. Canada has become a target of ill thought out and disgraceful campaigns by international activist organizations for what are very sustainable natural resource industries. We can look at the seal hunt, forestry and of course the oil sands. Bill C-380 sets a very bad precedent, is overly broad and could unfairly target sustainable fisheries around the world, just as many rural Canadian communities have been unfairly targeted even when science shows their resource use is sustainable and managed well.

There is a role for Canada to promote responsible resource management in international waters and fisheries, but we must ensure we follow the appropriate international channels and do not act unilaterally.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, actions have been taken domestically and internationally to end the practice of shark finning, and they are effective. The measures in Bill C-380 do not add anything further to our current efforts, and that is why we will not be supporting the bill.

•(1115)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. The whole idea of shark finning is cruel and inhumane. It has a very strong negative impact on the shark population in our oceans around the world. To the degree to which it threatens to put some species of shark into extinction, there is no justification whatsoever for shark finning. At the end of the day, I believe this is an issue that has been around for a number of years. In fact, we could go back to 1994, when Jean Chrétien, the former prime minister of Canada, introduced a ban in Canada.

The bill, if amended, could have some potential to reinforce what we believe a good number of Canadians believe, and that is that

shark finning is completely unacceptable in circumstances where the shark carcasses are thrown back into our oceans after their fins are removed.

Most Canadians would experience this by watching shows and news broadcasts. We see majestic documentaries that clearly show the role sharks have played in our oceans around the world, not only today, but for hundreds of thousands of years. Then we see the news broadcasts that paint a very ugly picture. They show how shark finning takes place on all of our oceans. They show where a shark is hauled from the ocean into a boat, is quickly de-finned and then thrown back into the water, where it is left to drown and the body left to decompose.

Many Canadians have seen these practices, whether on YouTube or in documentaries, and this has influenced their opinions on the issue. I believe that, generally speaking, shark finning is seen in a very negative light, as it should be. I suspect that there are very few Canadians who would support that type of shark finning, where the carcass is left to decompose.

Having said that, I want to highlight the fact that this is an issue that has been around for a long time. The Liberal Party has taken, I believe, a responsible approach with respect to this issue. In 1994, we brought in legislation to ban shark finning outright, in terms of our own fisheries.

Many other countries have followed Canada's lead in terms of banning shark finning. We applaud those countries that have seen the value in doing what Canada has done. Sadly, there are still many countries that do not see this for what it is, the inhumane treatment of a shark, and they continue to allow shark finning to occur. There are many businesses and entrepreneurs that continue to practise this disgusting measure.

We are right to do what we can to send the right messages and pass the right laws in order to prevent illegal shark finning from taking place. To that extent, we believe that having the bill sent to committee would be a positive thing. It would be our intent to propose amendments in committee in order to make the legislation more acceptable. As it stands today, it is not acceptable.

•(1120)

We need to recognize that there are two types of shark finning occurring. What is offensive is taking the fins and disposing of the carcass. Throughout the world in many countries there is legitimate shark harvesting and where that occurs those fins are properly packed and ultimately end up here in Canada. It is done legally. There are many benefits to that being allowed to continue. We need to be culturally sensitive because there are cultures here in Canada that put a great deal of value on shark fins. Therefore, the House of Commons would not be justified in putting an outright ban on them. Yet that is what the bill would do if it is not amended.

Private Members' Business

While we are offended by the illegal shark finning that takes place worldwide, we also recognize both the economic and social benefits of allowing properly harvested shark fins to continue to arrive here in Canada. It is important for us to distinguish that.

We have seen city councils here in Canada and in many states in the United States attempt to deal with this issue by passing bylaws. In 2011 or around there, the City of Toronto attempted to ban shark finning and a court ruling overturned it. I am not sure where that case is now, but I believe that for the most part most politicians recognize the sensitivity of the issue and see the value of allowing properly harvested shark fins to come into Canada.

I am very much aware of how sometimes words can be twisted and I would caution members who might want to twist these words because I have had opportunities to talk to people of all ages on this issue, and youth in particular. It is very easy to go into a classroom and paint this picture of the brutality and the inhumane manner in which sharks are being exploited for their fins and to generate huge opposition to that. It appalls me, my constituents and Canadians when that occurs. However, that is quite different from those countries that have established laws and regulations to protect their fishing industries, including sharks, where it is done legally in a humane fashion and then packaged accordingly. We have to be very careful not to lump all as one in this situation.

Because it is a private member's bill, I have recommended to my caucus colleagues that we allow the bill to be sent to committee so that we can achieve the amendments that would ultimately create what a vast majority of the public wants, which is to target the illegal harvesting of shark fin that is taking place worldwide. We must hit it as hard as possible, but not penalize the social and economic considerations that need to be taken here in Canada. We have to look at the fishery industry as a whole.

•(1125)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure for me today to offer support for Bill C-380, an act to amend the Fish Inspection Act and the Fisheries Act, which would prohibit the importation of shark fins not attached to the rest of the shark and enshrine in legislation Canada's prohibition on finning.

I would like to thank and applaud my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for his courage in raising this important issue.

As we all know, an illegal trade in animal body parts exists in the world, such as ivory and rhino horns from Africa, tiger parts from Siberia and bear parts from North America. I am not a hunter but I understand full well the practice of killing animals for food when done in a responsible way to feed people. One might say that shooting a deer in the wild could be considered more humane than putting animals through a slaughterhouse. However, being a meat eater, as most of us are, I accept all of these practices.

On the other hand, killing animals for trophies or body parts is totally reprehensible. That is why I do not support the hunting of grizzlies in my province or anywhere else for that matter.

I have seen the documentary *Sharkwater* and have watched how sharks are caught, their fins are cut off and they are thrown back into

the water. This practice is repulsive, immoral and is largely driven by an underground market controlled by organized crime that exploits threatened and endangered species to maximize profits.

•(1130)

[*Translation*]

Nearly 100 million sharks are killed every year, mainly for their fins. Trade is under-regulated, and it is almost impossible to ensure that imported fins have not been removed illegally or are not from threatened species.

Shark populations are slow to reproduce and cannot support the current overfishing. Sharks are essential to the health of marine ecosystems, and the decline in their population threatens to profoundly disrupt these ecosystems. In 2009, the International Union for Conservation of Nature reported that one-third of shark species were threatened with extinction because of this trade.

In a few decades, shark populations in certain areas have dropped by more than 95%, and they continue to decline. According to some experts, up to 20 shark species could disappear by 2017. In addition, it is impossible to know whether imported fins come from sustainable and respectful fishing.

Shark fin soup currently sells for between \$8 and \$100 a bowl in restaurants. However, in Canada as abroad, more and more people are refusing to serve or eat this kind of soup, and many Chinese restaurants have voluntarily taken this soup off their menu, including Floata in Vancouver, one of the largest Chinese restaurants in Canada.

Some municipalities in Canada have also passed, or will soon pass, bylaws prohibiting the sale of shark fins and related products. The communities in British Columbia that fall into this group are Coquitlam, Abbotsford, Duncan, Langley, the Township of Langley, Maple Ridge, Nanaimo, New Westminster, North Vancouver, Port Moody and White Rock. I congratulate the municipal councils for having the courage to pass these bylaws.

The Chinese government has required that shark fin soup no longer be served at state banquets. A number of prestigious hotels have removed this type of soup from their menu. Many countries, including the Bahamas, Ecuador and Fiji, territories like French Polynesia, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, as well as the American states of California, Hawaii, Illinois, Oregon and Washington have issued similar bans.

Some people say that Bill C-380 will have an impact on international trade. Based on our research, that is not the case.

We studied the possible consequences of an import ban in relation to the WTO obligations, and we feel that this bill complies with Canada's international trade obligations. Furthermore, my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam is open to amendments at committee stage.

[English]

We need to get the bill to committee to address any concerns anyone has.

There are a number of myths about Canada's current shark fin import laws. Some elected members have suggested that Bill C-380 is unnecessary because Canada already has enough laws and that Canada bans the trade of shark products from species protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) or the Species at Risk Act.

According to the Canadian branch of Humane Society International, this is false. Both CITES and SARA only protect three species of shark: basking sharks, whale sharks and great white sharks. In other words, out of 141 threatened or near-threatened shark species only 3 are protected by Canadian federal laws.

Another myth we hear is that Canada bans or restricts the trade, possession or sale of shark products that present human health or safety concerns. This is also false. Shark fins, which continue to be legally imported into Canada contain high concentrations of a potent neurotoxin, BMAA, which scientists have linked to neurodegenerative diseases in humans such as Alzheimer's and Lou Gehrig's disease. This is not unlike, for example, the link between phenylbutazone in horsemeat and aplastic anemia in children.

The third myth states that working through regional fisheries management organizations to ensure strong global management and enforcement practices is the most effective way to prevent unsustainable shark fishing practices such as finning. This is also false. As long as there is a demand for shark fins, there will be local industry pressure on governments not to prohibit the practice. This demand will also perpetuate the poaching of sharks in the waters of countries that already prohibit finning.

Canada has already been identified, for example, by CSIS as a destination country for poached shark fins from Australia, even though some Australian states have some of the world's strongest shark finning laws. Eliminating the demand removes incentive for fishermen to continue finning and poaching sharks.

We have a chance in the House to do something right together, to take a major step and end this disgusting practice. At a bare minimum, I strongly urge my colleagues who are here, and others who will be here later on, to support getting Bill C-380 to committee where there can be a detailed study with feedback from witnesses, as is the case in a democratic process.

It does not hurt, in any of these crucial issues, to have some more insurance. If we think we have good laws, let us beef them up and provide more insurance to toughen them up. We can always ease back on a law after we have toughened it up, but it is really hard to try to enforce something when we do not have the legislative background to do it.

Private Members' Business

For this reason, I urge my colleagues to support Bill C-380. I thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for having taken the initiative to bring this forward.

● (1135)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the important issue of shark finning. As others have said, I am confident that the consensus among all parliamentarians is that shark finning is a barbaric practice. We all agree on this.

The question is how to deal with the issue in an effective way. Bill C-380 is not the way. Why is that? It is because the bill calls for a ban on shark finning, which is already banned in Canada for Canadian licensed vessels fishing within and beyond our territorial waters. In fact, the practice has been banned in Canada since 1994, through licence conditions under the fisheries general regulations.

On the subject of import licence requirements, I am proud to stand before the House and report that our government is exploring options to identify a practical, effective and expeditious resolution to this issue. Specially, our government is exploring the option of adding additional conditions to arrangements that would require that shark fin imports be sourced from jurisdictions that, like Canada, ban the practice of shark finning. That way, we would bolster our domestic ban on this abhorrent practice by putting more teeth into our important protocols.

The course of this action would both respect Canada's international trade obligations and address the issue of shark finning. Best of all, once all of the appropriate considerations had been addressed, the new import requirements would be implemented more quickly than a regulatory change.

We have listened and we are taking action to address the major concerns of the proposed bill.

What are the current regulations? Recently, the issue of shark finning has received worldwide attention, as a number of animal rights and environmental organizations have blamed it for the decline of shark populations worldwide. These groups claim that between 70 and 100 million sharks are caught worldwide just for their fins, primarily for shark fin soup.

Private Members' Business

The practice of shark finning can be lucrative, yielding as much as \$700 per pound for shark fins. Thanks to our government's regulations, shark fishing in Canada is governed by sustainable management plans and strong enforcement. We have strong management and enforcement regimes in place to ensure that finning does not occur in Canadian fisheries. These apply to all shark species in Canadian waters. Shark fisheries are subject to dockside monitoring, at-sea observer coverage, quota monitoring systems, electronic vessel monitoring systems and hail requirements for both the at-sea observer program and dockside monitoring program.

The Fisheries Act is the cornerstone of Canada's fisheries management policy, providing broad powers to the minister for the management, conservation and protection of fish resources. These powers include the discretion to, one, issue licences or leases for fisheries or fishing; two, allocate harvests among user groups; and three, protect fish habitat and prevent pollution.

Section 22 of the regulations provides the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans the specific authority to set out targeted licence conditions for the proper management and control of fisheries and the conservation and protection of fish, including sharks. These provisions provide the minister with the authority to impose, as a licence condition, measures to eliminate shark finning.

We can see that the regulations already allow the minister to impose, as a licence condition, the measure to eliminate shark finning. Therefore, the member's bill seeks to prevent something from happening in Canada that is already prohibited. Today, all licence holders for Canadian shark fisheries and for fisheries where sharks are landed as a bycatch are subject to licence conditions that prohibit them from engaging in shark finning.

The ban is enforced through a number of internationally accepted methods across Canada. One approach requires that the number of fins corresponds with the number of shark carcasses landed by shark fishing vessels. Under a second and more common approach, the number of fins on shark fishing vessels cannot exceed 5% of the overall weight of carcasses on-board when it lands. Both measures are intended to ensure that sharks are not caught solely for their fins.

● (1140)

All licensed shark fishing vessels in Canada are subject to 100% monitoring to ensure that this ratio is respected. Any violation of a licence condition is an offence under the Fisheries Act.

Penalties for those found to be in contravention of their conditions of licence range from warnings, to prosecution, to requests for court-imposed licence suspensions and quota penalties, to loss of privilege of renewal of the exploratory licence.

These measures were put in place to ensure that Canada's shark fishing conforms to sustainable harvesting practices. It is a very practical approach and it has worked well.

Canada's approach is an internationally accepted standard within regional fisheries management organizations.

Canada has additionally worked with other countries to put an end to this practice. Our government will continue to work with our international partners to ensure sustainable management of sharks, including the prohibition of the practice of finning.

Internationally, we promote the sustainable management and conservation of sharks through international organizations, including the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and regional fisheries management bodies such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

There are also a number of international agreements, to which Canada is a party, that govern the conservation, management and trade of certain at-risk shark species. For instance, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora protects the great white, basking and whale sharks. In early March in Bangkok the convention voted at a global wildlife conference to regulate the trade of shark species that have been threatened because their fins are used to make expensive delicacies in Asia. Delegates supported proposals to put the oceanic whitetip, hammerhead and porbeagle sharks on a list of species whose trade is closely controlled.

More than two dozen species of shark are officially endangered, and more than 100 others are considered either vulnerable or near-threatened. Imports of any of these shark species or any of their parts into Canada is only permissible if accompanied by an export permit from the country of origin, which certifies that the imported shark, or products derived from it, were caught in a scientifically proven sustainable fishery.

Our government has taken action against the deplorable practice of illegal shark finning. We continue to support responsible, legal shark harvesters and crack down on those who break the rules.

Furthermore, to strengthen Canada's protection of sharks we are exploring the option to add additional conditions for fish and seafood imports into Canada that would require that shark fin imports be sourced from jurisdictions that, like Canada, ban the practice of shark finning.

We believe that, with these measures in place, private member's bill C-380 would not be required, and we will oppose it.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-380, introduced by the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam. I thank the member for his work on this issue. I know he has been working extremely hard to move forward on this and that he has conducted extensive consultations.

There seems to be a consensus regarding this bill, except on the part of the Conservatives, who have a habit of opposing sensible legislation.

Private Members' Business

Nevertheless, I rise here today in the hopes of convincing them, since there will be a vote on this next Wednesday, if I am not mistaken. I hope we will have the support of enough members of the House to pass this bill and send it to committee.

I thought it was important for me to rise and express my support for this bill, and that of most of my NDP colleagues, at second reading here today. From what I understand, the Liberals will also be supporting it. I hope all members of that party will do so. I also hope that the Conservatives will get on board this time in order to put an end to this problem, which is affecting more and more marine ecosystems around the world. I will come back to this point a little later.

To begin with, as usual, when I study a bill, I like to see for myself exactly what is in the legislation. The bill we are studying here today is very simple. It contains two important points.

First of all, this bill amends the Fish Inspection Act. It prohibits the importation of shark fins not attached to the rest of the shark carcass. That detail is important. It is an important aspect of the legislation that I will explain in detail a little later. Second, the bill amends the Fisheries Act to prohibit the practice of shark finning. I support both of these very simple, sensible clauses in the bill.

The bill adds subsection 3.1(1) to section 3 of the Fish Inspection Act to prohibit the importation of fins, with some exceptions, since special permits can nevertheless be issued.

In addition, the bill also adds subsection 32.1(1) to the Fisheries Act, prohibiting the practice of shark finning and defining that practice. Those are the two amendments this bill makes.

Why are these measures important? Why did my colleague decide to introduce this bill today? The reason is very simple: we currently have a very serious problem with our oceans. Shark species are going extinct. In fact, approximately one-third of species are currently in danger of extinction. This is therefore a critical and urgent problem that we want Canada to help solve.

I know that this bill will not eliminate the problem overnight. However, at least Canada will have sent a very clear message that we are taking measures to try to reduce this practice as much as possible because we are aware of the problem that it is currently causing.

The situation is critical. We must take action to protect and preserve our marine ecosystems. Sharks are at the very top of the ocean food chain, and so they play an extremely important role in the survival of the ecosystem in general, which would be greatly affected by the extinction of most species of sharks. Sharks are a vital component of the ecosystem.

I would like to mention some important statistics. I think that all the members who spoke today mentioned that approximately 100 million sharks are killed every year for their fins.

• (1150)

If that trend continues, up to 20 shark species could be functionally extinct by 2017. Another important statistic: Canada imports an average of just over 100 tons of shark fins per year. According to a CTV news report, testing conducted in British Columbia to determine whether shark fins could easily be found in

Canada and what species those fins came from showed that 76% of shark fins came from endangered species of sharks. That means that most shark fins in Canada come from endangered species.

How is shark finning done? In my opinion, this is a horrible, barbaric and abominable practice. It is inhumane to do what is being done right now: fishers are setting lines that are 85 km long in the hopes of catching sharks, knowing full well that many other species will be killed by this type of fishing. The sharks are even sometimes still alive when they are brought onto the boats. The sharks' fins are simply cut off and their bodies are dumped back into the ocean. Clearly, the sharks will then die because they cannot swim without their fins. It is hard to believe.

When I watched the documentary *Sharkwater* recently, I was quite surprised and disappointed to see that human beings are capable of being so disrespectful toward nature. These animals are basically being tortured. As I mentioned earlier, it is important that Canada send a clear message in this regard, and that is the spirit of this bill. Clearly, we object to this practice.

Earlier, I heard a member say that this could hurt the economy, but we know full well that shark meat is eaten only on rare occasions. Shark meat is rarely eaten. Most of the time, sharks are fished simply for their fins since their meat cannot be eaten because it often contains too much mercury. It is a bit of a flawed argument to say that the industry could also produce shark meat. It is a bit of a stretch to say that this would hurt the economy.

Communities that eat shark are changing their customs. The member for Brossard—La Prairie gave a speech about it. He said that the majority of communities and the new generation oppose the practice. Many countries, including China, have prohibited importing shark fins. China has also imposed restrictions, because it does not want shark fin to be served at its official banquets. The Chinese government has even signalled that it does not agree with the practice, which is a threat to our ecosystems.

I do not have much time left, so I would like to conclude by thanking my colleague once again and congratulating him. Today, Canada has a duty to send a message that we oppose this practice and we no longer want to be part of this trade, which is often a black market trade and even involves organized crime. This bill sends a clear message to the international community that we are taking this situation seriously, that we want to protect our ecosystems and that we want to protect the environment for future generations who will have to deal with the fallout of this practice if we do not put an immediate end to it.

I encourage all of my colleagues, from all sides, to support this bill and send it to committee so that any necessary amendments can be made. I know that my colleague is open to sensible proposals. At the very least, this bill should be sent to committee.

Private Members' Business

•(1155)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé to resume debate, I must inform her that she has only three minutes remaining for her speech, so that there is enough time for the right of reply.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support Bill C-380, introduced by my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam. This bill would amend the Fish Inspection Act to prohibit the importation of shark fins that are not attached to the rest of the shark. It would also amend the Fisheries Act to prohibit the practice of shark finning.

This has already been mentioned a number of times today, but it is worth repeating that every year, up to 100 million sharks of all species—even endangered species—die because of shark finning and overfishing. This number far surpasses biologically sustainable levels.

Sharks are vital to the long-term health of the oceans. Their disappearance would have unforeseeable consequences for the oceans, particularly for marine habitats and fisheries.

The shark fin trade is a horrific practice that involves cutting off a shark's fins on a fishing vessel and then throwing the living animal back into the ocean. I get goosebumps just thinking about it.

I fully support this bill. A survey carried out by Humane Society International at the beginning of 2013 showed that 81% of Canadians support prohibiting the importation of shark fins into Canada.

I have examined this issue from every angle. I see nothing but good reasons for moving forward with prohibiting the importation of shark fins.

As elected members of Parliament, our job is to represent the interests of Canadians in the House of Commons. The statistics are clear. The importation of shark fins must be banned. Mustel Group's statistics were similar to what the Humane Society of Canada came up with.

In the time I have left, I want to congratulate my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for his work on this issue. He held a number of consultations to prepare a truly balanced bill. I congratulate him on that, and I look forward to seeing the outcome of the vote, since I think this is worthwhile. We are here to protect our ecosystems. We must leave a better world for our children. I look forward to seeing how this turns out. I want to see the bill sent to committee.

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleagues for participating in this second hour of debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-380, which seeks to ban the importation of shark fins to Canada and enshrine in legislation Canada's current prohibition on shark finning.

I will conclude second reading debate on this bill by addressing a few key points.

First, there is a strong need for this ban. Since the first hour of debate, an important new study has come out, authored by a group of well-respected scientists. It found approximately 100 million sharks were killed each year, although it stated that this number could range as high as 273 million, which is far above sustainable fishing levels. It concludes:

Global total shark mortality...needs to be reduced drastically in order to rebuild depleted populations and restore marine ecosystems with functional top predators.

Its findings gained international media attention for it provided further evidence that the global shark fin trade was driving the depletion and likely extinction of numerous shark species around the world.

Canada can become a world leader in shark conservation and ocean stewardship by moving forward with a shark fin import ban, which would prevent over 100 tonnes of shark fins from being imported to Canada each year.

The shark fin trade in Canada, in which currently participates, drives the horrific practice of shark finning. Many of my colleagues have spoken to that. It drives the illegal targeting of threatened and endangered species, some of which are supposed to be protected under CITES.

Earlier this year I sent each of my colleagues a DVD of the film, *Sharkwater*, which shows how, even in jurisdictions that have banned shark finning, organized crime drives a hugely profitable black market. In Canada recent DNA testing has proven that fins from endangered sharks are commonly imported into the country. In 2012 testing of 56 fins obtained in Vancouver and Richmond stores showed 76% came from threatened and endangered sharks. Similar results were obtained from a 2010 study.

Canada has seen numerous municipalities move forward with local bans on the sale and trade of shark fin. They are explicitly asking the federal government to also take action. There is no excuse for the government to drag its feet on this time sensitive conservation crisis.

Experts predict that if current trends continue, up to 20 shark species could be functionally extinct within this decade. In a few decades, some regional shark populations may decline over 95%.

Shark conservation is an issue about which Canadians care deeply. They recognize the grave threat posed to ocean health by the continued targeting of these important apex predators. *Sharkwater* filmmaker, Rob Stewart, who wrote to MPs this week in support of my bill, stated:

The removal of sharks from marine ecosystems will gravely destabilize the balance of the oceans and may lead to the eventual disappearance of other populations, including commercially caught fish and shellfish species lower in the food chain. We need to take action in order to avoid a potential ecological crisis.

*The Budget***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]*

I would also like to draw to the attention of my colleagues an editorial published in the *Toronto Star* yesterday, authored by city councillors Kristyn Wong-Tam of Toronto and Kerry Jang of Vancouver, as well as Joanna Hui, founder of the Ethical Chinese Consumers Alliance. They stated, “banning shark fins is not an attack on the Chinese culture”.

All three are leaders in the Chinese Canadian community. All three are leading efforts to halt the trade of shark finning. They also point out that in Canada and around the world, Chinese leaders are the ones leading and supporting efforts to implement bans on the shark fin trade. A poll by EnviroNics, released last week, indicated 81% of Canadians would support a federal importation ban on shark fins.

The world has acted before to stop the targeting of elephants for their ivory and rhinos for their horns. Sharks are another example of demand for a single high-value animal part driving the unsustainable slaughter and waste of an entire animal.

• (1200)

It is imperative that Canada take immediate action to halt our role in the destructive and often illegal shark fin trade. The health of our oceans is at risk, as is the survival of sharks.

I ask all colleagues to support my private member's bill. Let us get this important bill before committee so that it can be thoroughly studied.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 12:04 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

• (1205)

[English]

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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 27, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from March 22 consideration of the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): When the House last considered the motion, the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou had six and a half minutes remaining in time for his remarks.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, we were discussing statistics on education in first nations communities, and I would like to repeat that they are quite appalling. I wanted to show why we need to invest more in education. It will help not just aboriginal youth across the country, but also Canada's economy.

[English]

Between 2004 and 2009, the rate of first nations graduation was approximately 36% compared to the rate of 72% for the general population. None of those statistics should surprise the government, because those are the kind of results we get when we underfund first nations schools by 30% compared to what provincial schools receive. That underfunding was not an accident, nor was it an oversight. That has been deliberate policy from both the Conservative and Liberal governments.

During the Prime Minister's meeting with first nations leaders in January, he did promise again to renew his government's approach to issues like these, but in this budget there is no new money for first nations schools. They will still face a 30% shortfall for another year. Young children, fighting for an education in communities like Eabametoong, Elsipogtog, Lac Simon, Lac La Ronge, will receive considerably less than other students in provincial schools.

The members in the government benches need to ask themselves this question. How reasonable is it to expect children and youth to achieve in their educational pursuits when they are put at such a disadvantage every day?

Unfortunately for first nations youth, Minister of Finance was not done with his handy work. He decided to go a few steps further, reach back into his dark days as finance minister of Ontario and reintroduce one of the biggest policy failures that the Harris Conservatives brought to our country.

The Budget

In this budget, the Conservatives decided to introduce training funds for aboriginal youth, but with one major caveat. To qualify, first nations communities would have to agree that recipients of the income assistance program would undergo specific job training. This means that in order to get access to these funds, communities must agree that youth between the ages of 18 and 24 cannot collect welfare without taking job training. This is a workfare scheme, similar to the one that Mr. Flaherty brought—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I remind the hon. member, we refer to ministers and other members in the House by their riding or their title, in this case. The hon. member.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for that. In the 1990s the Minister of Finance brought this deeply disturbing and disrespectful proposal to Ontario. It does nothing to deal with the underlying problems in first nations education that I mentioned on Friday. It is the kind of blame the victim approach we have seen in the past from the Conservatives. It saddens me to see it again today.

In a twist that seemingly only the Conservatives could make happen, only \$109 million of the \$241 million budgeted for this vile workfare program will actually be used to fund the training. The remaining \$132 million will go toward administrating the workfare scheme. Only the Conservatives would consider spending \$132 million to administer a \$109 million fund.

Quality education and training opportunities are vital for aboriginal youth to have a better future. However, it is simply wrong to force any group of people to do any activity to receive the simple benefits that everyone else receives for nothing. This approach smells of discrimination. It was not lost on me that the Conservatives decided to introduce this policy on the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The government should be ashamed of that, but I doubt it is.

This proposal in the budget will not help move aboriginal youth forward and, in my opinion, it is a slap in the face to those who have hoped for some positive educational and training ideas from the government. It is mean-spirited and divisive policies like these that make it impossible to support the budget.

The Conservatives were given another chance with this budget to show that they were truly committed to making our country work and prove that they were truly improving the lives of all Canadians. However, they have again decided to ignore that chance and opted for the same failed approaches they have given us since 2006.

We will see what the Conservatives will do this week. However, I will do the right thing and vote against this budget because it is a continuation of the wrong approach toward first nations.

•(1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was very eloquent and gave an excellent analysis of the impact the budget will have on first nations communities and also the impact it will not have.

Many things are needed to ensure good relations between the federal government and first nations communities. A lot has been said about that over the course of this past year. Not only is the budget sorely inadequate when it comes to the needs and the

economic development of first nations, but it also contains harmful and toxic measures. One of these harmful measures introduces workfare in first nations communities.

My colleague spoke about this issue, and I would like to give him the opportunity to speak more about how the federal government's coercive measure for labour training, as the government likes to call it, will affect first nations. The objective of this measure is to impose the federal government's vision.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and neighbour for his excellent question.

First nations had high expectations for the budget. The Prime Minister's remarks led us to believe that the budget would finally contain something good for first nations. Unfortunately, that was not the case, and the example I gave is just one of many.

I was raised to try to look for the good in what is proposed, even by my political opponents. I looked at the budget from a Canadian federal perspective, from a Quebec perspective and from a regional perspective. Forget that, because they abandoned the regions. I could not find anything. What is proposed, this workfare, is just an attempt to try something again that did not work in other jurisdictions. This work model was proposed in Quebec in 1989 or 1990. It was also proposed in New Brunswick and in the majority of American states. The only place it worked well was in Massachusetts, and that was because in that case, it was voluntary. People were not required to do what is proposed in this budget.

Unfortunately, it is a bad approach, as I said in my speech. That is why I will not support the budget.

•(1215)

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember workfare well in Mike Harris's Ontario in the 1990s. A number of Conservative ministers were also members of his government. Therefore, it comes as no big surprise. It will certainly involve first nations in particular.

Could my colleague explain how exactly this will harm relations between first nations and the Government of Canada? The way I see it, this relationship was not founded on respect, when decisions were made before any discussion took place.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

The Budget

Aboriginal issues are receiving unprecedented attention in Canada. Today, 400 young people will be gathering on Parliament Hill to share a message of hope and tell this government that its approach to date has not worked, and that things must change. These issues are receiving unprecedented attention, and the government must respond to these appeals. Unfortunately, that is not happening.

We can study this budget as much as we want and from all possible angles, but we will find absolutely nothing to provide any hope to the aboriginal young people who will be demonstrating on Parliament Hill today. Seven of these young people have walked and snowshoed 1,600 km over the past two and a half months. They started out in Hudson Bay, crossed James Bay and Abitibi and arrived on Parliament Hill today. They are asking for a little hope. Unfortunately, they will not find it in this budget.

[English]

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to stand and address budget 2013. I will be sharing my time with the wonderful member for York Centre, a very hard-working member of our finance committee.

It is my pleasure to speak to budget 2013. At the outset, I will outline for observers some of the processes that occur with respect to the preparation of budgets.

As members of this place know, the finance committee, which I chair, starts its hearings going back even to the spring and summer prior to the presentation of the budget. We receive submissions. Typically we cut off submission dates in the summer and we prepare all those submissions for members; members then hear from witnesses from across the country in the fall. Last year, we heard about 800 submissions. The committee tried online submissions for the first time in its history; we received those submissions, and the members heard some oral testimony as well.

We present our report to Parliament in December of each year, so we presented our pre-budget report in December. The budget is typically presented in February or March of the following year. We then follow with two budget implementation acts, one that we expect this spring and one that will occur in the fall.

That is just to give people some context in terms of the actual budgetary process.

I highlight that because there are numerous recommendations that our committee suggested in December in the budget itself, and I will refer to them as I go through the positive aspects of this budget.

In terms of the overall budget plan, the government would continue its increase in transfers to the provinces for health care, education and social assistance. For health care, there would be 6% increases until 2017, and then it would be based on nominal GDP after 2017. It would increase support for provinces for education and social assistance at 3% per annum until 2017 as well.

With respect to transfers to persons, those would increase, as obviously more people are receiving seniors' benefits each and every year. Family benefits would also increase going forward. There is an excellent graph and accompanying figures in the budget that reflect that increase. In terms of transfers to provinces and to persons, these transfers would continue to increase, as they have since 2006.

The area of federal spending that the federal government more directly controls does not affect these areas. As members know, there was a program put in a place, a deficit reduction action plan, which examined about \$70 billion of federal government spending, and it realized nearly 7% of savings, which is about 2% of what the federal government would spend over the course of the next few fiscal years.

That was very much based on a lot of the pre-budget recommendations we made. Recommendations numbers 2, 3 and 4 all asked us to maintain transfers for provinces and persons, to restrain our own federal government spending and to balance the budget in the medium term, which was echoed by many business groups and other organizations before the committee. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce strongly recommended that we continue to move toward a balanced budget in the medium term, so I am very pleased by that.

However, these organizations and other individuals before the committee also strongly recommended certain areas that did require investments and said that we ought to continue to make investments.

I will relay some of the stories, challenges and issues from my own riding of Edmonton—Leduc, including the southwest part of Edmonton, the city of Leduc, the town of Devon, the industrial heartland of Nisku south of Edmonton and the Edmonton International Airport. It is a very dynamic and diverse riding, but we have some very strong challenges.

The number one challenge that business people in that area raise with me is with respect to access to all types of labour, skilled and unskilled. I have taken visiting members of Parliament through my riding, especially through areas like Nisku where there are signs saying that if people are in one of six or seven listed professions, they should please stop in, because they need people.

I recall that when I took the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism into a company, Tenaris, in the riding, one of its shifts was not working. We asked why the shift was not up and running, and the plant manager simply said that the company did not have enough people to operate that shift, that if it had enough people the shift would be operating and the company would be producing more, paying more tax, supporting more services and employing more Canadians. They simply could not find enough people. That is on the skilled side.

• (1220)

PCL also has a huge centre in Nisku. It could use engineers, welders, boilermakers and all types of skilled trades. Hospitals, hotels and restaurants will say they need skilled and unskilled people. They are simply short-staffed.

One small business owner from the area with a restaurant chain and a drive-through service said at certain times he has to close down the drive-through, because people getting their lunch order would ask employees how much they were making an hour, and when they found out how much, they would give out business cards and say, "Call me tomorrow; we would like to hire you."

The Budget

This is the labour situation and the labour challenges we are finding in our area, which is why it is the number one issue raised with me. That is why I am very pleased by things like the Canada job grant, increased support for apprentices and acting on the disability report recommendations in the budget.

The reason I am such a big supporter of the Canada job grant is it actually engages employers and employees at a very direct level. A lot of the training done in the past by the provinces and the federal government has been valuable, but this is special in the sense that it engages employers and employees. It ensures that an employee is receiving training that will directly lead to a job and it matches employers and employees very directly. One of the common phrases used to describe our labour challenge today is “jobs without people and people without jobs”. That is a mismatch we have to address. That is exactly what the Canada job grant is trying to address.

I will refer again to our pre-budget report recommendations 8, 9 and 10 through 16, which all deal with the need to address this labour challenge and ways in which to do it. That is what this budget does.

Next is infrastructure. People often think a province like Alberta, which has seen relatively modest to strong growth over the last number of years, would not have a challenge with infrastructure. The reality is that we do, because when communities in southwest Edmonton or west Leduc or south Devon grow by 5% to 8% a year in the industrial sector, it puts a lot of challenges on our infrastructure.

The municipalities all asked for a long-term infrastructure plan. They worked with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, an excellent organization. The current President, Karen Leibovici, a city councillor from Edmonton, did an excellent job in negotiating with the government a 10-year plan in terms of addressing infrastructure needs going forward. Obviously this will start when the building Canada fund expires in 2014.

There are also things like renewing the P3 Canada fund, the new Canada building fund of \$14 billion over 10 years, the community improvement fund at \$32.2 billion over 10 years, and the gas fund tax payments and the GST rebate as well. With respect to the gas tax funding, municipalities say this is funding that they can count on and that they know is a certainty. They can then make investments and take out loans against the funding because they know it will be there. The fund can be used to access capital for the light rail transit developed in south Edmonton.

In relation to the P3 project, I am very pleased that there was a recent announcement on the light rail expansion in southeast Edmonton, in the constituency of the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont. It is a very large P3 project between PPP Canada and the City of Edmonton. Both organizations should be applauded for their work in making this happen.

With respect to housing, again based on recommendations 52 and 53 in our pre-budget report, the housing investments over a long-term period were very good as well.

In terms of investments in manufacturing, I am very pleased that we have continued the accelerated capital cost allowance for the manufacturing sector. I am personally very proud of that, as this was

in an industry committee report that we produced in February 2007. The finance minister included it in the budget of March 2007, and it has continued since that time. I am very pleased because of the investments in there.

There are also the investments in post-secondary education, based on recommendations 28 and 30 in pre-budget consultations. There is support for the federal research granting councils, for the Canada Foundation for Innovation, by working with excellent organizations like the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, an excellent organization in terms of putting forward its recommendations for the budget.

● (1225)

The last point I will finish with is that we are following up on some of the recommendations we have been hearing at committee with respect to the charitable sector and encouraging Canadians to give more, following up on the member for Kitchener—Waterloo and all of his initiatives, and also with respect to increasing the ability of the Canada Revenue Agency to deal with tax evasion, something we are studying currently before the committee.

I encourage all members of this House to support the budget and I look forward to their questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are measures in the budget to fight tax evasion. However, the Canada Revenue Agency is cutting staff whose job it is to seek out fraudsters.

How are we supposed to believe that collecting unpaid taxes is anything other than wishful thinking when staff responsible for collecting these moneys are being laid off?

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, we did ask this question to the Canada Revenue Agency at the committee on our current study. The agency said the auditors who are examining the tax evasion issue would not be affected, that the number of auditors who are investigating tax evasion havens would not be affected. In fact, the government's resources in that area would stay the same. There are lot of resources to be gained when we ensure that all Canadians do pay their fair share of taxes. That is the answer we received at committee, and that is obviously the answer presented by this budget as well.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member, my colleague from Edmonton—Leduc, for his terrific speech.

My colleague touched on the Canada jobs grant program, which I think personally is absolutely brilliant. There is no one better to drive the market or job creation than businesses that are actually seeking those types of employees. I think this is a terrific idea that we have in our budget.

The Budget

However, I wonder if the member would speak to our support for internship programs. In budget 2013, we are investing an additional \$70 million to support an additional 5,000 paid internship programs. I wonder if the member would speak on how internship programs would help our young people graduating from universities to find well-paying jobs in their fields.

• (1230)

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, that is an outstanding question. I should have highlighted internships in my speech as well.

I can recall a conversation that I had with the current Governor General when he was then president of the University of Waterloo. I asked why Waterloo is so successful as an institution and why the surrounding community is so successful as a community in terms of spurring innovation. His answer to me was “internships”. They facilitate a direct connection between students, universities, businesses, between that innovative culture and climate, in giving students the experience.

That is why I try to give as many opportunities to young people as I can. People gave me an opportunity and mentored me in various ways and showed me how to actually do this type of work. Young people are like sponges. They soak up all sorts of advice and expertise, from all over the place. That is why these internships are so important, not only internships in terms of youth programs, but also internships and partnerships with respect to universities in this country. It is also the international experience that our students would get overseas and that overseas students would get in Canada, which is one of the recommendations from the AUCC as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the member about infrastructure investment. We heard the Conservative government brag about the fact that it is increasing infrastructure spending. The truth is that it is investing money over 10 years instead of seven, which represents roughly the same amount per year. According to some calculations, over this 10-year period, there may even be \$1 billion less in infrastructure spending.

Personally, I believe that it is important to give Canadians the truth. To stimulate the economy, does it make more sense to reduce infrastructure spending, or provide about the same amount for infrastructure as before?

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, we should note that the building Canada plan in 2007 was a \$33 billion plan over a seven-year period, as he mentioned, until 2014. This is a \$53 billion plan. It is \$70 billion, if we include the infrastructure spending on reserve and other types of infrastructure initiatives. This stable funding was very much welcomed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. It is welcomed by the municipalities in my community.

Obviously the long-term permanency and indexing of the gas tax fund ensures that municipalities can borrow against it going into the future. There is the community component of that. As I mentioned, we have announced a P3 Canada project in Edmonton within the last two weeks with respect to the LRT development in southeast Edmonton. These are all massive investments over the long term that municipalities can count on in the future.

If the fiscal situation improves, obviously future governments can look at increases. However, this is very reasonable and within the budgetary plan in terms of moving toward a balanced budget over the medium term. It is long-term sustainable investment in infrastructure, and that is why municipalities across this country have welcomed this budget.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my colleague, the member for Edmonton—Leduc. He is one of the finest, most skilled chairs of the finance committee in the history of the House of Commons.

I want to congratulate our Minister of Finance on tabling his eighth budget. The budget certainly reaffirms that our government is on the right track to balancing the budget by 2015. It also shows that our government is focused on what matters most to Canadians, and that is jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Notwithstanding what the opposition would have us do, which would be to engage in reckless spending schemes and increase taxes to the tune of \$56 billion for starters, we on this side are determined to position Canada to be the great success of the 21st century in the global economy.

Economic action plan 2013 builds on the strong foundation that was first laid in 2006. It bolsters the fundamental strengths and resilience of the Canadian economy. This is very important. Our global reputation is strong. We have the best job creation record in the G7. There have been 950,000 net new jobs created since July 2009. We have the lowest debt to GDP ratio of any country in the G8. We have the highest possible credit ratings from Moody's, Fitch and Standard and Poor's. We have the best financial sector in the world, as rated by the World Economic Forum, and we are the best place to be doing business according to *Forbes Magazine*.

John Chambers, the president of Cisco has said that Canada is the best place to be doing business. Tom Donohue, the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has said Canada is not a miracle, but they are doing all the right things. Canada is a model of economic success.

However, let us not forget that Canada is not an island. Therefore, economic action plan 2013 strengthens this stellar record in Canada by the following measures: one, connecting Canadians with available jobs; two, helping manufacturers and businesses succeed in the global economy; three, creating a new building Canada plan; four, investing in world-class research and innovation; and, five, supporting families and communities.

Let us drill down a bit into the budget. My riding of York Centre is home to Bombardier Aerospace, one of the great Canadian success stories and one of the most prominent companies in the entire world. It is also home to Downsview Park, an area famous for its rich aerospace history.

The Budget

The aerospace industry in Canada is of utmost importance because it directly employs about 66,000 people. I am proud that with the 2013 economic action plan our government has committed to supporting Canada's aerospace industry so it can remain competitive and relevant in the rapidly changing world. The new budget is investing almost a billion dollars in strategic aerospace in the defence initiative to enhance the competitiveness of Canada's aerospace and defence industries. The budget also encourages new innovations in Canada's aerospace sector by creating the aerospace technology demonstration program. The government will invest \$110 million over five years beginning in 2014-15, and \$55 million in each year thereafter. These new initiatives will be incredibly useful to thriving companies like Bombardier.

Before the budget, I consulted with numerous businesses in my riding and across the country. During one budget consultation that I hosted in York Centre, I spoke with the Retail Council of Canada, and over 20 big businesses, ranging from Walmart to Costco to Cineplex to Kitchen Stuff Plus to Home Depot. The common theme I heard in their suggestions was that the price disparity between Canadian and U.S. stores makes it difficult to compete. Our government listened and thoroughly studied the Canada-U.S. retail price gap. In response to our study, the economic action plan 2013 will eliminate tariffs on baby clothing, sporting goods and athletic equipment. This will represent a total of \$76 million in annual tariff relief for Canadian families and the goods they need. Our government expects wholesalers, distributors and retailers to pass these savings on to consumers.

This Conservative measure is completely opposite to the NDP's proposed \$21 billion carbon tax that would raise the cost of everything, from baby clothing to food to gas.

●(1235)

Our government has been consistent and effective in its approach to keeping taxes low. Since 2006 we have cut taxes more than 150 times. The typical family of four will save more than \$3,200 in tax savings this year alone.

Our government has cut the personal tax rate to 15%. We have reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. This saves the average Canadian family approximately \$1,000 a year.

We have also reduced the small business tax rate from 12% to 11% and lowered the general business tax rate from 21% to 15%.

I am the proud father of two young children, twins, so I have to buy everything twice. I can say these savings mean a lot to Canadian families.

Overall, our government has removed more than one million low-income Canadians from the tax rolls.

However, that is not all our government has done to help low-income Canadians. Our government is going to invest more than \$1.25 billion in affordable housing in Ontario and across Canada. This funding would go toward different initiatives, including new construction, renovation, home ownership assistance, rent supplements, shelter allowances and accommodations for survivors of family violence. Between April 2011 and December 2012, more than 136,000 households benefited from our investments in affordable housing.

The new budget would also introduce a homeless partnering strategy and would invest nearly \$600 million in the strategy using a housing-first approach.

The people of York Centre benefit greatly from the affordable housing initiative. Just this past September, I was proud to represent our government at the official opening of a new housing project in York Centre at 485 Patricia Avenue. This brand new building accommodates 237 residents, including low-income seniors and people with disabilities. I am glad that the 2013 economic action plan would allow affordable housing initiatives to expand.

In addition to affordable housing, our government will continue to help Canadian seniors. We recognize that our senior citizens have helped make our country the great place it is today. Now is the time for us to give back to our seniors by ensuring a high standard of living and a healthy retirement.

The 2013 action plan would expand tax relief for home care services.

We are also going to work with banks and financial institutions to ensure that seniors are better protected when using financial services.

Furthermore, we are going to support palliative care services by providing \$3 million over the next three years to support training for front-line health care providers.

Our government would also assist in the construction and renovation of accessible community facilities by investing \$15 million per year in the enabling accessibility fund.

I am so proud to represent York Centre, because it is one of the most diverse ridings in our country. There are so many different cultural, religious and ethnic groups that make our society so much richer. It is these new Canadians who make our country famous around the world for being strong, pluralistic and an ethnocultural mosaic.

I was happy to see that economic action plan 2013 introduced a number of new initiatives to support new Canadians. The new budget announces the government's intention to test new approaches to attracting immigrant investors to Canada through the start-up visa pilot project to attract immigrant entrepreneurs. Canada is a land of opportunity, and this new business immigration program would attract bright minds from around the world.

Every year more than one million temporary residents come to Canada. That is why economic action plan 2013 proposes to invest \$42 million over two years to enhance the capacity of the temporary resident program.

The Budget

My favourite responsibility as a member of Parliament is to go to citizenship swearing-in ceremonies. These are very emotional times. I am a first-generation Canadian. People come to Canada to get away from oppression, racism and persecution. Many of them have young children. These people are coming here for hope and opportunity, not so much for themselves but for their kids. We all know there is talent all over the world, and we are lucky in this great country of Canada to be able to attract that talent. These people are coming here for opportunity and for hope.

Economic action plan 2013 reaffirms the government's commitment to Canadians and to new immigrants coming to this great country. I hope all members will support the great measures contained within economic action plan 2013.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech. We both serve on the Standing Committee on Finance. I found his speech extremely interesting, not for what he said, but for what he did not say. Based on discussions we have had, I know that he is a fan of classical economics, including Adam Smith.

The budget contains a measure he is not bragging about and that the Minister of Finance is not bragging about, and that is a massive increase in import taxes, customs tariffs. The Minister of Finance did not mention it in his speech.

It is important to realize that, while my colleague talks about a mythical, non-existent, invisible, hypothetical carbon tax, a \$21 billion tax that does not exist, he is keeping mum about the fact that the government will increase taxes on imports. It will increase customs tariffs on more than 1,200 products from 72 countries, to the tune of more than \$1.5 billion in the next five years.

I would like to know how the member can explain this action by the government, which will increase the taxes paid by Canadians by over \$300 million a year. In addition, how can he justify the new classification of countries like the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Venezuela and Jamaica, which will now be considered developed countries for the purposes of the preferential tariff? I would like to hear the member's answer to these questions.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his soliloquy. I think there was a question contained within it.

The preferential tariff, which he was referring to, has not been revised since 1974. Let us compare ourselves to the United States, which revises its preferential tariff every two years. What we would do in the budget is update the preferential tariff that was set in 1974, some 39 years ago.

The reason for the preferential tariff is developing countries. Here in Canada, we subsidize the preferential tariff. Those countries are doing very well now, economically, including the BRIC countries—China, for example. That is why we are updating the preferential

tariff. Those countries are not developing countries anymore; they are fully developed economies.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my honourable colleague from the GTA riding of York Centre for his wonderful speech. In his speech, he reaffirmed our government's position to return to balanced budgets. I am glad he mentioned it would be without raising taxes, and he indicated in his speech the 150 times we have reduced taxes for the average family. The average family of four in my riding of Scarborough Centre saves up to \$3,220, so I am very happy with that.

I would like to ask the member to speak about our new tax break for new manufacturing machinery and equipment, which is in the budget. It is \$562 million in tax relief, and as Conservatives, we know that when we reduce taxes for businesses, they reinvest, innovate and hire more people. I would like to ask the member to speak on that specific measure.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, here on this side, we are committed to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity; we have been since 2006. Our goal is to achieve a thriving economic recovery, not by raising taxes but by lowering taxes. What we have found is that when we lowered the corporate tax to 15%, for example, our corporate tax revenues increased. When we lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, spending increased and we had an increase in taxes.

We here on this side believe in lower taxes, and we believe that people and consumers are better arbiters and judges of how to spend their money than government is. On the other side, the opposition leader went down to Washington to trash Canada and argue against Canadian jobs. He called for a \$34 billion increase in taxes, which he said he would do when and if he assumes power. All of this is on top of the \$20 billion carbon tax he is proposing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to express my profound opposition to the budget that was tabled last week. Not only is this budget almost completely lacking in substance and content, the government has also used it primarily as a branding opportunity. At the end of the day, it contains a number of measures that are useless and, in many cases, downright harmful to Canadians.

Unfortunately, the budget is lengthy simply because the government added image-boosting measures. I only have 20 minutes to speak, so I would like to get to the heart of the Conservative government's budget 2013 and explain why it goes against Canadians' interests.

I will begin by speaking about the measure that has probably been the most controversial, particularly in Quebec, since 90% of the money allocated to this tax credit goes to labour-sponsored funds in Quebec. I am talking about eliminating the tax credit for labour-sponsored venture capital corporations. The government is looking to eliminate the 15% tax credit by 2017, thus saving \$335 million.

The Budget

Why is the government taking this approach? We are hearing all sorts of reasons and excuses. When the question was put to the parliamentary secretary on Friday, she said that it was not working. The government consulted the OECD, which said that labour-sponsored venture capital was not bringing in sufficient returns, so it is time to move on to something else.

Others are saying that it is because the funds now have sufficient capital and are effective. Depending on who you talk to, the funds are either working or they are not. The parliamentary secretary says one thing and the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism says another.

The fact is that labour-sponsored funds work. This model for economic development has worked well in Quebec in the past and is still working. For example, I would like to mention Quebec's Fonds de solidarité FTQ, which was created 30 years ago. Since then, the Fonds de solidarité FTQ has invested more than \$10 billion in Quebec. The money has been invested in start-up companies and in businesses that are having difficulties and need an infusion of capital to get back on track. Since 1990, the Fonds de solidarité has created or maintained 500,000 jobs in the province. The Conservatives are putting that template for success in danger by eliminating the tax credit for venture capital corporations.

Furthermore, 60% of the fund's assets are invested in Quebec. This came out nowhere. There was no justification or preparation. It was only a few paragraphs, somewhere in the middle of the budget. No justification is given, and if there is any, it is contradictory.

Nonetheless, what is interesting about this budget is that on pages 204 and 205, there is a section on enhancing Canada's venture capital system. I would like to read part of that section:

Recognizing the importance of the venture capital industry to Canada's future productivity growth, Economic Action Plan 2012 announced resources to support Canada's venture capital industry, including \$400 million to help increase private sector investments in early-stage risk capital, and to support the creation of large-scale venture capital funds led by the private sector.

What does this mean? This means that the Conservative government hopes to save \$335 million by taking away a tax credit that benefited all Canadians, and especially Quebecers who invested in the fund. The government is taking it back, only to turn around and give it to the private sector, to perform the same function. Budget 2013 renews 2012 provisions that allocated \$250 million to establish new, large venture capital funds of funds, led by the private sector; \$100 million to recapitalize existing large private sector-led funds of funds; and \$50 million invested in three to five existing high-performing venture capital funds in Canada.

How can the Conservative government justify ending a measure that does so much to help Quebecers' and Canadians' ability to save, and taking that money only to give it to the private sector to perform the same function, but less effectively?

Indeed, with the Fonds de solidarité, the 15% allocated to tax credits served to recognize the fact that the fund did not perform as well as private funds.

• (1250)

The reason is quite simple. Labour-sponsored funds, like Fonds de solidarité FTQ and Fondation CSN, quite often invest in local

economies, in industries and in businesses that are of no interest to the private sector because such investments offer high risk and a low return over the long term.

The purpose of the tax credit was not just to build these two funds, but also to recognize the different mandate that labour-sponsored funds have in terms of investing in and supporting local economies. In that sense, the Conservative government is missing the boat.

I would like to quote what Marcel Côté, from SECOR, a consulting firm in Quebec, had to say about Quebec's Fonds de solidarité in particular, since that is the best known fund. He said:

[The fund] has played a very important role in Quebec's economy and has served its purpose quite well. The fund has boosted savings and encouraged people to save for their retirement.

Quebec's Fonds de solidarité has been criticized by the Montreal Economic Institute and the Fraser Institute—the usual suspects, as it were. According to them, the fund is not effective enough and does not perform well enough, and not enough assets are being invested.

Quebec's Fonds de solidarité commissioned two studies to see whether the criticisms were founded, and one of those studies was conducted by SECOR, which, believe me, cannot be accused of having New Democratic leanings.

One of the things SECOR wanted to determine was how long it took for the provincial and federal governments to recoup their initial investment. When money is invested and a business grows, more revenue is generated, either through the economic growth of the community or through the taxation of businesses that are making a profit. SECOR came to the conclusion that every dollar invested by the fund, every dollar of the tax credit allocated to local businesses or initiatives, was fully recouped by the federal government in three years.

There is no net loss for the federal government. What the government does not recognize is that these are investments and that the tax credit represented an investment.

Another measure that seems ridiculous to me is the phasing out of the additional deduction for credit unions. This measure affects credit unions and caisses populaires in Quebec with taxable capital employed in Canada of less than \$15 million. Under this measure, the differential tax rate for small credit unions or caisses populaires will be eliminated by 2017.

Why does the government not mention this? The individuals we spoke with on the government side once again gave contradictory reasons.

The Budget

However, as is the case with the labour-sponsored funds, we must recognize that the lower tax rate for small credit unions was in place as a result of their specific mandate, which is different than that of other banking institutions. An example that I am very familiar with is the caisses populaires in Quebec's rural communities. Very rarely is any trace of a bank found in communities of less than 1,000 people. In Quebec, these small communities have caisses populaires, and in other provinces, they have credit unions.

The measure that the federal government wants to implement does not put everyone on a level playing field since it places credits unions and caisses populaires at a competitive disadvantage compared to major financial institutions, and for no good reason.

I would like to speak briefly about infrastructure because we have talked about this in very broad terms. Although we would have preferred for the deadline to be even longer, we are satisfied with the longer deadline for predictable investments in infrastructure, whether it be through the building Canada fund, the community improvement fund or any other measure that was announced. The infrastructure plan will be carried out over 10 years, which is a good length of time, even though we would have preferred that it be carried out over 15 or 20 years. As the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Union des municipalités du Québec mentioned, at least this provides a predictable timeframe during which investments will be made.

The government says a lot of things in its budget to enhance its image and its brand, but it has been very quiet about the fact that, during the first four years of the program, it is going to invest \$4.7 billion less than the trend for the past four, five or six years suggested. There will therefore be much less money for the next four years, and municipalities will suffer as a result.

I was shocked to see that one of the federal government's priorities is to help with workforce training and, as it so often mentions, to match job seekers with available jobs.

• (1255)

No one would deny that that is a laudable objective. We have to do something about the shortage of skilled workers in many places across the country.

However, the government is talking about a new initiative and new funding, while it is taking back the funds and mandate already allocated to the provinces. The government gave the provinces this mandate because it fell under their natural jurisdiction. Now the government is taking the money and the mandate back and saying that it will now manage things from Ottawa. Not only will the government not give more money than what it was giving before, but it will also ask the private sector and the provinces—without negotiating or asking for their consent—to contribute dollar for dollar what the government contributes.

Once again, the money that the federal government will invest is the money it was already giving to the provinces to manage this program. This money is being taken away from the provinces and they are being forced to invest the same amount if they want to take advantage of the program. The government is not considering the provinces' budgetary restrictions.

The government is offloading the deficit onto the provinces. Although the government denies it, it is doing the exact same thing

that past governments did when struggling with a deficit. This includes deficits under their government and under the Liberal Party.

Once again, it is shocking to me that the government claims to respect the provinces' jurisdictions.

The Supreme Court's ruling made it clear that the federal government was wrong to try to create a Canadian securities commission. The government can be involved, but this falls under provincial jurisdiction.

We know that the provinces, with the exception of Ontario, have established a passport system, a single-desk system, to compensate for the lack of centralization or to compensate for too much decentralization in the securities system.

If the government created a Canadian securities commission, it would be completely unconstitutional. Some provincial commissions, such as the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec, are working with commissions in other provinces, except Ontario. We hope that Ontario will join the group. They are looking to remove the barriers facing Canadian—and foreign—investors because this commission does not exist.

What is the government doing? Despite the Supreme Court's decision, the government is sticking to its guns in the budget, saying that Canada needs a Canadian securities commission. The government is interpreting the Supreme Court decision as it sees fit and is continuing in that direction.

By continuing down that path, the government will hit the same wall, because the provinces reject Ottawa's determination to interfere in this area. The government will hit another wall at the Supreme Court, which was very clear in its decision.

On this side of the House, we have a lot of difficulty understanding why the federal government persists in going in this direction, which seems to be a waste of time. This government would do much better to work with all the provinces to establish this passport system, which is a single desk for securities authorities across the country and for financial market authorities.

The government is claiming that it does not want to increase taxes. It is accusing us of talking about completely hypothetical and fake tax increases, when we are not even in power. They are the ones who form the government.

The Minister of Finance and the hon. member for York Centre did not brag about it, but a massive tax increase will affect all Canadians. It will take more than \$1.5 billion out of Canadians' pockets over the next five years. It is an increase in customs tariffs that, once again, came out of nowhere.

In the next fiscal year, the federal government will start increasing customs tariffs on over 1,200 products from 72 different countries. The increase represents nearly \$350 million a year on various products, from table fans to umbrellas to cornstarch. All these products will be taxed.

The Budget

•(1300)

It will not be the federal government that pays. Even though the government is arguing that it subsidizes these countries with a lower preferential tariff—an argument that makes no sense—it is Canadians who will pay more because of these new measures. It is hypocritical for a government that claims it is not increasing taxes to tax Canadians in this way.

Although it has tried to use all kinds of tricks as a distraction—such as eliminating tariffs on some sports equipment—the increase in customs tariffs will amount to 10 times what Canadians might save on a few small items. This measure to close markets is totally hypocritical on the part of a government that claims to be interested in opening up international markets.

What is more, this could be justified by saying that the government is reclassifying countries that were previously considered to be developing countries and have now become industrialized, such as Hong Kong and South Korea, which are similar. However, it is increasing tariffs for countries it considers to be fully developed and in this group is including Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Cuba, Kazakhstan and many other countries with economies that are not at all like those of South Korea or Hong Kong. I cannot understand this decision by a government that boasts about opening our country to international markets. Implementing this measure is completely ridiculous.

I would like to talk about one last element. I spent some time looking at the economic indicators used by the federal government. Once again, they show a certain degree of incompetence. The Minister of Finance botched his latest forecasts for revenues and the Canadian deficit. He was mistaken by a margin of more than 35%. I have the impression that the same thing will happen in the next two years. The Minister of Finance is forecasting real growth of 2.5% and 2.6% for the next two years.

Obviously growth is important since it leads to increased revenues that will help determine whether the government will achieve a balanced budget. This past year, economic growth was only 1.6%. For the next two years, the federal government expects the economy to grow by roughly half as much again. I understand that that is what private sector economists are saying, but they were way off in their predictions in the past two years.

If the Minister of Finance really wanted to pay attention to the Canadian economy and not fixate on balancing the budget by 2015 at all costs, then he should consider the fact that private sector economists have been wrong in the past and that their predictions have been far too rosy. This will have an impact on the total increase in revenues. This past year, revenues increased by \$4.7 billion, and the government predicts that revenues will increase by \$7 billion and \$11.8 billion in the next two years. This will have a significant impact on the government's objective to balance the budget.

Another interesting thing is to see what impact austerity measures might have on the budget. A 1% decrease of real GDP will result in \$13.7 billion in lost revenues over three years. That is rather significant. A 1% decrease in real GDP is exactly what the Parliamentary Budget Officer and other economists following the

Department of Finance's model said would happen as a result of the austerity measures the federal government has adopted since 2012.

The government is clearly incompetent when it comes to economic management. Its ideology is getting in the way of its attempt at sound economic management for Canada. From where I am standing, the Conservatives are not running the country driven by the well-being of Canadians, their families and their communities, but by an ideology that would eliminate any positive role that the federal government might play in the economy and in the daily lives of Canadians.

Services are being cut, the most vulnerable are being attacked and the most affluent are being rewarded.

•(1305)

This budget smacks of economic incompetence. This budget is more about image and branding and less about substance and content. That is why we will be opposing this budget.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant accomplishments of former prime minister Paul Martin was signing the health care accord back in 2004, which recognized how critically important health care is to all Canadians. That commitment gave a guarantee of annual increases to health care funding, but it will be coming to an end in 2014.

That cash flow from Ottawa to the provinces is critically important, especially for provinces that may not have other resources to tap into. However, there is a fear that the government is not moving toward renewing that health care accord, which could result in great costs. We would have liked to see that commitment to renew a health care accord with the provinces incorporated in this budget.

I wonder if my colleague could provide comment on the importance of having a health care accord to ensure ongoing cash transfers from Ottawa to the provinces. Indirectly, Ottawa has a strong and viable role in providing health care services, which is something Canadians truly believe in.

•(1310)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North for his very pertinent question.

However, I would like to point out that the Conservative government already showed its true colours during the last budget. In fact, it did so a little before the last budget, when it announced it was going to reduce the growth of health care transfers to the provinces, which had been negotiated at 6%, but will be reduced to 3%. This reduction will affect how the provinces manage their health care systems.

The Budget

What is even more problematic about this loss of revenue for the provinces compared to what they had in the past is the fact that this decision was unilateral. According to a health accord concluded between the federal government and the provinces, negotiation and agreement are needed. Instead, however, the Conservative government made a unilateral decision without negotiating with the provinces or seeking their consent. The same thing is happening right now with labour force training. Ottawa knows best how to manage all that and Ottawa is making decisions without the provinces' agreement.

We believe this is an example of federalism that does not work and proof that this government is refusing to make it work.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now everyone knows that the budget is a flop and is not reflective of the everyday problems facing Canadians, such as health—with \$35 billion in cuts—homelessness, affordable housing, employment insurance and the increase in the retirement age.

The government's budget 2013 attacks workers by eliminating tax credits for labour-sponsored funds by 2017. It is a direct attack on workers' pensions. Then the government is reaching into taxpayers' pockets again by taxing parking at hospitals, as though the people visiting there were going as tourists. It is also cutting tax credits for credit unions in order to reduce competition for big banks.

I would like to ask my colleague a question since he is familiar with the numbers and works so hard on the Standing Committee on Finance. Why is the Conservative government once again attacking workers and saving its friends—big banks and big business?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

In fact, this is not just an attack on workers; it is attack on all Canadians. Unions do not benefit from the tax credit for labour-sponsored funds, Canadians do. Taxpayers are the ones who invest in these funds because they want to invest in their local economy, and they are the ones who will pay the price.

In one breath, the government is clawing back \$350 million that was allocated as tax credits for labour-sponsored funds, and in the next breath, it is handing \$400 million to private companies that have the same mandate but are much less effective and less focused on regional economic development.

Why are we taking \$355 million that would go to taxpayers and giving it to venture capital companies to fund them, bail them out or create new companies? That makes no sense. The government has said that it wants tax neutrality, but labour-sponsored funds and credit unions are now at a disadvantage compared to their private counterparts, because they have a very different mandate. From this point on, taxation can no longer reflect that reality.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with a lot of the remarks the member made. In fact, I see this particular budget as quite a work of fiction, which gives us nothing to deal with, really, in terms of numbers in the House of Commons. We cannot compare department to department or anything at all.

My NDP colleagues talked about economic development and prospects, and I quote from the document. It says:

Indeed, lower prices for Canadian crude oil, as well as for natural gas, relative to global benchmarks are reducing gross domestic product (GDP) by about \$28 billion per year, translating into over \$4 billion annually in potential federal government revenues.

I agree. We have probably become too dependent on energy and have not looked after the manufacturing sector enough. However, what worries me in this particular statement is that we really do not have an outlet for bitumen from the oil sands, and it is impacting our economy to the tune of \$4 billion in revenues for the government and \$28 billion per year in GDP. That is serious.

I wonder where the member stands on that, relative to attempting to get the Keystone pipeline opened up so that we can, in fact, move more product out.

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I agree with much of my colleague's question.

When we become overly dependent on natural resources, especially on the revenue from them, we run the risk of having planning problems, particularly when it comes to the federal budget. Alberta is also having problems related to the budget process.

The reality is that when we depend too much on a single source of revenue, we end up encountering a number of major difficulties. We have to be able to diversify revenue sources to eliminate these uncertainties.

The issue is not so clear, because we are currently talking about the 2013-14 budget. If we were talking about our leader's proposal in favour of an east-west pipeline, I would not have a problem with that. However, the reality is that the impact of these measures will have very long-term consequences.

We are currently studying the immediate measures that the government announced in its budget and that the minister announced as well. We could spend a lot more time debating just this subject in the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have lowered taxes over 150 times. There is something for everyone in this budget. We have over \$70 billion in infrastructure building. We are creating skills and addressing a market that is in dire need of making sure we have youth engaged in skills training. We are helping to do that through innovation and training. All of these come together. They are not separate and apart.

Yet the member and his party want to propose tax increases to the tune of \$20 billion. In fact they go across the border and complain about Keystone XL taking jobs away from Canada, rather than the 950,000 net new jobs that we have created.

I would like to know why the hon. member and his party cannot be more supportive of Canada.

The Budget

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I should not laugh, but it is really very funny.

As I explained in my speech, what he is talking about is completely fictitious and hypothetical. However, the reality is that the Conservative government is increasing Canadians' taxes in this budget, particularly the import tax, also known as a customs tariff, by \$1.5 billion. Thus, over \$330 million will be taken every year out of the pockets of Canadians because of increased customs tariffs.

The NDP is not talking about hypothetical taxes or measures. The government is bringing in massive tax increases that Canadians will have to pay. The Minister of Finance and the member in question did not brag about that.

[English]

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be dividing my time with my friend, the member for Etobicoke Centre.

It is with great honour that I rise today in the House to speak to the budget delivered by the Minister of Finance last Thursday. Economic action plan 2013 builds upon the work from previous budgets and the government's impressive track record guiding Canada through the worst global economic slowdown. We are now in a leadership position amongst the countries of the G8.

The focus of the 2013 budget is clearly upon jobs for Canadians. It is about leveraging the jobs we have now in Canada through our leadership in financial services, resource development and technological innovation. It is also about securing the jobs of the future and reorienting our skills training and lifelong learning programs to ensure we provide Canadians with the tools they need to maintain our strong position in the world. Finally, economic action plan 2013 makes key investments in areas of priority for Canadians: families, seniors, veterans and our first nations. These investments are important and are being made in a budget premised upon two fundamental principles.

First is the government's laser-like focus on getting Canada back to a balanced budget by 2015. This is to ensure we maintain our quality of life and maintain one of the strongest credit ratings in the world for the purpose of financing our debt. Second is the critical commitment we make to seniors and families across Canada to balance our budget without resorting to raising taxes.

At a time when government revenues are somewhat flat, these two fundamental principles are not easy. The opposition suggests billions in new spending on almost a weekly basis. The Leader of the Opposition has suggested that the government should not stick to our timeline of balancing the budget. Mere days before the budget, he went to New York to tell the business press that he would raise taxes on Canadian employers if the NDP were in power.

Following the release of economic action plan 2013, which was very careful to maintain core entitlement program spending and increase transfers to the provinces and territories, the NDP leader said, "You cannot 'austere' your way out of a crisis". The NDP leader's cute turn of phrase and commitment to runaway spending and higher taxes reminds me of the Winston Churchill quote that compares a nation trying to tax its way into prosperity to a man standing in a bucket, trying to lift himself up by pulling the handle.

The challenging global economy and shifting labour realities requires the type of strong leadership that our Prime Minister has shown from the doldrums of the global economic recession to the present day. Economic action plan 2013 is about setting priorities that will maintain a focus on jobs for Canadians and a plan to ensure our prosperity for decades to come.

Our government is proud of its record of 950,000 net new jobs having been created since the depth of the recession in 2009. This leads the G8 nations and has helped maintain our quality of life when other areas of the world are in turmoil. Our government is, however, committed to a relentless pursuit of higher employment, particularly for young Canadians, aboriginal Canadians and in areas of the country experiencing a higher than average rate of unemployment.

Accordingly, I would like to speak to three key areas of economic action plan 2013, premised upon securing jobs for Canadians.

The first area is the government's innovative approach to filling the skills gap in Canada, while also helping transitional industries retrain and re-equip their workforces. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, in its 2012 statistics, indicates that 34% of small to medium-size businesses face a skilled labour shortage. This means that while some Canadians are having a hard time finding a job, some Canadian employers are having a hard time filling a job. Finding a solution to marry these two aspects of our economy should be the overarching public policy goal of any government. Our government is making that the top priority.

● (1320)

The Canada job grant will address the skills shortage in Canada by assisting up to 130,000 Canadians each year with short duration training for the workforce. The \$5,000 per person grant has the multiplier effect two times over, up to \$15,000 with our provincial and employer partners. The Canada job grant will allow employers facing skills shortages or training facilitators in the industry to work with both the federal and provincial governments on a solution that will help them increase their productivity, while also helping more Canadians find long-term employment.

The skills deficit in the marketplace is the true determinant of where skills training investment needs to go. This will allow the federal government to negotiate transformative labour market agreements with the provinces and territories.

Our government recognizes that the largest skills shortage in Canada is in the skills trades and in the engineering and mathematics fields across the country. Economic action plan 2013 will work toward reducing barriers on apprentice accreditation and support the use of apprentices in all areas of national procurement and investment.

The Budget

The government is also earmarking \$19 million to promote engineering sciences and mathematics to young Canadians in an effort to help young people fill these critical roles in our economy. Outstanding schools like the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, which serves my riding of Durham, have world-class programs in these core areas that will help our young men and women find engaging employment right out of school.

The government is committing \$241 million to ensure that young aboriginal Canadians have access to skills training to assist in raising employment levels on reserve through a realignment of the income assistance program.

I had the pleasure of joining 200 other Canadians at the Governor General's Canadian leadership conference last summer near months before my election to Parliament. It was an excellent opportunity to see some of the policy challenges facing our country. I was part of a group of 17 Canadians who toured the province of Alberta, meeting with business, political, social and aboriginal leaders. Every community we visited and almost every leader we spoke to described the labour shortage in Alberta as one of the most pressing issues facing the province. Indeed, it was placed as one of our key findings in our Governor General's Canadian leadership conference group. The economic opportunity in Alberta is of tremendous benefit to all Canadians and meeting the challenges this opportunity poses must engage all Canadians.

The second key area I would like to highlight from economic action plan 2013 is the building Canada plan. Nothing underscores the ability of this government to set priorities to secure our long-term prosperity better than this element of the budget. I would recommend page 171 of the budget to my colleagues to see this impressive plan represented visually.

The building Canada plan is an ambitious \$53 billion 10-year plan to secure and enhance our nation's critical infrastructure and establish predictable long-term partnerships with the provincial and municipal governments across Canada.

The building Canada fund will inject \$14 billion into our economy in priority infrastructure projects, with a national, provincial or local significance. First nation infrastructure is part of the building Canada plan and will see \$155 million directed toward critical energy, road, bridge and civic infrastructure alongside investments in broadband connectivity to complement economic development efforts on reserve.

The relentless focus on jobs and supporting skills trades in Canada is built into the building Canada plan. As part of its consultation and planning with other levels of government, the federal government will directly encourage the use of apprentices in projects receiving federal funding.

The third area I want to touch on briefly in economic action plan 2013 provides for small business in the manufacturing sector in Ontario. On the same day that our Minister of Finance delivered the budget, the Scugog Chamber of Commerce in my riding celebrated its Business of the Year awards.

Small businesses are often the foundation of our local economies and have been an important focus of our government. We have kept taxes low for these businesses for many years and have assisted with

the difficult challenge of whether to hire one more person or not through the small business hiring credit. This budget expands this hiring credit by providing up to \$1,000 against the rise in EI premiums as a result of hiring a new person. We are also increasing the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$800,000, which will also directly benefit small business owners.

• (1325)

While our government has shown its support for small businesses in Canada, I take this occasion to support Kenna Kozak from the Scugog Chamber of Commerce, Sheila Hall from the Clarington Board of Trade and Angela Horne from the Uxbridge Chamber of Commerce. These organizations in Durham, and others like them across the country, are the lifeblood of the small business community. They not only raise important policy issues to our government, they also serve to connect small businesses in a way to one another.

Finally, manufacturers will also benefit in southern Ontario with our government's proposed \$1.4 billion toward an accelerated capital cost allowance—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We have reached the end of the time allowed for the hon. member's comments. We will go now to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, the Conservative government has run up a debt of \$177 billion. Is that what it calls the sound management of public money?

[*English*]

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for identifying exactly the balance our government is trying to set. It would be much easier for a government to impose cuts in the way the Liberal Party did in the mid-1990s by simply slashing National Defence and slashing transfers to our provincial partners.

The government has tried to stay on a pragmatic course, and I direct the hon. member to this course, which set 2015 as a goal for balanced budgets, but along the way make strategic investments in infrastructure and in skills training as a way of softening the impact of the global economic downturn on Canada. The results speak for themselves with Canada's leadership of the G8.

The Budget

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting when members of the Government of Canada try to give the impression they really understand deficits and deficit projections. In reality, when the Conservative Party formed government a few years back, it was handed millions of dollars of surplus and then it turned that into a deficit, even in pre-recession times. According to the Prime Minister, we were not even in a recession, yet the Conservatives turned that surplus into a deficit. Since then, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister have contradicted each other on whether they will have a surplus or a balanced budget.

Why should Canadians give any credibility whatsoever to the Conservatives' claiming they will have a balanced budget in 2015, which happens to be an election year. There is a credibility issue here and I wonder if the member might provide comment on that.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, my friend particularly is from the Liberal caucus that I highlighted earlier. The previous Liberal government's approach to balancing the federal government was essentially through passing along the challenges of a changing economy to provincial partners, a massive reduction in transfer to the provinces that left provincial premiers, whether NDP in Saskatchewan or Progressive Conservative in Ontario, to be the real people cutting for the federal government. At the same time, the hon. member would know that the government of the day also took advantage of an EI surplus that had grown to help it in a way that really was not a revenue stream it should have taken.

One of the key things our government recognized when we came to office was that Canadians, particularly seniors and families, were overtaxed. Therefore, the Prime Minister made it his objective to lower those taxes, both through a reduction to the GST and reductions across the board, and I think Canadians have appreciated that.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for highlighting some of the great initiatives of this budget. One of the things he commented on was the building Canada fund.

Over the weekend, I had the opportunity to visit my riding, as many of us did, and I spoke to a number of municipal politicians and bureaucrats there. To a person, they were thrilled with the investment our government was making in infrastructure. The thing that primarily excited them was the fact that not only had the gas tax been made permanent a number of years back, but this year we committed to indexing those gas tax dollars and, in addition to that, large dollars for major infrastructure programs within their municipalities and across Canada.

Would my colleague care to comment on the kind of feedback he must be getting from his riding?

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for highlighting what is, unfortunately, one of the portions of the building Canada plan that I did not have time to speak about, which is partnering with municipalities instead of the previous government's penchant for multiple announcements and no action. This has truly been a partnership with the municipal level of government across the country, not only in the sharing of the gas tax, which, as my learned colleague has just recognized, will be indexed going

forward, but also an important GST rebate that will help municipalities, large and small, in all regions of the country be a strong partner in our economic action plan, in particular the building Canada plan and infrastructure.

• (1335)

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Durham and I are both veterans and I am delighted to be serving with him in the House now.

I am pleased for the opportunity to speak to our government's economic action plan 2013. I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for all of his hard work to present his eighth budget. Since 2006, he has presented budgets that have laid the foundation for creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for hard-working Canadian families. He is truly the best and most respected finance minister in the world.

When the global recession hit in 2009, our government acted quickly and took decisive steps to ensure our economic recovery. As a result, Canada created over 950,000 net new jobs since July 2009, which is the strongest job-creation record in the entire G7. Both the independent International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are projecting that Canada will have among the strongest growth in the G7 in years ahead. Canada even has the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7. For the fifth straight year, the World Economic Forum has ranked Canada's banking system the soundest in the world. All the major credit rating agencies have affirmed Canada's rock solid triple A rating as well.

Canada's unemployment rate is at its lowest level in four years and it is significantly lower than that of the U.S., a phenomenon that has not been seen in nearly three decades. What a testament that is to the economic stewardship of the minister and this government. These past seven years have, indeed, belonged to Canada.

Economic action plan 2013 benefits all parts of the country, but I would like to highlight what this budget has in store for my riding of Etobicoke Centre.

Experts have continually pointed out that Canada faces a skills shortage. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has identified the skills shortages as the number one obstacle to the success of its members. Our government has acted decisively by taking bold, innovative action and introduced the Canada job grant.

The Canada job grant will transform skills training by providing up to \$15,000 per person to help people get the skills they need for in-demand jobs. That \$15,000 will be funded by the federal government up to \$5,000, with matching funds from the provinces and employers making the job offers. Once fully implemented, this grant will help nearly 130,000 Canadians access training at eligible institutions, like community colleges and trade union training centres each year.

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges had only praise for this initiative and stated:

The Budget

Federal commitments in Budget 2013 will encourage a reduction in barriers to Canada's economic success, while maximizing the talents and advanced skills of Canadians....

ACCC congratulates the government for making investments designed to address Canada's skills gap. Budget 2013 acknowledges the role colleges and institutes play in ensuring that Canadian industry is prepared with the technology and skilled employees necessary to compete in the global economy.

For the first time, the Canada job grant will take skills training choices out of the hands of the government and put them where they belong: in the hands of employers with unfilled jobs and Canadians who want to work. The new grant will result in one essential thing for unemployed or underemployed Canadians, a new and better job.

Another initiative included in the budget that will create jobs is creating opportunities for apprentices. This will support the use of apprentices in federal construction and maintenance contracts in Ontario. Construction season will soon be upon us and in full force. It is encouraging that our government has a plan for apprentices to get more hands-on experience.

Another component of getting hands-on experience is internships. In support of more internships for recent post-secondary graduates, we will invest \$70 million and an additional 5,000 paid internships for recent post-secondary graduates in Ontario and across Canada. Recent graduates have spoken to me in my riding about this and our government has listened. Our finance minister has also consulted with high school students. These kids will all be graduates in the next five to six years and we are helping to shape the job environment for them today. We are not waiting.

In order to fill the skills gap that we face in our country, we need students to undertake education in high-demand fields, including the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Promoting education in high-demand fields aims to do just that. I am working hard to help people in my riding look for these opportunities for their future careers.

While it is important to get unemployed Canadians into the workforce, it is just as important to ensure that we support our seniors. They are the ones who helped build and make our country great. Our seniors have laid the foundations that we all tread upon today, strong and lasting foundations, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

• (1340)

Since 2006, over \$2.7 billion in annual tax relief has been provided to seniors and pensioners, including introducing pension income splitting; increasing the age credit amount by \$2,000; doubling the pension income credit to \$2,000; and increasing what GIS recipients can earn through employment without any reduction to their benefits from \$500 to \$3,500. A single pensioner, for example, earning \$3,500 or more will now be able to keep up to an additional \$1,500 in annual benefits. We have also increased the age limit for RRSP to RRIF from 69 to 71; established the landmark tax-free savings account, which is particularly beneficial for seniors; introduced the largest GIS increase over 25 years, which gave eligible low-income seniors additional benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples, helping more than 680,000 seniors across Canada, and, of course, removing 380,000 seniors from the tax rolls.

This government values our seniors. Etobicoke Centre has one of the highest populations of seniors in Canada. That is why economic action plan 2013 introduces new measures to improve the quality of life for Canadian seniors. That includes expanding tax relief for home care services to include personal care services for those, who due to age, infirmity or disability, require assistance at home; and better protecting seniors using financial services by working with banks and other financial institutions to ensure they develop and distribute clear information about powers of attorney and bank services targeted to the needs of seniors. We are also supporting palliative care services by providing the Pallium Foundation of Canada with \$3 million over the next three years to support training for front-line health care providers; encouraging the timely implementation of pooled registered pension plans by working with the provinces to expand their availability across Canada; and assisting the construction and renovation of accessible community facilities by investing \$15 million a year in the enabling accessibility fund.

This action would build upon our government's strong record of supporting Canada's seniors since taking office in 2006, and I believe that is an enviable record.

Economic action plan 2013 would take care of our veterans as well. These brave men and women have served our country valiantly and fought to defend the freedoms and the values that we as Canadians believe in. They deserve to be properly recognized. It pleases me greatly to see that this budget would enhance the funeral and burial program by simplifying it and more than doubling the current funeral services reimbursement rate, from \$3,600 to \$7,376. This would go a long way in helping ease the burden of funeral costs for families of veterans. We have heard these veterans, including those of us in the House with previous service. I am delighted that this issue has been addressed by our government. This government honours our veterans.

I would like to also bring to the attention of this House that economic action plan 2013 would include \$8 million in funding for venerable Massey Hall to help support its restoration and revitalization. This is an important cultural institution in the heart of Toronto.

It is an exciting time for Toronto, as it gears up to host the Pan Am Games and the Parapan Am Games in July 2015. Our government has already invested significantly in these games, including renovations in the Etobicoke Olympic facility in my riding. I hope to see many youth be inspired by the athletes who attend those games.

The Budget

Our government is making it easier for kids to get active and healthy. Economic action plan 2013 would eliminate tariffs on sporting goods and athletic equipment. By taking this action, our government fully expects wholesalers and distributors and retailers to pass these savings on to consumers.

The \$33 billion building Canada plan launched by our government supported over 12,000 infrastructure projects across Canada. Economic action plan 2013 would continue to deliver, with a new building Canada plan. This would provide over \$53 billion in predictable infrastructure funding for the next 10 years. This would be the largest and longest federal investment job in creating infrastructure in Canadian history.

I hope that the opposition will support creating jobs, support funding for infrastructure, support our seniors, support our veterans and support our students and apprentices getting practical hands-on experience.

This government is committed to balancing the budget in 2015. I call upon the members of the opposite side to support economic action plan 2013.

● (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

The phasing out of the labour-sponsored funds tax credit is one feature of this budget. According to a recently published study, what the government is giving away through the tax credit, it recovers over the next three years. Therefore, this means that as of the fourth year, it is to the government's advantage to give this tax credit.

I wonder if my colleague could explain why he opposes a measure that creates jobs and promotes economic growth and prosperity. I do not understand.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I would almost think that the hon. member had crossed over to our side. We, of course, support growth on this side. We support promoting jobs. We have created over 950,000 jobs in Canada. We have lowered taxes over 150 times. We are lowering the tariffs on sports equipment and the other consumer goods I just talked about.

The Conservative government is fully committed to jobs and growth in Canada. We fully support it, and we hope the members opposite will listen to us. We hope they will embrace and support the budget and support Canada and its growth.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested in my hon. colleague's comments, particularly when he talked about the recession having started in 2009. If he were to check the history of this, he would find that it was the fall of 2008 when the recession actually started. This is of interest, since he can find articles from July 25, 2008 by Reuters and CBC talking about the fact that the country was in deficit. The Conservative government, which had inherited a huge surplus, put us in deficit by April 2008. That is well before the recession began. It is even way before his numbers, but it was certainly before the fall of 2008.

Second, the member talks about job creation numbers from July 2009. If he goes online, he can also find articles from the summer of 2009, even December 2009, when municipalities were complaining about how slow the federal government was to get money out for infrastructure under the stimulus plan. The budget was announced at the end of January 2009, but it was the budget for 2009-10, the budget for the year that started April 1. That money did not start rolling out until at least the fall or after that, so how can the member claim credit for job numbers in 2009?

What does the member think about the \$2 billion increase in EI premiums on businesses and employers in the country?

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and I thank him for listening very carefully. He is correct. I meant to say 2008, not 2009; it was a typo in my speech.

Since the government took office in 2006, it has managed the economy brilliantly. All of the major leading institutions in the world will attest to that. We are the greatest economy in the G7 right now. I have read in the paper today that the British are lowering taxes for their small businesses for just that reason. They are doing it to encourage job growth and stimulus in the economy.

When we took over and the recession hit back in 2008, our government took prudent steps to stimulate the economy and keep people at work. As a result, we have ended up in the position we are in today, as the greatest nation and economy in the G7.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to return the kind words to the member for Etobicoke Centre about our veterans. Since he spoke, I was able to look around this House. The members for Pickering—Scarborough East, Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Winnipeg North, Westmount—Ville-Marie and British Columbia Southern Interior have all served. They would share our combined passion for the fact that the budget focuses on skilled trades and apprentices, specifically the Helmets to Hardhats program, and how the skilled trades can take in our veterans and be targeted on the building Canada plan.

I would ask the member to speak a little about the coordination that the government has been doing.

● (1350)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, as he is also a co-founder of the True Patriot Love Foundation, which has now raised over \$13 million for veterans. He is well positioned to ask that question.

The Helmets to Hardhats program is a vital program for our veterans, as a transition out of military service to take up a skilled trade in a very needed sector in Canada. The program that offers this opportunity will help our veterans not only transition, but live good, solid and decent economic lives.

The Budget

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the latest Conservative budget is not a good one for Newfoundland and Labrador. With yet more cuts to the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, at this point Conservatives are amputating bone. There is no more meat within DFO to cut. I will come back to that in a moment. The Conservatives are charging tax on hospital parking. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are already vicious with the fact that they are being charged to park outside hospitals, in other words, charged to see their doctors. By increasing the age of eligibility for old age security to 67 from 65, this budget is not a good one for Newfoundland and Labrador. It is not good for the fisheries. It is not good for the sick. It is not good for their families. It is not good for seniors.

It is not good for first nations. Workfare is to be introduced in this budget whereby aboriginal youth will be forced to work for their benefits. At the same time, post-secondary funding for aboriginal youth does not come close to meeting the need. This budget is also not good for the unemployed. The Conservatives are following through on their EI changes that punish workers by forcing them to take lower paying jobs or jobs outside of their communities, outside of their outports.

This budget is not good for the vast majority of students. There is nothing in the budget to tackle crippling student debt. The average federal student debt load stands at \$28,000. There is a problem in this country with accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education from one province to the next, and there is nothing in this budget to address that.

This budget is not good for the vast majority of young Canadians. There are 240,000 more young Canadians unemployed today than there were before the recession. All this budget does for youth job creation is to re-announce \$70 million in funding over three years for 5,000 internships. That is a start, but, again, it skims the surface of the actual need.

Closer to home, there is nothing in the Conservative budget to offset the 4% increase to Marine Atlantic fares that is due to come into effect on April 1. If that does not amount to a tax increase for all of Newfoundland and Labrador, I do not know what does. News flash for the Conservatives: Newfoundland is an island, and when the ferry rates are increased the cost of everything eventually goes up.

There is barely a mention of Labrador in the budget. The one mention there was for an old jobs program. For Conservatives, and I said this last week during question period, Labrador is just a place to pull puppet strings. If Labrador cannot get a decent mention in a federal budget that is released on the eve of a federal byelection in Labrador, well, Labrador will never get anything. Conservatives seem more preoccupied with winning the Labrador seat than actually doing something concrete for Labrador.

I also mentioned last week that back home they are saying “you either do it the right way, or the Penashue”. Conservatives choose to cheat Labradorians out of fair representation. That is the Penashue, and Conservatives defend it at every turn.

The Atlantic caucus of the New Democratic Party was in Labrador West this past fall. One of the chief concerns we heard in Labrador

West was the desperate need for affordable housing. The mining industry, iron ore specifically, is doing very well but the vacancy rate is almost zero. The local college offers a mining course that practically guarantees employment, but classes are not full because there is no place for students to live. We heard stories about how women remain in abusive relationships because there is nowhere else for them to go.

There is nothing in the Conservative budget that tackles the national housing crisis in any real way. The Conservative government is investing \$253 million in affordable housing, but that does nothing to address the lack of affordable housing in Canada through a national housing strategy. Throwing money at the provinces in the absence of a national plan is irresponsible. It makes no sense.

I should have said at the start that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

• (1355)

I stood in the House in February to address the need for a national housing strategy, to talk about Labrador's needs and to talk about housing needs in the northeast Avalon peninsula in Newfoundland. What did every Conservative member, including Peter Penashue, do? They voted against a national housing strategy.

There is nothing in the budget for the people of Labrador. Let me reiterate. If Labrador cannot get anything substantive from a federal budget that is released on the eve of a federal byelection in Labrador, from what would seem to be an election budget for Labrador, then it will never get anything from the Conservative government. Newfoundland and Labrador MPs are supposed to represent Newfoundland and Labrador in Ottawa. They are not supposed to represent Ottawa in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is the Penashue way. That is not the right way. It is not the New Democratic way.

I mentioned DFO earlier in my speech. Newfoundland and Labrador may not be the great fishing epicentre that it once was. The Grand Banks of Newfoundland may not be what they once were, but that does not mean the Government of Canada should walk away from the responsibility for our fisheries that it took over when Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949. However, that is what is happening. The latest cut has the Conservative government slashing the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans' budget by \$108 million over six years. There is talk that regional headquarters, like the one in St. John's, Newfoundland, could close.

I would like to quote from the budget:

To complement these savings, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will also improve regional program efficiency by reducing management overhead and consolidating decision-making authority.

Does that say directly that regional offices will close? No, the wording never does, but the writing most definitely appears on the wall.

Statements by Members

I also mentioned hospital parking earlier in my speech. This budget would require GST and HST be paid on all hospital parking. Currently, public sector bodies are exempt; the change would make parking spaces or facilities operated by a municipality or hospital taxable. Canadians, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians see the parking fees, which are most definitely destined to increase, as a financial barrier to health care. The Conservative government is going to charge people to see their doctors. That is what this would amount to. It is going to charge people for medical treatment. That is what this would amount to.

Let me sum up all the people that the Conservative government is leaving behind or so arrogantly neglecting in this budget: Newfoundlanders and Labradorians first; Labrador, or the big land, in particular; seniors; students; young people; first nations; low-income Canadians and fishermen.

Labradorians are lucky in a way. As I mentioned, a byelection will be called there soon, a byelection in which the people of Labrador will have an opportunity to send the message to the Conservatives that their way of governing by dictating from Ottawa, without a moral compass, is unacceptable. All Canadians should be so lucky to have that voting opportunity, because the Conservatives would find themselves out of office here and now and we would not have to wait two more long years.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl will have five minutes remaining for questions and comments when the House next returns to the motion.

Statements by members. The hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

EDMONTON—LEDUC EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the incredible efforts of emergency first responders and civilians in my constituency of Edmonton—Leduc following the massive multi-vehicle crash that occurred on the Queen Elizabeth Highway last Thursday.

Following a fast-moving and violent storm in our region, approximately 100 vehicles were involved in the accident. It caused the highway to be closed down in both directions.

It is with pride that I note how quickly and effectively the City of Leduc set up an emergency operations centre to ensure that efforts were well coordinated to support first responder and motorist needs. Hospitals, emergency crews and police from throughout the capital region collaborated to treat those who suffered injuries from the accident. Buses were also brought in to serve the multi-casualty centres, as well as to shelter individuals from inclement weather. In addition, the Leduc Recreation Centre set up a reception centre to provide a place of refuge for those who were involved in the accident south of the city.

Fortunately, there was no loss of life following what was one of the largest motor vehicle accidents in Alberta's history. I would like to thank all of those who stepped up to respond to the accident. It reiterates just how selfless and willing to serve our emergency responders are. I thank them very much.

* * *

ALEX NAPIER

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our communities are filled with unsung heroes who make our communities great. One such group of heroes in my riding were 18 World War II veterans who for over 20 years devoted their time to reading and telling stories to kids at Courcellette Public School.

It is with great sadness that I rise today to acknowledge the passing of the last member of this group, Mr. Alex Napier. Beyond reading to the kids every Monday, the 98-year-old Mr. Napier became part of the lives of many generations of students at the school.

This group of veterans valiantly rose to defend Canada in our time of need. Their service did not end with the war. It continued right up to the passing of Mr. Napier and continues today in the lives and memories of the kids of Courcellette. I am truly humbled and thankful for the lifetime of public service and dedication of this extraordinary group of veterans.

Mr. Napier was a legend to the staff and students at Courcellette Public School, and we in Scarborough Southwest will truly miss him. On behalf of a grateful community and Canada, I thank him.

* * *

JUNIOR TEAM CANADA

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize and congratulate Global Vision's Junior Team Canada ambassadors who are in Ottawa today.

These youth represent Canadian communities from coast to coast to coast and have worked together to develop innovative ways to actively involve their peers in civic engagement, economic development and Arctic sovereignty. As ambassadors, they have led the first-ever domestic trade mission to Nunavut to foster north-south dialogue as youth leaders.

Throughout their work as Junior Team Canada ambassadors they have demonstrated true attachment to Canada, helping to build stronger, more viable communities. This would not have been possible without the valuable partnership of Canadian Heritage, First Air, TD Bank, the Canadian Commercial Corporation and universities across Canada providing youth the unique opportunity to understand Canada beyond their back door.

I encourage them to continue to get involved, take action and be engaged as the leaders of today.

*Statements by Members***JOURNEY OF NISHIYUU**

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was truly moved to be at Victoria Island today to welcome the group of young people who finished their 1,600 km journey to Ottawa in support of the Idle No More movement.

The initial six young people left their James Bay Cree community of Whapmagoostui in January on their journey of *nishiyuu*, which means “journey of the people” in Cree.

[*Translation*]

This group of individuals, walking through the snow on snowshoes, welcomed hundreds of people who joined them along the way.

[*English*]

These young people have inspired us all with their message of hope and their plea that the government change its unilateral and paternalistic approach to aboriginal people in Canada.

The Liberal Party of Canada wholeheartedly supports these young people and their inspiring message. We must now honour their courage by working with aboriginal peoples to close the unacceptable gaps in outcomes in terms of health, education, housing, water and their participation in the economy.

* * *

● (1405)

WRESTLING

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the sport of wrestling has been with us for much of human history. Wrestling was part of the original Olympic games dating back to 708 B.C., and it was a major competition when the modern-day games began in 1896.

The appeal of the sport spans tens of hundreds of years. Wrestling represents the very best of competition, as it pits two opponents in a struggle to prove their agility, strength and tenacity. However, the recent trend of the Olympics has been to encourage sports in which a winner is chosen by judges who assign points based on an opaque system of preferences. Audience members can agree with the judges' decisions or be confused by their choices.

This is not so with wrestling. Everybody understands that once the other wrestler is pinned on the mat, there is an indisputable winner. This is why there are wrestling clubs throughout my riding, my province and our nation.

I am proud of this tradition that dates back to ancient Greece. Therefore, I am disappointed in the International Olympic Committee's decision to take wrestling out of the games. To eliminate wrestling from the Olympics is trendy, snobbish and wrong. The decision should be reversed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ST-PIERRE CENTRE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I want to acknowledge the 40th anniversary of a very important establishment in my riding, Centre St-Pierre.

Centre St-Pierre was founded in 1973 in response to the social transformation of Montreal's south-central neighbourhood and has since become a fixture in the community. Every year, over 150,000 people are drawn to the centre to do their part in creating a more just and democratic society that is more responsive to the well-being of individuals.

It is a centre for public education that provides training, support and community outreach.

The centre provides a wealth of resources and serves as a forum for the social movement and a popular meeting place for agencies and associations from all backgrounds.

I am very proud to celebrate the centre's 40th anniversary, and I acknowledge the importance of its mission and the strength of its values.

* * *

[*English*]

PERSIAN NEW YEAR

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as spring arrives in Canada, Nowruz, the Persian New Year, is being celebrated across our country. In 2009, this House unanimously proclaimed Nowruz officially to acknowledge its importance.

As government liaison to the Persian and Iranian community, I am eager to congratulate people of Iranian background on the legacy left by Persian pioneers of democracy, such as Cyrus and Mossadegh.

Persians love their poets. To honour Iranian-Canadians, I have written a poem called “Persian Spring”.

Close your eyes and think back to the dwindling snow
On the slopes of a land three millennia ago.
With the waning of winter, we welcome Nowruz,
The esgh of springtime, long-sought-after news.
Dream with me; sing with me; candles alight.
Think castles, oases, and sweet-smelling night.
Think freedom—aazaadi—think rule of law;
Think everything noble the great Cyrus saw.
Keep the faith, brothers and sisters and friends.
Our strength is our faith, and our faith never ends.
Remembering history, we're on the right track
Persia's best and her brightest are soon coming back!

Happy Nowruz. *Nowruz mobarak. Nowruz pirooz.*

* * *

HEROIC INTERVENTION

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I call on this House to join me in celebrating an outstanding Canadian from Brantford, a young Algonquin College basketball star and a good Samaritan, Holly Ryerse.

Last summer, late at night, Holly witnessed three young offenders robbing and senselessly attacking a helpless stranger right here in Ottawa. As three attackers brutally kicked and slammed the victim's head into the pavement, Holly intervened to protect the stranger without regard for her own safety, and then she called the police.

Statements by Members

Holly suffered a concussion, emotional trauma and hand and back injuries, but she likely saved that stranger's life.

What is so remarkable about Holly is not just her heroism, but her selflessness. She is an outstanding citizen who did what she knew was right, never asking for recognition or anything else in return.

We thank Holly for standing up and doing what is right. Her courage, integrity and constant optimism are a blessing to us all. She is a true hero.

* * *

VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board is out of touch with the needs of our country's veterans. Too many veterans are left without adequate financial support.

For example, Gordon Fergus, a 71-year-old pensioner, is a veteran who served with the reserve forces and militia for more than two decades. He has been decorated with numerous awards, but his service to Canada was not without sacrifice. Mr. Fergus sustained several injuries that have led to long-term disability.

However, his disability application has been a struggle with the board since 2001. After many years of service to his country, Mr. Fergus is unable to keep up with the cost of his medication. What does this say about the price we place on freedom and democracy?

To me, this is no way to treat Canadians like Mr. Fergus who served our country so bravely. It is time for the Conservatives to make the welfare and health of our veterans a priority.

* * *

• (1410)

JAMES PON

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate James Pon, one of the last surviving head tax payers, who passed away last Friday at the age of 95.

James Pon lived a truly accomplished life. He studied engineering and business and even won a Governor General's award for an innovation that aided Canada's aircraft industry in World War II.

He advocated tirelessly for an official apology for the unjust head tax and to have the Chinese railway workers recognized for their profound contributions.

James Pon helped educate Canadians and founded numerous community-based initiatives.

He was one of six head tax payers present in this House when our Prime Minister delivered a historic apology in June 2006.

I ask my hon. colleagues to join me in recognizing the amazing contributions James Pon, a truly outstanding Canadian, made to Canada and in offering our condolences to the Pon family for their loss.

JOURNEY OF NISHIYUU

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today it is with great pride that I rise to welcome the walkers of the journey of *nishiyuu* to Parliament Hill.

The journey began in Whapmagoostui, in the depths of the winter, with seven youths and their guide. Today, they arrive here on Parliament Hill, after walking 1,600 kilometres and growing to more than 400 youths, as others joined along the way.

With the message of unity, the journey of *nishiyuu* has captured the imagination of people from all across Canada, from all walks of life, and has inspired aboriginal youth from across the country to think big and take pride in who they are.

I especially want to acknowledge the original seven walkers who started it all: Stanley George Jr., Johnny Abraham, David Kawapit, Raymond Kawapit, Jordan Mast, Gordie Rupert, Travis George and guide Isaac Kawapit. It was their vision and their dedication that made this journey a success.

On behalf of the people of my riding, and on behalf of all Canadians for that matter, we thank them for their inspiration, for inspiring young and old, for an extended hand of reconciliation.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the final debate before Liberal members, supporters and Facebook friends decide who will lead the third party, there was a new focus on keeping Canadians safe and standing up for victims.

On this side of the House we welcome any reversal of the Liberal soft-on-crime position, which goes back to Pierre Trudeau-era solicitor general Jean-Pierre Goyer, who said it was time to take the focus off public safety and put it on the rights of convicted criminals.

It is important to remind Canadians that it was the Liberal Party that opposed enshrining in law the rights of victims to receive information on their attacker. The Liberals opposed giving victims the right to participate fully in parole hearings, and they opposed funding for the National Crime Prevention Centre, including the youth gang prevention fund. That is on top of their continued opposition to tougher sentences for serious and violent criminals.

Canadians know they can always count on the Liberal Party to put the rights of convicted criminals before the rights of victims.

* * *

PROMOTING EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been said that the ripest peach is highest on the tree and, if I can expand on that metaphor, York West is a tall tree with a unique harvest.

Oral Questions

Promoting Education and Community Health, also known as PEACH, is a local, non-profit, charitable agency that has been rooted in the Jane-Finch community since 1993. Its mandate includes working with marginalized youth in a resiliency-promoting framework and, in my experience, it is exceptional at what it does.

For 20 years, PEACH has helped young people become productive members of our society. It empowers marginalized youth to re-imagine their future, allowing them to overcome setbacks, reconnect to education, experience strong support, improve their skills and become engaged in community activities, express themselves, and feel connected.

In short, PEACH is another word for hope to many who had forgotten the meaning of that word, and for that we are all very thankful.

We thank PEACH and every volunteer who works there.

* * *

• (1415)

LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the NDP leader, it has been a year to forget.

Since winning his party's leadership, the NDP leader has advocated for a \$20 billion carbon tax that would increase the cost of everything; shamefully attacked Canadian interests and jobs on the world stage; called the growth of our resource sector a disease; called Canada's premiers messengers; advocated for more than \$56 billion in new spending; met with a convicted cop shooter and advocated for him to immigrate to Canada; lost three MPs, including one to the separatist Bloc québécois; placed a higher priority on placating separatists than defending Canadian unity; and was forced to repay the illegal donations he took from his union bosses.

I think I speak for all members on this side of the House when I wish the NDP leader many more years to come.

* * *

BYELECTION IN LABRADOR

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the votes are in and I am proud to report that Labrador New Democrats have chosen Harry Borlase to represent them in the upcoming byelection.

Harry was raised in Goose Bay. He is expert in polar law. Best of all, he has never had to resign due to massive election law violations.

New Democrats believe it is up to Labradorians to exercise their democratic choice, but we also believe in letting the rule of law run its course.

That is why Peter Penashue, after resigning in disgrace, should bow out of this campaign until Elections Canada and possibly the RCMP complete their investigations into the dozens of illegal campaign donations he accepted.

While the Conservatives field a self-admitted lawbreaker and a divided Liberal Party squabbles over its candidate, New Democrats

are proud to offer a positive alternative whom Labradorians can trust, and a candidate who will put Labrador first.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week our government introduced economic action plan 2013, our Conservative government's plan to continue to keep taxes low for families, seniors and businesses.

Our government's record is second to none. We have reduced taxes more than 150 times, and thanks to our Conservative government the average family of four pays over \$3,000 less in federal taxes each year.

While our government is standing up for Canadian families and businesses by keeping their taxes low, the Leader of the Opposition has a different plan in mind. The Leader of the Opposition's plan includes more than \$56 billion in new spending, which means he is going to need to find a way to pay for it.

That is where the Leader of the Opposition's \$20 billion carbon tax comes in. The new tax on everything would raise the price of everything, including gas, groceries and electricity.

Canadians know that our Conservative record on the economy is one that protects their interests and is helping the Canadian economy grow. We will vigorously oppose the Leader of the Opposition's plan to impose a job-killing \$20 billion carbon tax on Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the past three months, six young people from a Cree community in northern Quebec have been trekking 1,600 km through snow and ice to come to Ottawa in the hope that a new relationship can be forged between Canada and the first nations. Today, spring has arrived, together with hundreds of walkers. The problem is that instead of giving them hope, the new Conservative budget will crush them with paternalistic programs.

The Prime Minister promised equality in education. Why is Canada still spending 30% less on education for aboriginal youth than for other Canadians?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the priority of budget 2013 is jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

Oral Questions

We have brought forward a number of concrete measures to help first nations communities. These include significant investments in first nations infrastructure, the first nations policing program, the aboriginal justice strategy and enhancing health and mental health services for first nations and Inuit.

The question is this. Will the leader of the NDP do the right thing and stand up and support all these meaningful investments for our first nations?

* * *

• (1420)

THE BUDGET

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see the minister default to his talking points. He did not listen to the question: Why do we pay 30% less for education for first nations youth than for other Canadians?

The Conservatives' budget is a shell game. There is a billion dollars less for infrastructure next year, then funding is frozen for 10 years, so 10 years of darkness for the communities and 10 years of crumbling infrastructure.

Do the Conservatives not understand that the costs of government programs have to be adjusted for inflation? Is it incompetence or just dishonesty?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP wants more taxes, higher deficits and more government spending.

On this side of the House, we want to ensure that every single dollar of taxpayer money is spent wisely and well and that we get real value. That is exactly what we are doing. We are focused on economic growth, on job creation and measures like the Canada jobs grant.

We want to know this. Will the NDP stand up and do the right thing and support the Canada jobs credit, something that will help create many jobs right across our country?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we hear malarkey like that, we know why the Conservatives want to destroy the PBO.

This weekend, outgoing Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page said that the Conservatives are trying to “unwind” the PBO. Page slammed the Conservatives for refusing to come clean about the details of \$14 billion in cuts included in this budget.

Without a full-time budget watchdog, Canadians are being kept in the dark. Why are the Conservatives continuing to hide the truth from Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell the House about someone who is trying to hide the truth.

The leader of the NDP went to Washington and said he would not talk about Keystone and would not take a position. Then, behind closed doors with top American congressional leaders, he trash-talked the Canadian economy and lobbied against a Canadian project, one that would create literally thousands and thousands of jobs.

Will the leader of the NDP do the right thing: stand in his place, apologize and stop trash-talking Canada?

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans said: “Grace, you’re a great cook; you’re going to make a wonderful wife for somebody.”

Can the minister confirm the comments he made while promoting the budget?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member opposite is following the newscasts and our talk about the federal budget.

It was indeed a great day to promote our budget on Friday. We had significant interest in it.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, leave it to the Conservatives to encourage young women to get married as part of their economic action plan.

When the member said, “Grace, you’re a great cook; you’re going to make a wonderful wife for somebody”, his comments were disrespectful. In other words, “there, there, stop planning for your future”.

Is this the kind of response women can expect from the Conservatives with their economic action plan?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the opposition members have little fault to find in our budget if this is the only type of question they can ask in this House.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on wasteful advertising while depriving Canadians of the services they pay for and need. They are standing behind disgraced cheater Peter Penashue in Labrador who stood for wasteful Conservative advertising and stood against protecting search and rescue. His indifference to Labrador and his failure to stand up for search and rescue had tragic results for 14-year-old Burton Winters.

Why are the Conservatives willing to spend millions of dollars on self-promotion while failing to fund search and rescue in Labrador?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Peter Penashue was a great representative for Labrador, a strong voice for economic development and job creation. He was instrumental in getting support for the Muskrat Falls development, something that will transform the economy of Labrador. He fought to get increased Internet speed in Labrador. He fought against the wasteful long gun registry. All three of these things are something that could never be done by the third party. He delivered for the good people of Labrador.

Oral Questions

•(1425)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on wasteful advertising while starving Canadians of the services they need. The Prime Minister is standing behind electoral fraudster Peter Penashue in Labrador because he stood for wasteful Conservative advertising and stood against extending an extra five weeks of EI for the people of Labrador who face seasonal employment.

Instead of standing up for seasonal workers in Labrador, Peter Penashue stood up for Conservative propaganda. Why are the Conservatives willing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on self-promotion while failing to support the people of Labrador?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell members what this individual did. He worked hard for job creation and for economic growth. He was part of a team that saw the Canadian economy create hundreds of thousands of jobs since the bottom of the economic recession, someone who was working to transform the economy of Labrador to make it one of the economic engines of this country. We need strong leadership. We need people who can get the job done, like this individual did over the past two years.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have absolutely no problem spending hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money on partisan propaganda while they cut funding to fisheries. With Peter Penashue looking on as part of that “team” the minister refers to, Newfoundland and Labrador’s cabinet observers saw fisheries science being cut to the bone, the EI left without marketing support, crumbling infrastructure, slashes to EI and fisheries EI, and inadequate habitat and conservation protection.

With Peter Penashue looking on with his team aboard, the government said to the fishermen, “You’ve got what you had coming to you”. Now what do they—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has long been a tradition that when we present a comprehensive budget and economic action plan it would get the focus of attention in the House. All the Liberals are doing is following scandals. We can look at the advertising spending of this government. This government spends \$20 million less on advertising than the Liberal government did. We are focused on the priorities of Canadians: 950,000 net new jobs and more hope and more opportunity for the people of Labrador and all Canadians.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are just playing a shell game when it comes to infrastructure spending. They are renaming some programs. They are cutting others. However, the net result is clear: over \$1 billion taken

out of infrastructure spending in each of the next two years. With crumbling bridges, gridlocked roads and transit being starved, it is a shell game that will cost our cities dearly.

Why the deception? Why are the Conservatives claiming that their budget increases infrastructure when their own budget numbers contradict them?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the FCM president, Karen Leibovici, said:

[The] budget delivers significant gains for Canada’s cities and communities. We applaud the government for choosing to continue moving our communities forward even as it meets its immediate fiscal challenges.

[Translation]

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the vast majority of cities across Canada congratulated our government for the new infrastructure plan. The opposition does not understand this.

* * *

[English]

THE BUDGET

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us deal with some facts here. The Minister of Finance admitted that there was a decrease in funding, not an increase in infrastructure funding.

The Conservatives leak the contents of the budget when it suits them. They let out information about hockey equipment tariffs, but hidden away deep in the budget was a \$300 million hike on other tariffs. They use deceptive leaks to cover up massive tax hikes.

Why are they not just being honest with Canadians about the real impact of their budget?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be honest with Canadians. I do not think the opposition even understands what was being referred to by general preferential tariffs. I am sure that is what the hon. member was trying to spit out.

This is actually a foreign aid program that was created back in the 1970s to give special treatment to countries that are developing. I would suggest that the 72 countries we took off of that list have actually developed. This gives benefits, and some hope, to the least developed countries that are trying to compete.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, abolishing the labour-sponsored funds tax credit is such a foolish decision that it is creating division even within the Conservative ranks.

For the second time in one week, the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism contradicted one of his colleagues. At a press conference on Friday, he explained that the labour-sponsored funds tax credit had been eliminated because it was creating unfair competition. Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance said in the House that the tax credit had been eliminated because it was not working.

Why are there so many divisions within the Conservative caucus? Is it because the elimination of the tax credit is simply impossible to justify?

• (1430)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised by what my opposition colleague is saying because, as usual, the NDP believes what it hears from Quebec's big union bosses.

Clearly, this tax credit was not doing what it was supposed to. As we speak, the funds are overcapitalized. What is more, only 11% of the money is really being invested in the development of small businesses in Quebec.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this stupid decision is nothing less than an attack on investment, savings and job creation in Quebec.

The vice-president of the Fonds de solidarité, Denis Leclerc, clearly stated that it does not make any sense for the Conservative government to eliminate this important program that encourages workers to save.

The CEO of Fondaction, Léopold Beaulieu, indicated that the only way that many people with low incomes can save for their retirement is to contribute to a labour-sponsored fund.

Sixty percent of the money from these funds is used to start small businesses in the regions. Why do the Conservatives want to attack Quebec's jobs and small businesses?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, my opposition colleague is once again providing false information.

It is not 60% of the money that is invested in small business start-ups in Quebec but 11%. The FTQ fund has enough money to meet that need and increase its percentage of funding for small businesses in Quebec.

I would like to tell my colleague that our budget does what Quebecers asked us to do: it does not increase taxes.

We are balancing the budget. It is unfortunate that the members of the opposition are always pushing for more taxes.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$10 billion invested over the past 30 years by the Fonds de solidarité FTQ and 500,000 jobs maintained or created: now that is an economic success story.

The Conservatives' decision to centralize workforce training programs does not take into account what the provinces have already achieved.

The latest report from Quebec's labour minister indicated that 140,000 people have found jobs after completing a training program. Last year, Quebec's training initiatives helped save \$220 million in EI benefit payments.

Why would the government interfere with something that works?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada job grant will help unemployed people and people who are trying to improve their lives.

I want to share what the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada said:

In creating the Job Grant fund, the federal government has shown leadership in addressing the growing skills gap. We encourage provinces to support it.

* * *

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the Conservative way. They do not negotiate with the provinces, they take away \$2 billion and then they say that the provinces must match contributions dollar for dollar for the program to work.

I want to talk about another economic model that works but that the Conservatives want to fix. Credit unions have played an instrumental and crucial role in the development of Quebec's thriving business world and in the regional economic development of Quebec.

Despite this economic success, the Conservatives decided to go after credit unions by increasing their taxes, without even having the decency to give them advance warning.

Why do the Conservatives have it in for credit unions?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the NDP has shown us its economic expertise. The New Democrats actually do not understand that the credit unions still have access to the lowest small business tax rate out there. That has not changed.

We are simply eliminating an outdated tax subsidy that was set in place back in the 1970s, when tax systems were very different. We have actually reduced taxes in many other ways. No other business, I would remind hon. members, receives the special tax subsidy that the credits unions are receiving.

Oral Questions

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Quebec government changed its tax arrangements with credit unions, it talked to them first. The Conservative change came out of nowhere. Millions of Canadians are members of credit unions. By increasing the tax on the profits of credit unions, the Conservatives are taking away the shared benefits that credit union members get every year.

Why the backdoor attack on people's pocketbooks and why no consultation?

• (1435)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we respect the fact that credit unions have actually helped many Canadians and they continue to do that. They are becoming very large operations and they still, I would repeat, have access to the lowest small business tax rate.

As referenced in the question, Quebec actually did eliminate this comparable subsidy back in 2003. We continue to be a strong supporter of credit unions.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' attack on credit unions will take \$205 million out of the pockets of Canadians over the next five years. The Conservatives are also adding GST to hospital parking in the budget. The *Canadian Medical Association Journal* noted in 2011 that high fees are a barrier to health care. However, instead of giving Canadians a break, the Conservatives are raising taxes on people who visit their loved ones in hospitals.

Why the attack on sick Canadians and their families?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly reject the premise of that question. I know the NDP does not understand anything about tax fairness, but perhaps it should stop screaming and actually listen to the answer to the question.

We are ensuring that commercially paid parking is treated the same under the tax system everywhere across the country. We have lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5% and it is providing all Canadians with important tax relief.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans once again finds itself on the chopping block. The budget revealed that this department is facing over \$100 million in cuts. Conservatives already gutted the Fisheries Act and offloaded responsibilities to NGOs; first the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, now DFO.

Why are they refusing to consult with those affected, ignoring coastal communities and ramming these blind cuts through?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2013 contains a number of significant investments to support the development of Canadian fisheries. This includes

support for first nation fishing enterprises, improving the conservation of fisheries and enhancing regulatory clarity for the aquaculture sector.

Economic action plan 2013 proposes to dedicate all funds collected through the sale of the salmon conservation stamp to the Pacific Salmon Foundation.

* * *

[Translation]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, can the government waste less money on propaganda and use that money to keep Quebec City's maritime rescue centre open instead of closing it in mid-April? Officials in Halifax and the Canadian Coast Guard have told the minister that they cannot respond to distress calls in French.

I would like to quote their report from February 27 and 28. I should point out that it was written in English.

[English]

There is an increased concern in this area. Further language training is required... and management of the schedule is an absolute must to...avoid the worst-case scenario when it comes to language.

Is this clear enough for the minister?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, before we make any changes in the Quebec office, we will ensure that the language capabilities and the language requirements are there to provide a bilingual service.

We would never put anyone's life in danger in this kind of situation.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last fall, the government cancelled an employment insurance pilot project that provided up to five extra weeks of benefits to Canadians in regions with high unemployment. It would have cost \$77 million to renew the program this year. Instead, the government will be spending \$78 million on partisan budget ads.

Why is the government wasting money on pre-election propaganda instead of using it to fund programs that would help unemployed Canadians?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the pilot project the member is talking about did not deliver the desired results. That is why we replaced it with measures that will help people find training and jobs so that they can work, which is better for them and their families.

That is why we are introducing the Canada job grant to help people obtain the skills that industries are looking for.

Oral Questions

•(1440)

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2011, Natalya Rougas, a mother on parental leave battling cancer, won her appeal against the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development for access to sickness benefits. The judge made it clear that the law already provided for this benefit. Now we find the minister ignored the ruling and continued to deny sick women benefits to which they were legally entitled.

Why did the minister not respect the 2011 ruling? How many sick parents has she cheated out of their benefits since?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of that question, for sure. Our government passed the Helping Families in Need Act to provide parents who fell ill while receiving parental benefits to access employment insurance sickness benefits. This case relates to the previous Liberal government's rules, which we have since greatly improved.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more money will be spent on administrative costs to impose the training program for aboriginal youth on reserve than on the actual training of these young people. Unfortunately, we are no longer surprised to see the paternalistic attitude of the Conservatives in budget 2013. Young aboriginals on reserve already receive an average of 30% less funding for education than what the provinces provide off reserve.

Why are the Conservatives not investing enough in education and why are they not treating aboriginal peoples as equal partners?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member is suggesting is completely false. Funds invested in first nations education compare favourably, if not equally, to what the provinces spend. Not only has our government committed to consulting first nations across the country on the development of a first nations education act, but in the latest budget, it also committed to dedicating new resources to loans, bursaries, scholarships and training for aboriginal students.

In contrast to what the NDP has done in the past, this year, that party should support—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Churchill.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008 the Conservatives promised reconciliation. Today, hundreds of young indigenous walkers are on Parliament Hill to remind us of that promise. However, instead of welcoming them, the Prime Minister chose to greet two pandas that were FedExed from China. Instead of listening, the Conservative budget showed more of the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Churchill has the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: It just shows their priorities, Mr. Speaker. Instead of listening, the government showed more paternalistic attitudes toward first nations youth, imposing a punitive workfare program. What is needed is effective skills training and an investment in education.

What will it take? How many more kilometres need to be walked before the Conservative government listens to first nations people?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, we recognize and acknowledge the determination of these young aboriginal walkers and we commend them for their commitment to addressing first nation issues. In fact, contrary to what the hon. member seems to indicate, I shall be meeting later today with the walkers to discuss with these aboriginal youth about the challenges and also how we can best continue to improve the situation for all aboriginals in Canada.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, standing outside the House today, while we try to get answers inside, are young people who have walked over 1,600 kilometres through the harshest months of winter to be here today. Over the course of their journey from Whapmagoostui, they have been joined by hundreds and inspired thousands of others with their call for unity, their call for respect and their call for change.

Will the minister heed their call and start showing Canada's aboriginal peoples the respect they deserve?

•(1445)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he ought to listen. I just said that we recognized the determination of these young aboriginal youth. In fact, I will be meeting with them later today to discuss their concerns and to discuss possible solutions that we can envision in the future.

We are building opportunities and jobs and creating economic opportunities for our first nations all across Canada. I just came from western Canada where progress is being accomplished and we shall continue in that vein.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, adopting paternalistic measures is no way to make progress with the first nations.

If the Conservatives had done enough for aboriginal youth, then they would not have needed to snowshoe and walk 1,600 km.

[Member spoke in Cree.]

Oral Questions

I just thanked them for their courage and determination. The Conservatives do not seem to get the point. The time of broken promises and paternalism is over.

When will the Conservatives take the issues raised by these young people, including the environmental issues, seriously?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the hon. member's fine words, the fact remains that there is great potential for first nations in forestry and mining and in the skills in which we want to invest so that young aboriginals across the country can participate in the economy. However, when we try to do just that, the NDP goes to Washington to say that the mines and forests are a disease.

If they truly want to improve things for first nations in Canada, then they should get on board with the government's proposals to move forward.

* * *

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the socialist NDP would punish small businesses with new carbon and business tax hikes, our government recognizes the vital role small businesses play in the economy.

Since 2006, our government has taken significant steps to support the growth of small businesses, such as reducing the small business tax rate from 12% to 11%, increasing the small business limit to \$500,000 and much more.

Could the Minister of State for Finance please tell the House how economic action plan 2013 builds on our record of helping small businesses?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed to hear that the NDP will actually vote against small business and vote against the measures to help small business in budget 2013, measures such as extending and expanding the hiring credit for small businesses.

The NDP will also vote against increasing the capital gains tax exemption from \$750,000, the lifetime capital gains tax exemption for small business, up to \$800,000, and which will then be indexed. The NDP is going to vote against that too.

* * *

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week's budget all but ignores northern Ontario. The facts are in the finance department's own numbers.

While the southern Ontario development agency got some new funding, northern Ontario once again got snubbed by the Conservatives.

When will the government stop playing favourites, recognize the distinct economic challenges faced by our communities and ensure equitable funding and fair treatment for northern Ontario? Why is the government abandoning our region?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member should know, if he had read the budget, the budget specifically announced \$4.4 million to help capacity building in and around the Ring of Fire mining project that will help first nations, that will help communities prepare for this bonanza of economic opportunity in northern Ontario.

What does the member's leader do? He goes to Washington and talks down the Canadian economy. Shame on all those members.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is right. There is no new money and a 10% cut.

[Translation]

Yes, the NDP's call for FedNor to become an independent agency has been answered, but the money is not on the table.

There is a significant infrastructure deficit in northern communities. Flooding has caused major damage in Wawa, roads and water mains need to be repaired in many municipalities, and there is a shortage of cellphone towers and high-speed Internet everywhere.

The budget does not provide solutions for our rural communities.

Why have the Conservatives again ignored the needs of communities in northern Ontario?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, FedNor has a proven track record investing in northern Ontario communities. Whether it comes to Internet broadband, whether it comes to new jobs and new opportunities for our young people, whether it comes to tourism, whether it comes to, as I mentioned, resource development, that track record has been before the House. Every time, the party on the other side of the House voted against that and voted against the interests of northern Ontario.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will always vote against Conservative budgets that do not get the job done for northern Ontario.

We have a shortage of workers in the mining sector to the tune of 100,000, yet the Conservatives have no plan for reversing this trend. They are actually making it harder for mining sectors to survive by killing the accelerated capital cost allowance, despite extending this allowance to the manufacturing sector.

Why are they excluding northern Ontario from their economic recovery plan?

Oral Questions

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 20% of Canadians rely upon natural resources from the economy. Hundreds of billions of dollars of investment are going to be committed to natural resources over the next 10 years. We hear about \$650 billion.

Unfortunately, the NDP can see no good in any of this. It does not support resource workers. It does not support resource families. It does not resource communities. What is it going to take for the NDP to get up and actually defend those communities instead of standing in the House pretending it does when it is actually more interested in going to Washington and speaking against them?

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it looks like, in these austere times, the New Democrats will have to pitch in and buy the Conservatives a map of northern Ontario because the only allusion to our region in the budget is in a section called “Helping Southern Ontario Prosper”.

The Conservatives closed the experimental lakes. They abandoned their promise—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has the floor.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I will give the Conservatives a map to show them where northern Ontario is because they obviously need some help. They abandoned the experimental lakes. They walked on the James Bay Port Authority. They have left the NAN police without the support they need.

What is with the Conservative backbenchers from northern Ontario? Why have they been missing in action? Do they need a map as well?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will put our northern Ontario caucus against the NDP's northern Ontario caucus any day of the week.

We are there for northern Ontarians. We are there for more jobs and opportunity. We are there for more natural resource development. We are there to help our first nations. We are there to help our young people. We have been there since day one.

Those members' leader goes to Washington, talks down the Canadian economy, talks down our resource sector. That is their record, and they will pay for it.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than half of Canadians surveyed have reacted negatively to the government's non-stop economic action plan advertising, calling the ads, in turn, “political”, “a waste of taxpayers' money” and even “junk”.

When will the government free Canadians from its wasteful campaign of self-promotion and, instead, use the money, for example, to appoint a deputy corrections commissioner for

aboriginal inmates, as recommended by the Correctional Investigator, Howard Sapers?

When will the government stop channelling public funds into Conservative propaganda and, instead, use this money to make our communities safer?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, our advertising budget has declined by 46% since 2009-10. We are being responsible with taxpayer money, despite the fact that we have an obligation to communicate with Canadians.

The last full year of the Liberal government, it had an advertising budget more than \$20 million higher than our budget for the same purposes. The hon. member should think before he asks those kinds of questions.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I was honoured to be on Victoria Island to welcome the Cree youth who have walked here from their James Bay community, with a message of hope, unity and respect.

On Victoria Island, people from all over Canada were asking one question. Why did the Prime Minister choose to meet two pandas on a pampered flight instead of meeting with these courageous young people who walked 1,600 miles to be heard by their Prime Minister?

● (1455)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier to the House, and to the hon. member, I will be meeting with these aboriginal youth later today. Of course we acknowledge the courage that they have indicated in this long march. What is important, and I will discuss this with these youth later today, is how we can continue to improve the situation among first nations youth across Canada, which we intend to do.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to public safety we all know the Conservatives have an aversion to the facts. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was very clear: their agenda has had no effect on Canada's declining crime rate. Worse, when it comes to enforcing their agenda, they walk away from those doing the heavy lifting.

Instead of supporting jurisdictions that want to hire more front-line police officers, Conservatives are abandoning them and sticking the provinces with the bill.

Why is the minister still refusing to renew the police officer recruitment fund?

Oral Questions

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to announce not too long ago a five-year stable plan for funding for first nations policing. I had the opportunity to meet with these individuals, and we gave them that five-year funding to ensure we get the policing issue right in first nations communities.

We continue to work with the provinces in respect of the various laws they are responsible for enforcing. They are working with us. Unfortunately, that member and his party have opposed every single measure we have taken in terms of toughening up our criminal justice system.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, their law and order agenda is “talk, talk and talk some more, and pass the bill on to the provinces.”

By abolishing the police officer recruitment fund, the Conservatives are telling Quebec to go it alone in its fight against street gangs and the drug trade. Even proven crime-fighting measures administered by the provinces are not being spared from austerity measures.

Why has the minister turned his back on the provinces rather than tried to find solutions for long-term funding for police officer recruitment?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House is aware, policing is a provincial responsibility. We have contributed to policing through initiatives like the first nations policing program. Providing them with a five-year plan has been met with some great enthusiasm by first nations communities.

That party has opposed tougher sentences for sexual assault and has opposed ending house arrest for serious crimes. That party opposes tougher penalties for those who sell drugs to our children. That is the record of—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the government introduced the Canada job grant as part of economic action plan 2013. Last fall, nearly 250,000 jobs were left unfilled in Canada. Employers are all too aware that too many jobs are not being filled as they cannot find workers with the right skills.

Would the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development please update the House on the feedback she has been receiving about this new initiative?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed last fall there were nearly 250,000 unfilled jobs.

Let me tell the House what different organizations had to say on economic action plan 2013. The Certified General Accountants Association of Canada said, “In creating the Job Grant fund, the federal government has shown leadership in addressing the growing skills gap. We encourage provinces to support it”. The Canadian

Chamber of Commerce said “The measures...are a significant step” toward the federal government's attack on the skills shortages.

* * *

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason that credit unions and caisses populaires were given a tax break was to create a level playing field by facilitating their capitalization. They provide competition for Canada's big banks and often are the only financial institutions available to people in small town Canada, where too often bank branches do not exist.

In January, the Conservatives said they understood that capitalization is a significant issue for co-op businesses. Why was there a change two months later? Why neglect small town Canada? Why are the Conservatives turning their backs on credit unions and caisses populaires? Why increase their tax rate by 36%? Why kill the level playing field?

● (1500)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do continue to support credit unions. They do a great job supporting local communities. In fact, in the last budget, which the NDP voted against by the way, we allowed them the option to help grow their business nationally. They can come under federal regulation. The changes that are being made to credit unions across this country would eliminate an outdated tax subsidy. They would still have access to the lower small business rate.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by moving the National Capital Commission's events to Heritage Canada, our public celebrations are now in the hands of a Conservative minister. That is right, events like Canada Day are a chance for Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Once again, I will remind members to hold off on their applause until the member for Ottawa Centre is finished asking his question, and then they can applaud away.

The hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, that means events like Canada Day will be under the oversight of ministers in the Conservative government, not an arm's-length institution like the NCC. This is about celebrating Canada, not branding the Conservative government. Have Conservatives even costed this?

Oral Questions

The real question here is that as a result of this decision, how much exactly will be cut from the NCC's budget?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the member's question he said that now Canada Day celebrations will be under the auspices of the Department of Canadian Heritage. The Department of Canadian Heritage has managed Canada Day celebrations for over 50 years. There is nothing new about that. I am surprised the member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre does not know anything about the largest public event in his own riding that happens every year on Canada Day. There is nothing new here.

Perhaps the member for Ottawa Centre could learn a little more about Ottawa Centre and then he could actually ask some accurate questions in the House.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government has done more to create opportunities for aboriginal Canadians to participate in our economy. This includes expanding the first nations land management regime, which is just one way we are empowering first nations with the tools they need to take greater control over their lands, resources and economic futures. This regime has a proven track record. Jobs, investments and greater self-sufficiency are attained by those first nations who participate.

Can the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development please update the House on today's announcement?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is indeed right, on every point. In fact, I was pleased this morning to welcome and approve eight new entrants into the first nations land management regime. In addition to thanking the Government of Canada for a further investment of \$9 million in the program, Chief Robert Louie, among other great things, said, "This means that...projects can move forward at the speed of business...". Increased revenue for first nations provides "significant employment opportunities".

He was right—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for London—Fanshawe

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are taking a mother with cancer to court, which is yet another example of the government targeting out-of-work Canadians and restricting the EI benefits they have paid into for years. For Jane Kittmer, it gets worse. Not only is she battling cancer, now she has to battle the Conservatives too.

Will the government commit now to dropping this insensitive and unethical attack?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government passed the Helping Families in Need Act to provide parents who fall ill while collecting EI parental leave with access to employment insurance sickness benefits. The case to which the member refers was actually

under the previous Liberal government's rules, and we have made tremendous improvements to that system since then.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have accused every one of us of wanting to increase taxes, but they are the ones attacking Quebec's small investors in the 2013 budget.

In addition to eliminating the tax credit for the labour-sponsored funds, which enables people preparing for retirement to save the tax and gives businesses in all regions an economic lever, the Conservatives will now tax the Caisse populaire Desjardins. Every caisse populaire member will be penalized and will have to say goodbye to a portion of their rebate.

How can the Minister of Finance claim to be keeping taxes low when he is piling more and more and more taxes onto the backs of Quebecers?

• (1505)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to that question by reminding my colleague of something. Ms. Hébert, of the Montreal-based Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said that our budget deserved a B, simply because we are not increasing taxes on small businesses, because we are listening to entrepreneurs and because we are ensuring that the tax burden is not being placed on the shoulders of investors.

We are aware that entrepreneurs are the ones who will drive future economic growth. This budget is pro-business and pro-consumer. The Bloc Québécois is out of arguments.

* * *

[*English*]

JOURNEY OF NISHIYUU

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I was outside as the young people of *nishiyuu* flooded on to Parliament Hill. A bald eagle circled overhead.

I want to sacrifice my once-a-week question, and rather than be partisan I want to give these young people who have walked all this way, these beautiful Cree and first nations youth, something unique. Let us just give them a huge round of applause so they know that when they go back home to their families, all of us honoured them, saluted them and found them to be an inspiration.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we will do better than just applaud them. We will meet with them and listen to them.

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Andrew Swan, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the Province of Manitoba.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

THE BUDGET

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, I sent a very important letter to the office of the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

At the end of my remarks, I will seek the unanimous consent of the House to table it.

The letter pertains to a very troubling issue. As hon. members know, the government's budget must remain secret until it is tabled in the House in order to prevent certain individuals from acquiring privileged information from which they could derive personal benefit. Unfortunately, it seems that this is exactly what happened with the most recent budget.

The letter that I sent to the RCMP pertains to an information leak that occurred on March 20 with regard to a tariff reduction on hockey equipment.

[English]

Leaking budget information is a very serious offence and also a grave breach of the integrity of the House of Commons. That is why I wish to table this letter today for the benefit of all parliamentarians, who I am sure are as preoccupied as I am with upholding the integrity of our democratic institution.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table the letter?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development gave serious misinformation to this House twice during question period.

She was ordered by the judge to pay out the—

The Speaker: Question period is over for today. If the hon. member has a follow-up question, he may try to ask a question at a later date, but not after question period is over.

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 10 petitions.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: the 44th report in relation to the report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of New Brunswick, and the 45th report.

The standing committee advises that pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the subcommittee on private members' business met to consider items added to the order of precedence between February 27 and March 18, and recommended that the items listed herein, which had been deemed should not be designated non-votable, be considered by the House.

* * *

● (1510)

CANADA PETROLEUM RESOURCES ACT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-485, An Act to amend the Canada Petroleum Resources Act (transfer approval).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to put forward the bill to amend the Canada Petroleum Resources Act. The bill would amend section 85 of the act, requiring that all lease transfers must be approved by the minister, that there be a 60-day period of public comment before the minister makes his decision on these transfers, that all public comments must be available through the department's website and that the minister's decision must be made public through a notification in a local newspaper.

Under the current law, when an oil company transfers an oil or gas lease, especially in the offshore areas, it is only required to notify the minister. The minister has no ability to say yes or no to those transfers, even though the minister, when approving leases, has the ability to say yes or no to them. We would put these transfer opportunities back in the hands of the minister.

Canadians have been rightly concerned about the disposition of their natural resources through the sale of Nexen and through other things that have happened where foreign companies have taken over vast quantities of our Canadian natural resources.

With the great interest there now is in the Arctic, there is need for more protection and more understanding of the transfer potential of leases that are given in the Arctic. The bill would give that protection to Canadians and to the future of our natural resources industry.

Routine Proceedings

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

[English]

* * *

PETITIONS

KOREAN WAR SERVICE MEDAL

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present another petition on behalf of the Canadians who fought in the Korean War, the Royal Canadian Legions 606 and 43, and constituents from my riding of Pickering—Scarborough East.

The petitioners call on the Canadian government to take the necessary steps for the Republic of Korea service medal to be recognized as a war medal of honour and awarded to Korean War veterans. The Korean War service medal was authorized in 1954 by the South Korean government for all United Nations troops who fought in Korea between June 25, 1950, and July 27, 1953.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have another 200 signatures, this time from Ontario, in support of my Bill C-322. The petition basically states that, because horses are ordinarily kept and treated as sport and companion animals and are not raised primarily as food-producing animals and are commonly administered drugs that are strictly prohibited from being used in the food chain, petitioners call upon us here in the House of Commons to bring and adopt into legislation Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act, thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption, as well as horsemeat products for human consumption.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have 23 petitions here signed by Canadians who are appalled and puzzled by the government's decision to close down the Experimental Lakes Area, the greatest fresh-water laboratory in the world.

[Translation]

The petitioners do not understand why the government would close down the biggest fresh-water laboratory in the world.

[English]

SEX SELECTION

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a third petition, with hundreds of signatures, as I have in the past, that the House condemn discrimination against females occurring through sex-selective pregnancy terminations; and that all the members of Parliament support Motion No. 408 to condemn sex selection.

•(1515)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I am presenting a petition calling for the repeal of all of the definitions associated with employment insurance.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand to present a petition from residents of my own riding of Guelph who wish to draw attention to the northern gateway pipeline. Given the substantial environmental risks associated with the pipeline, the petitioners request that the Government of Canada assume a neutral position and remove its support for the development of the pipeline, which would then allow for a fuller, fairer and impartial assessment of the pipeline by the National Energy Board and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, so that a proper, evidence-based decision could be made at the appropriate time.

FALUN GONG

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of many people from Edmonton and area who are raising concerns with the Canadian government with respect to the treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in China.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here to present two petitions today.

On the first, some folks came to my office and they are concerned about the phasing out of personal and designated production licences for medical marijuana. They ask that Health Canada leave the current provision as is, in addition to the creation of licensed production facilities and patient-led co-ops.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from some folks who realize that the water levels of Lake Huron have dropped tremendously over the past decade, causing serious economic and safety concerns to communities in that area. They depend on tourism, cottaging and boating, so the petitioners are asking that Natural Resources, Environment, Fisheries and Transport increase their efforts to significantly halt and reverse the ongoing loss of water from the Great Lakes Basin.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to table a petition from residents of Winnipeg who are expressing concerns in regard to the cutbacks to the Canadian Experimental Lakes Area. The petitioners are calling upon the government to reverse the decision to close the ELA research station, in recognition of the fine work that it does that is virtually world renowned.

SHARK FINNING

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two petitions.

Petitioners are calling for a ban on shark fin imports. They say measures must be taken to stop the global practice of shark finning and ensure the responsible conservation management of shark fins. Therefore, they call on the Government of Canada to immediately legislate a ban on the importation of shark fin to Canada.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also submit a petition to save the Coast Guard station at Kitsilano. The petitioners say that, whereas the recent decision by the federal government to close the Kitsilano Coast Guard station is a grave mistake that will undoubtedly cost and put in peril the lives of those on the shores and waters near Vancouver harbour, they call on the Government of Canada to rescind the decision and reinstate full funding to maintain the Kitsilano Coast Guard station.

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table two petitions today.

The first concerns a Mexican family from my riding that has been deported. The petition is signed by people who want to see this family come back.

HOUSING

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I introduced Bill C-400, on which we voted recently. It is about implementing a national housing strategy.

The government voted against it, but these people still want a national housing strategy to be developed.

[English]

OLD AGE SECURITY

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of Canadians who are very concerned about the changes to old age security and the increase of eligibility to age 67. They believe that this is a direct attack on the poorest of seniors.

The petitioners support the NDP motion of February 2012 calling on the government to make the necessary measures and changes that will eliminate poverty among seniors and increase the guaranteed income supplement so that we can lift every senior out of poverty.

SHARK FINNING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions. I will present them efficiently.

The first is from petitioners primarily in the Ottawa area, calling for the end of the practice of importing, selling and distributing shark fins. I note that we will all be voting on private member's Bill C-380 later this week, and I certainly hope it will pass.

Routine Proceedings

● (1520)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes from people in Tofino, calling for the Minister of Natural Resources, the Minister of the Environment and the Prime Minister to cease supporting the northern gateway project, to adopt a neutral stance and to weigh it on its merits.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition comes from two groups, from Ottawa and Montreal, calling for the Prime Minister and the cabinet to refuse to ratify the Canada-China investment treaty as currently drafted.

NATIONAL ENERGY PROGRAM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the last petition comes from residents of Vernon, British Columbia, calling on the government to enter into plans and develop a national energy program that deals with all the various conflicting and very important issues that are before this country, for which we lack a program or a plan.

RAILWAY NOISE AND VIBRATION

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by a number of residents of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. These are people who live on Shore Road and adjacent to Shore Road, which is next to the harbour and next to a CN rail line. They are suffering as a result of the excessive noise and vibrations caused by CN trains switching along the area of the residential street, Shore Road.

These residents are urging members of the House to support Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act (railway noise and vibration control), which they believe properly addresses railway noise and vibration in the ways laid out in the petition.

[Translation]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour of tabling a petition signed by dynamic, involved seniors in Dollard-des-Ormeaux and the surrounding area.

[English]

More than 150 members of the DDO seniors club are calling upon the government to employ the measures at its disposal to prohibit charging consumers for receiving a monthly bill or statement in the mail.

[Translation]

These seniors are disgusted that they have to pay extra to receive bills by mail. They are asking the government to take action. Perhaps they will be heard.

The Budget

[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.

* * *

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The Speaker: The Chair would like to take a moment to provide some information to the House regarding the management of private members' business.

[Translation]

As members know, after the order of precedence is replenished, the Chair reviews the new items so as to alert the House to bills which at first glance appear to impinge on the financial prerogative of the Crown. This allows members the opportunity to intervene in a timely fashion to present their views about the need for those bills to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

[English]

Accordingly, following the February 27, 2013, replenishment of the order of precedence with 15 new items, I wish to inform the House that there are two bills that give the Chair some concern as to the spending provisions they contemplate.

[Translation]

These are Bill C-476, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Budget Officer), standing in the name of the member for Outremont, and Bill C-480, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (funeral arrangements), standing in the name of the member for Laval—Les Îles.

[English]

I would encourage hon. members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for a royal recommendation to accompany these bills, or any of the other bills now on the order of precedence, to do so at an early opportunity.

I thank hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: There are five minutes left for questions and comments for the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to pass up an opportunity to highlight what I believe is a lost opportunity for the government to deal with an issue that it really messed up last year, which was the issue of our seniors.

I have had the opportunity to provide to the House numerous petitions dealing with the government's decision last year to increase the age of retirement from 65 to 67, believing that the government's finances do allow for us to continue retirement at age 65. The government has lost the opportunity in this budget to say that it messed up last year, it made a mistake and people who are looking toward retirement at age 65 have nothing to fear. It would have been well received by Canadians as a whole if the government would have fessed up to its mistake. It is the only party that has said that there is a crisis when we know full well that there is no crisis.

Would the member join me and members of the Liberal caucus in acknowledging that we should be allowing people to continue to retire at age 65?

• (1525)

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the issues in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl, the number one issue is seniors and how seniors on fixed incomes deal with the rising cost of rent and the rising cost of living.

Seniors and people who are nearing retirement age are worried about raising the age of eligibility for OAS to 67 from 65. They are worried about how they would pay the bills and their rent once they retire. That is a real concern. The New Democrats share the thought that the age of eligibility for OAS should not be raised to 67 from 65. We see that it is included in this budget. It is not something that seniors want to see or that we want to see.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from across the way, although I found them to be quite mystifying in a number of respects. It seems as if he is almost in an alternate universe, particularly when he talks about ferry operators suffering under this bill.

I wonder if he has read that the Canadian Ferry Operators Association has said that it welcomes the 2013 federal budget and that, "This government continues to demonstrate its commitment to transportation infrastructure".

More than that, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has stated, "Overall, this is a good budget for small business". It also stated, "Minister Flaherty has done a solid job by remaining on course to eliminate the deficit while announcing some important measures for Canada's entrepreneurs".

The member said that no one in his riding would benefit from this budget. Are there no entrepreneurs in his riding?

The Budget

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the first part of the hon. member's question was whether or not I live in an alternate universe. I have to say that my feet are firmly planted in Newfoundland and Labrador. Even when I am here, I am still there.

He mentioned a couple of groups that support a ferry increase. I have to say to the hon. member, I do not know what universe you are in but you are not in this one. The price of the Marine Atlantic ferry will increase on April 1 by 4%. Therefore, when people or goods and services come across on that ferry service, it will cost more. When you pay more for goods and services for transportation, that cost is eventually passed on to the consumer. Therefore, everyone will pay more. Everyone will have a tax increase.

The fact that the prices will increase was not addressed in the Conservative budget. We live on an island—

The Speaker: I will take this opportunity to remind both members that over the past few weeks I have heard a lot of use of the second person. Sometimes members try to do it by saying “through you, Mr. Speaker” but then they go back to the second person. That is not in order. We must keep our remarks through the Chair.

Also, the member for Kitchener Centre, while he was quoting, did use the proper name of our Minister of Finance, and even though it is in a quote, we do not do that either. We do not do indirectly what we cannot do directly.

If members could keep that in mind as we go forward, the Chair and other chair occupants would greatly appreciate it.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will keep that in mind during my speech. If I have to say that the government is incompetent, I will address the remark through you.

I cannot tell the House what I really think about this budget because someone would raise a point of order. To put it politely, I think that, once again, middle-class Canadians are the ones who will pay the price and whose quality of life will suffer. I will not even talk about what will happen to poor people. They will basically not even have a quality of life now that this budget has been tabled. The problem is that, more and more often, this government is sticking the provinces with the bill and interfering in areas of provincial jurisdiction. That is really problematic for the provinces.

The budget gave the government the opportunity to propose a sensible employment insurance reform. There have been many popular uprisings, a coalition has been created in Quebec, and the maritime provinces are protesting. The government could have added one more thing to the budget, taken something out or announced a new investment. That would have been worthwhile. It would have proved that the government is listening to Canadians; however, I see that that is not the case.

I toured my region to speak with entrepreneurs affected by the EI reform, and they all told me that the reform is extremely problematic for their companies and industries. Seasonal industries, such as the horticulture and fishing industries in the maritime provinces and the agricultural industry in my riding, are struggling.

The government should also have backtracked on pensions and announced new investments in this area. Last year, the government suddenly announced that people who had worked hard all their lives, sometimes in jobs requiring manual labour, would have to wait two more years before they could retire. Once again, there were many popular uprisings, and individuals, workers and even employers spoke out about this situation. Yet the government did nothing. It is obvious that the government does not listen to Canadians.

Earlier, I was talking about how the quality of life of the middle class is deteriorating. Yet, the government plans to eliminate the federal tax credit for the FTQ and CSN funds by 2017. That means that small investors may no longer be able to save. This tax credit really helped them. Now, there will be people who will not have any money for retirement and who are unable to save. All they need is some help from the government, but the government will no longer be there to help them. Simply put, we have reached an impasse.

On the weekend I received dozens of emails from my constituents who were writing to say that they disagree with eliminating this tax credit. Chambers of commerce got in touch with me to say that this was not good. These funds are reinvested in the community. I do not see why the government would not continue to want healthy communities, where businesses are growing. I do not see why the government has a problem with this. This measure serves no purpose. It only hurts small investors, workers, employers, industry, businesses and Quebec.

I do not understand why the government is eliminating credits for caisses populaires. The caisses populaires have quite a history. Many businesses in Quebec got off the ground because a caisse populaire believed in people who could not borrow money from the banks. The Cirque du Soleil is one such example. This global enterprise was created in Quebec. It was able to take flight because of Caisse Desjardins. Today, it is putting Quebec on the map. However, the government has suddenly lost interest in this type of investment.

• (1530)

I could talk about services to the public. Earlier, I was talking about EI reform and the quality of life for the middle class. It comes back to that again here.

The Canada Revenue Agency will have to review its practices to become more efficient, and the government says that this will have no impact on the public. That is what it said about Service Canada, when cuts were made there. People ended up having to wait. They did not know where to go and there was no one on the other end of the line to help them when they called. Are we going to end up in the same situation with the Canada Revenue Agency? I think so.

The government cannot make cuts and expect that the public is going to receive exactly the same service with less staff. That is wishful thinking. The government is good at wishful thinking.

The Budget

I cannot speak to the budget without talking about agriculture, since 90% of the land in my riding is farmland. Eastern Montréal is known as Quebec's pantry, which speaks volumes. In this budget, there is absolutely no mention of agriculture. The word "agriculture" does not appear anywhere. Is this a problem? This is about our food sovereignty.

The government made cuts to agriculture last year that are still being felt this year because the cuts were spread out. There will be about \$158 million in cuts this year. That is a huge problem, especially when we consider that agriculture feeds people and that farmers need a helping hand to feed people. Does this government want to jeopardize our food sovereignty by making cuts to agriculture and by not acknowledging that this is a critical issue for a country that must maintain food sovereignty, especially a country like Canada, which must feed 34 million people? That was not mentioned once in the budget. I cannot believe it and it makes me so angry.

I could also talk about infrastructure. In its budget, the government says it is investing \$70 billion in infrastructure. Congratulations. However, when I crunch the numbers myself, I see that \$4.7 billion less will be invested in infrastructure compared to last year, if we take inflation into account. It is all well and good to talk about \$70 billion. It sounds like a big number, but that is over 10 years and we must consider that Canada's infrastructure is in bad shape. Just think of the Champlain Bridge in Montreal. I am taking a risk when I cross that bridge every week. One of these days, something is sure to happen to me.

We need federal assistance for infrastructure. The municipalities' hands are full and the provinces also need some help. I do not see how the government can think that investing \$70 billion in infrastructure over 10 years makes it a hero.

Earlier, I spoke about the middle class. Now, I would like to talk about people who are struggling even more, people who often have no income: the homeless. The HPS program has been renewed. This is good. However, the funding is much lower than in previous years and, once again, the federal government is really interfering in programs dealing with needs that should be determined by the regions. That is not what I see in the budget.

The government is investing \$253 million in housing. That is a drop in the bucket and is not at all what we need. I should also point out that there is still no national housing strategy.

I could go on for another 20 minutes about what this budget is lacking, but my time is running out, so I will stop there. I would be happy to take questions from my colleagues.

•(1535)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member spoke a bit disparagingly about the budget, but the agricultural portions are on pages 137-139.

With respect to the questions on the national housing strategy the member has been putting forward, the budget invests over \$1.25 billion to support investments in affordable housing and nearly \$600 million to support the homelessness partnering strategy.

In addition to that, it deals with items of removing or eliminating tariffs on baby clothing and sports and on other equipment of various kinds to promote physical fitness. Does the member at least support those two or three initiatives? If she supports those initiatives, might she consider supporting the budget, as opposed to opposing the budget for the sake of opposing it? It has a lot of good elements in it that even the NDP should find it can support.

•(1540)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I find my colleague's accusation particularly amusing. I do not appreciate the member trying to put words in my mouth. I am not opposing the budget for the sake of opposing it.

I work extremely hard in my riding. When a budget like this does not meet the needs of my constituents, I am obviously going to oppose it. And that is that.

My colleague said that the government has invested in housing and the fight against homelessness. That is all well and good, but it is not enough.

They are saying that \$253 million will be invested in housing, but it would take \$1 billion just to maintain existing social housing in Quebec. We are not talking about the same numbers.

The same applies to homelessness. There are between 150,000 and 300,000 homeless people in Canada. If our society does nothing to help those people, then it has a huge problem.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, within the budget the government is taking action that is going to penalize our credit unions. I want to highlight this because if we look at the riding of Winnipeg North, which I represent, we find that a number of banks have actually closed down. The only real expansion has been the Assiniboine Credit Union.

Financial services are something all Canadians need. Could the member provide her perspective on the government now penalizing credit unions in terms of the tax break over the next number of years, which could have a fairly significant impact on the number of credit unions potentially opening in the future?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I provided the answer to my colleague's question in my speech, but I would be happy to repeat it.

Members have said that the government's budget is an attack on credit unions. I feel that is extremely problematic. There will certainly be an impact in the short, medium and long term. The short-term effects will be felt immediately.

When credit unions were created, they gave loans to companies that could not get them through a bank. Credit unions have come a long way, and they put Quebec in the spotlight.

The Budget

In the beginning, credit unions were established only in Quebec, but now they can be found almost anywhere. That proves that the model is working. Why attack that?

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment on what a Conservative member just said.

The few positive aspects of this budget are not worth much, given all that is being done and, especially, all that is not being done. There should be no expectation that we will strongly support this budget.

Since 2008, the government, which is supposed to be a very good administrator, has run a deficit. When we look at each budget, we can see that the Conservatives could very well have come up with a balanced budget, but that has not been the case.

Is this the government's strategy, so that it can say, in the next election, that it balanced the budget and that it is the best? However, if its predictions prove correct, there will be more than \$175 billion in additional deficit over the accumulated debt.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, the current government is, in fact, responsible for a record deficit. If I am not mistaken, this is the largest deficit in Canada's history.

The Minister of Finance told us that he expects to balance the budget in 2015, without increasing taxes. I am a little skeptical. In fact, I am more than skeptical, because I have the impression that the government takes us for fools. Perhaps the government should go back to the drawing board to draft a decent budget. Perhaps then we will be able to discuss, negotiate and see if we support certain measures in the budget.

• (1545)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Peterborough.

Budget 2013 is all about jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. In order for there to be long-term prosperity, we must balance our budget, as we said we would, by 2015, we must keep our taxes low and we must control spending. These are conditions for success.

I know the hon. member has talked about being skeptical about whether taxes would be raised. Since we have taken office, we have reduced taxes 150 times, and today an average family of four is able to keep over \$3,200 that would otherwise go to taxes of one kind or another, so there will be no increase in taxes.

It is important to control spending. Continued cuts in departmental spending, reducing travel costs, closing tax loopholes, improving CRA compliance programs and providing for a better and more efficient administration are positive steps to ensure our budget is balanced by 2015, and it will be balanced.

In addition to getting this right, we need to make sure that businesses continue to grow by providing the human resources they need and the infrastructure they rely on. Those are two fundamentals required for growth.

With respect to the budget, Alexandre Laurin, associate director of research at the C.D. Howe Institute, stated in *The Globe and Mail* on March 21, 2013:

Overall, the 2013 budget should be well received by markets. Budgetary balance is projected based on reasonable assumptions and within the previously announced time frame.

These are well-founded assumptions.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, in its new release, stated:

Overall, this is a good budget for small business. [The minister] has done a solid job by remaining on course to eliminate the deficit while announcing some important measures for Canada's entrepreneurs.

No matter where members of the human resource committee travel in Canada, whether it is Vancouver, Whitehorse, Fort McMurray, St. John's, my home province of Saskatchewan or Montreal, we heard of skilled worker shortages in specific segments of the economy, with warnings that the situation would be getting worse, especially in the mining, construction and oil and gas extraction industries.

To be fair, we have made significant improvements in many areas, such as the temporary foreign worker program. I know many people in the fast food and hospitality industries have mentioned time and time again that they rely quite heavily on foreign workers, especially when Canadian workers are drawn to high-demand or high-paying jobs. In fact, one owner indicated that he would stay at work well into the night looking after his business and many times would fall asleep while there. He said this was important for him to grow his business and meet the demands out there.

That is one way to do it.

Another way is through immigration, by ensuring that the movement of our workers between provinces can take place. I know many have touted the Red Seal program and the fact that we should make it as easy as possible for people to go from province to province where the work is. The budget addresses the apprenticeship program and interprovincial mobility. As well, our first nations youth and under-represented groups in our high schools and community colleges have all been looked at in the budget.

The provinces have been able to rely on the provincial nominee program. I know Saskatchewan has embraced that program. In fact, the premier has asked for the numbers to be increased. In fairness, Saskatchewan has increased those numbers by thousands. The immigration minister has been transforming the immigration system on a federal level to attract talented newcomers with the skills and experience that our economy requires.

In the coming year, the federal skilled worker program will have an updated points system to take into account language proficiency and youth. Going forward, a new and innovative expression of interest immigration management system will allow for Canadian employers, provinces and territories to select immigrants from a pool of applicants that best meet Canada's economic needs.

Significant steps have been taken to ensure that foreign credentials are recognized. We have a select group of occupations that will have that assessment done within a year.

The Budget

•(1550)

I had the pleasure of announcing in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, that bridge financing would be provided to those who wished to use the financing to upgrade themselves in any area where there was a shortfall. In fact, many foreign credentials are recognized before people come into the country. Agreements have been signed with countries to recognize credentials that are accepted in a particular country.

All of these steps are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that, when put in place, help employers to grow our economy. It really is about jobs, growth in the economy and long-term prosperity.

That said, there is still a great desire for skilled workers in the trades and occupations who come from within Canada and from under-represented groups. The budget itself directly addresses this by creating the Canadian job grant. It provides \$15,000 or more per person, including a maximum federal contribution of \$5,000 that is matched by provincial, territorial and employer funding to help Canadians get the skills they need for in-demand jobs.

This budget sets the groundwork for continued prosperity and economic activity. The Certified General Accountants Association of Canada said:

The government delivered a responsible budget for uncertain times. ... We welcome the skills training initiative. In creating the Job Grant fund, the federal government has shown leadership in addressing the growing skills gap. We encourage provinces to support it. All should benefit—employers, workers and governments.

Just recently, on March 23, Licia Corbella of the *Calgary Herald* quoted Christopher Smillie, senior advisor, government relations and public affairs, building and construction trades department, AFL-CIO, as stating:

It means that the people will be trained for specific jobs which is a good thing. By attaching the money to an employer it means the worker will be training for a job that actually exists. It's about time this kind of common-sense approach was implemented.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation had this to say in its March 21 news release:

[The CTF applauds] the government's plans to overhaul job training and keep a lid on spending.... It's good to see Ottawa getting training money directly in the hands of young workers so they can land a good-paying job.

These are all important aspects of providing the human resources that businesses need.

In addition to providing the human resources, we need to provide the infrastructure they need and rely on in order to carry on their businesses. Again, as a committee, whether we heard from northern or remote areas or from cities or municipalities, the one common theme was that we need to have the infrastructure if we want to expand the economy. We need roads, bridges, provision of electrical services and facilities to transport and ship products to market. We need to alleviate traffic in the downtown communities and improve municipal infrastructure to provide the foundation and fundamentals that will ensure the continued expansion and growth of our economy. That is why the budget provides for long-term infrastructure programs with provinces and municipalities worth over \$53 billion over 10 years.

Municipalities were looking for long-term, sustainable and predictable funding, and the budget goes a long way toward that goal. It includes \$32.2 billion over 10 years for the community improvement fund through an indexed gas tax fund, which they have been asking for. It also includes \$14 billion for a new building Canada fund to support major economic projects of national, regional and local significance, and \$6 billion under current infrastructure programs. All of these are long-term, predictable funding.

All in all, it is a good budget that will ensure continued economic prosperity not only in the short term but for future generations as well. As the Minister of Finance said, "We remain focused on what matters to Canadians—jobs and economic growth, and ensuring Canada's economic advantage today will translate into the long-term prosperity of tomorrow."

The budget has a number of very specific items to help small business and farmers and ensures that we set the foundation and framework for the successful operation of the economy and to increase and expand it.

•(1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the Conservative government does not really like to say it too loudly, but it is following the example of the Liberals and learning a lot from them. It is cutting transfers in health, old age security, employment insurance, public safety and infrastructure. All that means that the provinces ultimately end up footing the bill. In addition to fobbing the bill off on the provinces, the government is unable to create a balanced budget.

Is this government capable of running a country?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, one thing we will not do is increase taxes. We will not do what the NDP might do if it ever became the government, which is not likely to happen, and that is to increase spending by \$56 billion-plus and impose a job-killing carbon tax of \$21 billion. We will not do that.

We have reduced taxes and we have increased the social transfers to the provinces. My home province is included, as is the member's province. It is good management. This good management is what the public is looking for, what the public is interested in and what they will reward in 2015. Not only that, we will bring this to a balanced budget situation in 2015 without raising taxes and without imposing on the provinces and social programs.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the Conservatives are increasing the payroll taxes on EI every year.

The Budget

My question for the hon. member is the following. I remember way back in 2011, during the last election, the Conservatives promised that once they balanced the budget, which looks like maybe 2015 according to their prediction, they were going to double the TFSA, the tax-free savings allowance, from \$5,000 to \$10,000. They were also going to do some family income splitting with respect to the income tax. Those measures are obviously going to cost money and yet there are projections of surpluses starting in 2015.

Would the hon. member tell us how much it is going to cost to double the TFSA and how much it is going to cost to do the income splitting for families with respect to income tax? That will play into the surpluses the Conservatives promised back in 2011.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, when the budget is balanced, family income splitting is not a bad idea. We certainly should look at that.

Here is what we will not do. We will not balance the budget on the backs of provinces, social programs, educational programs and the social transfers, like the Liberal government did when it balanced the budget. Not only did it balance it on the backs of those who were most vulnerable, it took about \$50 billion from the EI fund to attempt to balance the budget. Anybody can balance the budget by doing those kinds of things.

We will not do that. We will do it through efficient, good management and will ensure that government operates as it should, where spending is reined under control.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member presented some excellent information from the budget.

I know he has done outstanding work as the chairman of the human resources committee and in the House of Commons. I know he has travelled across the country and has heard the concerns with respect to labour shortages in his local riding in Saskatchewan and particularly in his hometown.

Could the member comment on how this budget will address those pressing needs in his local community and how his work as chairman of the human resources committee has contributed so much to this budget?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I am not so sure about the latter, but I know the budget certainly addresses the fact of skills shortages.

If members go to a community like Estevan, Saskatchewan, in the southeast part of the province, people will tell them what is stopping them from expanding as they should and from becoming what they can is a shortage of human resources. There is a shortage of specific skills that cannot be filled. They are trying everything they can.

Housing is another issue. There needs to be homes for people to move into and this budget provides for that. It provides for some direct input by cash directly to support people to get trained and to get matched up with the jobs that actually exist.

It also has a number of specific initiatives that would help small and medium enterprises to continue to expand the economy, to continue to ensure that we go forward and upward.

• (1600)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to the budget. I want to thank my colleague from Saskatchewan for being so gracious in sharing his time with me so I can stand and speak on behalf of the great citizens of the riding of Peterborough, the electric city region, a place where innovation is a big part of our past and our future. This budget is really about innovation.

Immediately after the budget was delivered, I was delighted to read the comments of so many speaking in favour of this economic action plan. Third-party praise was coming in fast and furious for the budget. It must have really disappointed the opposition to hear so many leaders from across the country speaking in such glowing terms of economic action plan 2013.

I thank once again the member for Whitby—Oshawa, the hon. Minister of Finance, who has once again demonstrated that he does not just lead, but he listens, and that is what we see in economic action plan 2013.

I mentioned some of the feedback. I want to particularly note off the top the comments of His Worship Daryl Bennett, mayor of the city of Peterborough, who indicated a couple of things: the indexing of the gas tax and the long-term infrastructure dollars that have been set up to support municipalities, to support infrastructure right across the country in public transit. His Worship Daryl Bennett said specifically that he appreciated not only the indexing of the gas tax fund, but also that we had provided a long-term window for planning, which municipalities need.

He also said something else that was critically important. As a person with experience in business, he spoke about how much he appreciated that our government was fiscally responsible, that our government was headed back to a balanced fiscal situation, back to balanced budgets. The mayor of the city of Peterborough stood four-square behind this economic action plan, and I want to extend my thanks for his input into our federal budgeting process.

I talked a bit about the electric city region of Peterborough. Peterborough was nicknamed the electric city because it was the first city in North America to have electric street lights go on. It is in fact a home of innovation. It is the home of General Electric Canada and Quaker Oats. It is the home of Rolls-Royce, which has invested so much into Canada's nuclear industry. These industries are critical to Canada's financial success. These are manufacturing companies that employ so many Canadians and lead with innovative products.

When I look at Peterborough's past as a manufacturing hub and I look at our entire region, I see the creativity. I see what these companies have created. This budget is exactly the right budget for the times because it will encourage and foster that very kind of innovation, the next step of that innovation, growth in manufacturing. We are seeing that in my region with investments our government has made in the last number of years and we will continue to see it moving forward.

The Budget

The budget will do a number of things.

My education is in business. I spent a lot of time studying accounting, finance and economics. One of the things I have specifically done over the last couple of years is challenge the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. I have had many meetings with the institute and talked specifically about the issue of depreciation of assets.

This budget will once again extend accelerated capital cost allowances for manufacturers for investment in capital equipment, and this is important. A lot of people at home might wonder why this would matter, what this would mean to them, why this would benefit companies. There has been a big change, certainly since the generally accepted accounting principles, or GAP, was thought up. We looked at depreciation of assets and we said that an asset should be set to depreciate over its useful life. It should depreciate in a straight line, so much depreciation per year, until that asset is written off for tax purposes.

If we are going to improve Canada's productivity, if we are going to lead in innovation, if we are going to be a country that encourages investment in next generation manufacturing, then we can no longer talk about the useful life of an asset. We have to talk about the antiquated life of an asset. This is critically important because a machine can still work fine, it can still produce. I have a laptop computer on my desk which I think is five years old. It still works, but this is not current technology.

● (1605)

If we want to keep up with the best in the world and be as productive as we can possibly be, that is what our manufacturers are faced with. They must have that new equipment. They must be able to write it off in such a way that they can make a business case for making the investment in the first place. The banks will ask them, when they are seeking to borrow dollars, what the payback is on a new machine and what they expect to earn. That is why accelerated capital cost allowance matters. That is why the budget has, once again, made that specific measure of \$1.4 billion in tax relief for manufacturers so they can invest and create jobs.

Paschal McCloskey, the owner of McCloskey International, came to me prior to the last election and said that without the measures our government had taken to reduce corporate taxes, to reduce business taxes, there was no way he would have been able to expand his company on the east side of Peterborough, which now employs over 400 people. There was no way he could have expanded the manufacturing facility because he could not compete on price globally. This company ships innovative machines around the world. It could not do it without the tax breaks we put in place.

I note today an article produced by the CBC, fine journalism on behalf of the CBC. It points out a study that has just been completed by the accounting firm PwC, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation. What did that study find? The best country in the G8 for business taxes is Canada. We have improved from 28th position overall. Out of over 150 nations, we were 28th in 2010. This year we are eighth and we are the best in the G8 by a wide margin.

What are the effective tax rates on business in the G8 nations? In Canada it is 26.9% of profits. In the United Kingdom it is 35.5%. In

France it is 65.7%. In the United States it is 46.7%. In Germany it is 46.8%. We have almost a 20% advantage over the United States.

Why does that matter for manufacturers in Canada? Why does that matter for job creators? Why does that matter in terms of attracting international investment?

It matters because in some other ways we have become a bit of a high-cost jurisdiction. Wage rates in Canada tend to be higher than they are in a lot of countries with which we compete. That is why we are putting incentives in, such as accelerated capital costs. That is why we are eliminating import tariffs on manufacturing equipment. We have put these measures in place so our manufacturers can compete globally, keep their costs low so they can continue to create jobs. Each and every manufacturing job created in Canada supports about eight other jobs in the economy. We know how important that is.

I want to talk a bit about a couple of measures, specifically for southern Ontario, that the government has invested into, programs that are in fact delivering big time, with big time dividends for the people of Peterborough, the people of southwestern Ontario, the people of central Ontario and the people of eastern Ontario. These are important investments.

The Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario will receive five years in renewed funding of \$920 million. A five-year commitment for the eastern Ontario development program. That is important funding that has helped small businesses create jobs in my riding.

I talked about the important investments and commitments that the government has made with respect to infrastructure. These are critical investments to move the country forward, to build a stronger economy, a stronger Canada, a stronger Peterborough.

I will stand four-square behind this budget. It is too bad the opposition will not.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Peterborough for his speech.

However, he did not mention VIA Rail. I know the member has a particular interest in the train.

Despite the \$54 million investment that has been announced, the VIA Rail budget will be reduced by \$287 million, which is more than a 50% reduction.

I wonder if my colleague thinks that the train has any future, in light of this kind of budget measure.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his interest in VIA Rail and passenger rail in this country. The railway industry is obviously a critical one for Canada. This government has invested \$1 billion in just the last couple of years into VIA Rail for its future: new locomotives, rebuilt locomotives, rebuilt rolling stock, new tracks, new stations, right across the country. These stations are of course accessible now for the physically disabled. This is so important.

The Budget

However, since the budget was announced, I have had the opportunity to speak with a number of the board of governors of VIA Rail. They told me that the budget delivers on exactly what they asked for from the government. This will support VIA's operations. This will support VIA's mandate. I think Canadians can be very pleased with that.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about lowering business taxes. Does he know whether corporations that have had their taxes lowered to 15% are actually spending that windfall of money they are receiving?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I would point to a couple of examples. For example, Tim Hortons moved its corporate head offices back to Canada after moving to the United States. It came back because of tax advantages here in Canada.

I know this is a member who advocates for job creation, and there are a number of things that we would actually agree on. Tax rates might be something we may differ on, but tax rates go into the calculus by companies when they are seeking to invest, especially global or international companies. They look at the tax rates, at the cost of doing business in any number of countries, and with an economy like ours, which has an ease of doing business, an ease in the tax system, competitive tax rates, I guarantee we will create jobs, attract investments and build a stronger Canada.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member commented that one of the positive aspects for infrastructure was the indexation of the gas tax. I also want to comment on one of the things referenced on page 173, which is that the list of eligible investment categories will be expanded to include highways, local regional airports, short-line rail, short sea shipping, disaster mitigation, broadband connectivity, and brownfield development. I know many of the municipalities in my riding have done a lot of work on water and waste water and have now moved beyond that to other projects. Could the member talk about the importance of the flexibility of this for municipalities?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, when we were looking at the gas tax fund, the member for Tobique—Mactaquac was advocating on behalf of making that permanent. I know he was advocating on behalf of indexation for his communities. He is absolutely right when he says that by broadening the categories for the gas tax transfer we are providing more flexibility.

When we first became government, we inherited an infrastructure across this country that was really falling apart. However, as municipalities have been able to go about correcting some of the most glaring deficits they have had in terms of infrastructure, they have come to us and said they have other areas of priority. They have asked whether they could use the gas tax fund for other applications. In my community it was for walkways, sidewalks, improved support for pedestrians and transit, including all around the lakeshore in Peterborough. We have told municipalities that we know they have other priorities and we want to work with them, partner with them and support those priorities.

• (1615)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the

questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Public Safety.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for York West.

[English]

In the 10 minutes I have, I want to cover a number of topics. First is the one I raised during question period today, which is the surprise decision by the government to eliminate a competitive advantage that was given to the credit unions and the caisses populaires in the seventies to allow them to compete with the banks on a level playing field. I also wish to touch on the federal public service, the matter of R and D, and a very important local institution, the National Capital Commission.

[Translation]

I will begin by talking about co-operatives.

[English]

As I said, the co-ops, credit unions and caisse populaires have a reduced tax rate. That is being taken away. They are getting a tax increase of about 36%. They are going from 11% to 15%. The reason the tax rate had been given is so that they could capitalize. Even the banks recognized that they needed it. I will quote the analyst from the National Bank Financial. He said:

Credit unions serve a different market, run higher costs partially as a result, and do not have access to capital other than retained earnings and preferred share instruments issued to members.

His name is Peter Routledge. He is an analyst at National Bank Financial, and I totally agree with him.

The reason the government had agreed to give and maintain this credit is so that credit unions could compete with the banks and offer financial services in small town Canada, where many banks had withdrawn their services. We have a situation where all of a sudden without any consultation, in the budget on Thursday credit unions and caisse populaires learned about this and wondered where it came from.

One wonders how the government justified its comments in the few pages just before that decision. These comments contradict what it had just decided, and I will quote the budget book, on page 147.

The Government will review the regulatory framework, including the process for approval of new financial institutions, to ensure that it promotes the entry and growth of smaller institutions, while preserving the safety and soundness of the sector.

However, for the safety and soundness of the sector, credit unions and caisse populaires have demonstrated their soundness.

The Budget

How can the government say on the one hand that it wants to encourage entry and growth of smaller institutions, and then tax them? The credit unions were essentially small and growing credit institutions, offering services where the banks, the big six, are not, and then it taxes them. I was reading this on the weekend with my contradictory detector, and then the alarm sounded.

Where is this coming from? That is what I asked the government, and I did not get a real answer. The government changed this two months after the government acknowledged, in its written response to the special committee on co-ops that was set up by this chamber unanimously last May, and which reported to the government in September. In its response on January 28, the government said essentially that it recognized and understood that capitalization was still a challenge for co-operative businesses. Yet two months later, boom, this happens.

One could suspect that the government might have been lobbied. That is a suspicion that I have. The same gentleman I quoted made another quote that is rather astounding. This was in *The Globe and Mail* on Thursday. He said:

Credit unions benefit mightily from CMHC mortgage insurance so one could look at that as a federal government "subsidy" that they now have to pay a little more via the tax code.

Yes, CMHC insures mortgages, but it does for the banks as well. I want to point out, in 2008, when it was a year of some financial difficulties around the world, including in Canada, the government put \$125 billion on the table to ensure the credit of banks would not dry up, via CMHC. There was \$69 billion of that which was taken up by banks; hardly any of that was taken up by credit unions. The banks saying the credit unions are getting a subsidy advantage from CMHC, forgetting that they are too, is something we should be very careful of.

• (1620)

When people profit from investment in bank shares, they get a 50% capital gains deduction. They do not have to pay tax on the first 50%. If the Conservatives had said in their budget on Thursday that maybe that ought to be reduced somewhat, say by a few percentage points, or by 36%, the equivalent of what they have taken away from the credit unions today, I am pretty sure the phones would not have stopped ringing in the government offices. I am not suggesting we do that, but that is a basis of comparison. The members of co-ops, credit unions and *caisse populaires* are essentially their shareholders, and now they are being dinged by a 36% tax increase. For the shareholders of banks, that is not the case.

I have asked numerous people over the last few months if they were aware of the amount of bonuses paid to bank executives and the higher echelons in the banks in Canada. No one I have talked to knew the amounts. That has to become a known fact. Last year, it was \$10.3 billion that was paid to Canadian bank executives. The year before, it was \$9.2 billion. In 2008, when we had fairly serious financial difficulties and the banks were offered a loan of \$125 billion, about \$7 billion was paid to bank executives. Before we start taxing credit unions more, maybe we ought to consider putting a cap on the bonuses that banks can pay to themselves, as is being considered now in some European countries, Germany being among them.

I want to ensure we realize the importance in the financial system of credit unions and *caisse populaires*. Before the Conservatives propose doing more things, they should have had the decency of talking to them first and not just announcing the decisions. I would hope they would even want to reconsider, given the importance of credit unions in small town Canada where there are no other financial institutions.

[*Translation*]

I would like to set this issue aside for a moment and focus on the public service.

I would have liked to see an improvement in the antagonistic relationship the government seems to have with our public servants, but that does not appear to be the case. In last year's budget, members will recall that the government said it would eliminate 19,000 public service jobs. Most of the unions representing public servants agree that many more have been lost, if we include the jobs that had already been eliminated and those currently being eliminated.

The way the government is doing this is just incredible. For every job it eliminates, it drives five other public servants into uncertainty. For the 19,000 or 20,000 jobs it wants to eliminate, it will advise 100,000 public servants that their jobs could be at risk. It is spreading terror throughout the public service.

When someone receives a notice, a letter—for that is how it is done—informing them that their job could be at stake, can you imagine what must happen after that? Fear must immediately strike the hearts of these people and their families. This has an impact on the economies of the communities in which these people live. It also has an impact on productivity, when an employee knows that they have a sword of Damocles hanging over their head and that someone could cut the cord. We need to fix this.

[*English*]

On R and D, I have no problems with the notion of investing in the applied part of that science, but I am worried that we have been neglecting basic and pure research. The 12 Canadian scientists who won Nobel prizes did not win them for applied research; they won them for basic and pure research. I hope the government would take notice of some concerns, which are now becoming more forceful, to not abandon basic research. The DNA was basic research, and that is having a major impact down the road. There is a number of these examples. If we neglect those, down the road we will suffer. We will pay for that, so let us ensure we keep an equilibrium.

As far as the NCC is concerned, quite simply if the Conservatives are serious about keeping the NCC, then they have one thing to do and do fast, which is appoint a CEO. That position has been vacant since last summer. If they are going to have an institution that has a mandate, then somebody has to exercise that and they need a CEO.

[*Translation*]

The minister responsible for that institution needs to appoint a CEO as soon as possible if he genuinely wants to preserve the National Capital Commission.

The Budget

• (1625)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have here another deficit budget. The size of this deficit is record-setting. The Conservatives often say that they have cut taxes and this and that, but there are a lot of hidden taxes they use to find money elsewhere.

Does the Liberal Party agree with me that taking money from the employment insurance fund to pay down deficits elsewhere is a hidden tax?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, this debate has been going on for a long time. The government is responsible for maintaining a central fund. If there is a deficit in the employment insurance fund, the government's central fund is used to make up for the deficit and, if there is a surplus, the central fund absorbs it. Therefore, my answer to the member's question is no.

Premiums should not be unduly increased, but that is what the Conservative government is currently doing. It is increasing premiums by \$600 million, when that is not necessary. If I were in my colleague's shoes, I would be concerned, because the increase in premiums is a direct tax on the employer and the employee. If it is not necessary, why do it? This is what governments do to get around the situation. When we were in power, we reduced annual premiums year after year until a balance was reached. That is the answer I have for my colleague.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague could provide comment in regard to the Minister of Finance's comments on the issue of deficit. He has been saying to Canadians, through this budget, that the government intends to have a balanced budget for the fiscal year 2015-16.

Quite simply, does the member believe the Minister of Finance? If not, why not?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, that is quite a question.

I have some doubts. The prognostics upon which the minister bases his numbers are rather optimistic. The prognostics of increased income that he has are also quite optimistic. I am not sure we will be able to gather all the income the minister thinks can be found while the government is cutting the source that he hopes will find these incomes, and that is Revenue Canada. There are many people out there who are rather skeptical about the ability of the minister to balance the budget as he is projecting to do.

There is also the habit the Conservatives have of using the unspent amount at the end of the year and applying it to the following year. That is good if there is a fairly even level of spending. However, because of the spike in spending on the action plan and the inability to spend that money in the first year, the Conservatives have created this margin, an artificial margin, that they are trying to apply. That is not going to work. The Conservatives are going to have serious problems.

The reality is that this minister will have accumulated, during his term as Minister of Finance, the largest amount of debt that any minister of finance has accumulated in the history of our country.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, toward the end of his speech the hon. member made

reference to the commercialization of education and research. He had to do it at the end because there are a lot of things to talk about and not a lot of time, mostly a lot of things to talk about that are not in the budget.

However, we looked at the overall budget, and the references to commercialization of research versus environmental are 10:1. I spoke to the internationally renowned Dr. Schindler, and he advised me that he has not received a single cent from the federal government for his very important research on addressing the environmental impacts of the oil sands.

Dr. Schindler was the first scientist at the Experimental Lakes Area. His work there led to his discovering the problem with phosphates, and that led to research by manufacturers to make a cleaner, safer soap. The research at Experimental Lakes Area led to identifying the mercury coming from coal-fired power plants, which then spurred a discussion I was part of to remove the mercury from coal-fired power plants.

I wonder if the member could speak to the problem of this unilateral look at commercialization value and science.

• (1630)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, the important thing there is that we keep things in equilibrium, in balance. There is a need for money to be spent in the application of knowledge, and that is the D of R and D. However, we have to keep things in balance. The trend in the last few years has been, although not exclusively, much more on the application, the applied nature of the D side of R and D, and less on the R side.

I think we have to be careful there. For instance, in 2009, a scientist in Canada who won the Nobel Prize for the discovery of telomerase at the end of DNA. That deals with longevity. The implication of that research down the road is absolutely astounding. If we as a country do not have the capacity to understand and make use of that, then we are going to pay the price.

I think all scientists would probably agree that there needs to be applied research and there also needs to be pure and basic research in equilibrium. That will serve our country and its population much better.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his comments. He has worked very hard on many of those issues and knows them well. He, myself and others in and out of the House are clearly disappointed in the so-called budget 2013. When I look at it I do not think it is worth the paper it is written on. It is too bad that the money that went into putting out all of the books the government has done, and all of the ads that we know will come, was not put back into helping Canadians. It would have gone a lot further than producing another advertising document, which is what this is all about.

Canadians coast to coast to coast are sending us emails, tweets and the rest of it about their concerns and their disappointment that there is very little in the budget, other than the recycling of a bunch of programs and initiatives.

The Budget

Andrew Coyne writes critically of the government and the opposition, so he is no friend of anyone except Canadians. He said that the budget is bloated, cynical and incoherent, and that, "So much of what is wrong with this budget...simply amounts to extending previous programs, or implementing past initiatives".

Even the Prime Minister's favourite friend, Doug Horner, the finance minister for Alberta, said, "We don't have any new money for these types of programs", which the Prime Minister put into the budget. Therefore, clearly there will not be new programs because the provinces do not have the money to match them.

I was also struck by the commentary from the National Citizens Coalition, a group the Prime Minister served as president. The current president, Mr. Peter Coleman, stated:

This budget plan seeks to grab headlines for relatively minor initiatives.... [I]t is discouraging that this government was not willing to commit to more far-reaching tariff reform.

There was also an article on the front page of the business section of *The Globe and Mail* about how the tariffs that were adjusted in this budget would have a significant impact on many other avenues of resources and things that come in that have a tariff on them, to the point where it would seriously hamper many of the retailers here in Canada.

Therefore, it seems that the government missed the mark again.

I want to be fair with respect to a few items, such as the reduction of the tariffs on baby clothes and hockey equipment. However, the government needs to take a much more thorough look. All it does is touch those little things that will get them a bit of positive publicity and those that really needed to be touched, looked at and examined so that Canada would be better off, it did not touch at all.

Canadian families now owe a record \$1.67 in debt for every dollar of income. Budget 2013 would not help middle class families that are struggling. Having the minister effect changes to the interest rates would clearly affect a lot of Canadians out there who have huge mortgages and credit card debt. It was the 40-year mortgage commitment that the government made for a short period of time that certainly helped drive up the amount of debt that many Canadians are feeling.

One of the issues that we all talk about here is the employment issue in and among our youth. We are facing the worst youth job market in a generation. That means that for many of our young people getting out of school there will not be jobs out there. We have been talking about this for at least two years now. What does the government suggest? It is going to invest \$19 million in an advertising campaign but it will not be creating any new jobs or new skills for youth.

We know how much the government likes to advertise its partisan ideas on the public dime, so I am sure we will be hearing a lot more with respect to that. By 2015, the government will have spent almost \$1 billion to advance their economic inaction plan during events such as the Super Bowl. So much for the accountability and transparency that we supposedly were talking about. Everywhere we go we cannot go 50 feet without seeing another one of these economic action plan ads. Most of the people I have talked to know it is their own money that is being invested in more partisan

propaganda instead of in people. The Conservatives should be ashamed of themselves every time they see those signs.

Youth employment is being ignored almost as much as the job market in general. Canadians want a real plan to grow the economy and create Canadian jobs. Instead, the Conservatives are repackaging existing programs, taking more money out of the economy and calling it another action plan.

● (1635)

In this budget, the Conservatives have prioritized spending cuts ahead of strengthening the economy and creating new jobs. We all know that the job market is still rebounding from the recession that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance promised would never happen. We were never going to have a deficit or get into a recession. Two months later, the recession was here and they had already blown the \$13 billion surplus that they had as a result of the Liberal government.

Despite the assurances, young Canadians now have an employment rate that is five points worse than it was before the recession. We risk creating a lost generation of youth, unable to move out of their parents' homes, saddled with unimaginably high debt and with no meaningful job experience. Budget 2013 should have included a real plan to help young Canadians specifically, but it is not in the budget at all.

Now Conservative henchmen say that budget 2013 announced infrastructure, training and manufacturing programs to kickstart the economy, but what they will not admit is that these are not new programs. The Conservatives are using budget 2013 to rebrand programs that already existed. The Liberal government introduced the gas tax some years back, and I acknowledge the fact that it was indexed and I think that is a good thing. We are always being told who voted for what, but when the Liberal government introduced that in its budget, the Conservatives, not as many as there are now, voted against the gas tax.

Today I have to say I am pleased that they indexed it, except that instead of being \$5.5 billion moving forward, it has been reduced to \$3.3 billion. It makes it much more difficult for municipalities to move forward. Everywhere one goes, infrastructure pressures exist. The government acknowledged it is a huge thing, but we cannot expect the cities to deal with that. The provinces are under a huge amount of debt. We say we are going to do a variety of things in partnership with them, but they do not have the money either. Nobody wants to have to raise taxes, but it is what we do with the money that we have, where our priorities lie, that matters.

The Budget

Budget 2013 is a hurry up and wait budget. That is what it is because the government says in five years it is going to create jobs, in five years there will be more money for infrastructure and in five years it will do a variety of things, but not today.

Speaking again of the skills training issue, I am sure the Prime Minister must have been disappointed because he talked so much about how the government was going to resolve these problems and come up with solutions. All he came up with was a whole lot of hot air.

Conservatives have invested a small amount, just over \$1 million, to harmonize the recognition of skilled trade credentials across the country, yet they have done nothing to increase the graduation rates of apprenticeships, one of the most critical barriers to improving the supply of highly trained workers needed in Canada. Many young people end up dropping out of the apprenticeship program because they do not have enough money to keep going. Over 40% do not finish the program and investigations indicated that it is because they did not have the money to continue. Inadequate financing is a big issue, which is not addressed in the budget when we talk about the big skills shortage. We all acknowledge that we have one.

Why not put the money into helping people so they can get jobs, move out of their parents' homes, buy their own homes and start investing. They cannot do it if they do not have jobs. While the government spends hundreds of millions of dollars on advertising to buy Canadians' votes, it should be thinking about the many young people looking for jobs and looking to the government for some leadership rather than passing down all kinds of ideas and deals where the provinces or companies have to match the money. A lot of them do not have the money, so I do not think these jobs are going to materialize.

I am thankful for being allowed to speak about the nothing budget that I have in front of me. I just wish I could get the money out of this budget so I could put it toward helping Canadians get jobs.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what the Liberal Party thinks of the Conservatives' choices.

Take, for example, the anticipated \$26 billion deficit. Since 2008, the Conservatives have recorded deficit after deficit after deficit, and they call themselves good managers. I doubt that very much. On the other hand, for a number of years they have given tax credits to major corporations—\$60 billion in this budget—with no requirement that the corporations reinvest the money in society. That is one of the reasons why we still have a deficit today.

What does the member think of the Conservatives' choices?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, clearly we have a different ideology about what the role of government should be. Let us start with the choices that the Minister of Finance made. It was the same group of individuals who drove Ontario into a massive deficit as well. The exact same thing is happening here now and they will just continue. It is about the choices we make.

Canadians want us to invest money into advancing the future so we have people who can get those jobs and so we have young people who can finish apprenticeship programs and get jobs. Instead, what the government is doing is spending more money than has ever been spent. We have a huge deficit. All we need to do is go back into our history and see what was going on with the same Minister of Finance when the Conservatives were elected in Ontario and the kinds of problems we ended up with, including the deficit and the debt.

The Conservatives are doing the exact same thing for the whole country. I am appalled at their decisions. I am more appalled at the \$1 billion they will have spent on economic ads when people are looking for jobs.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, currently, the federal government transfers \$500 million under labour market agreements to the different provinces. With this Canada jobs grant, the Conservatives are going to pull back \$300 million of that \$500 million to conveniently create a fund for themselves to deploy what they call the Canada jobs grant, which will require the provinces to contribute \$5,000 for every skilled worker. Employers will also have to contribute \$5,000 for every skilled worker.

I have heard that the minister of finance for Alberta and the finance minister for Ontario have already indicated they are not likely to participate in this program because the provinces do not have any money.

Could my hon. friend comment on the true effectiveness of this notional skills training development through the Canada jobs grant?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, that was a big disappointment. Certainly, we have been talking about the youth employment strategy and the need for one and we have been talking about changes to EI. This is nothing more than a continued attack on the many people who want to work. It is not enough to say that this new fund will be created.

What does it say when the provinces do not have the money? When Alberta, which does so well, says that it does not have the money, that has to tell us something. What about the other provinces? If Alberta and Ontario do not have the money, and they are supposedly our two richest provinces, no one else will have it either. Of all those fictitious jobs that are going to be created, I do not think that we are going to see even one.

If people are unemployed, they cannot find work and they have to live at home, that is bad for the economy. If people have jobs, they spend money. They buy houses, they get married and they do all the things we want them to do. That is a much better investment than economic ads.

• (1645)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga South.

The Budget

I stand in this place this afternoon in disbelief. I reviewed the economic action plan 2013 over the weekend and saw all the great opportunities that would be made available to my riding in Kootenay—Columbia. I cannot but wonder what document the opposition is reading. Maybe the Liberals are dreaming of an NDP budget that would be full of tax increases, crippling debt and job losses in the tens of thousands. Just look at what happened to British Columbia in the dark days of the 1990s. Maybe the NDP is thinking about a Liberal budget that would cut core services like health care spending or better yet, cut spending to our military men and women so when they were sent in harms way, they were under-equipped and wearing green fatigues in a desert setting.

Let us get back to reality. Let us provide Canadians with great opportunities that lie ahead under the direction of our Conservative government. I could speak all day on the opportunities that would be available to every community across this great nation, found on page 173 of this budget document.

For anyone who has been involved in municipal government, the community improvement fund is huge. It will provide funding in the amount of \$32.2 billion over the next 10 years through the new building Canada plan and, most important, it will give greater flexibility to a broader range of infrastructure priorities.

There will be \$21.8 billion over the next 10 years through the gas tax fund payments and what is a great move by our Conservative government is these payments will be indexed at 2% per year. This is guaranteed, consistent funding directed to communities across Canada.

Better yet, the list of eligible categories will be extended to include highways, local and regional airports, short line rail, short sea shipping, disaster mitigation, broadband and connectivity, brownsfield redevelopment, culture, tourism, sport and recreation. In rural Canada, municipal and regional governments welcome this news. By providing an expanded list of categories, they will be able to focus on improvements that encourage people to come and visit, play and stay in their communities.

Culture, tourism, sport and recreation are the mainstay for many small communities. In my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, places like Fernie, Kimberly, Invermere, Golden and Revelstoke boast some of the best skiing opportunities in North America. Hot springs in Fairmont, Radium, Ainsworth and Nakusp draw hundreds of thousands of people every year, but with this comes the expectation that communities will provide the infrastructure that matches the experience. This budget will do just that.

The connectivity between what I just spoke about and investing in affordable housing is also front and centre in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia. Although we boast some of the greatest recreational opportunities in North America, it also puts a strain on the thousands of people who work in the tourism industry as affordable housing is not always readily available. With \$253 million per year over five years earmarked to invest in affordable housing, funding for a variety of activities, including new construction, renovation, home ownership assistance, rent supplements, shelter allowances and accommodations for victims of family violence, it will make it easier for small communities to better serve those who live in their communities.

Let us not forget about the nearly \$600 million for the homelessness partnering strategy. Although we tend to focus on homelessness in the urban areas, homelessness in rural communities can be especially harsh as there is normally nowhere to go.

• (1650)

In places like Cranbrook, British Columbia, the Salvation Army is working tirelessly to raise funds for a new shelter to combat an ever-growing need for those who are less fortunate. Homelessness affects us all and I am very proud of our Conservative government in its efforts toward a homelessness partnering strategy.

The Canada job grant, in concert with the renewal of the labour market agreements, is expected to provide access to upwards of 130,000 people in training to fill available jobs each year. The federal government will provide up to \$5,000 per person toward training at eligible training institutions. This means the grant could provide \$15,000 or more per person, including provincial or territorial and employer contributions. In the Elk Valley, Teck Resources operates the second-largest metallurgical coal mines in the world and it welcomes this news with open arms. It is industry itself that must identify and pursue what it clearly understands as its employment demands.

The Leader of the Opposition came out after the budget, criticizing this initiative by saying that this was just another download by the federal government. If the leader of the official opposition would make a conscious effort to speak with business owners, he would know that investment by a company in identifying its priorities is key to its success. Training in trades, forestry and heavy equipment operating is in huge demand across Canada and it is industry that knows best where this needs to be applied. These people are not asking for a free hand-out. In fact, it is the exact opposite. They are looking for partners to work with them to solve a significant problem.

We on this side of the House recognize that working together with industry and other levels of government in a collaborative manner would be much more productive and bring the desired results in the long run. In line with this proactive approach with industry, we will extend the temporary accelerated capital cost allowance for new investment in machinery and equipment for an additional two years for those in the manufacturing and processing sector. This will bring approximately \$129 million in tax relief to growing companies and create jobs in British Columbia. In my riding, the mining and forestry sectors welcome this news. Investing in new equipment not only makes good business sense, it also increases safety and productivity.

The Budget

Finally, it is this Conservative government that is confirming total investments of \$1.9 billion over seven years to ensure that disabled, ill and aging veterans and their families receive the support they need and deserve. I would like to recognize my grandfather, Robert Whittaker, who served on the front lines in World War I; my two uncles, Jack Whittaker who flew the Lancaster bomber during World II and Robert Whittaker Jr., who was with the Royal Canadian Navy during World War II; my three uncles, George Whittaker, Bill Whittaker and Lloyd Whittaker who have given over 90 years of combined service to the RCMP; and finally, my son Master Corporal Matthew Wilks, currently serving with 1 Combat Engineer Regiment in Edmonton, Alberta. For them and the hundreds of thousands of brave men and women before them, I personally give thanks for their dedication to preserving Canada's values at home and abroad.

Our Conservative government, led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, continues to stand up for Canadians from coast to coast to coast, while we ensure that Canada remains the strongest country in the world, recognized by the G7 and G20 as a leader on all fronts. We as Canadians lead by example, proud of our past and excited about what the future holds. I encourage all members of the House to stand behind this budget, support it and watch as our country flourishes.

● (1655)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to questions and comments, I remind hon. members that they are not to use the proper names of their colleagues in the House, but should refer to them by riding or by office.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I notice my colleague spent much of his time giving rather lofty platitudes and some very nice history about his family's service in the armed forces, et cetera, but he was soft on details when it comes to one of the major concerns that we have about the budget, which is the jobs strategy the government has put forward.

I would like to correct one thing, remind him of another and then ask his opinion on a third.

First, if the Conservatives really wanted to do something for small business, they could have done something tangible in the budget. When the NDP took power in Manitoba in 1999, the tax-and-grab Conservatives were charging small businesses 11% in corporate tax. Subsequently, the NDP reduced that every year by 1% per year. I do not have to tell the Manitoba MPs in the House today—there are five of us here at least—that the small business tax in the socialist paradise of Manitoba is now zero.

If the Conservatives are serious about making a gesture to small business in the budget, it would not be to charge them more for labour market training, as they are contemplating, but to give them a real, tangible, take-home tax break—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, I guess the member was not up to speed on the small business hiring credit that this side of the House has provided to small businesses across Canada. The hiring credit is

something that is tangible. It allows small businesses to hire other employees and gives everyone a benefit.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to very briefly quote Fleming, who of course was the discoverer of penicillin. He said:

When I woke up just after dawn on September 28, 1928, I certainly didn't plan to revolutionize all medicine by discovering the world's first antibiotic, or bacteria killer, but I suppose that's exactly what I did.

I am very disturbed by the government's focus on moving away from basic and fundamental science, which of course has to be balanced with applied science. I would like to hear what the member has to say about that disturbing trend.

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House recognizes the importance of the sciences. We recognize that investing in sciences throughout Canada is something that will improve us in the long run.

On the health committee, we are looking at genomics right now. We are looking at technological innovation. We have some smart people in our country, and I am really looking forward to the future when they bring these things forward.

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Cranbrook for his comments. Some of my family members live in Cranbrook, and he has done an excellent job in representing the people of that community and that area.

I appreciate so much the comments that he made about the budget, especially regarding jobs and growth. One of the things that the chambers of commerce across the country have recognized is the lack of skilled labour in Canada. That has created a void in many areas. I know that even in Manitoba, there has been an issue regarding skilled labour. Could the member comment on our new program to link individuals who need training with the jobs that are available? Also, I wonder if he could talk about the importance of training people in Canada for the jobs that are available.

● (1700)

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, certainly in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, Teck Resources, the second-largest coal company in the world for metallurgical coal, is in dire need of all types of technical trades, whether electricians, heavy-duty mechanics, millwrights, or haul truck drivers. These are things that Canadians can do from coast to coast to coast. Just in the next few years, 1,500 of these people are needed. We have massive amounts of jobs available for Canadians as soon as they get trained.

I am looking forward to seeing our government partner with provincial governments and with all of the other industry and small industry across Canada to ensure that we have Canadians employed from coast to coast to coast.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to have this opportunity to speak about economic action plan 2013, which was put forward by the Minister of Finance last week.

The Budget

As we all know, we are on track and continue to focus on economic growth, job creation and long-term prosperity while keeping our promise to balance the budget by 2015. We are quite proud of that.

I want to note that many Canadians may have heard of the 950,000 new jobs created since the economic downturn of 2009, but they may not be aware that most of those jobs are full-time, well-paying jobs with almost 80% of them in the private sector. I want to note that as a bit of a success story.

We have heard about the innovative initiative put forward in economic action plan 2013 for skills training. This initiative would address the demand for skilled labour, something I have heard about many times in Mississauga South. I heard about it when we were holding pre-budget consultation meetings and local economic round table meetings. I heard about it when I met with the Port Credit BIA and small business owners, who told me that they had skilled labour shortage issues in their businesses. I heard it again when the Minister of State for Finance spoke with Mississauga Board of Trade businesses, and the minister heard it as well. The hon. members for Mississauga—Streetsville, Mississauga—Erindale and Mississauga East—Cooksville held a town hall meeting where we heard the same thing. We in Mississauga are especially pleased to hear about the Canada jobs grant because it will help Canadians to become apprentices. It will help both the unemployed and the under-employed. We are talking about 130,000 people who will be helped through community colleges and other training institutions. This is good news.

What I want to talk about today are the initiatives in the budget that would affect certain people who have been contacting my office, people in Mississauga South in particular. I went through the budget in search of these types of examples and found my favourite page numbers from budget 2013. I would like to tell the House what they are.

I am going to start with tax relief for home care services. Lucie Shaw in Mississauga South runs Nurse Next Door. These individuals drive around in little pink Volkswagen Beetles and help people who live in their homes. We see on page 222 that the Minister of Finance has decided to expand tax relief for home care services by extending the GST and HST exemption for homemaker services to include personal care services to individuals who, due to age, infirmity or disability, require this kind of assistance at home. This change was effective last week. I am particularly pleased about that.

I also want to tell the House about page 243, which is a good page for two reasons. The first reason is this government will continue to support the Nature Conservancy of Canada with \$20 million in 2013-14 to allow it to continue to serve ecologically sensitive land under the natural areas conservation program. Each federal dollar will be matched by \$2 in new funding from other sources, leveraging additional funds for the conservation of Canada's natural environment.

• (1705)

The government is also working on the development of a national conservation plan, and I was a proud member of the environment committee when we studied the recommendations for the minister for the national conservation plan. It included a very strong

component on urban conservation. To me and to my constituents in Mississauga South, which sits on Lake Ontario and has the beautiful Credit River running through it as well, these kinds of initiatives to protect and conserve our environment are very important.

On the same page and in the same line of thought is also a new initiative for improving the conservation of fisheries through community partnerships. Budget 2013 proposes \$10 million over two years to improve the conservation of fisheries by supporting partnerships with local groups. In Mississauga South these local groups would be groups such as the Credit River Anglers Association and the Port Credit Salmon and Trout Association, which do great work in my riding. One would not think of this, because Mississauga South is obviously an urban riding and is right next to Toronto, but the constituents of my riding care very much about our lake, our river and our environment. This is a great way for this government to show what a high priority we put on conserving our natural environment.

I would like to draw attention to page 226, where the topic is financial literacy for seniors. In particular, this budget will support efforts to make public awareness a priority to improve financial literacy, because sometimes older Canadians can be vulnerable to financial abuse. It will help them make more informed decisions about protecting their financial interests in the future.

I sat on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which studied, voted on and tabled a report on elder abuse. This was one of the topics that we did not expect to come up, but financial abuse of seniors is actually quite a serious problem. In addition to improving awareness and improving financial literacy, we have also adopted Bill C-12, which helps to combat financial abuse of seniors by allowing banks to report suspected fraud to the police and other social service agencies.

The Protecting Canada's Seniors Act, which received royal assent in December 2012, protects seniors better by considering age and other personal circumstances as aggravating factors in applying tougher sentences for those who take advantage of the elderly. I am proud that we are supporting our most vulnerable in society through this budget.

The Budget

With regard to innovation, in particular there is mention on page 201 of a business by the name of Electrovaya, which is located in Mississauga South. It was able to take advantage of Sustainable Development Technology Canada, SDTC, which the government is going to continue supporting with \$325 million over eight years for the development and demonstration of new clean technologies that create efficiencies for businesses and contribute to sustainable economic development. Clean technology and efficient practices can save businesses money, create high-paying jobs, drive innovation and improve the productivity of Canada's natural resources. Electrovaya, which produces batteries for cars, energy storage and smart grid power is a great example.

I thank the Speaker for allowing me to tell the House about my favourite pages in budget 2013.

● (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am curious whether the member is particularly proud of the fact that her government has run a deficit since 2008, even though it promised many times to balance the budget as soon as possible. Her government has even given us record deficits.

Now, it is going to eliminate the deficit by the next election. I would like to know if the member is particularly proud of her government for giving money to its friends, in an attempt to win votes, and waiting until the next election to eliminate the deficit.

[English]

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we are in very turbulent times globally. Canada has performed very well on the world stage. In fact, our net debt to GDP ratio is 35.8%, the lowest among the G7 countries, with Germany being the second lowest at 58.4%.

We are doing well, and we are doing well relative to the rest of the world in a very difficult time. I am quite pleased that without raising taxes we will be able to eliminate the deficit by 2015.

Mr. Frank Valeriotte (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the member would respond to this.

The Conservatives keep talking about this job grant. Everyone knows we have people without jobs, and jobs without people. We all agree that something needs to be done.

This is what the government did. It clawed back \$300 million of \$500 million under the labour market agreements it has with all the provinces. This will not even happen for another year. It clawed the money back so that it could conveniently create a \$300 million fund for itself, money it was already going to apply, not new money. Then the government said to the provinces that it will give \$5,000 per skilled labourer but they have to give \$5,000 each, and each employer has to give \$5,000. I get that.

I am wondering how the member would respond when she finds out that the finance ministers for Alberta and Ontario have both said they are not likely to agree to participate in this program because they do not have the money. The federal government clawed back

the money that would have allowed the provinces to do it. I am wondering how the member might respond to that, and how the Conservatives support the fictitious 130,000 jobs that will be created.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure about the cutbacks that the member for Guelph is referring to.

Under this Conservative government, transfer payments have never been cut to the provinces. In fact, under the Liberal government, in Ontario transfer payments were cut by \$25 billion. The previous Liberal government balanced the books on the backs of the provinces. We are not going to do that. I do think that the member for Guelph has a bit of a short memory.

We have not even begun the negotiations with the provinces. We are absolutely willing to work with the provinces. The Minister of Finance is getting every indication from the provinces that they too believe apprenticeship training is a very important issue. That is what we are hearing from everyone, that there is this misalignment of the types of jobs that are available and the skills needed to fill them.

We are working to address the problem.

● (1715)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the great speech.

She was going through page numbers, but she did not have enough time because I am sure would have gone to page 223 where it outlines our great palliative care program and the investing of \$3 million in community projects.

My question relates to infrastructure. This past weekend I visited with many municipal partners in my riding. They are thrilled with the investment we are making in infrastructure with the long-term sustainable gas tax fund. Not only is it permanent, it is now going to be indexed to allow the communities to do the great infrastructure projects that are on their plates.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Speaker, that is a great point. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has wanted us to index that gas tax for a long time, and we have decided that is a great idea. It will now be indexed. We are talking about the community improvement fund of over \$53 billion over 10 years. This is the longest and largest infrastructure program in Canadian history. I am glad we are going to be able to repair those bridges and highways and use the money for public transit.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak, but there is so much to say and so little time. We have 10 minutes in which to respond. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the wonderful MP from across the harbour, the MP for Halifax. We will perhaps give a bit of a Nova Scotia flavour of how to respond to this budget. However, there is so much to say.

The Budget

There is no question that the budget came down in a great deal of flurry and fanfare, but it appeared, not to overuse a phrase, that it really was a lot of smoke and mirrors. Once we began to dig down a bit, we saw the sleights of hand. However, we will not be able to get into the details until the implementation act is tabled.

I want to focus a bit on the budget as it relates to my constituency and as it relates to a process I have been involved in for the past couple of years. I bring representatives from different sectors and areas in the community to share with me and with each other their thoughts, priorities, and their advice to the government on the upcoming budget. It is a wonderful experience for me, and I know it is for the people who participate. We go for three hours, and we share some very valuable information about the community and our perspectives on the nation and what the government is doing. I want to share some of that with the members.

As I indicated, I held a community round table at North Woodside Community Centre in the riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. We dealt with a wide range of perspectives. We had a wonderful level of discussion and debate. We talked about trains and public transit, poverty and affordable housing, funding for local infrastructure, community organizations, regional economic development, defence procurement, environmental protection, and so much more.

We also talked about how on a whole range of issues there seems to be a complete lack of consultation by the government. This was expressed across the board. Whether it is consulting the provinces, stakeholders, or first nations, the government seems not to care what ordinary Canadians have to say about these issues and therefore does not engage with them in discussions before it makes important decisions. Even in the case where the Supreme Court of Canada has said that with respect to first nations, Inuit and Métis, the Government of Canada has legal obligations to consult and accommodate them, the current government completely ignores those obligations. People are feeling that. People feel the disdain with which the government seems to hold its ideas. They see it and they feel it, and they find it quite disappointing.

I was also disappointed with what I heard emanating from some of this discussion, and that is that citizens are feeling disheartened about participating in the political process. In fact, one participant went so far as to describe the government's approach to consultation as an erosion of opportunity to submit ideas. Another commented on how those who like nature have been equated by the government to being enemies of the state.

I think we agree in this House, but we have to pay attention to the effect of our actions. We want citizens to be engaged in the political process by having a government that will work actively to find ways, not reduce ways, for people to participate, to voice their concerns, as well as to voice their agreement, if that happens to exist. Unfortunately, we see too often that the current government wants to hear only from people who agree with it rather than those who dissent.

I cannot tell members enough how grateful I am and have been that we have so many interested and interesting people in my community, who take the time to share their perspectives with me and with each other.

● (1720)

Let me now talk about why I believe the budget fails to deal with a number of items discussed at the community hall meeting that afternoon.

On infrastructure, this budget commits \$50 billion over 10 years in the face of Canada's current infrastructure budget, which is tagged at over \$300 billion right now. It is a sleight of hand. The government is going to be spending less money over the next two years, at a time when our infrastructure is crumbling. At this time in Nova Scotia, Dartmouth and Halifax, the municipality is working desperately to maintain sewer and water lines. Those costs are being borne by taxpayers. The government needs to step up to help fund that level of infrastructure. It is deteriorating at a terrible rate, and the government is simply not putting the money forward that is needed.

On trains, there was no commitment in this budget to re-establish daily trips from Montreal to Halifax. In the last year, the government cut in half the daily VIA Rail passenger service from Montreal. It has been reduced from six trips to three. We need to recognize that this is where the trip ends. The people in Halifax, whether they be students or people who would rather travel by train or they do not have a car, do not have any other options. Some would suggest that the government is focusing some attention on VIA in central Canada and forgetting about the people in Atlantic Canada. It has cut back passenger rail service through northeastern New Brunswick. Communities there have been completely abandoned. What is interesting is that at the end of February, early March, for three successive weekends, the railcars in operation were completely booked, both sleeper and passenger car services. People are disappointed that the government has not come forward to properly fund trains.

On transit, Canada is still the only G8 country that does not have a national transit strategy because the Conservatives voted down the NDP motion in the House earlier this year. On poverty, poverty rates in Canada are on the rise. Instead of working with provinces to address the root causes, the government is downloading social costs onto the provinces. On regional development, one of the best ways to foster economic growth is to invest in local innovation. The Atlantic region has a wealth of innovation in areas such as agriculture and green technologies, but the government has provided no new funding to invest in these and other exciting regional industries.

What New Democrats have found in this budget, and we will begin to dig into the details as we go forward, is that the government is failing to support national programs and is now funnelling money into opportunities for government members to hand out cheques. It is pork-barrelling gone mad.

The Budget

As I wrap up, I want to remind all members of the House that the Constitution commits all governments, provincial and federal, to promoting equal opportunities, furthering economic development, reducing regional disparities and providing essential public services to all Canadians. The federal government is not doing that. In fact, it is heading in the absolute wrong direction. We need a strong federal government that recognizes the value of all regions and all people of the country. It should pull things together and make sure there is equality of opportunity throughout this country, so we can all participate together in moving the country forward. This budget fails to achieve that.

● (1725)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rather surprised at my colleague's attitude today. I find him normally to be a very positive guy, but today he is a little bit negative on many of the things in this budget.

He certainly missed the boat on the issue of infrastructure and public transit, because both the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Urban Transit Association applauded our budget. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities said:

Today's budget delivers significant gains for Canada's cities and communities. We applaud the government for choosing to continue moving our communities forward even as it meets its immediate fiscal challenges.... This is also a budget that delivers real gains for Canadians. ...it will spur growth and job creation....

The Canadian Urban Transit Association said it applauded the federal government's building Canada plan as a major step for planning and development of public transit in Canadian communities. It goes on to say:

Never before has a federal government invested so much in public transit. This budget provides a solid framework to ensure this will continue.

I would like my colleague to respond to those positive comments from two organizations that represent those two major sectors.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member recognizing the positive contribution I try to make in this House each and every day. I want him to know that when this budget came down, I began to pore over it, looking for the positive, looking for the constructive things that I could discuss with my constituents.

I went through it and then I went home. Whether it was at the pancake breakfast I went to on Sunday, whether it was at the Alderney market I went to on Saturday morning or whether it was in the grocery store where I ran into people, my constituents kept saying to me, "What are they doing to us? What have they done? Have they completely forgotten the needs in Atlantic Canada? Have they forgotten what we desperately need to have attended to, as it relates to infrastructure, as it relates to transit, as it relates to regional economic development?" I had to tell my constituents that I did not understand either what the government was all about, because this budget was clearly a failure.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his presentation and specifically for raising the subject of VIA Rail.

I have also gone through the budget, and the weirdest thing about the budget, which is pretty singular for any budget in Canadian history, is that it does not include numbers. It does not give us the bottom line, department by department.

In the case of VIA Rail, for example, the main estimates cut by 60% VIA Rail's budget. Whereas it had been \$475 million, for this year it would be \$187 million. That is a \$288 million cut.

The budget talks about money for VIA Rail, \$54 million this year and \$57 million over the next five years, but gives no indication of whether there will be supplemental estimate money that would keep VIA Rail viable, or whether this is really the death knell for VIA Rail with a couple of announcements thrown in to be band-aids on a gaping wound.

I wonder if my friend has any thoughts on what is really happening to VIA Rail in this budget.

● (1730)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for picking up my comments on VIA. It is a very serious concern for those of us in Atlantic Canada, the way the service has been gutted over the past few months. We are concerned that the Conservatives are setting the stage for the end of it.

It makes me crazy that the government does not follow through with any commitment. How can it when it is not prepared to have a national strategy on transit, for example?

The Conservatives talk about their commitment on skills training. We are one of the only developed countries in the western world that does not have a national skills-building and training strategy. It is deplorable to think that the government would solve the problem on skills training, for example, and it does not have any idea which way to go.

Countries like Germany, after which the government likes to model itself in the area of skills training, has a long history of working together with unions and companies, and it has a national strategy. We do not have a good history of working together, nor do we have a national strategy on skills training.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I have a lot to say in very little time. I am really pleased to rise right after my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who is doing an excellent job representing his constituents. I am really impressed with the way he is continually checking in with his constituents. It was great to hear their feedback today in the House.

When I had a look at the budget, I looked first with an eye to Halifax and Atlantic Canada. I wanted to see what the government's vision was for our region. To put it quite simply, the Conservative budget fails Atlantic Canada. The Conservatives have proven once again that economic development is not a priority for them in Atlantic Canada.

The Budget

What kind of economic development would I like to see? In Halifax, we have a thriving arts community, from music to theatre, to film and television, to the visual and digital arts. It is an incredible hub of talent and productivity that forms a thriving creative community in the Maritimes and a thriving creative economy. However, that economy is shut out of the budget.

In budget 2013, the Conservatives refused to change the course away from the deep cuts to the arts and culture sector that they are so proud of, thereby threatening Canadian jobs and really hurting an important economic driver. On top of last year's cuts, they are slashing \$42 million more from CBC, if we can even imagine that to be possible, \$24 million from Canadian Heritage and \$3 million from Telefilm Canada. This is a blatant attack on culture.

All told, arts and culture programs will lose almost \$80 million this year alone. That brings the total cuts over the past two years to over \$130 million, with additional reductions to come next year. Investment in the arts and culture sector has a significant potential to bolster the Canadian economy. While other sectors have been in decline, the cultural sector has grown rapidly in the past years. There are twice as many people working in the culture sector as in forestry and more than two times as many people as working in banks.

Our cultural sector adds approximately \$84 billion to the Canadian economy every year. That is incredibly impressive. As my colleague from Davenport pointed out, the Conservatives love their rhetoric on the economy, but reckless moves like this prove that they just do not get that the cultural sector is an economic driver.

It really is an economic driver in Halifax. We have incredible festivals, like SuperNova, East Coast Music Awards, Fringe, JazzFest, In the Dead of Winter, Nocturne, Queer Acts, ViewFinders and the Atlantic Film Festival. These are all festivals that showcase our theatre, music and visual arts and our artists. They also create a tourist destination. They bring people in, primarily from across Canada and the eastern seaboard of the U.S., and they help drive our downtown economy, supporting the hotel and restaurant industries as well. However, our growing cultural sector is not a part of Conservative Canada.

Looking at the money for infrastructure as well, the Conservatives say their plan commits \$70 billion over the next 10 years, but they did not adjust for inflation. What is happening is that the amount of infrastructure funding is going down. It will be \$4.7 billion lower than it was last year, and that will continue. That hurts all communities across Canada, but it has a disproportionate impact on us in Atlantic Canada as small provinces. It means we are not going to be able to address our infrastructure gap, or that we will, but these costs will be downloaded onto the provinces.

The Prime Minister did promise that he would not cut transfers to the provinces, but he is downloading the costs onto the provinces, which is essentially cutting transfers if they are not actually going to raise the transfers to meet the download cost.

The budget pushes ahead with reckless cuts to health care to the tune of \$36 billion, cuts to pensions, raising the age for OAS from 65 to 67, and with EI, making workers take a 30% pay cut, despite overwhelming opposition from Canadians. These are all areas where our provinces are going to have to make up the shortfall.

I am quite proud of the Nova Scotia NDP government and its work on health care. The New Democrats have been finding efficiencies while at the same time reducing wait times. For example, their collaborative care centres have been a huge success and are being exported to other provinces, like Saskatchewan. However, it seems that Nova Scotia is being punished for our innovation in health care, because we are going to be hit extremely hard by the change in the funding formula when it comes to health care.

• (1735)

Speaking of EI, there is nothing in this budget to reverse the EI changes that have been hitting our region so hard, and there is nothing there for seasonal workers. The government insists that seasonal workers need to find stable employment outside of seasonal industries, but how, when this budget does not even mention ACOA? How are we supposed to foster the development of these emerging industries, or these mythical, fictional industries toward which the Conservatives keep saying we need to shift our workforce? There is no mention of ACOA and not one more dollar to support emerging businesses and innovation in Atlantic Canada.

However, the Conservative government continues to subsidize the already profitable oil and gas industry. If members can imagine, millions of dollars would go to companies like Shell, Syncrude and Enbridge. These are companies that have pretty healthy bottom lines. However, there is not one more dollar to support our companies at home in Halifax or across Atlantic Canada.

In my first-ever budget speech in the House after my election in 2008, I talked about the amazing impacts of building affordable housing in our communities. To put it quite simply, the solution to homelessness is to build affordable housing. However, investing in affordable housing does not just house people and address homelessness; it also creates jobs in the construction industry. If we make sure that the housing we build is energy efficient, we can reduce our carbon footprint at the same time. This is win-win-win, especially in times when our economy is suffering.

As members know, that speech was a few years ago. Clearly the Conservatives were not listening, because not only are they not introducing a housing strategy, but homelessness funding is being reduced by \$15 million a year starting in 2014. Can members imagine that is actually being reduced?

The Budget

Organizations in Halifax like Metro Non-Profit Housing, Adsum for Women, St. Leonard's Society and Habitat for Humanity are doing incredible work in our community, but now there is even less support for them from the federal government. As it is, they are working with practically non-existent budgets.

The Out of the Cold shelter in Halifax is a perfect example of what is wrong with housing in Canada. It is serving an important role in our community as a seasonal last-resort shelter. The thing is, it is run entirely on donations and by volunteers. I am really proud of the work Out of the Cold is doing for people living in poverty in Halifax, but I am ashamed that it needs to exist. Those volunteers do their work with a critical eye. They know that they need to be there to address the gap, but they do their work knowing that the solution is to build housing. However, that solution will be even less likely to be realized after this budget from the Conservative government.

I did a number of media interviews about this budget on Thursday and Friday, especially in the Maritimes. I was doing an interview with a radio show and the host said to me: "Well, we're actually looking for the story here. What is the story of the budget? It doesn't seem like there's much of a story because the budget isn't actually doing very much".

The Prime Minister promised to focus on jobs, but instead he is pushing ahead with job-killing austerity cuts and is introducing no new measures to create jobs. He is basically playing a shell game with skills training money. I think that is the story.

Should we not expect more from our government, such as a job creation plan, an economic development plan, a plan for a transition to the green energy economy? Should we not expect our government to have a vision to plan for the future and ensure a green and prosperous country for all, not just the well connected?

That is what I had hoped for, but with the Conservatives at the helm, I guess I should get used to disappointment.

• (1740)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her presentation on the budget, which is as usual bang on in speaking about her fantastic community of Halifax, the Maritime area and Canada-wide.

One of the things I find gravely disappointing in this budget is that there is not a single mention of what the premier of my province of Alberta has called for, a Canadian energy strategy, nor is there any mention of support for the energy efficiency sector in which many Canadians are interested in working, particularly young Canadians. It would create a lot of employment, but there is no mention of that sector in skills development. I wonder if the member would like to elaborate on what she spoke on toward the end of her speech.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona knows the Maritimes quite well, having worked for a stint at Dalhousie's law school. I welcome her question and I will tell another story about an interview I did.

I did an interview about the environmental measures in the budget and I said that I was quite pleased that the Conservatives had not gutted something such as the Species at Risk Act. I figured that was the only piece of legislation left and those pesky caribou keep getting in the way of those pipelines, so I expressed relief and a sort of

vague pleasure about that. Then the interviewer said there was no mention of climate change in the budget, and I realized I have Stockholm syndrome because I am actually celebrating the fact that this budget is not gutting our environmental regulations.

The member for Edmonton—Strathcona is exactly right. Where is the energy efficiency? It creates jobs. It reduces our carbon footprint. It is such a win. There is nothing in there for climate. There is one little line that says those oil and gas emissions regulations are coming, just wait. We have been waiting since 2010 when they were promised, so she hit the nail on the head.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does my colleague on the other side of the House support the investments in innovation and research outlined in chapter 3.4 of the budget. These include increased funding for the granting councils; funding for Genome Canada; additional funding for the Canada Foundation for Innovation, for the National Research Council, for investments by SMEs in research for business development; and money for Sustainable Development Technology Canada. It builds upon the investments we have made in research with respect to the Vanier graduate scholarships, the Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships, the science and technology strategy of 2007, as well as the investments in terms of the venture capital financing.

Does she support these initiatives in budget 2013 or not?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, it is my Edmonton day.

It is hard to answer that question as a yes or no, even though I know that is what the member would like me to do. It is hard because I would have to unpack what is in there. For example, with SDTC, first of all, there is a big announcement about funding but it is only \$1 million for next year and then it is all going to mythically appear spontaneously after that. However, if we look at SDTC funding in the past, we have had projects that have received \$6 million in funding in one shot. Therefore, I do not understand how in 2013 SDTC getting \$1 million is actually something to celebrate.

There is a lot of smoke and mirrors. This is a bit of a shell game and if the member can prove to me that these sustainable development technology organizations are actually going to get this money, that is another question entirely. I do not think he can do that.

The Budget

● (1745)

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, come to think of it, this is just another sleight of hand, because infrastructure spending will be carried out over 10 years instead of seven, but there will be less money per year.

An in-depth review of the budget, which has been in the red for eight years, shows that it might be possible to balance the books immediately. I believe that the Conservatives have made certain choices in order to give money to their friends and to wait until the next election to balance the budget, in order to win votes.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, there are definitely a lot of these kinds of tricks in the budget.

The Conservatives are patting themselves on the back about this budget. However, it lacks solutions, vision and meaningful provisions that would improve our vision of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the people of Red Deer to speak to the federal budget for the next fiscal year. I will be splitting my time with the great member for Newmarket—Aurora.

I offer my congratulations and appreciation to the Minister of Finance and the officials at the Department of Finance for their continued hard work managing Canada's fiscal policy.

I would also like to thank the minister for consulting with Canadians and giving us the opportunity to submit the recommendations of our constituents directly to his office. I am pleased to see that suggestions from the people of Red Deer, which I forwarded to the Minister of Finance, have been heard and included in this budget. I invited constituents to submit their recommendations directly to my office. I also held round table meetings with business owners and operators in my riding. One of the main points that I heard from multiple constituents was the need for a long-term vision for public infrastructure that allows planning at the local level.

Red Deer is one of the fastest growing cities. It is a hub of economic activity and has seen a significant and rapid increase in population over the past decade. This is great for the Red Deer economy but it puts a strain on public infrastructure.

We will remember that in budget 2011, the government indicated that it would develop a new plan to support public infrastructure that would extend beyond the support that we have for the expiry of the 2007 building Canada plan. This was to take place in 2014. We have now come to that point and the government is delivering on its promise with a new building Canada plan beginning next year.

The new building Canada plan responds to the infrastructure needs of our communities and represents the largest investment in job-creating infrastructure in the history of Canada. Investments in Canada's public infrastructure create jobs and economic growth and provide a high quality of life for families in every city and community across the country. Canada's prosperity is supported by a vast and complex network of highways and roads, water and waste water infrastructure, transit systems and recreational and cultural

facilities. This network reaches into every community and touches every Canadian.

In central Alberta we have seen the results of this government's investments and its co-operation with the governments of Alberta and its municipalities. The strain on our public infrastructure has been eased with projects such as the Highway 11A interchange, the resurfacing of Highway 2 from Highway 2A to Bowden and the resurfacing of the Cottonwood Road and Range Road 270.

In Red Deer we have upgraded the city's traffic signal control system, the Red Deer water treatment plant and the Red Deer College campus. We have upgrades to the Benalto and Lousana's waste water storage and treatment facilities, the construction of the Penhold Regional Multiplex, the new Innisfail Public Library and the full replacement of the street curbing and all underground municipal infrastructure for 23rd Street and Westview Crescent in Bowden.

These are just some of the results in my riding of this government's commitment to infrastructure investments. We look forward to more co-operation with the Alberta government and our municipalities under the new building Canada plan.

Another recurring component of my consultations with constituents continues to be taxes, whether personal income taxes, the GST or business taxes. My constituents have expressed appreciation for this government's commitment to find savings within the federal government in order to manage the country's deficit rather than raising taxes on hard-working Canadians.

We know that business taxes have a significant effect on job creation. A competitive tax regime attracts businesses, increases investment in the Canadian economy and creates Canadian jobs.

The temporary hiring credit for small businesses has been well received in my riding. I heard many times through my consultations with small business owners that it was something that employers felt should be continued. I am pleased that economic action plan 2013 proposed to expand and extend the temporary hiring credit for small businesses for one more year. What I have heard from small business owners in central Alberta is that this allows them to grow their operations and hire more workers.

The result of our government's broad-based tax reductions are jobs, plain and simple. We have created an environment where businesses can hire employees. We are proud to say that Canada now boasts the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7.

● (1750)

The biggest challenge facing employers in Canada is no longer crippling taxes but a shortage of skilled tradespeople, and this is especially evident in Alberta. We recognize the importance of apprentices to Canada's economy and the benefits of providing financial support to tradespeople and the employers that hire them.

The Budget

Our previous budgets have offered unprecedented support to the trades with the apprenticeship incentive grant, the apprenticeship completion grant, the tradesperson's tools deduction, the apprenticeship job creation tax credit and the extension of the tuition tax credit for occupational exam fees. There has never been a better time for Canadians to learn a skilled trade. The job market is thriving and support from this government is unwavering for Canadians, whether they are continuing to refine their skills and further their careers or they are looking to get into the exciting field of trades.

Economic action plan 2013 delivers our support for skilled trades. We want to reduce barriers to accreditation in the skilled trades and to do this we have committed funding to harmonize requirements for apprentices and to examine the methods of assessment in targeted skilled trades. This will ensure that more apprentices complete their training and it will encourage mobility.

In addition, we are changing our approach to procurement by introducing measures to support the use of apprentices in federal construction and maintenance contracts. The government will ensure that funds transferred to provinces and territories support the use of apprentices in infrastructure projects receiving federal funding.

We are introducing the Canada job grant, which will help Canadians get the skills they need for in-demand jobs.

I have experience in the registered apprenticeship program in Alberta. I was a work experience coordinator and saw first-hand the benefits of supporting apprentices. It is a labour sector that requires an integrated approach to education and job placement with on-the-job training. I am proud to be part of a government that is supporting apprentices and addressing the labour shortage of skilled tradespeople. Our approach is a win-win solution for workers, employers and the economy as a whole.

Our government also recognizes the contributions that people with disabilities make to our economy, work that provides them with a sense of dignity and independence. Last year, we announced the panel on labour market opportunities to identify private sector successes and best practices with regard to the labour market participation of persons with disabilities.

The panel consulted widely with Canadian firms of all sizes in a broad range of sectors across the country. In its report released in January of this year, "Rethinking disAbility in the private sector", we found that many Canadians continue to have challenges regarding gainful employment. We are committed to working with provincial and territorial governments, employers and disability organizations to connect Canadians with available jobs.

In economic action plan 2013 the government has committed to introduce a new generation of labour market agreements for persons with disabilities by 2014 with an investment of \$222 million per year. The reformed agreements will be designed to better meet the employment needs of Canadian businesses and to improve employment prospects.

We will also maintain the ongoing funding of \$40 million per year for the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities and provide additional funding for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to support research relating to labour market

participation. We believe that Canadians with disabilities have skills and we are committed to improving their employment possibilities.

As a former high school teacher I know that it is important for all Canadians to have access to information on a variety of careers in order to make informed choices about their education early in life. Good choices early on can help to ensure that young Canadians obtain the skills and experience necessary to avoid unnecessary debt and to get a better start to their careers.

We want to communicate with young Canadians and provide them with the information they need to know which occupations are in high demand. We will promote education in high demand fields, including the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We also know that the transition to a first job can be challenging, so this budget provides funding for an extra 5,000 paid internships for recent post-secondary graduates.

It is no surprise that this government's support for education has received praise from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. I was in Olds College on the weekend celebrating its 100th anniversary and I heard the same thing from folks there, that we are on the mark with our targeted funding for research, post-secondary support and skilled trades initiatives.

• (1755)

It seems that every credible organization has lauded this federal budget. We are creating jobs, protecting health and social transfers and keeping taxes low, all while managing to reduce the federal deficit. We are doing this by finding savings within the government rather than shifting the burden onto Canadians.

This is a Conservative budget and I am proud to stand here on behalf of central Albertans and support this responsible spending planned by our government.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by agreeing with my colleague about one thing, that since ancient times, the best way to communicate craft trade skills has been through the formal apprenticeship system. This has been true since the ancient Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, and is as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago.

My question for the member is a pointed one and it builds from the labour market strategy, or the lack of one, and the EI system. He knows, as a former apprenticeship coordinator, that when people take their school component of their apprenticeship, they are not laid off by the employer, they are allowed to go and they are allowed to collect EI for that six weeks, or whatever it is, for their annual school component.

The Budget

Why then is there a waiting period, as if they have been laid off? Why is there an interruption in their income maintenance when apprentices go to community college to do their six week trade component? Would the member not agree with me that if we are trying to encourage young people to go into the apprenticeable trades, there should be no interruption in income maintenance when they leave the job to go to school and then back to the job again?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, we have constantly been trying to make changes to the EI program that are going to be best benefit individuals. This new concept with the Canada job grant is one of those things that is going to be looking at all possibilities.

We have to recognize the fact that we are looking into this and in a year's time we are going to be spending time speaking to each and every one of the provinces, trying to get input from their positions and their points of view. Certainly this will be one thing I would assume will come up in discussions.

I look forward to the opportunity to advance those positions.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a couple of years now, I have been hearing from constituents about how it is difficult to get apprenticeships. I have also heard about the long-term projections that show us we need young people to consider entering the skilled trades.

I wonder why the emphasis the government placed on apprenticeships in this year's budget could not have been put into previous year's budgets. Why has the government waited so long to put out a budget that has an emphasis on apprenticeships?

The reason why I ask this is it seems we are paying the price now. I was talking to somebody from Windsor who was saying that the automobile industry was going gangbusters now and that there were auto parts suppliers in Windsor that did not have enough people to do the work that they could be doing. This is because of a lack of people in the skilled trades.

• (1800)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, from another perspective, we can think about many jobs. He mentioned the issues that were taking place in the automobile industry. We can think back to all the projects that are sitting on the shelf right now in so many areas simply because we cannot get the trades people there.

We hear people saying that they cannot get jobs in the right places and everything like that. Quite frankly, there are billions of dollars just sitting there, but companies know that they cannot get people to work for them and they cannot get that type of thing organized. Because of that, the projects stay on the shelf.

These are the issues we have. That is why it is so important for us to look at different ways of getting the training for the in-demand jobs at the right time. I think this is the question was presented. We have to ensure we target it to those jobs that will be needed in the future.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today on behalf of my constituents in Newmarket—Aurora to speak on economic action plan 2013. This is an excellent plan that continues our government's responsible focus on creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. I join so many others

across the country in congratulating the Minister of Finance for tabling such a comprehensive document, created by a government that continues to listen, act and deliver results.

Since the depth of the global economic recession, the Canadian economy has created over 950,000 net new jobs, the best record among advanced economies. Economic action plan 2013 builds on this strong foundation by taking action in areas that my constituents have been asking for, as have all Canadians. It is focused on long-term growth and prosperity by connecting Canadians with available jobs, funding infrastructure and supporting Canada's manufacturing and small business sectors. It also stays on track to balance the budget by 2015. It increases federal transfer support to high records and keeps federal taxes at their lowest level in 50 years.

My constituents and local business community are especially pleased with the new Canada job grant, which will transform the way that Canadians receive skills training. We know that training in Canada is not sufficiently aligned to the skills employers need or to the jobs that are actually available. I have had businesses in my riding call to say how desperate they are for workers and ask what I can do to help. I am pleased that for the first time the Canada job grant will put skills training choices where they belong, in the hands of employers with unfilled jobs and Canadians who want to work.

Under the Canada job grant, individuals may qualify for up to \$15,000 to learn new skills to accept a new or better job. How significant is this? The Canadian Chamber of Commerce said, "The measures announced in today's budget" are a significant step forward in "the federal government's attack on Canada's skills challenge".

The Certified General Accountants Association of Canada said:

The government delivered a responsible budget for uncertain times. We welcome this skills training initiative. In creating the Job Grant fund, the federal government has shown leadership in addressing the growing skills gap. We encourage provinces to support it. All should benefit — employers, workers and governments.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation said that it applauds

the government's plans to overhaul job training and keep a lid on spending....

It's good to see Ottawa getting training money directly in the hands of young workers so they can land a good-paying job.

Economic action plan 2013 also introduces the new building Canada plan. This new infrastructure plan involves \$70 billion in federal infrastructure funding over 10 years, the largest federal investment in job creating infrastructure in Canadian history. This landmark plan responds to the number one request that I heard from my constituents during my pre-budget consultations, to invest in infrastructure. It also responds to my mayor's requests for stable predictable funding while reducing the burden for local major infrastructure from the property tax rolls.

The Budget

The building Canada plan has a number of important components. The first is the new community improvement fund. This fund will provide \$32.2 billion over 10 years in base funding for Canadian municipalities. It will index the gas tax fund and increase the GST rebate to municipalities, which can be used to build roads, public transit, recreational facilities and other community infrastructure. The gas tax fund indexing alone represents another \$74,000 into Newmarket—Aurora coffers each and every year. This is on top of the \$3.7 million in the federal gas tax fund that they now receive annually.

The second component of the building Canada plan is the new building Canada fund. There will be \$14 billion of the fund that will support major economic infrastructure projects that have a national and regional significance. The \$10 billion provincial-territorial infrastructure portion will support projects of national, regional and local significance in communities across the country. This will include highways, public transit, drinking water, waster water, connectivity and broadband, and innovation

• (1805)

The \$10 billion provincial-territorial infrastructure portion will support projects of national, regional and local significance in communities across the country. This will include highways, public transit, drinking water, waste water, connectivity and broadband and innovation.

The third significant component of the new building Canada plan is the renewed P3 Canada fund: \$1.25 billion will be invested and leveraged to find innovative ways to build infrastructure projects faster and to provide better value for Canadian taxpayers. Under P3 arrangements, governments continue to own the infrastructure assets, while the private sector plays a larger role in their design, construction, operation and maintenance. In doing so, the private sector assumes a greater share of project risks.

The building Canada plan also allocates \$6 billion in existing infrastructure funding and \$17 billion to build, operate and maintain federal public infrastructure. This \$70 billion in federal funding over 10 years to building or maintaining Canada's infrastructure is welcome news to my constituents.

What are Canadians saying about our building Canada plan? The Federation of Canadian Municipalities says, "Today's budget delivers significant gains for Canada's cities and communities".

The Canadian Urban Transit Association lauded the federal government's building Canada plan as a major step for planning and developing public transit in Canadian communities, saying:

We're really pleased to see this kind of commitment for public transit infrastructure...Never before has a federal government invested so much in public transit...This budget provides a solid framework to ensure that this will continue.

The significant support for Canada's manufacturing and small business sectors is also very exciting. Economic action plan 2013 takes action in three ways to support Canada's manufacturers. It provides tax relief for new manufacturing equipment through the extension of the temporary accelerated capital allowance. It builds equipment for the Canadian armed forces. It helps Canada's manufacturers to compete through a new advanced manufacturing fund for southern Ontario, the continuation of the strategic aerospace

and defence initiative, investments in forestry industry transformation and a renewed automotive innovation fund.

The automotive help in particular in this budget, combined with the skills training funding, will assist key parts of Newmarket—Aurora's industrial base to become more competitive, thereby helping to keep our local economies strong.

Economic action plan 2013 maintains our government's commitment to balancing the budget by 2015. It builds on our past efforts by announcing an additional \$1.7 billion in ongoing savings from areas such as reduced travel costs through the use of technology, standardized government information systems and enhanced integrity of the tax system by closing tax loopholes to ensure that everyone pays their fair share.

We are also continuing to keep taxes low for families, seniors and businesses which is very welcome news for my constituents in Newmarket—Aurora. Since 2006, we have reduced taxes over 150 times and the average family of four is paying \$3,200 less in federal taxes each and every year.

Seniors are also benefiting from our low tax plan, paying on average \$2,200 less in taxes each year. I have had many residents thank me for our actions to keep more money in the pockets of people.

There are so many other ways that economic action plan helps everyday Canadians that I cannot possibly mention them all. From enhanced tax relief for families raising children or who use home care services, to supporting and honouring our veterans by doubling the current funeral service reimbursement, economic action plan 2013 helps Canadians in my riding of Newmarket—Aurora as well as those across the country.

I urge all my colleagues to support this excellent budget.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to hear what my colleague thinks about VIA Rail's budget being cut in half.

Everyone knows that the train was responsible for Canada's development. The Canada we know today would not exist if not for the railway out west. Regional economic development and northern development—which is close to my colleague's heart—depend on railways.

How does the member think that cutting more than 50% of VIA Rail's budget will negatively affect economic development?

*The Budget**[English]*

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleague to take a look at page 181 of the budget, where it talks about VIA Rail Canada and passenger rail services for remote communities in particular. It says:

Economic Action Plan 2013 proposes to provide \$54.7 million in 2013-14 to support VIA Rail's operations and \$58.2 million over five years to maintain passenger rail services for remote communities that have limited access to the national transportation network.

We are working to ensure that remote communities have access to VIA Rail and that people have jobs.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora talk about how her constituents were pleased with the tax reductions. There is always a price to pay for some things, and one of the things that has happened in the seven years of the Conservative government's rule has been that the national debt has increased by \$124 billion so far. Of course, that has added quite a bit to our servicing charges.

I wonder what her constituents have told her about the fact that this year, for example, close to \$30 billion will be paid by the government to the public debt charge that has occurred because we are now at \$600 billion. How do they feel about that part of the big picture?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I remind my hon. colleague that it was his party that was calling on our government to spend more money, and a coalition of opposition members was looking to spend far more money. My constituents are telling me that our government is doing a wonderful job.

The more important facts are that our government is looking to help Canadians develop new skills and training and getting Canadians back to work, because we know that there will be tax revenues if more people are working. We want Canada to get back to a balanced budget and we are working on that. Our goal is 2015. We are working hard to make that happen.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that one thing Canada does particularly well is university research. Our government has been supporting that. Indeed, the Minister of State for Science and Technology and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario has been promoting that.

I note that the government has set aside an additional \$37 million to increase business partnerships with university research. Can the member speak about that? We want to improve productivity in Canada. We want to improve innovation. Could she talk a little about that measure?

• (1815)

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased over the March break week to have the opportunity to visit the MaRS facility in Toronto and see several new businesses that are developing innovative products that are going to come to market. These are some of the most remarkable young people who have recently graduated with Ph.D.s in science and technology. We want to ensure

those young people stay in our country, take that innovation to market and create more opportunities and jobs here in Canada.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith all questions necessary to dispose of the amendment to the amendment now before the House.

[English]

The question is on the amendment to the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment to the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the amendment to amendment 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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

• (1845)

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 647)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Grogulé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu

Adjournment Proceedings

Hughes
Julian
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
May
McGuinty
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nash
Pacetti
Péclet
Pilon
Quach
Ravignat
Regan
Saganash
Scott
Sgro
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Tremblay
Valerioté — 123

Jacob
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nicholls
Papillon
Perreault
Plamondon
Rankin
Raynault
Rousseau
Sandhu
Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Turmel

Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
O'Connor
Opitz
Paradis
Poilievre
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Saxton
Seeback
ShIPLEY
Smith
Stanton
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Yelich
Zimmer — 151

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
Obhrai
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Payne
Preston
Rathgeber
Rempel
Rickford
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trotter
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lauzon
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Baird
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the subamendment defeated.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1850)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the municipalities of Quebec are united in their opposition to the government's employment insurance reform.

The UMQ sees the changes as, quite simply, an attack on regional economies that harms both workers and employers. Instead of tackling the problem of unemployment and recognizing the diversity of the Canadian economy, the Conservatives would rather attack unemployed workers and small businesses.

Here I am, once again, talking about something that is making a lot of people in the country unhappy, and that is employment insurance reform.

Over the past few months and weeks, the major unions in Quebec, groups that advocate on behalf of workers and citizens, and municipal and rural organizations have come together to protest the changes that have been made to employment insurance. This is a testament to broad consensus in Quebec against this reform, a consensus that is also found outside the province.

On February 15, the executive committee of the Union des municipalités du Québec, the UMQ, adopted a resolution calling on the federal government to suspend EI reforms until economic impact studies have been completed. We know full well, such studies were not conducted before the reform was implemented.

Adjournment Proceedings

In short, we might as well say that the government is putting policies in place without having any idea about where it is going or about the potential consequences on the daily lives of Canadians.

All these Canadian organizations, which condemn the reform and now form a true coalition, are already trying to reason with the federal government so that it will suspend the implementation of this reform's ridiculous and arbitrary measures.

The government must immediately conduct impact studies on the changes it wants to bring about, it must release the results of those studies, and it must hold public consultations on the subject. These measures target workers and the most vulnerable sectors, and will most certainly have a negative impact on future generations.

According to Éric Forest, president of the UMQ and mayor of Rimouski, a beautiful region in the Gaspé Peninsula, this reform will affect the social and economic fabric of the regions. Seasonal workers and their families will have to move away from the regions to work. These regions will therefore lose skilled workers, and entire families will have to leave. Years of effort to boost the regions' vitality through policies and programs will be wasted.

The UMQ also pointed out that seasonal employment is part of the economic reality of many regions and contributes to the development of a number of sectors that are essential to the economy of Quebec, including agriculture, forestry, fishing, tourism and even film.

By impoverishing and emptying the regions of their skilled workers, employment insurance reform will lead to labour shortages for many businesses, which will have a devastating impact on all regions of Quebec.

The regions feel that these changes are a direct attack—pure and simple—on regional economies. It is bad for workers and employees. In what way is this reform positive? It is bad for the unemployed and their families. The government should address job creation issues and recognize the diversity of our country's economy instead of going after the unemployed and small businesses.

I will repeat my question. Why is the minister not listening to Canadians? Why is it not cancelling the devastating employment insurance reform?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of confusion concerning the updated employment insurance regulations. The opposition parties have been recklessly misleading Canadians.

● (1855)

[Translation]

My colleague should rest assured that it is not our intention to punish employment insurance claimants or to harm regional economies. On the contrary, as we have said from the beginning, we want all Canadians who want to work to be able to work.

[English]

Our aim is to connect EI claimants with available jobs in their local labour markets. We need to ensure that Canadians have access to and are skilled enough for the jobs that are being created.

Full-time jobs have been increasing across all occupations and in many industries. In fact, since July 2009, employment has grown by more than 950,000 jobs. This represents the strongest growth by far among G7 countries. Of those 950,000 jobs, most of them are full-time positions.

Let me be clear. We want to make sure all Canadian regions prosper.

[Translation]

We empathize with Canadians who have lost their jobs and who are making the effort to find work in their area, but who have not succeeded. These Canadians can rest assured that they will continue to receive employment insurance.

[English]

Rest assured these changes will be administered using common sense and will take everything into account among local labour market conditions.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, it may not be the government's intention to create problems for the regions, but that is what is happening, and we are starting to see major consequences.

It is fair to say that this reform was not created in the interest of unemployed workers or the regions, and the proof is that people are upset about it.

The Conservatives have failed to carry out their duty and should listen to what Canadians have to say. This reform is not working. It is a blow to our economy and our job seekers.

Last Friday, a number of people came to my riding office because their employment insurance benefits were unfairly and arbitrarily cut off. We had to take steps to set things right. This reform is an outright attack on Canadians.

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as has been said many times before in this House, for those who are unable to find work, EI will continue to be there for them as it always has been.

EI recipients have always had the responsibility of undertaking a reasonable job search by preparing resumes, attending job workshops and contacting prospective employers. There has always been a requirement to accept a suitable job.

The new definitions of “reasonable job search” and “suitable employment” clarify these responsibilities. At the same time, the new definition of “suitable employment” takes into account people's personal circumstances, working conditions, the time it takes to commute to work, the type of work they are qualified to do and the rate of pay.

Adjournment Proceedings

The purpose of EI is to provide temporary assistance to those who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Our top priority is job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians. When will the opposition finally support our plan, which has already created 950,000 net new jobs?

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening in adjournment proceedings to pursue a question that I initially asked on February 4 of this year. It relates to the mysterious case of Dr. Arthur Porter, as I referred to it at the time. I have asked questions on previous occasions, and on that occasion I asked the Prime Minister a question and the response came from the Minister of Public Safety. I asked why Dr. Porter is still a member of Privy Council, which is the highest level of trust within the government, an individual who is able to access all government secrets.

At the time I did not realize there was more to this story than I knew on February 4. For instance, my question to the Prime Minister included the question as to whether normal background checks were suspended. I asked how Dr. Porter was approved for these very sensitive positions.

What I have learned since then, through a number of access to information requests, is that although the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act requires that all leaders of parties with more than 12 members in the House get to review appointments, my assumption was that leaders of other parties had not raised an objection. They, like the Prime Minister, were unaware there was anything suspicious in Dr. Porter's background and that somehow the background checks fell apart.

What I was surprised to discover is that one of the leaders of one of the official parties in the House at the time, not once but twice, objected to Dr. Porter. The member objected, when in 2008 he was made a member of the Canadian Security Intelligence Review Committee, and in 2010 objected when Dr. Porter was named chairman of the very important Canadian Security Intelligence Review Committee.

How could this have happened? Who was that member? Now that he no longer sits in the House, I can use his proper name. It was the leader of the Bloc Québécois, Gilles Duceppe. Gilles Duceppe, in his first letter dated February 2, 2008, to the Prime Minister, which I am going to repeat in English, said "Regarding the appointment of Arthur T. Porter...I wish to draw the following to your attention...".

He proceeded to draw to the Prime Minister's attention the problems that occurred when Dr. Porter was at the Detroit Medical Center. Mr. Duceppe lists them as conflicts of interest, mismanagement, financial crises, threats of bankruptcy, and so forth, and refers the Prime Minister to an article in *Le Devoir*. He also mentioned that it had been reported that Dr. Porter regarded himself as a close friend of former U.S. president George Bush and former vice president Cheney. Mr. Duceppe thought that such a close relationship with foreign powers, previous leaders, would represent a conflict of interest in his loyalties to Canada by being in such a sensitive post. In 2010, when the Prime Minister sought to elevate Dr. Porter to chair of the committee, Monsieur Duceppe repeated his concerns.

Again, I remain baffled. In every answer from Conservative members of Parliament to questions about Dr. Porter, we are told only two things: he is now basically escaping prosecution for his transgressions by hiding out in the Caribbean, and that these allegations had nothing to do with the fact that he is a Privy Council officer nor that he was chairman of the Canadian Security Intelligence Review Committee.

My questions are very simple. Is Dr. Porter still a Privy Council officer? Our information is that he is. Where were the background checks? More specifically, why did the Prime Minister choose to ignore very clear and specific warnings from the leader of the Bloc Québécois, Mr. Duceppe, who raised these very issues. We now see that Dr. Porter was a spectacularly poor choice to be in possession of this country's secrets.

• (1900)

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her interest in this. I want to assure the member that the allegations relating to Mr. Porter have absolutely nothing to do with the work he did as a member of the Security Intelligence Review Committee. There has been no suggestion whatsoever of any improper handling or disclosure of confidential information.

Prior to his appointment, Mr. Porter was subject to a series of security background checks coordinated by officials from the Privy Council Office. These checks were robust and included police, security and financial records. The government consulted with both the leader of the New Democratic Party and the leader of the Liberal Party. As the member is aware, Mr. Porter offered his resignation in 2011 and the government accepted it.

The allegations that Mr. Porter is currently facing do not have anything to do with his former responsibilities. The government has taken this opportunity, however, to strengthen the screening process as we feel that is important. Prospective Security Intelligence Review Committee members are now vetted in the same way as all other government officials who require access to highly-sensitive information through a clearance conducted by CSIS, in addition to a pre-appointment background check. This includes consideration of people with whom the prospective members are closely associated and connected with.

Importantly, CSIS does not assess individuals' qualifications to serve as members of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, also called SIRC, only their loyalty to Canada and their reliability. In addition, as part of new procedures, CSIS provides the results of its checks to the Privy Council Office, which, in consultation with the government, retains responsibility for deciding whether to appoint the individual. In this way, the independence of SIRC is preserved, which is incredibly important for all of us.

As the hon. member may know, in June 2012 the government appointed Chuck Strahl to replace Mr. Porter as chair of the Security Intelligence Review Committee. Mr. Strahl was subject to these new security measures.

Adjournment Proceedings

We believe the steps we have taken in this matter have strengthened the screening process. They ensure the continued robustness and integrity of the process, as well as the protection of confidential government information.

• (1905)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I lament on the parliamentary secretary's behalf because I have great empathy for people who have to read talking points that I have just pointed out were not really answering the question I had last time.

I do not know if she will be able to answer this, but I really think Canadians want to know.

First, is Dr. Porter still a Privy Council officer? I know it is fairly theoretical because he is not in Ottawa, where would he get access to our secrets, but it is certainly not appropriate for him to remain a Privy Council officer.

My second question is this. Why was it that these very clear concerns put forward by Gilles Duceppe were ignored in the process that occurred in appointing Dr. Porter first as a member of SIRC and then as a chairperson of it? I think Canadians want to know.

I am glad to see that Chuck Strahl has taken the reins. I do not think there is anyone I respect more than Chuck Strahl. However, how on earth did Dr. Porter, who professes his allegiance to Sierra Leone, ever end up in that sensitive position?

Ms. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, armchair quarterbacks are usually not the best quarterbacks, but it is easy after the fact to make these observations.

I want to assure the hon. member that whatever the allegations against Mr. Porter, they do not relate to his work as a member of the Security Intelligence Review Committee. Nevertheless, the government has taken steps to strengthen the screening process. That is an important part of the work the government has done and continues to do. The measures we have taken and put in place are further safeguards to ensure the continued protection of confidential government information.

I appreciate the hon. member's comments with regard to Chuck Strahl. I agree with her. He is and will continue to be a great leader of that organization.

I appreciate the hon. member's contributions in so many ways. As a government, we need to look at what we have done and will continue to do to build on our strengths and ensure that anything we have missed continues to be accounted for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:07 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, March 25, 2013

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

BAN ON SHARK FIN IMPORTATION ACT

Bill C-380. Second reading	15117
Mr. Chisholm	15117
Mr. Sopuck	15117
Mr. Lamoureux	15119
Mr. Atamanenko	15120
Mr. Payne	15121
Mr. Dusseault	15122
Ms. Brosseau	15124
Mr. Donnelly	15124
Division on motion deferred	15125

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

The Budget

Financial Statement of Minister of Finance

Motion	15125
Mr. Saganash	15125
Mr. Caron	15126
Mr. Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	15126
Mr. Rajotte	15127
Mr. Blanchette	15128
Ms. James	15128
Mr. Tremblay	15129
Mr. Adler	15129
Mr. Caron	15131
Ms. James	15131
Mr. Caron	15131
Mr. Lamoureux	15134
Mrs. Sellah	15135
Mr. Easter	15135
Mr. Opitz	15135
Mr. O'Toole	15136
Mr. Tremblay	15137
Mr. Lamoureux	15138
Mr. Albrecht	15138
Mr. Opitz	15138
Mr. Blanchette	15140
Mr. Regan	15140
Mr. O'Toole	15140
Mr. Cleary	15141

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Edmonton—Leduc Emergency Responders

Mr. Rajotte	15142
-------------------	-------

Alex Napier

Mr. Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	15142
--	-------

Junior Team Canada

Mr. Preston	15142
-------------------	-------

Journey of *Nishiyuu*

Ms. Bennett	15143
-------------------	-------

Wrestling

Mr. Williamson	15143
----------------------	-------

St-Pierre Centre

Ms. Laverdière	15143
----------------------	-------

Persian New Year

Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	15143
---	-------

Heroic Intervention

Mr. McColeman	15143
---------------------	-------

Veterans with Disabilities

Mr. Sandhu	15144
------------------	-------

James Pon

Mr. Menegakis	15144
---------------------	-------

Journey of *Nishiyuu*

Mr. Saganash	15144
--------------------	-------

Public Safety

Mr. Seeback	15144
-------------------	-------

Promoting Education and Community Health

Ms. Sgro	15144
----------------	-------

Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada

Mr. Opitz	15145
-----------------	-------

Byelection in Labrador

Mr. Cleary	15145
------------------	-------

The Economy

Mr. Lizon	15145
-----------------	-------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Aboriginal Affairs

Mr. Mulcair	15145
-------------------	-------

Mr. Baird	15145
-----------------	-------

The Budget

Mr. Mulcair	15146
-------------------	-------

Mr. Baird	15146
-----------------	-------

Mr. Mulcair	15146
-------------------	-------

Mr. Baird	15146
-----------------	-------

Status of Women

Ms. Leslie	15146
------------------	-------

Mr. Ashfield	15146
--------------------	-------

Ms. Leslie	15146
------------------	-------

Mr. Ashfield	15146
--------------------	-------

Search and Rescue

Ms. Foote	15146
-----------------	-------

Mr. Baird	15146
-----------------	-------

Employment Insurance

Mr. Andrews	15147
-------------------	-------

Mr. Baird	15147
-----------------	-------

Fisheries and Oceans		Mr. Gravelle.....	15151
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte).....	15147	Mr. Anderson.....	15152
Mr. Baird.....	15147	Mr. Angus.....	15152
Infrastructure		Mr. Clement.....	15152
Ms. Nash.....	15147	Government Advertising	
Mr. Lebel.....	15147	Mr. Scarpaleggia.....	15152
The Budget		Mr. Clement.....	15152
Ms. Nash.....	15147	Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Menzies.....	15147	Ms. Bennett.....	15152
Taxation		Mr. Valcourt.....	15152
Mr. Boulерice.....	15148	Public Safety	
Mr. Bernier.....	15148	Mr. Garrison.....	15152
Mr. Boulерice.....	15148	Mr. Toews.....	15153
Mr. Bernier.....	15148	Ms. Doré Lefebvre.....	15153
Intergovernmental Relations		Mr. Toews.....	15153
Mr. Caron.....	15148	Employment	
Ms. Finley.....	15148	Mr. Trottier.....	15153
Financial Institutions		Ms. Finley.....	15153
Mr. Caron.....	15148	Financial Institutions	
Mr. Menzies.....	15148	Mr. Bélanger.....	15153
Mr. Rankin.....	15149	Mr. Menzies.....	15153
Mr. Menzies.....	15149	Canadian Heritage	
Health		Mr. Dewar.....	15153
Mr. Rankin.....	15149	Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	15154
Mr. Menzies.....	15149	Aboriginal Affairs	
Fisheries and Oceans		Mr. Strahl.....	15154
Mr. Donnelly.....	15149	Mr. Valcourt.....	15154
Mr. Ashfield.....	15149	Employment Insurance	
Search and Rescue		Ms. Mathysen.....	15154
Mr. Dion.....	15149	Ms. Finley.....	15154
Mr. Ashfield.....	15149	Taxation	
Employment Insurance		Mr. Fortin.....	15154
Mr. Garneau.....	15149	Mr. Bernier.....	15154
Ms. Finley.....	15149	Journey of Nishiyuu	
Mr. Easter.....	15150	Ms. May.....	15154
Ms. Finley.....	15150	Mr. Valcourt.....	15154
Aboriginal Affairs		Presence in the Gallery	
Mr. Genest-Jourdain.....	15150	The Speaker.....	15155
Mr. Valcourt.....	15150	Points of Order	
Ms. Ashton.....	15150	The Budget	
Mr. Valcourt.....	15150	Mr. Caron.....	15155
Mr. Saganash.....	15150	Oral Questions	
Mr. Valcourt.....	15150	Mr. Easter.....	15155
Mr. Saganash.....	15150		
Mr. Valcourt.....	15151	ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
Small Business		Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. McColeman.....	15151	Mr. Lukiwski.....	15155
Mr. Menzies.....	15151	Committees of the House	
Regional Development		Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Thibeault.....	15151	Mr. Preston.....	15155
Mr. Clement.....	15151	Canada Petroleum Resources Act	
Mrs. Hughes.....	15151	Mr. Bevington.....	15155
Mr. Clement.....	15151		

Bill C-485. Introduction and first reading	15155
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	15156
Petitions	
Korean War Service Medal	
Mr. Chisu	15156
Animal Welfare	
Mr. Atamanenko	15156
Experimental Lakes Area	
Mr. Scarpaleggia	15156
Sex Selection	
Mr. Payne	15156
Employment Insurance	
Mrs. Day	15156
The Environment	
Mr. Valeriote	15156
Falun Gong	
Mr. Rajotte	15156
Medical Marijuana	
Ms. Leslie	15156
The Environment	
Ms. Leslie	15156
Experimental Lakes Area	
Mr. Lamoureux	15156
Shark Finning	
Mr. Donnelly	15157
Search and Rescue	
Mr. Donnelly	15157
Citizenship and Immigration	
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	15157
Housing	
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	15157
Old Age Security	
Ms. Mathysen	15157
Shark Finning	
Ms. May	15157
The Environment	
Ms. May	15157
Foreign Investment	
Ms. May	15157
National Energy Program	
Ms. May	15157
Railway Noise and Vibration	
Mr. Chisholm	15157
Consumer Protection	
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	15157
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	15158

Private Members' Business

The Speaker	15158
-------------------	-------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

The Budget

Financial Statement of Minister of Finance	
Motion	15158

Mr. Lamoureux	15158
Mr. Cleary	15158
Mr. Woodworth	15158
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	15159
Mr. Komarnicki	15160
Mr. Lamoureux	15160
Mr. Tremblay	15161
Mr. Komarnicki	15161
Mr. Tremblay	15162
Mr. Garneau	15162
Ms. Leitch	15163
Mr. Del Mastro	15163
Mr. Blanchette	15164
Mr. Garneau	15165
Mr. Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	15165
Mr. Bélanger	15165
Mr. Tremblay	15167
Mr. Lamoureux	15167
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	15167
Ms. Sgro	15167
Mr. Tremblay	15169
Mr. Valeriote	15169
Mr. Wilks	15169
Mr. Martin	15171
Mr. Garneau	15171
Ms. Bergen	15171
Mrs. Ambler	15171
Mr. Tremblay	15173
Mr. Valeriote	15173
Mr. Albrecht	15173
Mr. Chisholm	15173
Mr. Albrecht	15175
Ms. May	15175
Ms. Leslie	15175
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	15177
Mr. Rajotte	15177
Mr. Tremblay	15178
Mr. Dreeshen	15178
Mr. Martin	15179
Mr. Hsu	15180
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	15180
Ms. Péclet	15181
Mr. Garneau	15182
Mr. Del Mastro	15182

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Employment Insurance	
Mrs. Day	15183
Ms. Leitch	15184
Public Safety	
Ms. May	15185
Ms. Bergen	15185

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>