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Monday, October 28, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 28, 2013

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

ELECTRONIC PETITIONS

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to recommend changes to the Standing Orders and other conventions governing petitions so as to establish an electronic petitioning system that would enhance the current paper-based petitions system by allowing Canadians to sign petitions electronically, and to consider, among other things, (i) the possibility to trigger a debate in the House of Commons outside of current sitting hours when a certain threshold of signatures is reached, (ii) the necessity for no fewer than five Members of Parliament to sponsor the e-petition and to table it in the House once a time limit to collect signatures is reached, (iii) the study made in the 38th Parliament regarding e-petitions, and that the Committee report its findings to the House, with proposed changes to the Standing Orders and other conventions governing petitions, within 12 months of the adoption of this order.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to begin debate on my private member's Motion No. 428, a first critical step in bringing electronic petitioning to the House of Commons.

I would like to start with two very positive quotes from two important and outstanding Canadians who directly support my motion. The first may surprise my colleagues on the other side of the House. It is from former Reform party leader, Preston Manning, who, when asked to support my motion, agreed enthusiastically and provided the following quote. He said:

To be able to petition one's elected representatives, and to have such petitions addressed, is one of the oldest and most basic of democratic rights. Affirming and re-establishing this right in the 21st century through electronic petitioning is an idea well worth pursuing.

These are some words of wisdom from one of our leading democratic reformers who has pushed for democratic reform in our country for a very long time.

I would like to move to a second supporter of the motion. He is our former leader, NDP giant Ed Broadbent. He said:

Bringing electronic petitioning to the House of Commons is a 21st Century idea and one I fully endorse. Empowering Canadians to come together and help set the Parliamentary agenda will breathe fresh air into our democracy.

For Canadians who are watching at home and have been following this debate, and I have had much support on this, these two quotes really outline how Canada needs to change. Canadians, especially at this time, when we are so focused on perhaps changing the institutions here in Parliament, are thinking that we need not only giant changes here but also small ones. Perhaps the small ones are easier to accomplish, especially when we have cross-partisan support.

These quotes from these two prominent Canadians show that there is a real hunger out there for democratic reform. I hope I can persuade my colleagues on the other side of the House to support my motion.

We have done quite a lot of work on the e-petitioning motion. Recent polling by Angus Reid, who we commissioned on this, shows that a full 80% of Canadians support e-petitioning. When one thinks of the diversity of opinions in this country, that is a pretty astounding number that support moving from a paper petition process to e-petitioning. It needs to be recognized.

I have a unique chance here today to have a second first hour of debate on the motion due to the government's decision to prorogue earlier this year. I will take this opportunity to address some of the criticisms of my motion brought forward by the government side of the House in the original first hour of debate, held in June.

For those who were not present for the first hour of debate, I will start with a brief overview of my motion on e-petitioning and what I aim to accomplish with the motion. I would also refer people who are interested in this to my website, which has many more details and outlines support from many more prominent Canadians.

Motion No. 428 instructs the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs, PROC, to undertake a study of the petitioning process and to develop recommendations for how we might improve the process with electronic petitions.

Currently, Canadians can only circulate, collect signatures on, and submit paper-based petitions. It is a popular thing in my riding to petition government by having an officially sanctioned petition signed and submitted by the member of Parliament to the House of Commons. In fact, it is a practice that stretches back centuries. In our current system, if citizens collect 25 names and find an MP to represent their written petitions to Parliament, the government has to respond in writing to the petitioner within 45 days. This is a common practice in the British parliamentary system and in many other systems around the world.

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However, as we know, many civil society groups put online petitions on their websites and collect hundreds and even thousands of signatures from Canadians. It is much easier for people to access the system, considering the geographic scope of our country. It allows people in Newfoundland to sign petitions that are initiated in British Columbia and vice versa. These online petitions are currently unofficial. Even though there are thousands of signatures on these petitions, they cannot be submitted to the House of Commons. The cries of those who are asking for change go unanswered under the current system.

● (1110)

My motion calls on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to report back to the House with recommendations as to how we could enhance our current petitioning system and bring it into the 21st century by allowing citizens to post and sign certified petitions online. It sounds like a simple endeavour. It is one that is used in many countries and even in jurisdictions within our own country, such as Quebec and the Northwest Territories.

This is a first critical step in moving toward online petitions. I have not put forward a private member's bill that would force us to vote on whether we want e-petitioning. In fact, what I am doing is a reasonable first step, which is asking PROC to look at this and come back within 12 months to tell us what we should do to implement electronic petitioning. It has had broad support on both sides of the House and through history in Parliament.

This study would allow us to hear not only from civil society groups and privacy experts but from those familiar with other jurisdictions that use e-petitions so that we can establish best practices for implementing an e-petition system that is fair, efficient, and responsive.

In addition to calling for a comprehensive study, my motion goes further. It suggests that we increase the impact of petitions by maintaining the current paper-based petitions, which are good for local issues, and then move to electronic petitions, which would allow many more Canadians to get involved and would lower the threshold for participation.

The motion proposes that petitioning should trigger a short debate in the House, similar to a take-note debate, if these petitions receive a certain number of signatures—50,000 or 100,000 signatures are used in other jurisdictions—and are sponsored by no fewer than five MPs. That would allow for an issue seen by people as important and worth debating to make it into the House. There would be no votes. There would be an hour of debate to raise the profile of the issue and to bring it out in public.

Not only would citizens be able to post and sign official petitions online but their views and concerns would be debated at the highest level by their elected representatives. That is what we are here to do. We are here to debate, talk about, and deliberate upon important issues in society. Sometimes this House does not often do that. This e-petitioning idea would give citizens more direct access to their governments. That is one of the main reasons I am bringing it forward.

As I mentioned in my first speech on this topic, I have broad support for this motion from my colleagues on this side of the

House, those at the end of this side of the House, independents, and even some members on that side of the House, who jointly seconded my motion. I thank them for that, especially the members for Saskatoon—Humboldt and Edmonton—St. Albert.

In addition to the support of Mr. Manning and Mr. Broadbent, the following have said that they fully endorse my motion for supplementing our e-petitioning process. Another name that might surprise members is the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. It is on board with this as are Samara, Leadnow, and OpenMedia, which are leading social media and online-based groups. It may not surprise members that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is on board with it, as is Egale. Hundreds of Canadians have signed a paper-based petition supporting this motion.

There is a lot of support for this and no reason it should not go forward. It is not a bill that prescribes what an e-petitioning system would look like. It is a motion for a study on what e-petitioning would look like. It would have to be reported back to the House in 12 months, before the next election.

I will now move to objections from previous debates. I feel lucky to have been able to hear what my opponents' objections were to this and to be able to address them in this short speech.

The concerns relate to first, costs. Second was experiences in other countries. Members on the other side of the House were interested in that. Third was a concern about frivolous issues being debated in the House. Fourth was the technical matter of the exact wording of the motion.

● (1115)

Let us turn to cost concerns, and we have really done our homework on this. We have talked with top political scientists around the country who helped us design the motion, and in fact we have made great use of the Library of Parliament. Library officials have told us the costs in various jurisdictions, including Quebec and the Northwest Territories, are minimal and mostly rely on existing resources to get the job done.

That many jurisdictions outside of Canada use e-petitioning, such as the U.S. and Britain, shows that this is a reasonable endeavour, and in some cases it lowers costs, because we are going from petitioning by paper to using electronic means.

I am happy to submit any of the costing information to the committee if it is interested, and of course, if we could save money, that would be a great step forward.

Speaking of experience in other countries, there was some concern raised on the other side that other countries have looked at this and not gone ahead with the idea. In fact, after these objections were heard, we went back to the Library of Parliament and asked officials to examine a wide range of democratic countries to see if any jurisdiction had ever terminated a system after putting it in place. The Library of Parliament reported back that no jurisdiction has ever put e-petitioning in place and then taken it out.

The British House of Commons has recently reviewed its petitioning system. It is much like what I have designed here. In fact a lot of the wording has been lifted straight from the British House of Commons system. A committee reported back:

The system introduced by the Government has proved very popular and has already provided the subjects for a number of lively and illuminating debates.

That is hardly a government report that says it wants to get rid of this.

In terms of frivolous issues, the concern is that, with 50,000 or 100,000 signatures, we would have frivolous issues directly debated here in the House. I remind the other side that it is not voted on, just debated. That is why I have put the clause in, the suggestion to the committee that it look at having five MPs sign on to any petition that was received with a certain threshold of signatures. This would be an effective check against any frivolous matters. I doubt any of my hon. colleagues in the House would attach their names to silly ideas that would waste the House's time, and even if one would, five certainly would not. I think that is an effective check.

The last question regarding the motion is on the wording of the motion, which some on the other side of the House said perhaps is a little too prescriptive. Recently we have had motions raised in the House, voted upon and passed unanimously that are much prescriptive than this. The motion is asking for PROC to conduct a study and then report back within 12 months. If we cannot be any more prescriptive than that, I doubt we would get anything done here at all.

I do not think the objections raised by the other side of the House should at all be a death knell for the motion. I would think they are so scant that it would encourage members on the other side of the House to support the motion and come forward.

What do we have to lose? We have a system that a lot of people are saying is in crisis. We cannot open a newspaper or turn on a TV without hearing about the current problems in the Senate and a hankering for reform. Here we are in a democratic age and also an electronic age where people are using smart phones and tablets and are so hooked in worldwide and together, which is a good thing, bringing Canadians together, but we have not kept up with that here in the House of Commons.

When I go to high schools to talk about the motion, they cannot believe we still use paper-based petitions. They ask how we have not kept up, especially when they are so prominently featured in the United States and Britain? We really have to get with the times and move.

I close with a quote from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, which perhaps may not always be an NDP ally on a lot of issues, but is very supportive here:

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The Canadian Taxpayers Federation applauds this worthy initiative...to kick-start Parliament on accepting electronic signatures on petitions. When taxpayers get the opportunity to go online and sign an official petition to Parliament, they'll be able to get the attention of Ottawa politicians in a hurry. We also support...[the] suggestion that 50,000 Canadians signing a petition and 5 MPs should be able to force a debate in Parliament. This would help restore...grassroots democracy and accountability on Parliament Hill.

I will leave the House with that quote, and I look forward to questions from the other side and debate in the House on this issue.

● (1120)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is something that is really necessary as technology has enabled Canadians from across the land to participate directly by getting engaged through the Internet. It is only a question of time before we actually acknowledge it.

I, for one, have used petitions with my constituents. People respond quite well and favourably to petitions. They feel as if they are being consulted and asked for their participation and opinions.

I wonder if the member might want to share some of his thoughts about the important role petitions play in enabling our constituents to express their opinions on the issue at hand? In this case, the issue at hand is the petition.

I have used petitions dealing with, for example, retirement age, crime and safety in our community and a wide variety of different issues that I think are important to my constituents. They respond by signing those petitions. This is just another extension of the ability of members of Parliament in working with their constituents in gathering support and getting a better sense of what they feel are important issues at the grassroots level.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I know that a number of people who are not within the NDP, members of other parties, have said they support this because they actively use petitions within their constituencies, and this would make things a lot easier. I thank the hon. member for his support and I look forward to his support during the vote that will be coming up later this year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to support the motion by my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas.

This kind of electronic petitioning system has already been set up in Quebec and is running very well. Indeed, the results are very clear because electronic petitioning encourages public involvement. Like my colleague, I support the modernization of our democratic system. I know he is prepared to work with all parties in the House.

Could he comment on the support he has also received from groups across Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her support. In fact, if anyone really wants to see her support, they should go to our website, www.betterpetitions.ca, where they can see a video from my colleague, explaining in French how great this motion is.

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I would like to say that there is growing support in the House for this motion. Many colleagues have stopped me in the hallway and said they will support it. I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her support. I hope we can get this done.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague what types of organizations have also got involved with this. There are a lot of third-party organizations that have been pushing for reform in this matter. We have had communications in my office with a number of groups that support this initiative. I would like to hear from my colleague about a particular one.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I have read a number of quotes, from Ed Broadbent, Preston Manning and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I will read a quote from Leadnow, which is one of the most prominent online groups that support this. Leadnow said:

Leadnow helps hundreds of thousands of Canadians take action on the issues they care about online, through social media, and in their communities. We fully support bringing e-petitions to parliament as it will help strengthen the voices of Canadians and enable them to reach decision makers more effectively.

That sentiment is echoed through many civil society groups that have contacted me on this issue. They see it as a bright light in what seems to be a rather dark period for Parliament.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Burnaby—Douglas for bringing forth this important motion. I do hope it will get support from across the aisles. In my own riding, a group of constituents from Saanich—Gulf Islands raised the same issue with me. I have a petition in support of the idea.

I wonder if there is anything my hon. colleague would like us to do on this side of the House in getting people's support. It is really a non-partisan issue.

• (1125)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I think what is important here is for all of us to talk about this motion with colleagues and people we have made friendships with who are open to reasonable change in the House.

If this went all the way through and were introduced, it would not affect the business here in the House greatly, but it would impact the lives of Canadians.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand today and join this debate on Motion No. 428.

Initially, I would like to congratulate my colleague opposite for bringing forward this motion for debate in this place. I say that because I believe my hon. colleague has brought this forward in an honest attempt to try to have a motion that would increase citizens' engagement in the democratic process. Anyone who brings forward any initiative to try to increase all of our citizens' engagement in the democratic process and parliamentary system should be applauded. However, there are several flaws in this motion that I feel require me to oppose the motion, and I want to articulate that to members in this place this morning.

My primary and overriding concern with Motion No. 428 is that it would require the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to conduct a study with a predetermined outcome. In other words, Motion No. 428 would instruct the procedure and House affairs committee to conduct a study on how to implement a system of electronic petitioning rather than asking the committee to conduct a study as to whether or not a system of electronic petitioning would be beneficial. That is the primary reason why I must oppose the motion.

I believe that a study should be open-minded. A study conducted in any committee on any subject should be to determine the best result rather than predetermine a result. In this case, the member opposite is asking the committee to justify or rationalize the result that the member wants to see. I do not think that is how Parliament works. I do not think that is how Parliament should work.

I believe that if the member is truly convinced that e-petitioning is a proper system for Parliament to adopt, he should then introduce a bill rather than a motion. It could be debated and could be voted upon. A bill would then purport that he has a solution and he would ask Parliament to either ratify it or reject it. However, I do not think it is democratic at all, quite frankly, to suggest that a committee conduct a study with a predetermined outcome. It actually flies in the face of what the member is trying to accomplish.

On that basis alone I would have to oppose this motion, but I think there are some other practical issues that would also prevent me from endorsing and supporting the motion, some of which the member opposite tried to address in his presentation. Before I get into those practical problems, I will just say this.

If the member opposite had suggested that a study be conducted by the procedure and House affairs with an open-ended view as to whether or not e-petitions should be adopted by this place, it would certainly be a motion I could consider supporting. In fact, currently in the procedure and House affairs committee there is an ongoing study on change to the Standing Orders. I think it would take a simple request by the member opposite, in the form of a motion, to ask the procedure and House affairs committee to include a study on petitions in its current study of the Standing Orders. If that were the case, I could mostly certainly consider supporting that motion. Unfortunately, because the member wants to see a predetermined outcome, on principle I simply cannot support it.

I will now turn my attention to some of the practical problems that e-petitions could cause in Parliament.

The member opposite speaks to the systems of e-petitioning that have already been adopted in the United Kingdom and United States. He basically says that all of the charges of frivolous petitions coming forward are really nonsensical or, quite frankly, should be dismissed. I do not see it that way, and I will give a few specific examples of petitions that have reached the threshold of 100,000, which is required in the United Kingdom, and that have been debated in its Parliament.

• (1130)

One of the issues was on surgery in a local hospital. I am sure that is a very real concern to members in that particular area of the United Kingdom, but debating a local issue in the parliament of the United Kingdom, I do not think so. There have also been other debates that have occurred in Britain's parliament, one on a beer duty escalator. What in the world would parliamentarians be doing to enhance democracy for the entire country on a debate such as that?

Then there are petitions brought forward, hoping for debates, by special interest groups. In the United States there have been petitions that have reached the 100,000 signature mark on whether or not Texas should secede from the United States. Another petition that was initiated and received the mandatory 100,000 signature threshold was on whether or not to impeach President Obama. Are those the types of debates we truly think are worthwhile in anyone's parliament? I do not think so.

In today's day and age, it is quite easy for any well-organized special interest group to reach a 50,000 signature online petition threshold. If we adopted the motion, we would find that more and more we would see frivolous motions brought forward for debate. Whether or not it be inside the regular sitting hours or outside, I do not believe, given the context and the wording of the hon. member opposite's motion, that it would actually enhance democracy and parliamentary debate.

If the member opposite thought long and hard about revising his motion and the wording of his motion, it is something that many parliamentarians could support. However, under the current wording it is simply not something that I could support. Frankly, most parliamentarians, if they carefully read the motion and carefully thought about the arguments I am presenting and many others will present, will have a similar view.

As I mentioned earlier in my comments, if the member opposite truly believes that e-petitioning is a correct route, and he is certainly entitled to his opinion and I applaud him again for his motivation, bring it forward not as a motion but rather as a bill. We could still have the required debate in Parliament but it would at least stand to a vote. That is the proper way in which to bring this forward, rather than instructing the committee to conduct a study, but here is the result that I want.

That is not what studies are about. That is not how parliamentary committees engage in studies. Committees are not here to engage in a study for which the result is already known. That is an affront, frankly, to the intelligence and to the independence of all members, whether they be on that side or our side of the House. I cannot for the life me think why any parliamentarian would agree to engage in a study with the caveat that regardless of what the study finds, this is the result that must be recommended.

That is not democracy. That is not how Parliament works. That is not how Parliament should work. For those reasons, I must oppose Motion No. 428.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about what some people may call frivolous petitions, there was a petition some time ago that called for Stockwell Day to change his name to Doris, which was

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featured by Rick Mercer on CBC. It was one that we all signed in jest, of course, but I bring that up only by way of illustration. What I mean by that is that the hon. member outlined ways in which we can avoid frivolous petitions such as that.

I had prepared something earlier, but after hearing the member's speech, I am going to play off that for a bit because I thought there were many things in it that are misconceptions or perhaps playing with concepts. I do not understand why the Conservatives are against this, quite frankly. I suspect they will be against it now and introduce it themselves under a blue ribbon at a later date. I will put that on the record. When it happens I am sure my hon. colleague from the NDP and I will both laugh at this one because that is going to happen.

The member said that "a study to determine whether it is a good idea" should have been in the motion. Therefore, he wants a bill. Initially, I would have said yes, a bill would have been great, but as the hon. member points out, that is a little too prescriptive at this juncture. What he is doing is providing the committee instruction to study the idea of how petitions work.

The hon. member across the way says that is not a good idea because now the committee has been told what to do when we should be asking whether electronic petitions are really legitimate. I would argue they are legitimate. Otherwise, actual paper petitions would not be legitimate, if that is the case. It is not about the electronic element of it. What is at the core here is the petitioning of government to seek answers and debate. If the member does not think that we should be studying the idea of whether electronic petitions exist, then he is also calling into question actual petitions, several over the years, if not hundreds, which he has presented himself.

I find this a flimsy argument and I do not understand why the Conservatives would pursue this. I am hoping that other members across the way will support this so we can bring it to the appropriate committee. One of the things I genuinely like about this is the fact that many people get involved in the petition issue more and more over the years because they know that it is going to demand a response from the government. That is a true test of any democracy.

Recently, the Governor General was in Mongolia and one of the issues there was about how to develop a new democracy into something that is more mature, a democracy that is considered to be a prime example of the way democracies should be run around the globe. Certainly, models of democracies in the United Nations would prove that petitioning is a strong element of any democracy. I go back to that argument. If the Conservatives are going to say we should question the idea of electronic petitioning, then why do they not just say question petitioning itself?

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I guess what they are saying is the element of it being electronic, e-petitioning, is what they are against. Therefore, they do not like the element of online petitioning or engagement with the public, which is kind of bizarre, really, because recently they told fishermen in my riding that they can no longer visit an office to get licences, they have to go online. In addition to that, they can no longer call Service Canada to check on their files as they are waiting for employment insurance. They cannot visit the office and they cannot call the number. Here is the irony. The government recently mailed out information to constituents of mine and told them if they want information, they are to go online. The matchup here is a little peculiar, to say the least. If members think that changing Stockwell's name to Doris is strange, this whole argument falls apart much like that.

• (1135)

The member talked about frivolous petitions in the sense that a bill needs to have a sponsor. Who in the House would sponsor a bill that would change Stockwell's name to Doris? That is probably a bad question, because I feel that many hands will go up. Let me rephrase that. I am not suggesting this, but imagine if a petition came in here calling for a province to be kicked out of the Confederation of Canada. No one would put their name on it. That's why we talked about the individual sponsoring of a petition. It makes sense. The ultimate gauge will be the member of Parliament who signs something that people feel is frivolous. That MP will pay for it at the polls. That is normally how we do things here and that is the progression.

I would ask members of the House to think for just a moment. If they vote against the motion, they are really voting against the idea of petitioning. Government members may think that is not a bad idea. I will give the House another frivolous petition that may be introduced. How about eliminating public broadcasting, the CBC? I am sorry, that was already introduced in petitions. Many members of the government have already done that. Maybe that is a bad example.

Many members of the House have petitioned over the years. Many members of the government petitioned when they were in opposition. I had the benefit of being here in 2004 and 2006. Some of my colleagues have been here even longer. They can remember how petition after petition presented in the House by a Conservative opposition used to fill up almost an entire hour. I am not saying that was wrong by any means. They are still doing petitions, and that is great because it engages the public. Putting a petition in the House of Commons about a certain issue requires a response from the government. It is an answer to constituents and it is an answer to the country.

Before government members vote on the motion I would ask them to think about it for a moment. According to the argument put forward by the member from Saskatchewan, an argument which I am assuming is the official government line, he is essentially saying that the idea of petitioning is a bad one. If the member wants to give instructions to an appropriate committee about e-petitioning, why does he not just say petitioning? Let us see how that debate would go. Let us gauge how many members would want to eliminate that.

Finally, I commend my hon. colleague for doing this. We have done so much to push us forward into the new age. Just last session

we debated a bill that would push international crime surveillance into the electronic age. The Conservatives practically stood on their heads to say it was necessary, that it had to be done because the world is moving forward. Social media and all these elements of electronic communications are now evolving to the point where government is being done on an electronic basis. I already mentioned Service Canada and Fisheries and Oceans, and there are many other aspects of government.

The Conservatives pushed the idea of international surveillance of crime forward into the electronic age and they were proud to do so. However, when it comes to petitioning, they really do not like it so much because it may prove to be frivolous. Whether the government feels it is frivolous or not, a debate on petitions that are sponsored by the appropriate level of MP is a fantastic idea. It would be a way to engage the public in a way we have not before. Really, it would be an extension of what we are already doing. Why the hesitation?

I would like to thank the sponsor of the motion. I urge all members to vote for the motion because it is time for us to catch up with the rest of the country.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is my first speech since we returned from an extended summer break. I would like to acknowledge my colleagues and welcome them.

I would like to start by congratulating my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas for his work on this motion and on electronic petitioning, as well as his overall efforts to represent his constituents. I know this is really important to him. I am very proud to have him as a colleague, since I see how hard he works. I hope he can achieve his dreams of modernizing Parliament.

The motion before us is an important step to bring Canadians closer to the political process, and I think that is why he has focused on it. It really is a first; however, it is still very basic. Unfortunately, we, in the House, in our work, increasingly see citizens and young people lose interest in politics. They feel that the political reality is too remote and makes no impact on their lives and that they have no influence on policy and on us, their members of Parliament.

We need to change that perception by reminding Canadians that they are always the focus of our concerns here in the House of Commons. We also need to provide them with more tools to give them greater influence in the House. We need tools that create more interaction between Canadians and politicians.

This motion will help improve Canadian democracy and the vitality of our participatory institutions. Our petition system is, quite frankly, a dinosaur. Innovations in information technology have made the paper-only petition process obsolete. We need a tool from this century—or even from the last century, since we are that far behind—so that Canadians can communicate easily with their elected representatives.

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My hon. colleague's motion will allow us to work in that direction in a professional, thoughtful manner, because it calls on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to make recommendations to establish an electronic petitioning system that would allow Canadians to sign petitions electronically.

This is very simple: we want Canadians to be able to sign a petition that the House will receive via the Internet. The particulars of this request are to be debated by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which was already mentioned earlier.

I want to be very clear. If this motion passes, the House would be sending a clear message that we want to modernize how we do things in Parliament in order to include Canadians more. We would be calling on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to carry out this modernization, but most of all, we would be recognizing the importance of doing so. I do not know what else to say about the speech given by one of my colleagues, who said that we would be skipping some steps. The House needs to recognize the need to modernize. That is the right decision. We need to move forward.

This is a very clear request to refer the matter to a very competent body that could really introduce these measures in an appropriate manner, both legally and procedurally.

My colleague has also made some proposals that could be incorporated, including the possibility of having a debate in the House of Commons outside of regular sitting hours once a certain number of signatures has been collected. He also suggested that a petition be sponsored by five members and be tabled in the House. I like those suggestions.

The fact that we would have to debate the subject of a petition signed by a significant number of Canadians is not even the most important thing here. When that many Canadians sign a petition, they need to know that the issue has been acknowledged and studied by the House and that proposals are being heard and truly taken into consideration by the political parties. We owe them that.

• (1145)

The majority of Canadians would be surprised to know that this is not already something we do when enough people sign a petition. In fact, when a petition is presented, the minister responds and it ends there. Canadians would like to have more influence over what is discussed in the House

Requiring a petition to also have the support of a certain number of members is another effective measure against abuses.

While I support these proposals, I would like to remind members opposite—and other members who are not sure they will support this motion—that these are suggestions that the committee should evaluate. Giving the committee the authority to establish the best way forward for Parliament and for our country is a very good idea.

Unfortunately, certain Conservative members too often oppose excellent bills because they are unhappy with small details. They sometimes use that to try and divide the House. I really see this as an opportunity to engage in non-partisan work.

In this case, I am very optimistic that we will embrace the necessary changes proposed by this motion. I hope it will be adopted.

All Canadians will benefit from this change because it is clear that the Internet is becoming more prevalent in our lives. However, it is mostly young people who will be affected by this motion because, as we all know, they communicate mainly via the Internet and social media. That is also the main way they participate in the democratic process. Young people are at ease with using new technologies and the Internet in every aspect of their lives. This really is a way to bring home the political process for them.

It is something I see in my everyday life and when I visit schools, universities or the homes of young people in my riding and across the country. For me and these young people, it is completely incomprehensible that the House of Commons does not recognize online petitions. Apparently, technology is everywhere but in the House of Commons.

It is possible to make purchases and fill out a variety of official forms online. My colleague from the Liberal Party mentioned that many government services are available only online these days. If we want to be sure that people are included, the House must accept both paper and electronic petitions.

We are even trying to put together a pilot project to make House standing committees paperless. This is something that we could also do in the House and not just in committee.

Since I have been in office, I have met with young people across the country and in all of the Atlantic provinces. I have led discussions on youth involvement in politics. Young people were really shocked to learn that only paper petitions could be circulated and submitted to their federal MPs. They were really surprised. It made them feel even farther removed from the process and their MP. That is very unfortunate.

I got the same reaction when I visited universities in western Canada, Ontario and other areas. Young people were really surprised to learn that we are so behind the times when it comes to technology. Young people across the country feel the same way about this situation.

My riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel is located in Quebec. This province uses electronic petitions. I went to speak in youth centres. The young people there are not necessarily old enough to vote yet but I want them to start thinking about getting involved in politics and I want them to be heard. The young people were completely shocked to learn that they had to circulate paper copies of petitions, particularly when the province accepts electronic petitions.

• (1150)

In closing, I would like to say that I sincerely believe that we must vote in favour of this motion in order to make the voices of all Canadians heard in the House, to speak on their behalf and to find out their concerns.

Private Members' Business

● (1155)

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Motion No. 428, sponsored by the member for Burnaby—Douglas, which would instruct the procedure and House affairs committee to recommend changes to the Standing Orders to establish an electronic petitioning system.

The motion would prescribe changes to our convention governing petitions so as to establish an electric petition system. It would also require the committee to consider, among other things, the possibility of a debate in the House outside of sitting hours when a threshold of signatures was reached.

I heard my friend from the Liberal Party, probably the finest weatherman in the House, give all of his reasons why we should support the motion. When I listened to some of his comments with respect to frivolous petitions that he could picture, it gave that whole background on why electronic petitions may or may not be all that effective when it came to changing people's names or seceding parts of the country by electronic petition unless we had some other means to deal with these things. I would suggest that the House would be terribly tied up in dealing with those.

I will begin by noting the unusual nature of the motion, namely, that it would seek to predetermine the study of the procedure and House affairs committee.

The motion would prescribe a resolution to a study the committee had not conducted. Rather than asking the procedure and House affairs committee to undertake an examination of our petition system, the motion would dictate to the committee that it must recommend changes to the Standing Orders to implement an electronic petition system. In other words, the motion would require that the committee report lead to the implementation of an electronic petition system for the House.

I find that an affront to the members of the committee and, more fundamental, to the principle that committees are masters of their own affairs. Instead, the committee should have the ability to review the effectiveness of our petition system under review of the Standing Orders and decide on its on terms whether changes are needed.

While the House provides the standing committees with the powers to examine and enquire into all such matters as may be referred to them, our standing committees have broad powers to undertake studies relating to their mandates.

The procedure and House affairs committee has already undertaken a study on the Standing Orders. It would seem reasonable that a proposal to modernize the petition system could be studied within that context. Should the committee study this issue as part of the Standing Order study, it would certainly want to develop recommendations based upon witness testimony and other research.

The member for Burnaby—Douglas has an academic background. Prior to being elected, he was a professor at the Simon Fraser University. I find it strange that the member is trying to undermine the principle of evidence-based research by reading the text of the motion:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to recommend changes to the Standing Orders... to establish an electronic petitioning system....

As opposed to evidence-based decision-making, the member has proposed decision-based evidence-making.

While I am willing to support a study to investigate initiatives to modernize our petitioning system as part of the procedure and House affairs committee study on the Standing Orders, I will not support the motion. If the committee chooses to conduct this review, as a member of the committee, I would hope we would have the ability to hold meetings, hear from witnesses and come up with recommendations, as opposed to having the outcome dictated by the motion.

I will now turn to the important democratic role that petitions play in the House of Commons.

This is where more of my concerns with this motion rest. The presenting of petitions by members of Parliament is a key feature in the democratic representation of the views of constituents in this House. Not only are petitions a key feature of democratic representation, but they are also a long-standing feature of the House.

The House has also provided for the presentation of petitions by members. At the time of Confederation, the rule allowed members to make a statement identifying from whom the petition came, the number of signatures attached to it, and the material allegations it contained.

While the rules governing petitions have changed, namely by providing a rubric in routine proceedings specifically for this purpose, the presentation of petitions in the House has largely stayed intact. One could assume that the system has worked and continues to work, in that petitions create a clear link between constituents and the members who represent them.

The motion before us seeks to alter that relationship. We should all tread very carefully with changes to our rules that could seek to undermine the connection between members and their constituents.

Unfortunately, despite this caution, we are asked by this motion to simply accept its terms without meetings. I would not support that.

Our current rules allow members to table over 2,000 petitions each year on a wide range of issues of concern to Canadians from coast to coast. Most jurisdictions share the same approach we have with respect to petitions. The jury is still out on the long-term effect of electronic petitions; however, the experiences of the United Kingdom and the United States indicates that electronic petitions can have very negative consequences for citizen engagement and parliamentary operations and can empower special interest groups to advance their issues.

That is why I am going to oppose Motion No. 428, and I call on all members to do likewise.

● (1200)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before resuming debate, I must inform the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville that she has just two minutes for the first part of her speech.

The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas.

As the digital issues critic, I think it is extremely important to modernize our democracy and for the House of Commons to reflect 21st-century realities and the digital age. That is exactly what this motion does.

In this digital age it is much easier for people to communicate with their MP. It is much easier for them to access information on important issues and share that information with others. Petitions are an important part of that communication and awareness-raising by people on the Internet.

It is therefore essential that the House recognize electronic petitions. Whether we like it or not, our society communicates using the Internet and social networks. Without those tools, the House will not reflect life in the 21st century and the digital age.

As the digital issues critic, I often hear people in the community asking why electronic petitions are not accepted. I hear this from people in my riding, but also from people I meet when I am travelling. This is what people want, and according to my colleague's study, 80% of Canadians support this motion.

I would also like to say that having this debate after receiving a petition with 50,000 signatures, supported by five MPs, is also very important. People are increasingly disenchanted with politics. They want their voices to be heard and their MPs—who were elected to represent them—to debate the issues that matter to them.

This debate on electronic petitioning is essential to the House, because it will help our institution better represent what people want.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville will have eight minutes left when the House resumes debate on this motion.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT NO. 2

The House resumed from October 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, A second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for that mouthful of an introduction this morning. It is still a title I am trying to get used to. It is a little rough around the edges.

It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak to this particular piece of legislation this morning because of its importance to our country.

Government Orders

It is time for us to take a look at the last five years of our country's economy. If we rewind to this time in 2008, there was a lot of angst in the global community around the global finance system, economic growth, and the prospect of countries not being able to pay some of their debts. It was a time of great uncertainty. We saw a lot of uncertainty with our major trading partner, the United States.

I was not in the House at that time, but working out in the field, we looked at the situation as professionals and wondered if a deal was going to go through. What would it mean for our staff? Were we going to be able to achieve our targets? Were we going to be able to do what our business wanted to do? Those were questions many Canadians were asking. They were wondering if they would have a job at the end of that time.

When I look at what our government has accomplished since then through our successive economic action plans, including the implementation act that we are talking about today, it is amazing where Canada is at. Our job creation record of one million net new jobs since the time when we marked the beginning of the economic recovery in 2009 puts our country at the top among the G7 countries. We certainly have an excellent track record among organizations such as the International Monetary Fund. I believe they have called our country one of the best places to do business. Those are facts that show that Canada is really coming into its own in terms of being an economic powerhouse on the world stage.

Certainly the execution of an agreement in principle around the Canada-European trade agreement is very positive for Canada's long-term economic growth prospects. I was speaking with an importer and a distributor in Winnipeg on Friday; they are actually looking at increasing the number of their retail stores in Canada because they see that this trade agreement positions them so well to be able to bring in new products.

It is not just about economic growth, it is about the impact on consumers, and overall it is our government's economic plans that have really positioned Canada to be talking about where we go next. How do we grow above and beyond the success that we have seen? That is what this particular bill seeks to do: it seeks to accelerate Canada's economic growth prospects.

Some of the items that I think are very positive and that I hope my colleagues will support include extending and expanding the hiring credit for small businesses, which we believe will benefit an estimated 560,000 employers; increasing and indexing the lifetime capital gains exemption to make investing in small business more rewarding; and expanding the accelerated capital cost allowance to further encourage investments in clean energy generation. I talked to a bunch of stakeholders in Calgary about a month and a half ago about this particular piece of information, and they were very excited about it. Another positive item is freezing employment insurance premium rates for three years, leaving \$660 million in the pockets of job creators and workers in 2014 alone.

Government Orders

If I have some time toward the end of my speech, I would like to continue going through some of the other provisions in this act that will allow Canada's economy to continue to grow and prosper; however, at this moment I would like to talk about my department and how we are trying to grow Canada's economy, specifically in the west.

As the House knows, there are regional development agencies in each part of the country. I represent western economic diversification. It has a very dynamic group of staff and individuals who are committed to seeing Canada's western economy, which is certainly a powerhouse for the rest of the country, grow, diversify, and prosper in new ways. One of the key ways we can do that is through getting innovation to market and encouraging an innovative ecosystem and culture.

I have worked in the innovative sector, research administration, and intellectual property management in western Canada for over ten years, so it has been a great pleasure to be part of this portfolio. One of the things that I heard from my stakeholder consultations over the summer was that oftentimes, when small and medium-sized enterprises try to take a product or new process to market, there is actually a capital gap in the product development life cycle.

● (1205)

For example, for people running a small company that has a new device or tool that they think is going to be able to expand their business, create new jobs, and create opportunities for highly qualified personnel, taking that from concept to actually scaling it up, testing it, and looking at the ways that it can be manufactured is the particular piece of work that oftentimes the people running small and medium-sized enterprises cannot find funding for in terms of venture capital or traditional lenders, and often, although we have an excellent track record in funding basic research through our tri-councils, it is that particular gap in the product development life cycle that we sometimes see entrepreneurs struggle with.

As a result, on Friday, again in direct alignment with our government's economic action plan priorities and as part of our economic action plan, I announced the western innovation initiative, or WINN for short. This is something I am very excited about for western Canadian entrepreneurs, because it will actually fill that gap to a certain extent.

One of the key things about this particular program is that it is geared toward small and medium-sized enterprises, and we are certainly hoping to see many people apply for it when the new round of funding opens up on November 8. We hope to see several new products advance to market from this initiative.

Some of the details of the program, as outlined on WED's website, include being eligible to apply for up to \$3.5 million in a repayable contribution. We are looking at projects that we hope can get to market within three years and will therefore be able to pay back this loan so that future generations of entrepreneurs can also benefit from the same fund while respecting taxpayers' dollars.

While it is a small component, it speaks to the larger economic agenda that this government has consistently had, which is to grow Canada's economy and seek growth and prosperity for all Canadians. If entrepreneurs listening out there today in western Canada fall

under those criteria of being a small or medium-sized enterprise that has been in operation for a year or more and has fewer than 500 employees and may be facing that funding gap, I hope they will apply in this first round and be considered for this new pool of funding. It is a great thing.

Some of the other components of economic action plan 2013 include closing tax loopholes and combatting tax evasions. Some of the important components of this part of the legislation include introducing new monetary penalties and criminal offences to deter the use, possession, sale, and development of electronic suppression of sales software designed to falsify records for the purpose of tax evasion; closing tax loopholes related to character conversion transactions, synthetic dispositions, leveraged life insurance arrangements, and other schemes, to ensure that everyone pays their fair share; and extending in certain circumstances the period during which the Canada Revenue Agency can reassess a taxpayer who fails to report income from foreign property. Some of these components sound quite technical, but they are actually positive in that we would make the tax system more robust and ensure that people who are contributing in Canada's very prosperous economy are paying their fair share, which we think is very positive.

There are some other very positive components, including measures for post-secondary students. This act would provide for the modernization of the Canada student loans program by moving to electronic service delivery. That is a really positive thing. I remember having to go and stand in those lines, and this change would be really great for some of our post-secondary students.

I certainly hope that my colleagues opposite will have a look through this act and realize that there are provisions in it that would be really good for this country and for the long-term economic health of Canada. We can all rise today and be proud of where our country is in terms of economic growth and in terms of our prospects for being a world leader internationally, not just now but for decades to come. I certainly hope that colleagues will support this bill, because many good common-sense measures that would support the average Canadian are included in it.

● (1210)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we start into questions and comments, I would just say that we have only five minutes in this period, so members who go on for more than about a minute, either in their question or in response, will be cut off in order to give more time for other hon. members to participate.

The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the government has also cut back services. It has closed my immigration office to the public. It has closed the consular services in Detroit. It is, unbelievably, closing our veteran's office. It has also removed our postal services to London.

Government Orders

I would like to ask the hon. member a question with regard to the assertion that the government has created a million jobs. If it has created a million jobs, could she tell me in what sectors? What percentage is in the auto sector, the agriculture sector or the health science fields? The Conservatives talk about a million jobs created. In what sectors have they been created and what are the percentages?

• (1215)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, in terms of sectors across the economy, my colleague, I believe, mentioned the manufacturing sector. I would ask him to check his leader's economic thought policy around the manufacturing sector when he talked about Dutch disease. We have a booming energy sector in the west that will create hundreds of thousands of jobs in the next 25 years, I would hope, across various sectors in the Canadian economy. He said that the manufacturing sector shrunk because of the energy sector, which has been proven false by, I believe, Statistics Canada and many other think tank groups. The New Democrats need to get their economic policy in line before they start looking at ours.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to raise an issue about which I believe many Canadians are concerned. Time and time again we hear it is a very important issue. Many, including myself, would say it is in the top three and possibly the number one issue, and that is health care.

The government has brought in budget after budget, but it tends to want to ignore the importance of the issue of renewing the health care accord. The accord is going to expire in 2014. The reason we have the funding we have today is because of the health care agreement. That is what has allowed us to get that record level of health care services, dollars and resources to our provinces so Canadians can feel comfortable in knowing they have a health care system from coast to coast to coast. When is the government going to deliver on a renewed health care accord?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, frankly, I am shocked that my colleague brought this up, given that it was his party that slashed and burned funding to the provinces during its tenure in government.

Our government's philosophy to managing the finances of our country is pragmatic and it is the same as any Canadian family would undertake. When a Canadian family looks at its chequebook, it says that if it needs to balance, there are two ways to do that, either by bringing in more revenue or spending less. Any business that asks this questions knows that those two components can be balanced. It can deliver good, effective service, but also ensure that it happens in a context that is respectful of the taxpayer dollars.

I am just shocked that my colleague would bring this up, given the Liberals' record on health care transfers to the provinces.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the members opposite talk about is spending and never address the issue of how our country and our economy can create the wealth for which we can have all these great social services that our government is funding.

Could the minister tell us why it is important to have a climate for economic growth and what our budget is doing to ensure that economic growth continues?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hard-working colleague on his moose, which his constituents will appreciate.

Our government has consistently stated that one of our key goals is to get back to balance. As our Minister of Finance has stated, we are well on track to do that. If we contrast that with the economic policy of my colleagues opposite, their shadow budget did not even include numbers. The shocker is that numbers are important when it comes to a budget. Then my colleague opposite from the third party, his only policy to date has basically been up in smoke.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating my hon. colleague, whom I also like to count as friend, for her promotion. She is now within Privy Council.

I would be happy to support some of the parts of Bill C-4, such as the software that allows for fraud at point of sale. We should deal with that. However, would she not agree with me that it makes it very difficult for members of the opposition, who read such 300-plus page bills carefully, to vote for them when they are omnibus in nature and include many portions that I cannot possibly support, such as weakening the Canada Labour Code?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her congratulations. I look forward to working with her.

Every once in a while, as parliamentarians, we have to sit back and look where we are in our country. Certainly, we have passed a great deal of legislation in the House. However, when we look at some of our international partners and some of the legislative gridlock they face, we see what that means for their businesses. Our government sees clear action, tangible results and investment for business growth. This is a very positive thing, as is this legislation, and I certainly hope she will support it.

• (1220)

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is a pleasure, but I want to stand and speak to the budget. After travelling throughout Random—Burin—St. George's for an extended season, thanks to the Prime Minister who chose to prorogue the House of Commons so we were not back here to deal with some of the issues raised in the budget, I learned from my constituents a lot of the issues they were dealing with and why they were having those problems. A lot of it points to the lack of leadership, I am told, by the Conservative government.

The reality is that my constituents continue to tell me that unless the leadership is there on issues, policies and programs that are controlled or maintained by the federal government and unless the federal government is more cognizant of issues of people who particularly live in rural communities, they will never get out of the bind in which they find themselves. When I met with them, as I do every weekend, but particularly over the extended period this summer, they asked me to bring forward their concerns to see if it were possible for the government to get its head out of the sand, start listening to Canadians from coast to coast to coast and recognize that some people were having difficult times and finding it hard to make ends meet. They asked me to bring forward their concerns, hoping the government would listen and would take their concerns into account.

Government Orders

My constituents are certainly not at all impressed when they look at the budget bill that has so much in it that it is hard for parliamentarians to decipher it and take the time needed to go through it bill by bill. How can the government expect Canadians to do so, particularly those who live in rural communities, some of whom do not even have access to the Internet, some of whom have no way of finding out what is in the budget bill unless their members of Parliament convey and explain to them what it contains? At the same time, it is hard for members of Parliament to get the message across because there is so much in the budget.

Again, we see the Conservative government put forward a budget that does not take into account the concerns of Canadians, no matter where they live in our country. The budget implementation act and surrounding debate is further evidence that the government just does not get it. Rather than congratulating itself on mediocrity, the government should focus its efforts on ensuring families in Random—Burin—St. George's and the rest of Canada do not continue to struggle.

The fact that Canada's fiscal situation is better than that of Spain or Greece does not change the reality for those in my riding who are without jobs through no fault of their own, or those with adult children who have moved back home because there are no employment opportunities for them or they are underemployed and cannot afford to live independently.

At events throughout my riding, constituents have told me they are tired of being ignored by the Conservative government. They expect better, and so they should. Bill C-4, sadly, is just more of the same omnibus legislation that Canadians from coast to coast to coast have come to expect, but not accept from Conservatives out of touch with the real needs of people who try desperately to make ends meet, but find themselves falling behind because of the measures being enacted by the Conservative government.

At a time when the Bank of Canada is cutting its growth and inflation estimates across the board and warning “the risk of exacerbating already elevated household imbalances”, the government introduces legislation and uses rhetoric showing it is completely ambivalent to the fact that Canada's economic growth is rapidly slowing. After 18 consecutive months cautioning investors that the bank would soon be raising the interest rate from 1%, the Bank of Canada has been forced to drop the rate hike talk altogether to try to stimulate investment or risk compounding the weak economic outlook caused by the Conservative government.

The Bank of Canada even pushed back its projected target for Canada's economy to return to full production six months later than it had recently forecast. In fact, the Bank of Canada now predicts the economy will return to full production at the same time Canadians will return to power the Liberal government in 2015.

• (1225)

At a crucial point in Canada's economic future, the Conservative government has once again failed to put forward a budget implementation act to grow the economy and help create jobs.

For years, the Liberals have called on the government to freeze its scheduled employment insurance premium hikes. Finally, the Conservatives are reversing their ill-timed tax hikes on Canadian

jobs, which would have made it more expensive for employers to hire those in need of work. While I am relieved the government has decided to heed the advice of the Liberals and freeze EI premiums for the next three years, after years of steadily increasing the costs workers and employers must pay into the program, freezing EI premiums for the next three years will not make up for the billions of dollars in increases the Conservatives forced on employees and employers to pay during this fragile economy.

If the Conservatives truly wanted to address the problems with employment insurance, which they created, they would have used Bill C-4 to reverse the punishing changes they made to the EI program last year. EI is still inaccessible to thousands of Canadians who need it, even though they paid into the program. Although this budget implementation act contains a number of provisions that were not in the initial budget document, such as many of the technical tax measures in part 1 of this act, it is telling the Conservatives to use Bill C-4 to take action to make EI more accessible to those who need the support.

Furthermore, the Conservative government has completely ignored the need to address the factors driving high unemployment and underemployment, as well as the need for improving skills training and education. The only time this budget addresses skills is when it changes the name of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development to the Department of Employment and Social Development. This is a sign that the government is no longer interested in skills training.

There are still too many jobs without skilled Canadians to fill them and trying to push programs on provinces and employers without consultation will simply not result in the skills training needed. Canadians need a government committed to helping create jobs for Canadians, because it is a partnership. We do not expect the government to create all the jobs. We expect it to make it possible and create an environment where jobs can be created. They also need a government whose priority is to ensure Canadians receive the training they need to fill existing vacant jobs.

Not surprisingly, as I alluded to previously, this omnibus budget implementation act contains many changes that have nothing to do with budget 2013. It is a sad state of affairs when the Minister of Finance cannot even answer questions on his own legislation, instead opting to refer questions to other ministers because the government has squeezed so many disparate bills into Bill C-4, including major public service labour changes and modifications to the appointment of Supreme Court judges.

Government Orders

While the Minister of Finance claims this is, “the mechanics of government”, the truth is it is easier for the Conservatives to restrict debate and avoid scrutiny if they lump dozens of bills together, which has unfortunately become the hallmark of the government. When legislation is combined in this way to avoid transparency, mistakes are bound to happen. For example, this bill would fix an error in the last budget where the government mistakingly included a disincentive to fishermen working non-fishing jobs in the off season by discarding fishing income for the calculation of EI benefits for those who worked 421 hours or more in a non-fishing job.

As many members of the House prepare to attend Remembrance Day events in their ridings, we cannot allow the government's continued attack on veterans to go without proper scrutiny. Bill C-4 would cut the number of members sitting on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board from 29 to 25. What is worse, we know that under the Conservatives, only slightly more than 50% of board positions are presently filled. This board is tasked to “provide veterans and other applicants with an independent avenue of appeal for disability decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada”. From time to time, far too many veterans know first-hand that Veterans Affairs Canada makes mistakes it has to review.

• (1230)

That will continue as long as the government refuses to acknowledge the fact that services are being cut to the most vulnerable in our country, and it does not matter what part of the country we live in, but particularly to those in our rural communities. While services and programs are being cut, Canadians are being made to suffer.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could provide some additional comment on the manner in which the government has brought budget bills, implementation bills, before the House, where it has introduced numerous pieces of legislation that should not be a part of the budget bill. Ultimately, I would argue, that the government is bringing in other legislation through the back door of a budget bill. This is the wrong way to bring in legislation, because it denies the opportunity to have a good, thorough debate on what should be individual pieces of legislation.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, that has been raised throughout my riding, particularly when I go to an event and people are asking me what is in the budget. I do not have the kind of time it would take to explain to them what is in this particular budget and still have time to spend talking about other issues.

The reality is that these omnibus budgets have become the hallmark of this particular government. It has to change, because no parliamentarian has time to review every aspect of the budget. When the Conservatives lump changes to labour and changes that deal with the appointment of Supreme Court judges into a budget bill, it raises questions about what exactly the government is about. However, people know what the government is about. It is about hiding so that we cannot possibly know the ins and outs of what is in the budget because it is so large.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great intent to the speech that my hon. colleague from Newfoundland just presented. She spent quite a bit of time talking about EI premiums. There is always a discussion among Canadians as to

whether it was actually \$57 billion or \$58 billion that the previous Liberal government took out of the EI fund when it was in power.

I wonder if she could clarify that number. Was it \$58 billion or \$57 billion? I am confused.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question and the bit of humour that he injected into it.

The reality is that for people who are on EI, who need to access the EI program, it is a program that they pay into as does the employer. It does not matter what government stripe is in power, this money is the money paid in by both parties, one who may need to avail themselves of it and the other who makes it possible for them to avail themselves of it. I do not care what political stripe is in power. We need to recognize the importance of this program. There are people who lose jobs through no fault of their own. They want to work. They need the support. It is not a handout, it is a hand up at a time when they need it. It is their money and their money alone.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the official opposition, New Democrats, are strong supporters of a well-funded and effective EI system that can deliver quickly the benefits that employees and employers have paid into. My friend opposite is quite right that the money that is paid into the EI system is money that has been deducted from employees' cheques and is paid for by employers. It is the money of employees and employers.

The hon. member just said that is the case, that this is the money of employees and employers. Why did the Liberal government, 10 years ago or so, take over \$50 billion of employees' and employers' money and transfer that into general revenue?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I can see that question is one that the official opposition wants to hang its hat on.

The reality is that it was done with approval at the time. Was it right? The Auditor General at the time said it was the right thing to do. Does it mean it should happen again? We never know what the circumstances will be, but when people need to avail themselves of the employment insurance program, they should be able to do it. However, under the Liberal government, I do not think people were not able to avail themselves of it.

Today, because of decisions by the Conservative government, people are having difficulty availing themselves of the EI program. The decisions the Conservatives are making are having devastating impacts with respect to certain components of the EI legislation.

• (1235)

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in support of Bill C-4.

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I will be focusing my comments on the proposed amendments within Bill C-4 that apply to the Public Service Labour Relations Act. This is in large part because of the misinformation and rhetoric that we hear from the opposition on the proposed amendments, which are of truly epic proportions.

Let me clear, the intent of these changes is to ensure that the public service is affordable, modern and high performing. I believe it is important to look at some of these proposed changes in greater detail in order to see what is actually being proposed.

It is true that Bill C-4 includes measures to modernize and streamline the collective bargaining process and the public service recourse system. I would like to take a moment to explain why these reforms are important for Canadians and for our public service. I will begin with the proposed amendment to extend the current four-month notice period up to 12 months. I am certain most would agree that providing more time would increase the odds that a new agreement could be reached prior to the expiry of an existing collective agreement.

Bill C-4 also proposes that the employer have the exclusive right to designate essential services. I would also like to speak to the importance of this amendment. Ultimately, the public service does not exist for the benefit of big public sector union bosses and their opposition political friends. The role of the public sector is to serve the taxpaying public, Canadians. By extension, a democratically elected government represents the interests of taxpayers and as such should have the right to identify what Canadians consider to be essential services.

This is an important point when one considers that an opposition member currently receiving money from unions is quoted as saying essentially that he could not be a bigger friend to them. I submit that particular member has all but conceded who he is looking out for, and it is certainly not the taxpayer. Likewise, the leader of the third party is also reported as receiving significant amounts of union money in speaking fees while sitting as a member of Parliament. Again, I point out that when it comes to the interest of taxpayers and public sector unions, only our government represents Canadians fairly and that is reflected in this piece of legislation.

Canadians know that it is the responsibility of government to maintain public safety and protect the interests of Canadians. It is part of what Canadians elect a government to do. For this reason, I submit it is entirely fair and reasonable that it is the democratically elected government on behalf of Canadians that should determine essential programs and services within the federal government.

I would also like to speak to the arbitration provision that exists within Bill C-4 for essential services employees. Arbitration would be the resolution mechanism in cases where a bargaining unit has 80% or more of the positions designated as essential or if both parties mutually consent to binding arbitration. Given that essential employees are not able to participate in strike activity, if no agreement could be reached, arbitration offers a meaningful dispute resolution solution while minimizing disruptions that could compromise the health and safety of Canadians.

Another proposed amendment I would like to highlight would require arbitration boards and public interest commissions to give

greater consideration to the government's recruitment needs and fiscal circumstances. These amendments would ensure that the value of all salaries, benefits and other compensation, not solely wages, is considered when determining fair compensation. It also includes provisions that the public interest commissions and arbitration boards set out reasons, rationales, for making awards and recommendations. I believe that most here in this place would agree that this is common sense. Canadian taxpayers deserve to know the reasons behind decisions dealing with large amounts of tax dollars and this proposal would make that happen.

● (1240)

I would also like to point out another amendment that requires separate agencies to seek approval from the President of the Treasury Board before consenting to binding arbitration. This is an important amendment for the benefit of Canadian taxpayers who expect public sector compensation to be fair and reasonable. For the protection of the taxpayers, it is imperative that the President of the Treasury Board have the ability to review any terms and conditions that could have a significant impact on public sector compensation. I believe that a democratically elected government should not be powerless when it comes to the spending of tax dollars on public sector wages and benefits, and that is one of the many reasons why I support the bill.

Another amendment is the elimination of the compensation analysis and research function of the Public Service Labour Relations Board. This service has been negated by the fact that the bargaining agents consistently do their own research. As such, this amendment proposes the elimination of a rarely used service that will result in savings to the taxpayer.

I would also like to share some of the proposals that I believe will be of benefit to the public service. I believe all members of the House will agree that employees expect and deserve to be treated fairly. When conflicts occur, it is important to all sides that a timely and effective process be in place to deal with issues of concern. Although many of our current recourse mechanisms meet these objectives, over the course of time a number of additional processes and procedures have arisen. This has resulted in a complex patchwork of systems that at times is legalistic, is often cumbersome and is costly.

Bill C-4 proposes an amendment designed to simplify this process. The amendment proposes that the allegations of employment-related discrimination should be addressed through the grievance process. This amendment eliminates the potential for duplicate proceedings and related expenses, which can further delay workplace dispute resolution. This is a benefit for all workers.

I would also like to be clear on another point. All third-party rights to issue remedies to the public servant who complains of alleged discrimination will remain intact. Public service employees, as citizens, would still be able to file a Canadian Human Rights Commission complaint on matters other than workplace disputes. Bill C-4 would also require bargaining agents and the employer to share the expenses of grievance adjudication, with the exception of grievances related to discrimination. Sharing these costs is a standard practice in virtually all workplaces in Canada. I would ask why the federal government would be any different.

Another point I would like to raise is that Bill C-4 would require employees to obtain bargaining agent support before filing a grievance, except for grievances related to discrimination. I believe this is an important consideration as the union is recognized as the exclusive bargaining agent for the employees in the bargaining unit and has both the expertise and experience in this regard.

Bill C-4 also proposes a revised staffing complaint process. Currently, to be appointed to a position within the public service a person must be found qualified. If a candidate is deemed unqualified for a position, that person could challenge the appointment of another candidate through a complaint, clearly creating a potentially adversarial process. Bill C-4 would amend this process so that a candidate could only challenge the determination of his or her own qualifications and not those of another candidate deemed qualified for the position. This creates a much fairer, more efficient and less adversarial process.

The final proposal I will raise today is the consolidation of the Public Service Labour Relations Board and the Public Service Staffing Tribunal into a public service labour relations and employment board. Clearly this proposal reduces the overlap and duplication of bureaucracy to help avoid a lengthier and more costly process.

• (1245)

While there has certainly been a significant amount of rhetoric and alarmist language on the proposed changes I have spoken about, it is clear that on closer inspection these amendments are certainly responsible and reasonable. Bill C-4 will help to ensure the public service is affordable, modern and high-performing in a manner that respects the taxpayer and our public service.

I encourage all members of this House to support this piece of legislation.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to speak today on economic action plan 2013 act No. 2.

I believe that the results on which our country is now coasting, economic results that are the toast of the world over, relate to an approach to government and an approach to business for which this Conservative government is becoming renowned. It goes back to what a mentor once taught me many years ago when I was running a business in a very competitive environment in Taiwan. The lesson I learned was “may the niche be with you”. That means asking whether we can focus on something that is our calling, something that will lead us to success.

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That is what I believe this government and this Minister of Finance have done, through more than seven successive, successful budgets. Again in this budget implementation bill, we see the same hallmarks of success.

Let us delve for a minute into what those successful results have meant for Canadians. What we have seen is the best economic results in the world. We have seen Canada's performance exceed that of all other G7 nations. We have seen over a million new jobs created since the recession began in July 2009. It is by far the best job creation record in the G7. Unemployment rates are below those of the United States; it is the first time in three decades that we have witnessed such an amazing, strong performance.

The International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have both said that Canada is likely to have the strongest growth in the years ahead. Our debt to GDP ratio is by far the best in the G7. In 2012 it was 34.6%. Germany was a distant second at 52%.

For the sixth straight year, the World Economic Forum has rated Canada as having the best banking system in the world. This would amaze the clients I dealt with in Asia when I practised law in that part of the world: Canada now has the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7. Canadians are facing the lowest tax burden in some 50 years.

Those are the hallmarks of success and the kinds of things we see implicit in this budget implementation bill. I say to people in government everywhere that if people could only follow the lead of this Conservative government's “may the niche be with you” focus on what is the priority for those it is governing, then we would see success everywhere.

Politics is renowned to be local, and I would like to just delve into some of the examples of these successful hallmarks as they have been manifested in the riding I have the honour to represent.

The first example is in the shipbuilding world. The hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services announced, this month, a contract to Seaspan to build 10 additional large non-combat ships for our coast guard, in the Vancouver shipyards. This is a contract worth \$3.3 billion. It is a blockbuster. It is going to create thousands of jobs, including many in the riding I represent.

That is just the beginning of the story. It is a story I would like to speak on for hours, not the few minutes that are allotted to me.

This Conservative government has seen a shipbuilding business, which was being written off as a sunset industry, become a sunrise industry in our great country. In addition to those thousands of high-paying jobs, we see economic development throughout the country. Industry analysts are saying that in total the national shipbuilding strategy is going to mean some 50,000 jobs across Canada and over \$2 billion in annual economic benefit over the next 30 years. It is some sunrise industry.

This is one great example of “may the niche be with you”, how a focus on economic development and job creation is putting Canadians in good stead as we compete to create a truly international centre of excellence for shipbuilding in Vancouver.

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•(1250)

A second example of how this government's laser-beam focus on the economy and jobs is creating success is in the pulp and paper world.

In the riding I represent, Howe Sound Pulp and Paper is one of the largest employers in one of the most important sectors in British Columbia. In 2010 a sizable amount of money was invested, not just in upgrading an important mill but in what was called the pulp and paper green transformation program, an excellent example of ensuring that the environment is the economy, a doctrine I am trying to cultivate both in the riding and throughout the country, a doctrine that suggests that our resources and our economy are not at odds with one another but instead are intertwined, something our Conservative government grasps and continues to endorse. We have seen this specific investment in the Sunshine Coast part of the riding I represent increase productivity in an environmentally friendly manner. "May the niche be with you". We see that again being demonstrated in the pulp and paper industry.

More and more we are seeing that, in the world of the arts, this is an important economic driver. We have seen continued support by this government for the arts, in past budgets and directly or indirectly through the encouragement of this budget implementation act.

People are thronging to the riding I represent to attend festivals just like the two for which we announced funding in the last month, the Sechelt Arts Festival and the Sechelt written arts festival. These are two examples where our government, through a wise use of taxpayers dollars, is seeing those dollars leveraged over and over again by people in the arts who are in and of themselves demonstrating an international prowess that makes us the toast of the world in the arts while also creating economic development and jobs.

Let me move from shipbuilding through the arts to fisheries, another area where our government is investing and showing that when "the niche is with you" we can succeed.

In the last budget we saw two great strides forward for fisheries, and these came as a result of legislators representing British Columbians and other Canadians, who said we need to reward the amazing efforts of our volunteers who are improving fisheries habitat around the country. This is not just for the fisheries. This is for jobs and growth.

The recreational fisheries conservation partnership program was created, a great program that is seeding super projects around the country. Two of those projects were funded in the riding I represent, projects that will enhance fisheries habitat, that will encourage volunteers and will lead directly and indirectly to jobs and economic growth. I am speaking of the Evans Creek rewatering project and the Tiampo coho restoration project submitted by the Squamish Watershed Society. Kudos to the Sea to Sky Fisheries Roundtable and Pacific Salmon Foundation, which collaborated to make those a success. In the last budget, we saw enhanced support for the Pacific Salmon Foundation, one of the best volunteer organizations in the country.

These are all examples of how the Government of Canada has continued to support and build up successful industries, not only in

British Columbia but throughout Canada. The niche is with this Conservative government. As a result of the government focusing on jobs and growth, both in the budget implementation act and in all of its actions, Canadians are benefiting and we continue to be the toast of the world.

•(1255)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my area we are witnessing a return of investment in the auto industry. The government did not want to do that at first, and it was brought kicking and screaming to the table. However, there has been a rebound of some degree. The reality is that our auto industry has not picked up like that of the United States and other countries where the industry is growing. Our industry is recovering but not to the same degree as the American industry.

Does my colleague have any comments with respect to the auto industry and what we could do to enhance it? Why is the Canadian situation different from that of the rest of the world?

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I think that is the case for any industry we might discuss. Our unemployment rate is lower than that of our G7 competitors and considerably lower than the U.S. rate. This is the first time in 30 years that we can say that Canada is doing better than the United States. I believe that there has been an upswing in all industries, including the auto industry. Things are not perfect by any means. We have a lot of work to do, but this is really a great success. We have to congratulate our Minister of Finance and our Prime Minister for their leadership in this area.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech by my colleague opposite. I found his phrase "may the niche be with you" rather intriguing. I do not know why, but it reminds me of *Star Wars* movies and makes me think about the fact that time allocation has been brought to bear on this debate and that this mammoth bill is more than 300 pages long. I do not know why, but I thought of the *Phantom Menace*.

[English]

Then, fast forward to 2015 and a new hope came to mind.

However, out of curiosity, what does "may the niche be with you" mean exactly?

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

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We have to focus on our priorities. In a world where there are many challenges, we have to focus on certain priorities. First of all we have to identify our priorities. Our government consulted Canadians extensively. I conducted consultations with many ministers who came to my riding. We heard about Canadians' priorities. More and more we see that Canadians want us, their government, to help them find jobs and sources of income. That is why we are seeing success across the country.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for my colleague.

We know that one-quarter of the measures in this budget affect the public service and conditions for workers. However, the President of the Treasury Board was very clear: he wants to pass the bill first, and then he will share the details.

Does my colleague think that is democratic? The President of the Treasury Board is forcing us to pass his bill before he reveals any details. Does my colleague think that is truly democratic?

• (1300)

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Every time she speaks in the House, her French is clear enough that even an anglophone can understand. I thank her for that.

Her question has to do with how democratic this process is. We need a bill like the one we are debating today to implement the budget. We will examine many more bills in the House. We will have many opportunities to discuss them. I know. I have a lot of confidence in our democracy.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sad to rise today to speak to Bill C-4. My speech will focus primarily on division 19 of part 3, clauses 471 and 472, which have to do with the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court of Canada. It feels strange to say in the same sentence that I will talk about two clauses regarding the appointment of Supreme Court judges and the budget implementation bill. Something does not seem right there.

We opposed the last three budget implementation bills, and we will oppose Bill C-4 because of both its content and the method the government has used. Bill C-4 includes a wide range of complex measures, many of which have nothing to do with the budget. This is what bothers me the most, and I think it deserves to be studied carefully. The bill is so broad and we have so little time to examine it.

I repeat: we are faced with a time allocation motion. Not only has the government decided to group a number of unrelated items that have nothing to do with either the economy or the budget measures, but it is also preventing the members of the House from making their views known and looking at those major considerations properly. I am not the only one saying so.

Columnist Andrew Coyne said that this type of mammoth bill makes a mockery of the confidence convention, shielding bills that would otherwise be defeated in the House. As a result, there is no way of knowing how the lawmakers would vote on those bills. We have no idea at all whether they are for or against each of the pieces of legislation grouped under this bill. All we know is whether they voted for or against the omnibus bill as a whole.

There is no common thread among the various measures, no overarching principle. It is a sort of compulsory buffet. It is alarming to see that the government wants to force Parliament to approve its legislative agenda in one go, including division 19 of part 3, which consists of clauses 471 and 472 dealing with appointing judges to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Canadian Press journalist and lawyer Stéphanie Marin gave a very good factual account of the situation that triggered the addition of clauses 471 and 472 to Bill C-4 in relation to the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court of Canada.

We must fully grasp what is happening. This is not just a technicality, as I thought I heard from the Conservative benches, but rather a real fundamental problem. Clauses 471 and 472 were added after the appointment of Justice Marc Nadon, the most recent appointment to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The day the Prime Minister appointed Marc Nadon to the Supreme Court of Canada, he had the appointment document in his left hand and a legal opinion in his right hand from the Honourable Ian Binnie, a former Supreme Court justice. The government had seen fit to ask him whether someone from the Federal Court of Appeal could be appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada to take one of the three seats allocated to Quebec in order to protect Canada's bijural nature.

I cannot tell you enough how much I respect the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court of Canada. My respect for that institution knows no bounds. That being said, the Conservative government has managed to politicize this institution, which it should not be. Politics should have nothing to do with the Supreme Court so that it can make decisions as the highest court without any interference, without any lingering questions about the people on the bench. That is how it was up until recently.

• (1305)

I mean no disrespect to Justice Marc Nadon, whose career as a lawyer and a judge has been quite remarkable in many respects. Nonetheless, the real question here has to do with the meaning of section 6 of the Supreme Court Act.

Consider this: the government shows up with an appointment and a legal opinion. I could read the tons of comments that have been made on this. Eminent constitutional lawyers who know an awful lot more than I do have written about this.

I encourage anyone who is interested in this issue to read *Purposive Interpretation, Quebec, and the Supreme Court Act* by Michael Plaxton and Carissima Mathen from the University of Ottawa. You will see that this is not a technical matter. We do not usually see this type of thing in budget implementation legislation.

These are fundamental issues that go to the heart of what our federation is. Ian Binnie told the government that the decision is in order, but many others, like the Government of Quebec, say that this decision does not meet the criteria set out in section 6.

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There must be enough doubt in this respect for the federal government, through its Minister of Justice, to think it was a good idea to make what we call a reference to the Supreme Court of Canada.

I must confess that I am very pleased that the government has broken its silence after too many weeks, and decided to move quickly.

Indeed, it is important to understand that Quebec, which has three seats in the Supreme Court of Canada, currently has only two judges sitting on that court, for the simple reason that Justice Marc Nadon, in his wisdom, has opted to sit on the sidelines for now.

The government could easily have avoided all this drama if it had chosen to make 100% sure that it was making a good decision, not in terms of the person selected, but rather with respect to sections 471 and 472 of Bill C-4, which will be amending sections 5 and 6 of the Supreme Court Act—apparently to explain, after the fact, what these sections really mean according to the government of the day.

This is extremely worrying, especially when we consider that it is being done without consultation. I am not making this up. The finance people held a briefing on Bill C-4. When we asked about division 19, specifically sections 471 and 472, they told us that, in their opinion, this would apply retroactively if the bill were passed.

However, the reference to the Supreme Court of Canada is very clear. The questions before the Supreme Court are the following:

1. Can a person who was, at any time, an advocate of at least 10 years standing at the Barreau du Québec be appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada as a member of the Supreme Court from Quebec pursuant to sections 5 and 6 of the *Supreme Court Act*?
2. Can Parliament enact legislation that requires that a person be or has previously been a barrister or advocate of at least 10 years standing at the bar of a province as a condition of appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court of Canada or enact the annexed declaratory provisions as set out in clauses 471 and 472 of the Bill entitled *Economic Action Plan 2013 Act, No. 2*?

Thus, two questions have been referred to the Supreme Court, yet this is going to pass here before we even get an answer. It makes no sense.

Last week, I moved a motion and hoped to receive unanimous consent to at least remove those two clauses from Bill C-4, since they have absolutely nothing to do with budget implementation. Unfortunately, my motion was rejected by the members opposite.

• (1310)

We are in a real quagmire, caused entirely by this government and this Prime Minister, who ignores all of the recommendations and suggestions we make, many of them for his own good. He refuses to listen to anything on this.

I have a lot more to say, but unfortunately, given the time allocation motion, we are out of time. In addition, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights will not even have the opportunity to study this issue thoroughly with constitutional experts to respond to this question.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate our hon. colleague on her speech. As usual, she provided us with some very relevant explanations

regarding the issue she raised from Bill C-4, that is, the appointment of Supreme Court justices.

She also talked about how this government tends to deny not just reality but also the democratic process. Bringing forward yet another time allocation motion is definitely not meant to encourage a more thorough debate on everything included in Bill C-4, which, I would remind the House, is yet another omnibus bill.

Getting back to the question she raised, I wonder if our colleague could elaborate on the impact that such a regulation will have on the decisions before the court.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question because there is a huge impact.

At the Supreme Court of Canada, the bench that is called upon to hear a wide range of major cases should be comprised of nine justices. Take, for example, the reference—the approach taken by the Conservative government—involving the Senate. The question is whether we can modify the composition of the Senate and what type of constitutional amendment it would require.

There are only eight justices on the bench, and one justice from Quebec is missing. We know that, like it or not, the whole constitutional issue and a balanced federation are extremely important elements. Nobody reads sections 5 and 6 for fun. Nobody is denigrating the Federal Court judges, who have tremendous value, and who have a legitimate and rightful place in the Supreme Court in accordance with section 5, although I am not sure that is the case under section 6.

This is a major issue that is not going to be resolved in the coming weeks. It could take as long as a year or more. What a pity. This could have all been avoided.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. She has incredible legal experience and she is very generously sharing it today.

Let us look at the facts. My colleague's speech was 10 minutes long, but probably could have lasted an hour, and it touched on only two clauses of a bill that amends 70 different laws.

As the citizenship and immigration critic, that makes me angry. Elements of this bill could also be studied by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and we would certainly do well to hear from experts on the various elements of this bill.

What types of experts could talk to us about the clauses she discussed today? How would it be beneficial to hear from people with this type of expertise, and what are the potential consequences of not listening to these experts when studying the bill?

• (1315)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, there is a huge impact.

We would like to hear from constitutional experts. We have to look at the interpretation of section 6, and I will take the time to read it because people are talking about this issue without necessarily talking about the situation specifically.

According to section 6:

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At least three of the judges shall be appointed from among the judges of the Court of Appeal or of the Superior Court of the Province of Quebec or from among the advocates of that Province.

It all depends on the interpretation of section 6, and not section 5, which states that any person who has at least ten years standing at the bar of a province may be appointed to the Supreme Court. Section 6 is a little more specific.

As for the impact of whether or not a person has been a judge for a certain period of time, these are valid and important questions that reflect on the credibility of the institution, and not the person appointed.

That being said, we need more than just the cursory study that we will be forced to do at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights as referred by the Standing Committee on Finance. I am sorry, but the finance committee is not our boss. We will probably not be able to amend anything nor even have the time to meet with constitutional experts from Quebec or the rest of Canada who could enlighten us on this matter.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise today and speak in this august chamber about Bill C-4, Economic Action Plan 2013 Act No. 2, our second implementation bill from the government. I appreciate very much the opportunity to rise and talk about how important the bill is, not only for my constituents in the great riding of Wetaskiwin but for my province of Alberta and the country as a whole.

Canada is a great nation. It is built by the hard-working families of our communities. They are paving the pathway to prosperity for future generations with their hard work.

Since 2006, which was the year I was first elected, our government has invested in families at unprecedented levels. In fact, I ran for the nomination for this party because of the lack of interest that previous parties and governments seemed to have when it came to treating families fairly, particularly with the tax system. Now more families than ever before are benefiting from the measures that we put in place since 2006.

I will cite some examples. In my riding of Wetaskiwin, Alberta, trades play a large role in generating jobs for our communities. It does not matter whether one lives in or around Blackfalds, Rocky Mountain House, Millet, or any of the places in between: the tradespeople's tools deduction is working to put a little money back into the pockets of these hard-working families, right where it belongs.

This is not all we have done to improve the lot of families right across Canada to help them get ahead and make ends meet. Since 2006, the typical family of four can now realize approximately, on average, \$3,200 in tax savings in any given year. Conservatives have done this by cutting the lowest personal tax rate and increasing the tax exemption amount. That means there are fewer Canadians paying taxes than ever before when it comes to personal income tax. Conservatives have reduced the GST, a tax that everyone pays, from 7% to 6% to 5%, and we have introduced numerous tax changes and savings measures to help families keep their hard-earned money.

I will go through a couple of examples, because I know the families in my constituency certainly appreciate this. There is the children's fitness tax credit. My kids play hockey, school sports, baseball, and soccer, and this has been a great opportunity for us to realize some of the savings because families incur a cost for these activities. It is wonderful to see so many kids out there participating in activities, keeping fit and so on.

There is the children's arts tax credit. Again I can speak for my own family, whether it is my boys in guitar lessons or my daughter playing cello or piano. These are the kinds of things that allow us to keep a little extra of our income to make sure we can pay for the lessons and the instruments in our particular case. It does not matter whether it is music or any of the other types of arts, such as dance or whatever the case may be; these are great initiatives.

There is the child tax credit. Before the Conservatives became the governing party, there was not even a tax credit for having kids. Everyone knows the cost of raising children is very high, and just keeping money in the hands of parents, who know how to spend it best, through a child tax credit, is a no-brainer.

There is also the family caregiver tax credit, which allows family members to look after their sick or elderly family members, and the first-time homebuyer tax credit, which reduces the barrier to make it a little easier for young families to get into their first home.

There is the registered disability savings plans, allowing families to save for their loved ones who are going to be struggling for the rest of their lives with the disabilities that they may have.

The volunteer firefighters' tax credit honours those men and women who voluntarily put themselves in harm's way to defend our property and our lives. They spend money out of their own pockets to make sure they are well equipped. The least the government can do is to offer something back through a tax credit to these brave men and women who are our volunteer firefighters. I should note that every fire department in the constituency of Wetaskiwin is a volunteer fire department.

There is the working income tax benefit. Absolutely, if someone is going to work, they should realize a savings as a result. This is going to break down that wall to make it more feasible for people to work. We should not have to have a choice in the tax system on whether it is more lucrative not to work than to work. This is a no-brainer as well.

We also have the textbook tax credit. A number of people in my constituency face the same issues I did when I went to university. I grew up in a rural community; there were no post-secondary institutions near me, so I had to move in order to get a post-secondary education. At no point in time did any previous government ever give me the opportunity to claim textbooks, which are a huge expense. Now we have that textbook tax credit, allowing students and families to keep more of that money and allowing them to invest more resources into their children's education.

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• (1320)

On eliminating the marriage penalty for single-income families, I cannot believe that previous governments did not even value a stay-at-home parent. If a family made the choice to have one person stay at home to raise children in their formative years, the person who was not making an income, whoever that happened to be, would get less of a personal exemption amount at tax time. Well, we ended that penalty and treated stay-at-home parents equally in terms of tax. This is a step in the right direction, and someday I hope we can get to a point in this country where we actually see income splitting for families. That is something I will certainly be supporting.

There is also the tax-free savings account. As I go through my riding and talk with people, they say that this investment vehicle has revolutionized the investment and savings industry and allows Canadians more flexibility and freedom. This is an absolutely fantastic tool that I know will help empower people across the country to save for their retirement and plan for their future.

Time and time again, whether it is these measures or any other common sense measure that Canadians ask us to bring forward, at every opportunity when we have had a chance to stand in this place and vote in favour of these measures, it has only been Conservative members of Parliament who have stood up and voted in favour of these budgets. Every other time that I have been here, opposition members over there have been against all of the measures that I just talked about. If Canadians want to know who has their best interests at heart, they have to look no further than here on the Conservative side of the House to make sure that they have the resources they need to raise their families.

Speaking of some of the changes that we need to make in the budget here for those hard-working families who pay their taxes and play by the rules, there are some rules in budget 2013 that I would like to highlight.

Budget 2013 would restore fairness to the tax system by ensuring that everyone pays their fair share of taxes. When everybody pays their fair share of taxes, we all pay less. We are making changes that would improve the integrity of the tax system and close some of the loopholes that currently exist; strengthen compliance and clarification of the language so that there is less confusion, both for the person filing taxes and for those who audit and oversee the tax system; and combat international tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance.

As I said, closing loopholes and clarifying the tax rules would ensure that all Canadians pay their fair share. This would allow hard-working Canadians to keep more, because they would not be offsetting what other people hide or get away with.

Alberta, like the rest of Canada, was not immune to the effects of the global economic crisis. Yes, Canada is leading the G7 in job creation, and Alberta has a robust economy, but that does not mean all of our communities and all of our residents are thriving. Every once in a while we have to extend a hand to those who need a hand up and make sure that no one gets left behind. That is precisely why our government is investing over \$1.25 billion in affordable housing initiatives.

In August, I had the pleasure of announcing on behalf of the Minister of State (Social Development) \$600,000 in funding for Shkola Suites in Calmar, Alberta. This is a great initiative. It allows those families an opportunity to be close to a school for their kids and gives them a bit of a break on their housing costs so that they can get back on their feet and get re-established. This is an interim housing measure for those families who just need a little bit of help to get going again, because sometimes life throws a curve ball, and that can happen in Alberta just as much as it can happen anywhere else. Thanks go to Nancy Lang and the folks at the Leduc Foundation, who are doing a great job making sure that nobody gets left behind in those communities.

In order to continue helping Canadian communities and families, the budget would invest nearly \$600 million in Alberta and across Canada to address homelessness. Coupled with our affordable housing strategy, I know that the budget would greatly help those people get back on their feet.

Speaking of communities, Alberta and every region of Canada has communities that are facing challenges when it comes to infrastructure. I hear this constantly. I represent a large geographic area of 26 municipalities and counties, and every one of them tells me the same story: they want long-term predictable funding, which is what we did through the gas tax transfer in previous budgets.

Now, going forward with the announcements in budget 2013 and with the implementation coming up in 2014, some \$32 billion will be flowing to these communities in stable, predictable funding. When we couple that with \$14 billion over the same time frame for major infrastructure and with the P3 partnerships, Canada will be well poised to address the infrastructure problems that it has, which would enable our communities to flourish and thrive going forward.

I want to talk a little about agriculture.

First of all, I want to thank the Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade for the excellent work they did with the comprehensive economic and trade agreement.

Agriculture is a backbone in my constituency, as are all of the resource sectors that are there. I know that with the changes that will be coming as a result of the budget implementation and these trade agreements, central Alberta will be well poised to thrive well into the future.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his speech, my colleague spoke a lot about tax credits. About ten days ago, I held an information meeting in my riding on tax credits for persons with disabilities. Many people who attended did not know about these credits or that they could apply for them any time of the year.

I would like to know how the member plans on informing people about all the credits announced. Will he count on NDP members to inform the public?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, the member is asking me a question about what the government is going to do with regard to disseminating information. I guess I would have to tell her to stay tuned as the information presents itself.

What I would encourage her to do is vote in favour of the budget so that the information can get out there and the programs can be delivered to those folks, whether they are disabled, people who need investment for skills and jobs training, or people who need employment insurance. Whatever the case might be, if the hon. member wants the program to be delivered to her constituents, the sooner we pass the budget, the sooner these programs will be delivered.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would argue that ultimately the middle class has not fared well under the Conservative government. In fact, I would like to focus some attention on working people who find themselves in a position of being laid off. The government has really failed to step up to the plate and come up with a creative, positive program that is going to enable those unemployed individuals. They might be in their 40s or 50s, and they do not feel that the government is on side with them in allowing them to gain additional skill sets so that they can get back into the workforce at a reasonable wage, something that they might have been receiving prior to being laid off.

The Conservatives had one program, under which they did not negotiate with the provinces. My question to the member is this: to what degree does he feel that the government has negotiated in good faith with provinces to try to create a better working environment so that people can get back into employment?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada does a lot of good things. I think what the member is specifically referring to is the Canada job grant, which was announced in the last budget. While he cites this as a specific example, what he has failed to mention is creating opportunities for apprentices, the various tax incentives that we have for employers, and the hiring tax credit for businesses to make sure that they have some \$225 million in their pockets. We have extended that tax credit to make sure that Canadians can get a job or keep their jobs.

We have the lowest unemployment rate among our peer countries. We have had a lower unemployment rate for some years now than our friends south of the border. That is a complete role reversal that our country is not used to.

I am not sure what the hon. member is complaining about. There is more investment going into training and development, and we have created one million net new jobs since the end of the recession. I think he needs to rethink his thoughts.

• (1330)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer I had the opportunity to host a round table with my colleague in his riding with several stakeholders from his community, specifically to talk about economic growth opportunities in his community. We heard several different themes emerge.

I wonder if he would like to take this opportunity to talk about how this particular piece of legislation would help address some of the economic growth concerns that he is hearing from his constituents?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague and congratulate her on her recent appointment into cabinet. She is doing a great job, not only in looking after all of the interests of western Canada but particularly in coming to my riding and having a round table.

I had folks come from Red Deer, Sylvan Lake, Breton, Wetaskiwin, Leduc, Lacombe, and Ponoka. They are all business leaders or involved in the education system or involved in some way through agriculture or whatever sector. Broad interests were represented. They all came together and had an opportunity to express not only how well the government is currently doing and the trajectory it needs to stay on but also some of the concerns they had when it came to labour and making sure that Alberta has the labour force and the skilled tradespeople that it needs, right from low-skilled jobs up to highly skilled trained professionals, to ensure that we are able to meet the needs of the future.

I know that the minister, through western diversification, will be doing a great job as an enabler to bridge those gaps and continue to help our economy and our communities grow and thrive.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour, as always, to rise in the House and represent the great people of Timmins—James Bay. I am rising today to speak on the government's budget implementation bill, another bill that fails the average Canadians of this country.

I speak with a heavy heart, as just this past Friday, I was in discussions with the residents of Resolute about the shutdown of the historic No.1 paper machine of Abitibi, in Iroquois Falls. The situation facing that community is an example of what happens in an economy based on resource development and of the need for understanding transition.

The Iroquois Falls paper mill is historic in this country. Abitibi, which was the largest paper company in the world, got its start on the shores of the Abitibi River, in northern Ontario, over 100 years ago, when it realized that there was an enormous opportunity for utilizing the hydro power on the Abitibi River. It also realized that there was an incredible amount of wood product nearby, so a deal was set up. This is the important thing. My hon. colleagues on the other side have this belief in the mystical powers of capital, that capital is something that comes down from heaven and creates. What we saw in Abitibi—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: You earn it, Charlie.

Mr. Charlie Angus: The heretics over there are going off the deep end again, which happens when we question their false god of capital.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It is called hard work.

Government Orders

Mr. Charlie Angus: What we saw in the case of Abitibi was that a company saw an opportunity, but what really drove the agenda was that a province understood that a plan was needed for development to create a region and to build what was building in northern Ontario at that time.

At that time, there was an agreement with Abitibi, a young company. It would have access to the forest and the province would give it access to the power of the dams. That is what made Abitibi the economic powerhouse known around the world. It was the agreement with the province. The same deals were struck then in Quebec and in the Maritimes that these were the resources of the people of the province, but they would work with the company to share the resources to build a base.

In the case of Abitibi, the communities of Ansonville and Iroquois Falls built up around it. Generations and generations of people worked in that mill. There were times when over 1,000 people were working in the mill. Thousands of people were working out in the bush, cutting the wood and bringing it in.

The sense of spirit and community in Iroquois Falls has always been very strong. There was the building of the arena, the most beautiful arena of its kind in the north. The Abitibi Eskimos, the junior hockey team, has been able to sustain itself in a community like Iroquois Falls.

However, over the years, we have seen continuing pressure on the paper industry. We have seen the decline of the forest industry across northern Canada. We are hoping that the markets are beginning to rebound and that we might begin to see the return of some of these once-mighty forestry communities. However, in the case of the No. 1 paper machine, which is 100 years old, the market has changed. This is a recognition that we are in a new economy. What was once the big papermaking money machine operation at Iroquois Falls is no more.

We have to take that into account, and nobody understands that better than people who live in a resource economy. When we look at these issues, we need to have a long-term plan. Unfortunately, we have seen the absolute failure, at the provincial level, of the Liberal government, and at the federal level, of the Conservative government. The Liberals provincially had such a short-term vision of the north that they thought they would just sell off the dams to private interests, make some quick bucks, and pay off their badly managed debts. Here were people who were ringing up \$1 billion on gas plants through a dodgy deal to save a few Liberal MPPs while at the same time they were trying to have a fire sale of some of the provinces best resources, which were the mills on the Abitibi River. That certainly affected the bottom line of the Abitibi company.

Again, it was the lack of understanding of how to build a region. We saw the provincial Liberals cut train services to northern Ontario. "We'll save a few more bucks. We'll just keep writing off anybody who lives north of Highway 17. They don't really belong in Ontario anyway". It was a lack of understanding that to build an economy, there has to be investment. There has to be the infrastructure.

• (1335)

At the federal level, we see the problem, particularly in this bill, of no vision for the pension crisis in this country. There is no response

to the fact that more and more people are falling through the cracks when it comes to EI.

There is a failure of the government to work on adequate infrastructure investments in communities. As the population ages in northern communities that were once able to count on the tax dollars from single employers, like a paper mill or a mine, more and more of that cost is being downloaded onto the backs of ordinary Canadian citizens.

My colleagues in the House always talk about this fiction that the average taxpayer pays so much less in taxes. Time and again, whatever they have lost at the federal level they have gained in costs at the municipal level. That is the reality. If we ask citizens about their municipal taxes, they ask why it is that they are paying such enormous taxes. Unfortunately, more and more of the costs have been downloaded to the provinces and the municipalities without their partnership. We certainly see that in Iroquois Falls where there are roads and bridges that are going out, and there is no money to replace them. We see that in decaying infrastructure and a lack of investment.

Iroquois Falls was also ground zero for the pension crisis in this country, because when the company was facing bankruptcy, it was the Abitibi workers who were facing the insolvency of their pension plan, just as the Nortel workers did.

If we ask Canadians, the issue of the need for an overhaul of Canada's pension plan is paramount. My father-in-law, who worked in the oil patch, paid into a pension for life and retired with a pension he was able to live on, but that is less and less available now.

I regularly meet people in their late-60s who come up to me at Tim Hortons and tell me that they have paid into the Canada Pension Plan their whole lives and cannot afford to live in their homes anymore. Men who are 68 and 70 tell me that they are going back to work underground in the gold mines, because they cannot pay the cost of living. When the municipal tax rates were reassessed in Timmins, again the costs were downloaded onto senior citizens. I see people in their late-60s going to work at Walmart and in the mines. They are trying to find work, because the pension system has failed them.

The New Democrats have tried to work with the government on a coherent pension plan. The CPP at one time was the best pension plan in the world. It is a system that works. However, the government attacked senior citizens and said that they had to work an extra two years.

Right now, the Conservatives are over in the Senate with their buddies saying that Pamela Wallin is being hard done by and they have to work out a deal for her. They have to get a deal for Patrick Brazeau. They had to get the Prime Minister's chief of staff to cut Mike Duffy a secret cheque, because he is one of them.

What about all the senior citizens who are being told, "Too bad, so sad, the cupboard is bare. Work an extra two years. It won't kill you. Just get back to work and stop complaining"? It shows complete disrespect for the people who built this country.

Government Orders

We know that at least 5.8 million Canadians do not have the ability to retire on their pensions. That is a serious issue. It is standing before us. We have debated this time and again. The government has said not to worry about that and to tell them that there are pooled savings, as though if RRSPs worked, they would not need them. They would prefer to tell the senior citizens of this country to work an few extra years. To add to the gall, the Conservatives did not have the guts to tell senior citizens to their faces. The Prime Minister had to go off to Davos to tell the world's millionaires that he was putting the screws to Canadian senior citizens.

In Iroquois Falls, where we are seeing the shutdown of the No.1 paper machine, we are seeing the loss of at least 70 jobs. We are seeing people who are in transition, who paid into EI, who do not have enough to retire on. They will be in for a shock when they call Service Canada, the operation in the community that is supposed to help them. They are being told that they are not allowed to talk to a real person anymore. They have to go online.

The government also got rid of the EI appeals board. Now there are a couple of Conservative hacks running that. What we have now is more and more denials for people with legitimate claims.

The Conservatives on the back bench always say that there are lots of jobs in Alberta, so what is the problem? The problem is that they are not looking at a national economy.

● (1340)

When we have a community like Iroquois Falls that is in transition, we need to ensure that the people who work there are able to receive EI and are able to receive retraining, and fundamentally, that everyone who pays into the system is able to retire with dignity. Once again, the government has ignored that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things we will be asked to do is vote on this bill in which we find numerous pieces of legislation brought in through the back door that should have been stand-alone pieces of legislation. Because they have been incorporated into the budget implementation bill, the Conservatives are limiting debate on a wide variety of issues that we should have been afforded the opportunity to debate and vote on as separate issues.

Would the member like to comment on the importance of budget implementation bills being there to allow the government to implement the budget, not to have the add-ons? The government, more than any other government, whether provincial or federal, has gone out of its way to bring all sorts of things in through the back door through budget implementation bills.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we are seeing from the government an act of contempt for the basic workings of democracy. Democracy is not about the Conservatives' partisan spin versus ours; it is about accountability. What more important place to talk about the issue of accountability than in the spending of taxpayers' dollars?

What the government has done with the budget implementation bill and the estimates is stuff all manner of ideological issues into the footnotes of a massive bill. They demand that Parliament pass it, refuse to allow proper debate, and refuse to allow the committees the proper time to study it. This is an incredibly large and complex issue,

but we are seeing all the little poison pills that favour the Conservatives' ideological, strange people in their ranks. They are using a budget implementation bill to do this.

I was talking the other day with my colleagues at the provincial level. For the estimates for, say, agriculture, the MPPs might have the deputy minister before them for 13 hours to discuss the implementation of the estimates. This is what happens at the provincial level, yet at the federal level, we see debate shut off. We see the Conservatives using budgets to force ideological agendas to attack people's rights and to attack all manner of things. Then when they cannot find—

● (1345)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's description of what happened at Iroquois Falls. I am deeply sympathetic to that, having worked in an Abitibi mill myself, in a previous life, that is now closed. I think he is quite right to describe the pain those resource workers feel when an operation like that is shut down.

Having said that, I detected in his speech some sympathy for the resource industries in Canada, and thank goodness for that. However, how does he square this particular circle: his evident sympathy for the natural resource industries, which quite frankly are the basis of our entire economy, and his party's warm embrace of these environmental activists and radicals who want to shut down the natural resource industries?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I had a grandfather who died in the mines and another who had his back broken underground.

We live in resource communities. I have never met a person in a resource community who said, "Let's poison our rivers to get a few quick jobs". I have never met anybody in northern Ontario who said, "Let's pull the Ring of Fire out as fast as we can and ship it to China without value added". I have never heard anybody in Timmins say, "Let's push the bitumen through as fast as we can, and if it blows out on the Mattagami or any other river, well too bad, so sad".

I do not know what world my colleague lives in, but the people I live with in resource-based communities believe that development has to be sustainable, and it has to be something that is there for future generations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like my hon. colleague to comment on the statements made by Michael Harris on iPolitics.ca, who wrote that "apart from pitching a free-trade deal with Antarctica, the PM has nothing to offer on the economy besides glowing self-appraisals, bad commercials on the public dime, and discount-rate foreign workers inflating his dismal job creation numbers."

Government Orders

For all he bragged about being a champion of the economy, things certainly are not going well.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have such great respect for my hon. colleague's work.

We have a prime minister who is an economist. My father was an economist. He went back to school in his forties, because he had never finished high school and then he became an economist. My father thought numbers mattered.

However, he also told me "Son, they can say anything they want with numbers. Don't ever believe them".

What we see with the government is it just makes up numbers. What it is saying is that permanent jobs are part time and what we are seeing are thousands of temporary foreign workers coming in, being given the jobs and then being deported.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the budget implementation bill today, our second budget implementation bill.

Although it is quite technical in parts, in fact, it is part of the process of governance that is taking Canada and our government to a brilliant future, a future where governments provide excellent services at reasonable costs and do not continually take more from people's paycheques than they can afford, especially to pay for programs that are inefficient or unnecessary and for which costs cannot be controlled.

There are over 40 million people worldwide who would do almost anything to immigrate to Canada. Why is that? In many cases it is because life is not easy in many parts of the world. In many countries, even basics like food and shelter are hard to maintain, especially where there are wars in Syria today where millions of people have been displaced. It is very hard to get a basic or advanced education in many countries because it is unaffordable. Many countries are governed by totalitarian leaders, such as North Korea, Iran, or Cuba, countries where a word criticizing the government or even the wrong official would result in men coming in the middle of the night to take people away, sometimes never to be seen again.

However, even in the freer countries, such as South Africa, the Philippines and India, people literally line up to fill out forms to come to Canada. Why? Because Canada is one of the few countries in the world in which people, especially young people, have a virtually unlimited potential in career, quality of life and wealth. They are fleeing governments that do not protect or nurture free enterprise, equality of opportunity, responsible spending and fairness in taxation, all of which this budget bill supports.

Canada sits on the cusp of a new day. Although we know the economic recovery in the U.S. has been slow at 2.5% growth and our U.S. friends buy 70% of the goods produced in Canada, the U.S. economy is still the largest in the world.

Last week, the Prime Minister went to Brussels to sign CETA, the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. When this deal kicks in, 98% of the tariffs on Canadian goods in Europe will disappear overnight.

Canadian entrepreneurs who already have access to the largest market in North America with U.S. and Mexico, with 400 million people, will have free access to the world's largest market: 28 countries in Europe, with 500 million people.

One out of five jobs in Canada is created from trade now, even with our tariffs. We are a trading nation, but the future will be far more exciting if we stay on track.

Canada has what the world needs, such as copper, nickel, uranium, gold, phosphorus, lumber, grains, potash, seafood and dairy products and we manufacture and sell high-tech goods with the best.

In my riding of Oakville, Ford of Canada is partnering with our government, the province of Ontario and Unifor to develop a state-of-the-art auto manufacturing facility where it will assemble up to 10 different cars on one platform, lasting 10 years.

It already sells thousands of Ford Edges in Canada and Brazil. However, this line, using \$71.6 million out of the auto innovation fund and a \$700 million investment from Ford, will make cars with ecoboost engines, diesel engines and hybrids, all on the same platform. This partnership will guarantee 3,000 jobs in Oakville for the next 10 years. That is the power of free trade.

Our dairy farmers, those who make butter and cheese, our fishers, our excellent wineries and our manufacturers will all have access to a new market of over 500 million people. That is not just goods that can be sold without tariffs. This is a comprehensive agreement. It includes services, banking, insurance and government procurement. It is the largest trade deal in Canada's history.

Our government, under the leadership of a prime minister, who is an accomplished and excellent expert economist, is assembling an economic structure for Canada that would be unmatched worldwide. I am quite serious about that. All the business writers talk about Canada's growth and all its manufacturing and all its successes. However, in China's west, there are 600 million people living on less than \$20.00 a week. The command economy is not working for the majority of the people in China.

Because Canada has a free economy, wealth and opportunity are spread right across our country, even to the Far North. Canada's environment minister, who is a first nation Canadian from the Far North in Nunavut, is chairing the Arctic Council in the Far North for the next two years, dealing with issues such as the environment and resource development.

● (1350)

Most people do not know there are more natural resources in Canada's territories within the Arctic Circle than in the rest of Canada, which is already rich with resources. Our commitment as a government is that these resources will be developed in the interest of the people of the north.

Each budget bill is one more step toward the goal of an excelled economic structure and will be the envy of the world. Here are the elements.

First, we already talked about trade. Fair trade and new markets are the most important way to grow an economy, without massive new spending programs the opposition parties would like to introduce. The trade agreement with the European Union could bring a 20% boost in bilateral trade, another \$12 billion annual increase to Canada's economy. Put another way, this is the economic equivalent of adding \$1,000 to the average Canadian family's income or almost 80,000 new jobs to the Canadian economy, which is of course great news.

Second, taxes must not be punitive on people or business. They must be competitive to attract new business and jobs. Our government has lowered the GST from 7% to 5%, cut corporate tax rates from 21% to 15%, and cut taxes over 160 times now in other ways, saving the average Canada family \$3,200 a year and helping businesses succeed.

Taxes must also be fair and paid by all. This bill introduces measures to combat tax cheats by cracking down on Canada's black market and the use of electronic suppression of sales software. This software hurts Canadian businesses that play by the rules in favour of those that refuse to comply with Canada's tax laws. When these businesses cheat, we all lose.

Taxes must be kept under control. Three levels of government increasing taxes year after year drives business and opportunity out of the country. That is self-defeating. We will not increase taxes.

Third, balanced budgets should be the law under normal circumstances. Borrowing billions and creating government debt should be done only in a recession or when that money is invested for a real financial return. Borrowing money to pay out in entitlement programs or for government operations is a sure way to end up in trouble. Europe's mistakes should be a lesson to all. Too many countries are crippled with overwhelming debt due to years of excessive borrowing. In Greece there is a 27% unemployment rate. In Cyprus bank accounts have been confiscated. Italy has a debt to GDP ratio of 130%. Portugal's unemployment rate is 16%. It is no surprise that these nations are not prospering.

In government, if it is that important, tax to pay for it. If it does not have the nerve to tax to pay for spending schemes, that is a good sign that the scheme is a bad idea.

Our government will introduce a balanced budget bill as described in our throne speech. Canada's federal budget will be balanced in 2015: fair taxes shared by all, lower taxes, balanced budgets and innovation. We have invested more than \$9 billion to date to support science and technology and innovative companies in the last seven years. Programs like the industrial research assistance program, the clean energy fund and now more with FedDev Ontario, these investments help create jobs and make Canada more competitive worldwide.

When we have a country as wealthy and large as Canada, there will always be those who wish they could take a piece of it. We have been very lucky in Canada. We have not had fighting on our soil since 1812. However, we are partners in the Norad security with the

world's largest military power. Our armed forces must be vigilant and do their share. They guard the world's second largest country in extreme weather conditions. They must be equipped with the best equipment to do that important job. Our government has ensured they do. We have committed in the throne speech to continue that stewardship. We will not break trust with those who guard our nation.

Fair taxes shared by all, low taxes, balanced budgets, innovation, national security, these are our priorities as indicated in the bill for Canada's future. Canada's economic structure also includes safe communities. Our government has put in place legislation that holds criminals to account by ensuring sentences match the crimes, such as mandatory minimum sentences for serious, violent and repeat offenders, in order to get violent criminals off the streets so they cannot reoffend.

We have also introduced protection for individuals, to get lead out of children's toys, to stop companies selling flavoured cigars aimed at children and to introduce new regulations for plain language drug labels so Canadians and their doctors will know the true risks of serious adverse drug reactions when they are taking their drugs.

Our government has done all of this and created the structure I described, prioritizing stability, prudent fiscal management and careful stewardship of our economy. That is why we are light years ahead of most of Europe economically and ahead of the other G8 countries in so many ways.

● (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): When the House next resumes debate, the hon. member for Oakville will have five minutes remaining in questions and answers should he wish to take that up.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

1956 HUNGARIAN UPRISING

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Canadians of Hungarian descent on the 57th Anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

Statements by Members

The freedom fight of 1956 was a bold attempt by Hungarians to establish solidarity away from the long arm of Soviet and Communist rule. After this uprising, over 200,000 Hungarians fled their homes into neighbouring countries and 38,000 were welcomed in Canada with warmth and compassion.

The bloodshed 57 years ago bears powerful witness to the unwavering spirit of freedom that resounds in the hearts of the Hungarian people.

I invite all hon. members to join me in commemorating the shining example of idealism, patriotism and sheer courage that is the immortal legacy of the freedom fighters of the Hungarian revolution.

God bless Canada.

[Member spoke in Hungarian as follows:]

És Isten áldja Magyarországot!

* * *

• (1400)

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, iron dust blanketed Limoilou after the dust suppression system at St. Lawrence Stevedoring failed.

Véronique Lalonde and Louis Duchesne, two outstanding citizens, exposed the extraordinary levels of nickel contamination in the air. I commend them for their determination and initiative.

However, a series of troubling facts have since come out. The port authority refuses to work with the authorities and seems to have chosen sides in this case. The communications director for Quebec Stevedoring gave \$963 to the Whitby—Oshawa Conservative Association in 2010, before contributing another \$1,000 to the Minister of Finance's campaign in 2011.

Conservative ministers have done nothing to fix the situation. No one is above the law at any level of government. I will not let my constituents be taken hostage by private interests. If no solution is proposed, one will be imposed.

* * *

[English]

FLOOD RELIEF IN ALBERTA

Hon. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, none of us could have foreseen the floods that directly impacted many of my constituents this past June. It was a very difficult time that made many of us re-evaluate our priorities and indeed our lives.

Though many people experienced tremendous loss, it was also a time in which I saw an outpouring of compassion and kindness of people from near and far to those in need.

In the aftermath, I had the privilege of joining many Albertans who volunteered to lend a hand in High River, Black Diamond, Bragg Creek, and surrounding areas.

I am so honoured to have witnessed and worked alongside residents, emergency responders, and all those who demonstrated

true Canadian grit, determination, bravery, and community spirit during and after the flooding.

I have been involved with flood mitigation planning since June, and it is clear that recovery will be a very slow process. We must continue to work toward practical solutions for those affected as we follow the recovery.

Once again, I extend my utmost gratitude to the volunteers who gave their time and support to all affected families. It was greatly appreciated.

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LAY'S DO US A FLAVOUR CONTEST

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Tyler Lefrense from the small rural community of Isle aux Morts, population 600, in the riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

Tyler entered the Lay's potato chips "Lay's Do Us A Flavour" contest by submitting his uniquely Canadian Maple Moose flavour.

In April, Tyler received news he was one of four finalists chosen from 630,000 entries across the country for which he received a \$5,000 cheque.

During months of online voting, Canadian taste buds from coast to coast to coast deemed Maple Moose the best flavour of all the entries.

Tyler was awarded the grand prize of \$50,000 and 1% of all future sales of the product. The chips will be available for purchase throughout the country in November.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Tyler Lefrense on his big win and I encourage everyone, while watching the hockey game on Saturday night, to enjoy some Maple Moose potato chips. Nothing could be more Canadian.

* * *

TRIBUTE TO VETERANS

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to two veterans residing at the Sunnybrook Veterans Health Centre in my riding of Don Valley West.

Mr. Jim Wilson, a gunner in the Royal Canadian Navy, has devoted his life to serving and protecting Canadian and Allied troops around the world, from the North Atlantic Ocean in World War II to the hills of North Korea.

Mr. John Bennett, a veteran of World War II, brought with him his painting supplies to the European theatre of battle. Today, 78 of his watercolours hang in our National War Museum.

On this Remembrance Day, I will join Mr. Wilson, Mr. Bennett, and some 500 veterans at the Sunnybrook Cenotaph in Don Valley West to remember the tremendous contributions they have made for our great nation.

I thank all of the men and women of our armed forces and their families. They are Canada's truest heroes.

Lest we forget.

*Statements by Members***SPORTS BETTING**

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the issue of Bill C-290, an act to amend the Criminal Code, passed in this chamber and now sitting in the Senate for more than 18 months. There should be no controversy in passing Bill C-290, as it went through the House of Commons without a single dissenting voice.

Bill C-290 would allow provinces to choose to allow single sports bets, similar to Las Vegas and a series of other federal states. Once passed, it would be a serious hit to organized crime and the nefarious offshore betting cabals that rack in billions of dollars each year. In fact, provincial revenue would increase, allowing support for education and health care, for example.

Bill C-290 has significant support from political parties, provincial governments, gaming associations, the Canadian Labour Congress, and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. It would also protect billions of dollars in tourism infrastructure and 250 jobs in the gaming sector that are under attack by increased U.S. competition and a higher dollar.

Unfortunately, with prorogation Bill C-290 has returned to the first stage in the Senate, a setback to law and order and to our economy. I call upon the Liberals and the Conservatives to move quickly and pass this bill, which has been studied and passed all procedures. Every day we delay this change allows organized crime to have another holiday and payday at the expense of Canadians.

* * *

● (1405)

OSHAWA FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the privilege of attending the third annual Festival of Remembrance concert at the Regent Theatre in my home riding of Oshawa. The festival is a great opportunity to help honour the sacrifices of our men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces. It was indeed a special night.

As 2013 is the 60th anniversary of the Korean War, and the Year of the Korean War Veteran, the Festival of Remembrance commemorated and celebrated the contributions made by our men and women in uniform. Oshawa has many Korea vets, including Doug Finney of the Oshawa Legion, who is the national vice-president of the Korea Veterans Association.

The festival featured the Oshawa Civic Band, the HMCS *York* band, the pipes and drums of Branch 43, and soloist Ms. Danielle Bourre. The proceeds of the concert went to the Oshawa Legion's poppy fund.

The Oshawa Festival of Remembrance was a great opportunity to support our local legion and ensure that Canadian veterans who fought and those who paid the ultimate price are never forgotten.

* * *

RCMP COMMANDING OFFICER IN SASKATCHEWAN

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to honour a much-decorated member of my constituency.

Russ Mirasty, a Lac La Ronge Indian Band member, joined the RCMP in 1976 as a first nations member and Cree-speaking person. He served the RCMP in six divisions in a variety of positions, including general policing, the police dog services, highway patrol, and divisional aboriginal policing services in posts across the nation. He briefly left the force to serve as executive director of his first nations home, the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. Upon his return to the RCMP, he worked as operations officer for the north district in Prince Albert, before moving to Ottawa in 2009 to oversee national aboriginal policing and crime prevention services. In 2010, Russ Mirasty made history by becoming the first aboriginal commanding officer in "F" Division, an appointment that made him Saskatchewan's top-ranking officer.

In August 2013, Russ announced his retirement from the force. I am sure the entire nation joins me in thanking commanding officer Russ Mirasty for his service to our national police force and our country. I would like to also thank Mr. Russ Mirasty for giving up his safety to serve others in the community.

* * *

MISSING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today to mark five years since the disappearance of Maisy Odjick and Shannon Alexander, two young aboriginal women from the Anishnabeg community of Kitigan Zibi. As a father of two girls, I can't imagine the ordeal the family has been through, and my prayers and hopes are with them.

Unfortunately, too many aboriginal women and girls go missing, and this more often than non-aboriginals. Unfortunately this is still widely considered an isolated matter and not a grave public concern.

I rise today to say that this is indeed a nationwide problem, an issue that we should all be concerned about. In fact, it is a national disgrace, and the inaction of the government is even more so. These families deserve justice just like any other Canadian family, and it is not an exaggeration to say that the whole world is watching in shame.

As a father and a strong believer in respect and equality among aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples, I wonder when this government will stop procrastinating. When will it take its responsibility seriously and start a public inquiry? When, Mr. Speaker? The only humane answer to that question is, "Now".

*Statements by Members***GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families are the cornerstone of society, and the government will continue to support and protect Canadian families by keeping taxes low, defending Canadian consumers, supporting victims and punishing criminals, and safeguarding families and communities.

Canadians work hard for their money. That is why the government has lowered taxes year after year for families. Overall, the federal tax burden is at its lowest level in half a century. Once the budget is balanced, the government will continue to offer tax relief for Canadians. Families are the cornerstone of our society.

The government will address persistent social problems, ensure access to safe and reliable infrastructure, and introduce legislation and measures that encourage a healthy lifestyle and environment for all Canadians. We are committed to supporting and protecting Canadian families.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

MOISSON OUTAOUAIS REGIONAL FOOD BANK

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not hesitate to agree to be the honorary spokesperson for the seventh annual non-perishable food drive organized by the Buffet des Continents restaurant in Gatineau in support of the tireless efforts of the Moisson Outaouais food bank to combat hunger in my region.

It is unbelievable, but some 31,000 people go hungry in the Outaouais. It is hard to imagine that 10% of the population does not have enough to eat every day, including many children, because of the tough economic times and the soaring increase in the cost of living.

Last year, thanks to the generosity of the people of Gatineau, 7,234 pounds of food were collected for the least fortunate.

I invite my constituents, and anyone here in the House who can, to go to the Buffet des Continents on December 2 and give generously once again in order to beat that number.

I am proud to say that I will be there to help alleviate the burden on people in need. By working together, we can make the holidays a bit happier for the less fortunate.

* * *

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current law gives the Commissioner of Canada Elections the power to investigate in order to verify whether loans were used to circumvent donation limits.

An investigation is necessary in order to determine whether the Liberals are using loans to intentionally exceed the legal donation limits.

The failed Liberal leadership candidates seem to believe that the election financing laws do not apply to them.

In fact, the lawyer for defeated candidate and former MP Ken Dryden recently indicated that Dryden would not even attempt to pay back the money he owes in relation to the Liberal leadership race.

Elections Canada is aware of the situation and openly admits to knowing that this loan will likely never be repaid, basically transforming the loan into a donation.

Since Elections Canada admits to being aware of what is going on, what is stopping it from launching an investigation and getting to the bottom of this situation?

* * *

[English]

CHIEF ERNIE CAMPBELL

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was deeply saddened by the news this Saturday that former chief Ernie Campbell of the Musqueam First Nation passed away.

Over the years I was fortunate to have known Chief Campbell, a thoughtful, determined leader who helped build bridges and foster understanding among all cultures.

Ernie Campbell was first elected chief of the Musqueam in 1998 and served for 14 years. He was a former residential school student and graduated from Magee Secondary School in Vancouver Quadra. He was also a former boxing champion, so it is not surprising he had a reputation as a fighter for his community. Chief Campbell was a tireless promoter of aboriginal land and fishing rights, and last year led a protest resulting in a negotiated settlement to protect an ancient burial ground known as the Marpole Midden.

On behalf of my Liberal colleagues and all colleagues in Parliament, I would like to express our deep condolences to Chief Campbell's family and community. I have no doubt that he will be greatly missed by all who had the honour of knowing him.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend women in Saudi Arabia made international headlines when they did something that we all take for granted: drive a car.

Participating in the Women2Drive campaign, these women posted videos to YouTube of themselves simply driving around town. The result? Fourteen women were arrested and detained by Saudi authorities for violating the decades-long ban against women drivers.

Today, Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that does not allow women to drive. Fourteen women must now wait in fear of punishment for exercising a right that is afforded almost universally.

This must change. The Saudi kingdom must recognize the rights of its citizens. It is unconscionable that such double standards continue to exist in our world today.

I salute the bravery of these women and condemn their arrests. Our government is proud to stand beside these women in their fight for basic rights.

*Oral Questions***THE SENATE**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems Canadians from all walks of life are frustrated that the Prime Minister keeps changing his story.

On Friday he was claiming there would be no deal with these miscreant senators, that they must all be taken off the public dime. Then we learned that the leader of the Conservatives in the Senate was offering up backroom deals. Today he is contradicting his story about how Nigel Wright left the PMO. Which story are we to believe? Did he resign or was he fired?

No wonder that even the Minister of Finance has broken ranks and is now standing with the NDP, calling to get rid of the Senate, calling it an anachronism.

I call on the Minister of Finance to back up his words with actions and include a new line item in the next federal budget: the defunding of the Canadian Senate. We may not be able to abolish the Senate without the provinces, but we can cut off its blood supply.

We know the Conservatives are happy to cut services Canadians rely on. Will they now cut out the patronage of this undemocratic, out-of-date, anachronistic body?

* * *

● (1415)

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, John Porter was convicted of killing an Oshawa man, Roland Slingerland, in cold blood. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for 25 years. However, we have learned that three years before he can apply for parole, Correctional Service of Canada has allowed Porter to leave prison early.

Canadians find this unacceptable. That is why I introduced Bill C-483. Those serving life sentences for heinous crimes must appear before the parole board before they can see the light of day. I am proud that our Conservative government announced that we will make life sentences mean life behind bars.

I call on the Liberals and the NDP to support these important measures to help protect families and increase accountability for offenders.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

ETHICS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the ever-changing stories of the Prime Minister are doing nothing to help his credibility on the Senate scandal, nor is the Prime Minister being clear about his office's actions in the attempted cover-up. This morning, the Prime Minister said he dismissed Nigel Wright after finding out about the \$90,000 payoff, but just last Thursday, he told the House that Wright "...to his credit, recognized that decision was totally wrong and he has resigned".

Which version of the events is true?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that Nigel Wright has accepted sole and full responsibility for his actions. He knows that what he did was wrong and it was inappropriate. He also knows that it would have been smart to let the Prime Minister know of this and it was wrong that he did not. Had the Prime Minister known of this, he would have, of course, never accepted it. Nigel Wright no longer works in the office of the Prime Minister.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, "to his credit", one cannot just make up this kind of mixed messaging, although I do understand now how the Prime Minister is having trouble keeping the stories straight.

Last week, the Prime Minister said, in the most confused way that he could, that few in his office knew of the Mike Duffy payoff. Could the Prime Minister tell us how many is a few? Is it four? Is it 13? How many is it exactly?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would refer the hon. member to affidavits that were recently filed in court.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we actually already know what the RCMP has shared with us. What I was asking was: How many did the Prime Minister know about?

Has the Prime Minister asked his staff to determine who knew about the cheque and, if so, could he share with Canadians exactly how many Conservatives were aware of the attempt to pay off Mike Duffy?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I would refer the hon. member to affidavits that were recently filed in court.

At the same time, Nigel Wright has accepted full and sole responsibility for his actions. He knows that what he did was wrong. He is prepared to be accountable for those actions. The Prime Minister has also made it quite clear that, had he known that this was being offered to Senator Duffy, he would have in no way agreed to it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning the Prime Minister has once again become entangled in his own contradictions.

In an interview, he said he had dismissed Nigel Wright. However, just last Thursday, he confirmed to the House that Nigel Wright had resigned. Another day, another story.

Would the Prime Minister like to clarify his new version of events and tell us whether Mr. Wright was dismissed or whether he just resigned?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Nigel Wright has accepted full responsibility for his actions. He knows that what he did was wrong. Again, he has accepted responsibility for this and no longer works in the office of the Prime Minister.

- (1420)

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Leader of the Government in the Senate admitted that he had offered Patrick Brazeau a deal to let him keep his pay. All he had to do was apologize and disappear for six months, and everything would go away.

At the same time, the Prime Minister was saying that he would do everything in his power to remove these senators "from the public payroll."

Does the Prime Minister support the deal offered to Patrick Brazeau by his leader in the Senate?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear right from the beginning that we expect that these senators would accept accountability for what they have done. We of course expect that they should apologize to the Canadian people at the same time.

We expect them to be accountable and apologize to the Canadian people. The Prime Minister has made it quite clear, as have the majority of the Conservative caucus, that we expect the Senate to get on with passing this motion. We expect the Liberals in the Senate, who are blocking this motion, to get out of the way so that we can pass this motion and that Canadians can get the accountability they so deserve.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 13, the Prime Minister told this House that he had checked Pamela Wallin's expenses himself and that they were in order. Today he is saying the opposite.

When Mike Duffy was accused of inappropriate spending in December, the Prime Minister's Office told him that his expenses were in order. Today, the Prime Minister is saying otherwise.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, why does he keep changing his story?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to get that question. We have been talking about this for some months and what we have shown is this. There was an audit that was completed that showed that these expenses were not in line. That is why we expect these senators would apologize, accept accountability for what they have done and repay the expenses they did not incur, and we expect the Liberals in the Senate to get out of

the way and let us pass this motion so that we can suspend these senators without pay.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 16, after Nigel Wright told the Prime Minister about the \$90,000 hush money, the Prime Minister said Nigel Wright had his full support. On May 19, the Prime Minister stated, "It is with great regret that I have accepted the resignation of Nigel Wright...". Now the Prime Minister says Nigel Wright was fired. His story keeps changing every time, and nobody believes the Prime Minister.

When will the Prime Minister come clean and tell Canadians once and for all what he knows about this Conservative cover-up?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, Nigel Wright has accepted responsibility for what he has done. He knows that what he did was not appropriate. He also knows, I suspect, that he should have informed the Prime Minister. He did mention, of course, that the Prime Minister knew nothing of this, and had the Prime Minister known, he would have in no way accepted such a deal.

We are looking for the Liberals in the Senate to approve this motion, to stop blocking accountability of the Senate. It is time for the Liberals to stop fighting so hard for the status quo in the Senate and actually start fighting for change in the Senate.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on June 5 in the House the Prime Minister indicated, incredulously, that Nigel Wright had acted alone, yet on October 24 he was forced to tell us that a few people in the Prime Minister's Office knew about this scandal and its cover-up. These are numerous examples of a Prime Minister's story changing all the time.

Canadians no longer trust the Prime Minister to tell the truth. The only solution would be for him to finally testify under oath. If he has nothing to hide, nothing to cover up, why is he afraid of testifying under oath?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Nigel Wright has been quite clear with respect to who he brought into his confidence on this matter, and the Prime Minister has also been very clear that, had he known, he would have in no way approved such an arrangement.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Friday the government leader in the Senate, Mr. Claude Carignan, admitted that he had approached Patrick Brazeau about a secret plea deal. Do the Conservatives not get it? It was a secret deal with a senator that got them into this mess.

My simple question is this: Was the Prime Minister's Office aware that Senator Carignan was offering this side deal with Senator Brazeau on behalf of the Conservatives, and were Senators Wallin and Duffy offered the same deal?

Oral Questions

•(1425)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, of course, the Senate is in charge of its own affairs. At the same time, we have been saying from the beginning that we expect these senators to accept responsibility for what they have done, to apologize to the Canadian people, to repay those expenses that they did not incur. That is the standard we would expect on this side of the House. I am surprised to learn that the NDP and the Liberals do not have the exact same standard.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): I think, Mr. Speaker, the standard Canadians are expecting is that the Prime Minister will apologize for what has happened.

It seems that the Conservatives are having difficulty keeping their story straight as the story changes daily about who was involved, so let us now talk about the baker's dozen. In Mike Duffy's epic speech last week, he referred to negotiations between his lawyers and a Conservative Party lawyer. Will the Prime Minister confirm that Arthur Hamilton was involved in this deal, that he was the one representing the Conservative Party?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to hear that the hon. member believes everything he reads. If he does believe everything he reads, then he would have to believe that since his leader took control of his party, he is the least popular federal leader, that he brought his party from a high point to some of the lowest points in popularity. He would also have to believe that the leader of the Liberal Party might actually one day talk about policy. I am very surprised to learn that the hon. member believes everything he reads.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with an answer like that, I call shenanigans.

We know that Arthur Hamilton is a regular fixer for the Conservative Party. He helped it on the robofraud investigation, he helped it on the Helena Guergis affair, he helped it on the in-and-out scheme, and now it seems he is involved in the PMO cover-up.

I will ask again. What role did Arthur Hamilton play, and will the Prime Minister confirm that Arthur Hamilton's office was used to transfer the money to Mike Duffy?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I would refer the hon. member to affidavits that were filed.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that the RCMP affidavits have certainly painted a picture that the Prime Minister is not telling Canadians the truth on this issue, and we cannot get a straight answer; so let us try another one.

Last May, the Prime Minister said that Nigel Wright resigned and that he was sorry he was resigning and he was going to receive full severance. Now he is claiming that he fired Nigel Wright.

Well, when average Canadians get fired, they are not entitled to EI; so why are the taxpayers being stuck with the bill to pay off the severance for Nigel Wright?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

as I have said a number of times in the House, Nigel Wright has accepted accountability for what he has done. Nigel Wright, of course, no longer works in the office of the Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister said exactly 29 times that he had been very clear. That is ironic, because we have 29 different versions of the Conservative scandal.

In order to clarify the most recent developments in this matter, can the Prime Minister tell us if Ray Novak instructed Claude Carignan to cut a backroom deal with Patrick Brazeau? Is that what happened?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that one would think this member would just erase the number 29 from his head. Now that he has laid it out there, it would probably be an appropriate time for me to remind him why he does not want to talk about 29, but I am not going to, because what Canadians want to talk about is an accountable Senate. That is what they want to talk about. Unfortunately, the Liberals in the Senate are standing in the way of accountability. The NDP are flip-flopping all over the place when it comes to the Senate.

Canadians know one thing. When it comes to accountable, open, honest government, it is the Conservatives who always provide that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that we are the only party that is clear. We want to abolish the Senate.

The Prime Minister may seem to be saying “those morons won't catch me”, but because he is changing his version of the events, they are going to do just that.

If Senator Carignan did act alone, without consulting the Prime Minister's Office, why is he still the Leader of the Government in the Senate?

•(1430)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, as we have said right from the beginning, the Senate is in charge of its own affairs. At the same time, the Prime Minister has been very clear, as has a majority of the Conservative caucus, that we expect these senators to be accountable, to apologize to the Canadian people and to repay their expenses, and we would also like the Senate to pass this motion that would see them suspended without pay. That is the standard Canadians expect, and that is the standard we are trying to give them, if the Liberals would only get out of the way and let us do that.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind members what happened to the last person who supposedly acted alone, the famous Nigel Wright. He resigned. No, that is not true. I think he was fired. Is that the latest version? All right.

Was Arthur Hamilton, a well-know lawyer involved in all the Conservative schemes, really asked to help the PMO with the Senate scandal, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know this hon. member is quite often confused, because when he took his seat in Parliament he took an oath that he would fight for a stronger united Canada. At the same time, he went back to his province and started making donations, not once, not twice, and I could go all the way up to 29 times, to a party that would break up this country. That is what one would call a big flip-flop.

While we are over here fighting for Canadian jobs, he is donating to break up the country. While we are fighting for freer trade, he is donating to break up the country. That is the type of leadership he wants to get in this House and brag about. I think not.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense.

The question was about Arthur Hamilton. Was he involved in any way? We do not know. In fact, even if he did give us an answer, we might have three different versions tomorrow. It might be best not to answer. We get that.

However, as for Carolyn Stewart Olsen, did the Prime Minister or a PMO staffer ask her to step down from the Senate committee examining the expenses?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member has only been here for a couple of years, but the Senate does undertake its activities independently.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that, although some members may have only been here for a couple of years, they would do a much better job of answering questions than he does.

From September 1, 2010 to May 31, 2011, Carolyn Stewart Olsen claimed \$11,123 in living expenses for the time she spent in the national capital region, yet she has a home here and this is where she spends all of her time. It is funny. This feels like déjà vu.

As in the cases of Pamela Wallin, Patrick Brazeau and Mike Duffy, does the Prime Minister think that this is an example of inappropriate spending? If so, will the Prime Minister try to expel her from the Senate?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 13, the Prime Minister was very clear to the caucus, which included senators, members of Parliament and senior staff, that if they had any inappropriate expenses, they should pay them back. If they did not, they could not expect to be sitting in the Conservative caucus.

That is the high standard we expect on this side of the House. That is the high standard Canadians expect. It is only the New Democrats and the Liberals who do not expect that same high standard. They are so busy fighting for the status quo that they have forgotten that the real bosses here are the Canadian taxpayers.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether Nigel Wright resigned or was fired, as the Prime Minister's latest story claims, makes a big difference under ministerial guidelines as to whether he would be eligible for separation pay.

Canadians will not accept any doublespeak or baffle-gab from the Prime Minister on this. Will he finally tell the truth? Was Nigel Wright granted an exemption for a higher salary than the normal treasury board maximum? Precisely how much did he receive in severance, separation pay or any other taxpayer-funded benefits—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has stated on a number of occasions, Mr. Wright will receive what is required under the law.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is trying to cover up corruption within his own office and his handling of the bogus expenses of senators who he appointed. The Prime Minister's approach in the House is a different story.

The member for Peterborough is facing very serious charges and possible prison time for electoral fraud, yet he is still sitting in the House. Why the double standard? Is it because in the Senate, the Prime Minister, and his entire senior staff have their dirty little fingerprints all over this Conservative corruption?

• (1435)

The Speaker: Order, please. I am not sure if that turn of phrase is appropriate to the debate today. The hon. member has a supplemental point. I encourage him to use language that is more judicious.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, fair enough. Peter Penashue cheats on his election and his punishment is that he has to resign from cabinet and resign from the House of Commons. The member for Saint Boniface cheats on her election and what is her punishment? She gets to be—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives sent a message at the end of last week by refusing to renew the government's rental agreement with the First Nations University of Canada in Regina. The university is facing a financial hit of \$1.4 million.

When the problem of inadequate funding for first nations education is on the agenda, how can the minister justify this new disengagement from the country's first nations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as most members of the House know, there is a transparent process and there are rules to ensure the fair renewal of federal leasing arrangements.

In this case, when the lease expired, the Department of Public Works and Government Services issued a call for proposals. The university was eligible to submit a proposal but chose not to do so. As a result, the rules apply.

That is what happened.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, adequately investing in first nations education is in the interest of all Canadians. Closing the funding gap for first nations kids attending on-reserve schools should be at the centre of any education proposal. Instead, the minister is treating this critical issue as an afterthought in his proposal for the first nations education act.

Why is the minister delaying any attempt to close the funding gap?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the premise of the hon. member's question is totally false. If she cares to read the proposal, she will find out that for the first time in a hundred and some years in Canada, this proposal casts an obligation on the minister to pay the cost of education at the secondary and elementary levels for first nations.

The members opposite should be welcoming this statutory obligation on the minister, which is now at his whim because it is only a policy. We want to make it statute-based, and first nations will benefit.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us continue with the topic of underfunded programs. Today, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities asked the Conservatives to do something about the lack of rental housing in Canada. More than 1.5 million families are in dire need of housing, but the government is refusing to renew the agreements between social housing agencies and CMHC.

Will the Conservatives start listening to the NDP and the FCM, implement a housing strategy, and renew the agreements?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2013 renewed our investment and our commitment to affordable housing.

Together with our partners, our government has provided housing and support for over 880,000 individuals and families.

We are actually producing results. CMHC provides mortgage subsidies for long-term 25- to 50-year agreements. Those agreements are coming to an end. There are no cuts.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from small towns to big cities, too many Canadians do not have or cannot afford a proper roof over their heads. In Toronto, a quarter million people are on the waiting list for affordable housing, and the average cost of a home continues to grow further out of reach.

There is a housing crisis in this country. Why are the Conservatives not doing anything about it?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our investment and our commitment to affordable housing is a multi-pronged approach.

We are working steadily with our partners on things like agreements for investment in affordable housing as well as our homelessness partnering strategy, with the focus on housing first.

We are producing results. We are not just talking, as the NDP always wants to do: more bureaucracy, more talk. We are actually producing results for those who are vulnerable.

* * *

● (1440)

JUSTICE

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal poster boy Joe Fontana is up in criminal court today. He is what bad dreams are made of.

Allow me to remind this House that London mayor and former senior Liberal cabinet minister Joe Fontana has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and uttering forged documents.

Could the government please update this House on what it is doing to combat crime and protect Canadian families?

The Speaker: I am not sure there was much in that preamble that had to do with government business.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are very worried about the lack of rail safety in Canada under the Conservative regime. Now they have the same concerns about the pipeline network. The Conservatives' mismanagement is wreaking havoc. Since 2006, the number of oil leaks in these networks has tripled.

What measures will the government take to restore the public's trust in the safety of Canadian pipelines?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, between 2000 and 2011, pipelines under federal responsibility had a safety rating of 99.9996% with respect to the transport of crude oil. Our government increased the number of pipeline inspections and audits to give Canada a world-class safety system. As a result, the National Energy Board is being informed of more incidents.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister should read the Transportation Safety Board statistics, because Conservative spin does not make Canadians safer; only action does.

Pipeline leaks and spills have tripled under this Conservative government, and this is even more troubling because the Conservatives have weakened the assessment rules so that projects can go ahead now with even less due diligence.

Canadians deserve better. Why are the Conservatives acting so irresponsibly? Why are they acting so recklessly? Why will this Conservative government not put the safety of Canadians first?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question is a bit rich coming from a party that voted against increased pipeline inspections and fines for polluters.

The National Energy Board is a strong independent regulator that ensures pipeline safety. We have increased the number of inspections by 50%. We have doubled the number of audits. We have put forward fines for companies that break Canada's rigorous environmental protections. We require pipeline operators to have \$1 billion in financial capacity to ensure taxpayers are not on the hook.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if a bill is tabled that increases funding for inspection and enforcement, I guarantee we will vote for it.

The government speaks publicly of balanced development and a new respectful working relationship with first nations. The reality is far the opposite. Incredibly, last week it downgraded environmental assessment rules to exempt in situ oil sands projects from any review or hearing. This exemption not only contradicts the information of its own scientists but abrogates constitutional duties to consult. Is forcing first nations and Metis to seek redress in the courts the Conservative vision of a new working relationship?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, environmental assessments are a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. We have made environmental protection laws stricter

while making environmental assessments more efficient and more effective.

Our government also increased funding and opportunities for public and aboriginal consultations throughout the environmental assessment process. We will continue to support economic growth while protecting our environment in a balanced way.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us put this back in context.

Just a year ago the Conservatives dismantled the laws governing Canada's environmental assessment process. However, that was not enough to please their buddies in the industry. Now they are going to exempt in situ oil sands projects from any federal review, even though these kinds of oil sands projects are becoming more and more common.

How do the Conservatives justify this decision?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, our government is making environmental protection laws stricter while making environmental assessments much more efficient and effective. For example, in the past something like a blueberry washing facility had to go through the same processes as a pipeline. Unlike the opposition, which wants to waste taxpayers' money on assessing blueberries, our government is ensuring that resources are focused on projects with potential environmental effects.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Canadian Heritage on her appointment. We both had the pleasure of attending the ADISQ gala last night.

The Minister had the opportunity to see that Quebec song is alive and well, but at the same time, she heard the deep concerns arising from the government's elimination of the creators' assistance component of the Canada music fund.

Canadian composers entertain and thrill us with their music, which is admired throughout the world. Why is the government turning its back on them?

Oral Questions

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the Canadian heritage critic. I am looking forward to working with him on this file.

Since I have the floor, I would like to acknowledge the winners of the Felix awards handed out last night and congratulate the winner of the honorary Félix award, Guy Latraverse. He has made an enormous contribution to his province.

Let us discuss the Canada music fund. Our government did not make cuts to the program. Our government has continued to invest in the arts and culture. We will keep doing so through unprecedented funding here in Canada, including in Quebec.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of Finance met with private sector economists. Did they remind him that the current Prime Minister has the worst economic record of any Prime Minister since the Great Depression, or that the incomes of middle-class families have stagnated while the costs of everything from daycare to bus passes have skyrocketed, or that households have taken on record debt just to make ends meet? Did he hear their wake-up call, or is the government's economic plan still just to tell Canadians don't worry, be happy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member might not believe me, but she ought to believe the economists, several of whom spoke publicly after our meeting this morning and all of whom agreed with the economic projections of the government. They have agreed we have moderate, steady growth. They have agreed we have produced more jobs in Canada since the end of the great recession than any other G7 country.

I do not know where the member has been, but she has not been in Canada, obviously.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the new fleet of Sikorsky helicopters were supposed to replace our 50-year-old Sea Kings back in November 2008. That is almost exactly five years ago. This is only one of a series of procurement files the Conservatives have grossly mismanaged.

I have a straightforward and very simple question for the Minister of National Defence. When will the new helicopters be delivered?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that the Canadian Armed Forces get the maritime helicopters they need and at the best possible value to Canadians.

The previous Liberal government contracted with Sikorsky, and the company has yet to deliver a contractually compliant helicopter to Canada.

We have not decided yet on next steps.

[Translation]

Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it cannot be that hard to answer such a simple question. After spending \$5 billion, making our troops and Canadians wait for five years, and blaming others for their own problems, it is time for the Conservatives to start being accountable.

I will give them another chance. When, exactly, will Sikorsky start delivering the new fleet of helicopters to replace the Sea Kings?

• (1450)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making sure that the Canadian Armed Forces get the maritime helicopters that it needs and at the best possible value to Canadians.

The previous Liberal government contracted with Sikorsky, and the company has yet to deliver a contractually compliant helicopter to Canada. We have not decided yet on next steps.

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[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government inherited a broken immigration system and we have worked hard to fix it.

The Speech from the Throne highlighted the government's record on reducing the immigration backlog by half and eliminating the economic immigration backlog completely.

Could the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration inform the House on what our government is doing to ensure that we are attracting the best and the brightest, while reducing the backlog inherited from the Liberals?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hard-working member of Parliament for Vancouver South for her excellent work.

As she well knows, the Liberals left us with the legacy of huge backlogs, reduced immigration. When we took office there were 830,000 unprocessed applications. Some prospective newcomers were waiting a decade to come to Canada.

We have taken action. We reduced the waiting time for foreign skilled workers from seven years to one. We have cut that backlog in half. We are taking action to fix the once broken system to make it fast, fair, and flexible. I will have more to say on this score in a few minutes.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, cellphone towers are popping up indiscriminately across the country from Lawrencetown, Nova Scotia, to Vancouver Island.

Oral Questions

Last week alone I tabled three petitions with signatures from hundreds of Guelph residents with regard to their health and other concerns. Local residents of municipalities are deeply frustrated over a federal approval process that either leaves them powerless to influence the decision or ignores them when they try.

When is the Minister of Industry going to listen, stop ignoring their concerns, change the process, and empower local governments and Canadians to make decisions in their own communities?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see the opposition asking questions about one of its own priorities, namely access to truly competitive cellphone rates.

If the opposition members had read the Speech from the Throne that was presented a few weeks ago, they would know that this is one of the government's priorities. We will be working on this.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in June, Transport Canada refused to grant Sherbrooke's airport facilities the necessary security screening services.

This would have helped the airport conclude an agreement with a national airline. This designation was a major condition for securing three daily flights from Sherbrooke.

Unfortunately, Transport Canada denied that request. We are talking about the economic development of our region. The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable has even offered his help on this.

I want to know if the Minister of Transport will review this file quickly.

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with a delegation from the City of Sherbrooke in August of this year and discussed the issue of CATSA designation, but the reality is there are over 200 airports in Canada and, by law, only 89 of them are currently screened. Although Sherbrooke wants to be part of it, it has to go through a process.

We will continue to work with the people who represent Sherbrooke on the issue, and my officials will continue to have discussions with them on the matter.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians remain concerned about the potential for high-risk individuals being released into their communities. This is one reason our government was elected with a strong mandate to keep our streets and our communities safe.

Last spring, the government introduced the not criminally responsible reform act. The bill would ensure that public safety and the rights of victims would come first. Could the Minister of Justice please update the House as to the status of this important legislation?

• (1455)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Wetaskiwin, a strong proponent of an effective criminal justice system. Indeed, he is right. There is concern in the criminal justice area about the reform in the area of high-risk individuals who are found not criminally responsible.

Canadians and victims are rightly concerned about this issue as well. Individuals, under the current provisions, can be released into the community by provincial parole boards, potentially putting the public at risk. That is why our government's landmark legislation, the not criminally responsible act, will be brought back, restored, and examined by the Senate.

I encourage the Liberal leader, in particular, and his House leader to get behind the bill, perhaps change their minds and have senators and all members support this important bill to keep our country safe.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, my colleagues questioned the government about the gradual disappearance of beluga whales.

After the foolish response from the Minister of the Environment, who obviously did not know what she was talking about, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans told us not to worry. She said that research is continuing. The problem is that the cuts to the Maurice Lamontagne Institute will result in lower-quality research. The ecotoxicology laboratory is closed and the research position has been eliminated.

Who in the department is going to do the research?

[English]

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the minister said, researchers from DFO have been working with our partners to study beluga whales in the St. Lawrence. In fact, a scientific review meeting was held earlier this month to review scientific information on the state of the population and the peer-reviewed science advice will be published in the coming months.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the bill on the right to die with dignity is moving forward in the National Assembly.

With the support of members from all parties and following significant, rigorous consultation that was free of all partisanship, the bill is on the verge of moving through the crucial steps on its way to being passed.

However, the federal government is still hinting that it might intervene in this file, which is a matter of health, respect for patients, and human dignity.

Will the government respect the National Assembly's decision to pass a law regarding the right to die with dignity, and will it promise not to interfere in its implementation?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this very contentious and very emotional issue has been before the House of Commons in recent years. The federal government has no intention of reopening the debate.

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, rail in Canada has reached a state of crisis. The government has no rail strategy. Service and safety and Canadians suffer. VIA rail trains are forced onto the sidings, while dangerous goods just roar past.

Does the minister agree with former Conservative prime minister Robert Borden, who called for the nationalization of Canada's key strategic rail beds?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former prime minister Borden of course being a Nova Scotian, it would be tempting to agree with him.

However, that being said, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate what our government has done on the issue of rail safety. We have increased the number of inspectors. We have invested \$100 million into ensuring that our goods can travel safely and securely. With the full support of the Canadian public, we are working hard on the matter and will continue to do so.

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PARKS CANADA

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Trent-Severn Waterway is the largest and most complex of Canada's historic canals committed to and completed by Conservative governments. It boasts the Peterborough lift lock, the largest in the world, the Kirkfield lift lock, the Big Chute Marine Railway, 45 locks in all and more than 32 kilometres of entirely man-made channels. A national historic site, it was constructed as a piece of strategic infrastructure, forever changing the natural landscape of the Trent Valley region. It is not today and has never been a park.

Given that there is a consensus among stakeholders, will the government commit to the creation of a management structure that will properly support its operations and the communities that depend on it?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Peterborough for all his work on the Trent-Severn and all the consultations he has done with his constituents.

Points of Order

As he knows, our government is proud of our support for Canada's national parks. For example, we have taken action and protected an area twice the size of Vancouver Island.

Parks Canada aligns operating seasons and hours in national parks and national historic sites so it can focus on peak visitation periods. Our national parks will continue to provide Canadians and visitors with the means to connect with our country's natural heritage.

I would like to commit to my colleague across the way that we will continue working with him and other MPs in regard to this.

* * *

● (1500)

ETHICS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to have a simple, straightforward answer from the Conservative government to a simple and straightforward question. Which version of events, according to the Prime Minister, are Canadians meant to believe. Was Nigel Wright fired or was Nigel Wright simply allowed to resign? Which is it?

Could the government tell Canadians the straightforward, honest truth for once?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered that. However, since I have a little extra time on my hands, I want to tell the House a little story that my kids love to hear. It is the story of angry Tom and the three chairs. Angry Tom tried the first chair. It was a Liberal chair. He did not like it because it was too corrupt. He tried the Conservative chair, but he knew that they would never accept 17 years without telling the truth about a potential bribe. He tried the last chair, the NDP not accountable, behold to the big union bosses—

The Speaker: That concludes question period for today.

The hon member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is rising on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have made this point of order before. Particularly when the member for Random—Burin—St. George's is speaking, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs interrupts her constantly. I have trouble even hearing her question.

I know that the Minister of Foreign Affairs believes himself to be very amusing, but it is a violation of our rules to continually interrupt people when they are trying to ask a question.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the member in question stands to talk about ethics, I would remind the House that she received a \$5,000 watch and did not report it.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***2013 ANNUAL REPORT ON IMMIGRATION**

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to subsection 94(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2013 annual report on immigration.

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GLOBAL CENTRE FOR PLURALISM

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Multiculturalism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Global Centre for Pluralism's annual report for 2012.

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*[Translation]***COMBATING COUNTERFEIT PRODUCTS ACT**

Hon. Steven Blaney (for the Minister of Industry) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-8, An Act to amend the Copyright Act and the Trade-marks Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the special order made previously, I would like to inform the House that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-56 was in the previous session at the time of prorogation.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-56 was in the previous session at the time of prorogation of the first session of the 41st Parliament.

[English]

Accordingly, pursuant to an order made on Monday, October 21, the bill is deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee.)

● (1505)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, clauses 290 to 293, which deal with the establishment of a new system of permanent residence in Canada, be removed from Bill C-4, A second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, and that those clauses form Bill C-9; that Bill C-9 be deemed read the first time and printed; that the order for second reading of the said bill provide for the referral to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration; that Bill C-4 retain the status on the Order Paper that it had prior to the adoption of this order and that Bill C-4 be reprinted as amended; and that the law clerk and the parliamentary counsel be authorized to make any technical changes or corrections as may be necessary to give effect to this motion.

We introduce this motion in order to improve the transparency and accountability of this Parliament. This is important for the NDP.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

*[English]***PETITIONS**

SEX SELECTION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition mainly from residents of Orangeville, Ontario, who are concerned with the issue of preventing sex-selective abortions. Specifically, they are concerned that sex-selective abortions have denied millions of girls in Canada and throughout the world the chance to be born mainly because they are girls.

The petitioners are asking the House of Commons and Parliament assembled to condemn discrimination against girls through sex-selective abortion and to do all it can to prevent sex-selective abortions from being carried out in Canada.

KITSILANO COAST GUARD STATION

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of presenting three petitions today.

Petitioners are first calling on the Government of Canada to rescind the decision to close the Kitsilano Coast Guard station and restore full funding to maintain the Coast Guard station.

SHARK FINNING

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, second, petitioners call on the Government of Canada to immediately legislate a ban on the importation of shark fin to Canada.

NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD DAY

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, finally, petitioners call on the Government of Canada to designate March 18 as National Sustainable Seafood Day.

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of tabling two petitions today.

The first is a petition from Canadians from Inuvik, Yellowknife, Fitzgerald, Serpent River, and Alberta. They are calling on the House of Commons to add the Slave River to the Navigable Waters Protection Act because the Slave River historically has been famous for its navigation.

HEALTH BENEFITS FOR REFUGEES

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from 120 Albertans calling on the government to immediately rescind the changes to the interim federal health program so as to reinstate necessary health benefits to refugees.

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many residents of Winnipeg North. They are asking for the Prime Minister to acknowledge the importance of our old age pension programs. They want to ensure that there is an option to retire at the age of 65 and that the government not in any way diminish the importance and value of Canada's three major seniors programs: OAS, GIS, and CPP.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure today of presenting two petitions signed by citizens in and around my riding of Beaches—East York.

The first is with respect to climate change. The petitioners call on the government to accept the science of climate change, table a comprehensive climate change plan, identify the current value of government buildings and infrastructure assets, determine the possible impacts of our changing climate and changes in extreme weather on identified assets, and determine the projected cost of climate change on these assets.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has to do with genetically modified alfalfa. The petitioners call upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa in order to allow proper review of the impact on farmers in Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

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

The first is from residents of the British Columbia coast, from the areas of Langley and Vancouver, particularly as well from the outskirts of Vancouver. They are calling for the British Columbia coastal ban that has been in place since 1972 on all supertankers loaded with crude oil to be made permanent and legislated.

• (1510)

SECURITY CERTIFICATES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is primarily from residents of the Ottawa and Gatineau area. It calls for this House to review security certificates, which the petitioners believe violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and violate fundamental human rights. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to abolish the security certificates process.

[Translation]

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition signed by people in my riding in support of Bill C-475 to modernize the

Routine Proceedings

Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act so that it better protects Canadians in the digital age.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to officially present a petition signed by some of the citizens in my riding, Manicouagan, who are worried about the amalgamation of CIDA with the Department of Foreign Affairs. These people want to ensure that the principle of development assistance as defined in the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act is not lost in the shuffle of that amalgamation. At the same time, they are urging the new department not to put development assistance on the back burner. In closing, I wish to commend the work and the efforts of the Baie-Comeau chapter of the organization Development and Peace, which initiated this petition.

HEALTH

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present four petitions regarding health care in Canada and the importance of keeping our health system public and ensuring that the necessary funds are transferred to the provinces in order to maintain a public, universal, and free health care system.

[English]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to introduce two petitions today.

The first petition is signed by people in Vancouver. They want to draw to our attention the fact that unwanted contamination from GM alfalfa is inevitable, that it will contaminate organic systems, and that it will compromise the ability of both organic and conventional farmers to sell alfalfa and related products into domestic and international markets. The petitioners call on Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa in order to allow a proper review.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from hundreds of people from Toronto, Peterborough, Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond, and Surrey. I have had the pleasure of introducing thousands of these petitions.

The petitioners point out to us that every year hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats are brutally slaughtered for their fur in a number of Asian regions. The petitioners ask Canada to join the U.S. A., Australia, and the European Union in banning the import and sale of dog and cat fur, and they point out that in fact we are the only developed country without such a ban. They ask the government to introduce legislation to amend the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act and the Textile Labelling Act.

*Government Orders***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2013 ACT NO. 2

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, A second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, I must rise today to object to this terrible and completely undemocratic habit of the Conservative government. This is the fourth omnibus bill it has introduced. Another mammoth is wandering the halls of the House of Commons. The bill is over 300 pages long. Even the President of the Treasury Board admits that you would have to talk to half the people in cabinet to understand everything that is in this bill.

In such an unwieldy document, it is easy to make mistakes without realizing it, for example, increasing the tax rate of credit unions from 15% to 28%. This forced the Minister of Finance to quietly correct his bad policy in the bill that is before us today.

The NDP is disappointed that the Conservatives refuse to learn from their mistakes and insist on presenting Canadians with a fourth omnibus bill.

The government is voluntarily preventing Parliament from engaging in a point-by-point debate of these reforms that are harmful to Canadians. As we saw with the Duffygate scandal, here is another 300 pages of proof that the Conservatives prefer camouflage to transparency.

I cannot talk about this bill without mentioning the changes that will affect Canadians' right to a healthy and safe working environment. This bill removes the powers granted to health and safety officers by the Canada Labour Code and gives those powers to the minister. It significantly weakens employees' ability to refuse to work in hazardous conditions and places nearly all powers related to health and safety in the hands of the minister. It seems to me that the three changes I just mentioned do not respect workers' rights.

The NDP firmly believes that no worker should ever be forced to work in hazardous conditions.

Another aspect of this bill that concerns me is the attacks on the public service. This is another case of interference. The minister can now arbitrarily designate which services are essential without basing that decision on an objective analysis. These powers could be used to completely take away the right of some workers to collective bargaining. That is unacceptable and it violates the fundamental rights of workers.

This reminds me of a story that was published in *Le Devoir* last week. A public servant who works for employment insurance's integrity services was formally dismissed for revealing to *Le Devoir* that quotas were being imposed on EI investigators. Today, this courageous woman voiced her concerns about the way whistle-blowers are treated. She said:

I acted in the public interest and I am paying a very high price because of it. It is a dreadful experience to go through and to live with, especially because no one wants to hire a whistleblower. It has ruined my career, and my life.

I sincerely hope that this woman will be able to find a decent job, because she acted in the public interest and that is very commendable.

The government is doing everything in its power to hide the truth from taxpayers, and it is exercising a disturbing amount of control. How can we have confidence in a government that is contradicting itself day after day and preventing parliamentarians from doing a good job by hiding all vital information and introducing such colossal bills?

Bill C-4 contains a wide range of complex measures, many of which are not related to the budget and deserve further consideration.

Because the government pushed through omnibus Bill C-60 last year, a number of errors slipped by unnoticed, including the tax hike for credit unions. As I mentioned earlier, the result of this mistake was that credit unions were facing a tax hike of 28% rather than 15%. Bill C-4 will fix this error.

The NDP is opposed to the tax hike for credit unions and is disappointed that the Conservatives have not learned from their mistakes and are imposing an omnibus bill once again.

I am also very disappointed with the part of the bill that eliminates the tax credit for labour-sponsored venture capital funds.

● (1515)

Labour-sponsored funds are an important economic development tool for small and medium-sized businesses. I want to point out that last Friday was Small Business Day. Abolishing the tax credit for this fund does not help our country's small businesses.

In the past 10 years alone, 2,239 businesses in Quebec and Canada have benefited from this tax credit, and 80% of them have fewer than 100 employees. It is estimated that the Fonds de solidarité FTQ has helped create or maintain 171,000 jobs in Quebec. So much for all the government's talk of job creation. Moreover, I do not see a single measure in this budget that will create real jobs in our communities.

Over the weekend I had the pleasure of visiting a business in my riding. The first-ever saffron farm in North America just opened in Saint-Élie-de-Caxton. I was truly impressed by this business. This is the kind of business that we need to encourage and support through tax credits for young workers, research and development and risk management programs that work. These are the things we have suggested.

Government Orders

I would also like to talk about the cuts being made to scientific research institutes. In Bill C-4, the Conservatives are going after the National Research Council of Canada, cutting nearly half of the jobs there and giving more powers to the president they chose. I find that extremely disheartening. In my role as deputy agriculture critic I often hear about the needs in agricultural research. I know that there are similar needs in other areas. Stakeholders have told me that independent research allows agricultural businesses to grow and set themselves apart from the competition on international markets. Innovation is a priority in the agricultural industry, and it is sad that the Conservatives are not interested in this important issue.

I see nothing in this bill that can help the people in my riding. In the spring, my office was inundated with email and mail criticizing the employment insurance reform. Now the Conservatives are dissolving the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board. The board ensured independent management of EI financing. Now the Minister of Finance has the power to manipulate the rates.

The government wants to bring Canada back to a time where the successive Liberal and Conservative governments could dip into the EI fund. Employment insurance comes from money contributed by workers and is to be used by workers. We cannot trust the Conservatives to manage EI financing. They have shown us time and again that they are not responsible. I am very concerned about this measure.

We are opposed to Bill C-4 both for its content and this process. The Conservatives forced Canadians to wait an extra month for Parliament to resume in order to come up with a new political agenda. Congratulations. Now the Conservatives are forcing us to work at lightning speed to approve their bill. The government wants to quietly slip all manner of things through, which inevitably includes unpleasant surprises.

In the meantime, the economy is stagnating, families keep getting further in debt and their priorities are being ignored. We will oppose budget 2013 and its implementation bills, unless they are redrafted to take into account the real priorities of Canadian families: the creation of good jobs, the assurance of a decent retirement, the creation of job opportunities for young people and a more affordable life for families. That is what people want. It takes more than just saying a few words here and there, like in the Speech from the Throne, to look good. People need action and commitment.

Canadians will have a real government in 2015.

• (1520)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's concluding remarks. They were in regard to what real people want to see.

There has been a serious void in attention given to Canada's middle class. What we have seen, and it has been highlighted by the leader of the Liberal Party on numerous occasions, is that the middle class is not getting its fair share of the wealth Canada has been able to produce. It has been neglected by the government.

One example is the unemployed today. To what degree is the government coming up with creative programming in co-operation with the different stakeholders, such as the provinces, in developing

skill sets and in encouraging individuals to become re-engaged or re-employed at a level at which they will get a salary based on their salary when they were laid off just months prior?

To what degree does she believe the Government of Canada has been negligent in not working with our provinces to ensure that we have first-class training opportunities and programs that would allow our middle class, in particular, to stay employed at quality jobs for quality pay?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Liberals like to talk about the middle class and what they are doing to defend the middle class. However, members of our caucus represent Canadians well. I am a single mother, and I know what it is like to work two jobs and pay for daycare and juggle it all.

The government is not doing enough to help families get out of poverty. We talk about the middle class, but consider the people under the middle class. We need to help people get out of poverty. We need to make sure that they have good jobs and that when they retire, they have *une retraite assez décente*.

I recently read an article from the Wellesley Institute about the children's fitness tax credit. It is great. It is a tax credit. However, the article says that it only helps families with incomes over \$200,000 a year.

Make that tax credit reimbursable.

• (1525)

[Translation]

That would make life more affordable for families who are truly in need. This is a concrete measure that the government could include in the budget.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, who works so hard and does such a great job of representing all Canadians, including the middle class. I was very pleased to hear her talk about that.

I will stay more or less on the same topic. Michael Harris, a journalist who writes on iPolitics.ca, stated the following: "The PM and his government are not good managers. The nauseating repetition of the claim that the Tories know what they're doing with the country's finances will not make it so."

Similarly, the fact that the Liberals keep repeating the words "middle class" in every sentence that comes out of their mouths will not make them the great defenders of the middle class. No one will forget that when they had majority governments, they did nothing to advance the interests of the middle class.

Going back to the Conservatives, Michael Harris also stated the following: "They've pissed away more money than Madonna on a shopping spree—a billion on the G8-20 meetings that put a dent in the world's Perrier supply and little else. They just plain lost \$3.2 billion and the guy in charge over at Treasury Board is still there.... They are such good fiscal managers that we now have the highest deficit in our history."

Well, that is what we see here day after day. What are his comments on this—

Government Orders

The Speaker: The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé has the floor.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and congratulate her for the speech she made earlier. I always love listening to the hon. member for Gatineau, because I always learn something.

This omnibus bill contains many elements. They should be separated so that we can study them in depth. We know that we cannot trust the government of the day because, once more, the things it is foisting on us are full of mistakes. Nor has it learned a thing. My son makes mistakes but he understands that he must not make them again. He learns from his mistakes. The Conservatives do not.

According to Statistics Canada, there are 6.5 unemployed people for every job vacancy in this country. Are the Conservatives going to fix that? I see nothing to that effect in this omnibus bill. The number of unemployed people has increased by more than 270,000 under the Conservative government. Well done!

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real privilege for me to speak to economic action plan 2013. It will not surprise you, but I stand in support of this legislation, as it really is a continuation of what our government has done to bring prosperity, hope, and opportunity to Canadians of all ages, from coast to coast.

It is a privilege to stand and commend our Minister of Finance, who has brought forward another plan, a continuation of a plan, to continue to see jobs created across this country.

I might need to remind our opposition colleagues, who like to lead folks to different conclusions, that since the depths of the recession, we have seen over one million net new jobs created in this country. That is great news, especially for those people in the middle class, who work hard to pay the bills and make ends meet. We are seeing the lowest unemployment rates in some eight years, which is just great news, and that number continues to drop, month after month.

Having come from the province of Alberta, and representing the province of Alberta, the number one issue small businesses, industry, and employers have is trying to find folks to fill job vacancies. The number one issue that seems to be holding back growth and opportunity in the province of Alberta is finding a skilled workforce.

That is why I am so excited about what is included in the plan we are debating today. It has so many different initiatives within it to create jobs, opportunity, and prosperity. Specifically, I am very excited about the Canada job grant, which is one of the things Canada would do to reduce the major issue of not having enough folks to fill the job vacancies in our communities.

We have a number of industries that continue to struggle to find skilled workers in the areas of agriculture, forestry, pulp and paper, and natural gas and oil. What are most desperately needed are those folks who can fill the skilled jobs. This budget responds to that through the Canada job grant program, which would be initiated through this budget implementation bill. Not only are employers excited about this but so are young people who are trying to find the training necessary for the high-paying jobs of today.

I have been speaking with many educational institutions, specifically one in my constituency, Grande Prairie Regional College. It is very keen to begin the process of continuing to work with our government and with the provincial government to put highly trained people into the workforce to fill these job vacancies. GPRC is not only excited about what we are doing on the Canada job grant initiative but also about what we are doing in terms of some of the contributions for the development of new technologies and research.

GPRC last week was named the third most important research institution, at a college level, in the province and the 14th in the country. This is great news, considering the fact that three or four years ago it was at about the bottom of the heap. Since then, we have seen significant contributions from the federal government for initiatives within GPRC through CRI and a number of other initiatives it has undertaken to link up with federal funds to build things such as the National Bee Diagnostic Centre, which is now located in Beaverlodge.

● (1530)

Our government was proud to fund the construction of the original facility, and we were very keen in the last number of months to announce that we will have ongoing support for that initiative for the next five years. This really is exciting not only for the folks who live in the Peace River region but also throughout the country. When I recently toured this facility, which just celebrated its one-year anniversary, I learned that one of the major groups of folks using the research capacity of that facility are people who come from Ontario. We are seeing that this really is a trans-Canadian initiative and I am very proud that our government funded it and that it is located in my community.

The budget is very multi-faceted. One of the things that I am very keenly aware of is the necessity to engage our first nation people in training for the jobs of today. I have served in the past as chair of the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee and it has been a real privilege to serve in that capacity. One of the major issues that is recognized across partisan lines is the underemployment or unemployment within first nation communities, specifically the youth of these communities. I am very excited about the continued initiatives put forward in this budget to continue to support education opportunities for folks who live within first nation communities, and to link those folks who live within close proximity of some of the new industrial developments and resource developments with the training necessary to get those jobs.

Government Orders

In my community, folks who live on reserve in some cases are just miles away from some of the highest-paid jobs in the country. The only thing that seems to be standing between the opportunities and the underemployed or unemployed young people on these reserves is training. With training they might be able to get those high-paying jobs in the industry and in the resource sector in very close proximity so they can continue to live within their communities and will not need to move to a large urban centre. They can get the training and work in a community that is close to home. This is great news. Our government is responding to needs and challenges that many first nation folks are facing by putting more money into training and working with local institutions to provide support to ensure that young people get the training that is necessary to support their families and create opportunities in the regions in which they live.

One of the other major challenges we have faced over the last number of years as a growing community and region that has continued to see development is the ability for municipal and provincial governments to keep up with the essential infrastructure necessary to keep local industries moving and prospering. I am very excited that the finance minister has continued to allocate money to essential infrastructure from coast to coast, and Alberta is going to be one of the big benefactors of this program, as every province will be.

Specifically, my province and the region in which I live are in desperate need of some of this essential infrastructure so that prosperity can continue to be developed. Things such as water systems, sewer systems, roads and bridges are all essential in order for there to be prosperity in local communities. It is something that we are very excited about and I commend the government for continuing to recognize the needs of regions across this country to continue to build the infrastructure necessary for long-term prosperity in all communities.

As I go through this action plan, I can say that from the beginning to the end there are nuggets and important initiatives within this piece of legislation that are good news for Canadians, good news for Albertans, and definitely good news for folks who live in Peace Country.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question that I have also put to a number of his colleagues.

On the weekend, the President of the Treasury Board said in an interview that we had to vote for the budget before he would give us the details of the bill. Does the hon. member feel that this is democratic, that it provides the opposition and members of Parliament with information? According to the President of the Treasury Board, we have to pass the budget first and then later we can talk about it and find out about the details in it.

If the NDP were in government and the hon. member were in the opposition, what would he have said if the President of the Treasury Board had told him to vote for his bill before getting any information about it? Is that democratic?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that many of her colleagues on that side of the House have read the documents, so I am hopeful that she will catch up with them, read the document and see the details that are necessary to vote on it.

This is an interesting tweak on what has been the practice of the NDP. Often NDP members have decided that they will oppose the budget even before having it presented in the House, so this is an interesting change. What I continue to hear is that NDP members are unable to see the document or be able to determine if it is going to be a plan that would lead to prosperity, hope and opportunity in this country.

If the hon. member does not want to read the document, that is fine. She can take my word or take the word of economists across the world who have said that Canada has had a plan and that the plan is working, creating opportunity, hope and prosperity. She can even ask some of her colleagues who are currently snickering at her. They will tell her that she probably should support the budget.

• (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that no other minister of finance in the history of our great nation has been manipulated into bringing in as much legislation as this particular minister has. Over the last series of budget implementation bills, the Minister of Finance has had more than half of his cabinet colleagues come forward saying, "Me too, Mr. Minister of Finance, I want my bill brought through on your budget bill".

It is absolutely mind-blowing in terms of the number of pages that the current Minister of Finance has brought in over the last couple of years, since this Reform Conservative government. How does this member justify his Minister of Finance bringing in legislation that should in fact have been broken down into numerous pieces of legislation?

Most of the stuff that is in here has nothing to do with the actual budget implementation and what we have seen in the last couple of years. Does the member not believe that more legislation should have been brought forward as opposed to trying to bring everything in through the back door of budget legislation?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not have to take my word for it, but he can take the word of the economists or other folks who have declared that our Minister of Finance is the best finance minister in history.

We as Canadians have really the privilege to be served by one of the greatest finance ministers. For him to lead us through what has been a very difficult time over the last number of years to a place of prosperity that has outstripped any other of the industrialized world is really a credit to him.

I can say that when this Minister of Finance brings a piece of legislation to the House the members opposite should take it seriously, reflect on it and recognize that Canadians support what this finance minister has done and continue to support what this finance minister is doing.

Government Orders

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to thank the people of Etobicoke North, the community where I was born and raised. I want the community to know that I loved being in the constituency office almost every day this summer. I want the people to know that I loved being at their beautiful celebrations during the week and on weekends, sometimes attending 10 events on a weekend. I want to thank them for coming to our annual community barbecue. There were 1,200 of us and it was a wonderful party because we shared and met new friends.

From my daily work in our constituency office this summer I know that people need jobs, and I have worked hard to get them jobs. In fact, I obtained funding for a completing the circle program, a \$500,000 jobs program in our community in remembrance of Loyan Gilao, a young Somali Canadian man, a York University student with a bright future, who was shot and killed in 2005. Eight years later we still do not know Loyan's killer. We now have 50 deaths of young Somali Canadian men.

In 2012, six of 33 Toronto shooting victims were Somali Canadian men. Our community is asking that the government investigate these deaths through the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, develop federal-provincial job programs, particularly with the RCMP, and examine witness protection.

There was not a day this summer that I did not have a student, a graduate, a parent or even a grandparent come asking for help to find a job. They came and continued to come because we do help them find jobs. I personally review and edit resumé late into the night, sometimes doing two and three drafts. We get our people into job programs. We follow up with them to make sure their jobs searches are going in the right direction, and while they search, we help them with food and clothing and whatever other supports they might need.

At critical times I have personally bought medicine. We had a lady looking for help who was in agony due to an ear infection that had raged for three weeks. She had pus and blood running down her face. The sad reality is that she could not afford antibiotics because she could not find a job. How many more stories like hers are there?

I had a university graduate who came in to get help after being out of school and out of work for two years. I have numerous disappointed graduate students, international doctors and teachers who could not find work. I had grandparents who came on behalf of their grandchildren, the first in the family to graduate university and college, asking why they had fled their country of origin to come to Canada, the land of promise, so their children could have educations. Now they have educations and they still do not have jobs.

It was particularly hard to hear from service providers that federal funding was being cut from job and training programs in our Etobicoke North community. My community depends on these job programs. We cannot afford to have them shut down. That is why I contacted the minister's office, and I hope that this will be rectified.

What I was looking for first and foremost in the budget was real help for the people of Etobicoke North for jobs. Instead, we have 308 pages with 472 separate clauses amending more than 50 different pieces of legislation. Yet again, another anti-democratic omnibus bill meant to limit debate and ram through as much unrelated legislation as the government can get through Parliament.

The legislation fails to address the very real challenges faced by the middle class and those seeking to enter it. It does little to help the economy create jobs. In fact, the so-called job creation measures in the bill are just a continuation of the status quo, which simply is not good enough. Moreover, it does little to help young Canadians find jobs at a time of persistently high youth unemployment and underemployment. The reality is that there are still 224,000 fewer jobs for our youth than before the recession.

As the critic for Status of Women for our party, I was disappointed to see virtually nothing for women. In response to the throne speech, one of my young constituents simply asked, "Do women and girls even register with this government?"

● (1545)

Her question prompted me to think about what a throne speech and a budget bill might have looked like if it actually addressed the challenges Canadian women face. Perhaps such a throne speech would have recognized, in silent prayer and reflection, the 600 murdered and missing aboriginal women—mothers, aunts, cousins, and sisters stolen from our communities and taken from Canada—and made a commitment to an inquiry with real recommendations to end the violence.

Perhaps Bill C-4 would have begun to address the remaining inequalities women face and would have begun to build brighter futures for our families, our communities, and our country. After almost 100 years of women's advocacy, this would mean eliminating the gender wage gap at last. Its eradication would be an economic imperative, as the wage gap hurts our families and hurts our economy. In fact, the Royal Bank of Canada has shown that the lost income potential of women in Canada because of the wage gap is a staggering \$126 billion a year.

A healthy and robust Canadian economy needs women's contributions, and it is government's job to remove the obstacles that appear at all stages of women's lives that keep them from realizing their full potential.

A lack of child care, an enormous issue in my riding of Etobicoke North, holds women back. It is one of our country's great unsolved issues. It is time to fix Canada's broken child care promises and fix a system that is failing Canadians.

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By the end of this fiscal year, the government will have spent about \$17.5 billion on the universal child care benefit. Has the benefit helped more parents stay at home with their children, affected the severe shortage of child care, or made child care more affordable? Astoundingly, the government cannot answer these questions.

Our government should ensure that when each of our daughters leaves college, university, or a trades school, she will make the same wage as the young man sitting next to her. This would mean that she would have the same opportunity to buy a home, raise a family, and save for retirement. She would have enough money to leave an unhealthy relationship if she needed to, without being trapped and dependent upon a partner who hurts her, as often happened in past generations.

Where is the promise and sustainable funding to develop the national strategy to end violence against women and girls, violence that forces 100,000 women and children from their homes into shelters each year, carries an incalculable human toll, and costs Canadian society billions? Where is the apology to our aboriginal peoples for the loss of their children, Canada's children, and an inquiry into the missing and murdered aboriginal women with the promise to listen, nation to nation, and together develop real recommendations that we would implement together to end the violence?

The news that the Minister of Health plans to make ending family violence a major theme of her tenure is welcome. The Canadian Medical Association president wants to ensure that resources are put in place, and that the minister's efforts turn into a national strategy.

For the people of Etobicoke North and for women across Canada, Bill C-4 offers very little. My constituents need better and deserve better.

The government needs to recognize that pay equity, child care, and ending violence against women are key economic issues, and it must become a champion for women.

• (1550)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member addresses an important issue, which is child care.

I do not have children of my own, unless my cats are counted. That said, I have many colleagues and friends who value choice in how they approach child care. If they choose find care out of the home, they have a choice in where to go to find it; if they choose to stay at home and raise their children, they have the choice to do that, and that choice is equally valued. There is choice in how things are provided, and the state is not telling them how to undertake a fundamental freedom, which is how to raise one's children. That is where we differ ideologically.

I was wondering how the member can argue for state-run child care when choice in parenting is a fundamental Canadian freedom that builds our society. Our universal child care benefit speaks to that, speaks to the heart of Canadian parents.

If the member wants to talk about income splitting or other measures, let us talk about that. However, let us not take choice out of the equation.

I would like the member to explain how state-run child care allows for choice.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the question is this: does the universal child care benefit actually provide a choice? Has the benefit helped more parents stay at home? The government cannot answer that. Has it affected the severe shortage of child care? The government cannot answer that. Has it made child care more available? The government cannot answer that. The government cannot answer those fundamental questions.

Had that \$17.5 billion actually gone to child care, we would have had 700,000 additional child care spaces in this country.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the presentation by my hon. colleague from Etobicoke North highlighted the fact that we have not seen much focus on the concerns of women in this country. After hearing the Speech from the Throne, a Conservative friend of mine made the same point: that there was not much there in relation to the concerns that women experience in this country.

I want to mention a specific concern that I was hoping to see in the Speech from the Throne. I know there are many Conservatives who are in favour of this change. It would be of assistance to the police in not only searching for those who have brought harm to murdered and missing aboriginal women but also in searching for missing children across Canada. I am speaking of a database of the DNA of missing persons for routine cross-referencing to crime scenes.

It is an important idea that has been endorsed by Senate committees and supported by various Conservatives. We still have not seen it. It is called Lindsey's law. Judy Peterson, who is one of my constituents, has been championing this effort since her daughter Lindsey went missing 20 years ago on August 2.

I would like my friend's comments.

• (1555)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I first offer my profound apologies to my hon. colleague's family for the loss of her daughter. We are talking about the murder of a child. I cannot imagine the horror of that. We need better databases and anything we can do to provide information to improve databases.

Government Orders

I do want to pick up on pay equity and women in the economy. Canadians should remember that in budget 2009 the Conservatives attacked the rights of Canadian women by undermining pay equity. In 2010, it voted down the Liberal private member's bill to implement the recommendations of the 2004 pay equity task force. The gap in income between men and women in Canada is 19%. According to the Conference Board of Canada, Canada ties with the United States for the 11th spot of 17 countries and earns a C grade. With the challenges of the current financial climate, it has never been more important to take full advantage of the skills and talents of all people, regardless of their gender.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the second budget implementation act. This act builds on many important measures that are part of the 2013 economic action plan and puts them into practice for Canadians. Today I would like to highlight several of these measures that I feel would benefit constituents in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, and indeed Canadians across the country.

To begin, it should be noted that the Canadian economy has been recognized globally as a leader through the current global economic recession. In fact, Canada has had the strongest job creation record in the G7. Furthermore, both the International Monetary Fund and the OECD are projecting that Canada will have among the strongest growths in the G7 in the years to come. Finally, the World Economic Forum has ranked Canada's banking system as the soundest in the world, and a great part of that can be attributed to the great finance minister that we have in this country.

These global accolades are a strong indication of the economic success that this country has seen. This government knows to spend when spending is necessary and it knows to save when saving is possible. In fact, leading up to the recession, this government took almost \$40 billion in surpluses and paid down the national debt. That is nothing to sneeze at. I was very pleased to see that budget 2013 and this implementation act continue this proven, successful Conservative tradition.

One principle that is very important to me is keeping taxes low for hard-working people and allowing workers to keep their hard-earned money, yet still providing necessary services. Since 2006, we have done just that. We have cut taxes over 150 times, resulting in the overall tax burden being reduced to its lowest level in 50 years. This is translated into the average Canadian family saving approximately \$3,200 each year.

Expanding further, this budget will introduce more measures to save money for the average Canadian. This will be achieved by the freezing of employment insurance premium rates for three years, leaving \$660 million in the pockets of workers and job creators. Therefore, Canadians will be saving money through tax breaks and other incentives while still benefiting from federal stimulus initiatives.

The new long-term infrastructure plan is a fantastic measure in the 2013 economic action plan. It will support economic growth and development in Canada.

The livelihoods of Canadians depend on a network of highways and roads, water and waste water infrastructure, transit systems, and

recreational and cultural facilities. I and many of my colleagues on all sides of the House have spent time in municipal politics; in my case, it was almost 13 years. At this level of government, one of the main challenges that all of us had was addressing the needs of local infrastructure. That is why I am pleased to see that this budget addresses the need to support this network of infrastructure. Instead of a patchwork program, we have dedicated \$32.2 billion over 10 years. The community improvement fund will support construction of, or improvements to, local roads, public transit, recreational facilities, and other important infrastructure, as well as provide a consistent and steady source of funding for local municipalities across the country. It is long overdue and well anticipated.

Along with supporting the development of infrastructure, economic action plan 2013 also contains measures to support a knowledgeable and healthy workforce. For example, the Canada job grant will provide \$15,000 or more per person through federal, provincial, territorial, and employer funding to help Canadians get the skills they need for in-demand jobs. This program is expected to reach approximately 130,000 Canadians at eligible institutions each year.

● (1600)

Furthermore, I was pleased to see that this budget would reduce barriers to apprenticeship accreditation by working with the provinces and territories to standardize requirements for apprentices in the skilled trades across Canada. This is very welcome news in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, as many students and young workers obtain the skills they need for future employment through apprenticeship programs with local businesses that also benefit from the skills of these young workers. In fact, one of my own sons apprenticed with a local business and achieved his red seal in carpentry. That example of a great program happens all over the country every day.

Representing a riding that is surrounded by water on three sides puts the protection of our waterways, local fisheries and environment among the top priorities for me. That is why I was happy to see that budget 2013 contained measures to support these initiatives.

The first of these would be the recreational fisheries conservation protection program. This program would support local groups and sportsmen associations on local conservation projects. In fact, I was very pleased recently to welcome the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to my riding to announce funding for a couple of local groups which had been approved for funding through this program. Remember that this program was just announced in the recent budget. To actually get some money flowing two to three months after that, if anyone knows how the government works, was a phenomenal thing to get through. It just does not usually happen that quickly, so kudos to the minister on that. It is a great program.

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Along with this program, I was also pleased to see that the budget set aside \$4 million to monitor and enforce ballast water regulation. This would help to protect our Great Lakes and other waterways from invasive species, such as Asian carp.

With Remembrance Day right around the corner, we should all take some time to recognize the strides that have been taken to better the lives of our honourable veterans. Specifically, this budget would enhance the funeral and burial program by simplifying it and by more than doubling the current funeral services reimbursement rate from \$3,600 to just over \$7,300. This program means a great deal to the families and friends of veterans who have passed away. These amendments certainly come as welcome news. These changes go along with other initiatives that have been implemented to support our veterans, such as the Helmets to Hardhats program and more.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that the current global economic recession is just that. The impacts of this recession have been felt all over the world. Global co-operation will be required to fix the problem and create a strong and stable international economic system. That is why the new and historic free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union is an outstanding accomplishment that we should certainly celebrate. Canadian companies will now benefit from free access to one of the world's largest consumer bases, which will create much more economic activity in Canada. Approximately 500 million people in agriculture, small business and all the other aspects of the Canadian economy have an opportunity here. That is what it is. Trade just does not happen overnight, but we have the opportunity to now make it happen. Having a very large and rural agricultural riding, my constituents will benefit from this.

This agreement has the potential to boost Canada's income by \$12 billion annually and will increase bilateral trade by 20%. In other terms, this will add \$1,000 to the average Canadian family's income and will also result in 80,000 new Canadian jobs. With statistics like these, it is very easy to see why this agreement is something to be celebrated. I look forward to taking questions.

• (1605)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, serving on the committees with my colleague has always been a pleasure. I would like to ask, though, a question regarding the auto industry. In Ontario and across the country, it is significantly important. One of his colleagues earlier today in the House referred to it as a “niche industry” and that it is not significant or important.

First, what does he feel about that? Is it the case that it is a niche industry? Second, with regard to the auto sector right now, what strategies or plans are there in the government to get a battery procurement facility for automobile production?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, in response to his question about the auto industry, it is fair to say that in any industry, whether it is agriculture or the auto industry, there are components of those industries that can attract niche markets.

I am not aware of the comments that he referred to, but from some of the figures I have seen, in the last year 17,000 cars from Canada went to the European Union. Under this agreement, that could rise to somewhere between 100,000 and 120,000 cars. If that is not significant, then I do not know what is.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I have noticed is that the government time and time again likes to repeat the things it believes are really sellable. One of the things the Conservatives always talk about is economic action plan 2013, as if it is actually good. They have spent literally millions of tax dollars promoting that plan.

I have heard a couple of members in a row talk about the best Minister of Finance ever. There is an obligation to tell the full truth inside the chamber. We need to recognize that Minister of Finance inherited a budget surplus and turned it into a budget multi-billion dollar deficit. He inherited a trade surplus and turned that into a multi-billion dollar trade deficit. An argument could be made that he might be the worst Minister of Finance.

Given the whole scandal involving the Prime Minister's Office, does the member not believe there is any merit to telling the full truth in what is actually taking place?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, it is really good to hear an opposition member, particularly a Liberal, stand and recognize the great Minister of Finance we have in our country. It is one thing for one of his colleagues like myself, who obviously already knows that he is a great finance minister, to say it, but to hear that member say it is fantastic.

I talked about the \$40 billion that we used to pay down the deficit. If the Liberal Party of Canada would pay back the \$40 million that went out of this place in paper bags, we could add that to it.

• (1610)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is from a rural riding. We have talked about jobs, growth and economic prosperity in the budget. Could he talk a bit about what that means in his riding? When Canadians have more money in their pockets, they change their spending habits on agricultural products, for instance.

Could the member talk about what this budget would mean to the people who live in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, the member for Newmarket—Aurora has been in my riding and I think she would agree that it is a pretty special place. She represents a great riding as well and does a great job of that.

My people are no different than hers. They are average, hard-working Canadians. Any time we give honest, hard-working Canadians extra money in their pockets, we know what they will do. Their kids will benefit from it. Seniors will benefit from it. As I said in my speech, \$3,200 is nothing to sneeze at. It is significant. That \$3,200 is a lot of money which allows Canadians to do those little extras that they might not have been able to do.

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[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, Science and Technology.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by saying what a delightful weekend I had in my riding of Newton—North Delta. It was so wonderful to have our leader in the riding and meet with so many of my constituents and the press and hear their concerns expressed. As members know, it is always very rewarding to be back home working with constituents.

I also want to acknowledge the amazing work done by my colleague, the member of Parliament for Parkdale—High Park, on this file.

I rise today to oppose what is before the House, both the process and the content, and I will tackle the process aspect first.

Here we go again. I have been an elected member of Parliament since May 2011 and it has been quite an eye-opener to see how our parliamentary democracy works, or does not work. One key area is the number of times parliamentarians are denied full debate on issues.

Once again, we have hundreds and hundreds of pages on a budget with not only budget issues, which should be in a budget document, but there is so much other stuff buried in there.

Once again, what does the government have against transparency and accountability? Do Conservatives have a hard time with members of Parliament debating legitimate issues that should be debated here? Why is it that time and time again they feel they have to bury stuff in the budget and then ask for these votes wholesale, yea or nay?

Once again, as a parliamentarian, I find it quite outrageous and not only that, there is time allocation as well. Not only has the government put forward a huge bill that has far more than the budget in it, but it also moves to limit debate. These are all major concerns.

The other issue I want to get to is on the content.

We have seen some of the advertising already that this budget would fix our economy. Let me tell members that nobody in my riding believes it will fix the economy. No matter how many glossy advertisements or TV advertisements that go on, people know what they are struggling with in their daily lives, day in and day out.

Let us focus on youth unemployment. As one of the richest countries in the world, richest in resources, we are failing our youth, and this budget does nothing to address the high level, double-digit youth unemployment across the country. We must not take this lightly. Imagine how debilitating it is for our youth when they go to university, take up post-secondary education and even go on to further studies, but they cannot find jobs. This budget fails our youth quite miserably.

The job action grant, as we know, has not been a great hit with any of the provinces or territories. In fact, I have not heard one provincial leader stand and acclaim it, embrace it and say that it is the best thing since sliced bread or even that it is an okay thing. Every one of them have criticized the shortcomings in the job action grant. Once again, where are the investments that will lead to job growth?

We have also heard that this budget would fix or could do things to the unemployment rate. This is not a budget issue, but it is right in the budget where the minister would have control and the final say over setting the rates for EI contributions, which once again opens the door for abuse by both Conservatives and Liberals by taking money that employers and workers pay into it for the rainy days when they do not have jobs.

● (1615)

We have seen \$57 billion stolen out of the EI pot and put into general revenues. I say the word “stolen” because that money was paid for by Canadians and employers for a rainy day when they did not have a job.

We have seen a lower number people on employment insurance, not because people are more needy or unemployed but because the system has become so cumbersome. The cuts in Service Canada and the bureaucracy around applications, getting a phone call, being online for hours and hours is just not working.

I was pleased recently with the change to address the fishermen issue. I am hoping the government will wake up tomorrow morning and fix the rest of the problems it has created for unemployed Canadians and make it easier for them. Surely this is the time when we should be investing in skills training and skills development. For people who lose jobs in one area there should be an intensive investment in order to make sure that we help people to get into the jobs that are around. We know there is not a shortage of jobs.

Also in the budget we see that the government is going to extend the \$1,000 hiring credit for small businesses. It is laudable, but the New Democrats have gone even further by proposing a \$2,000 hiring tax credit that will not cut into EI funds and will help businesses hire and train young people. These are the kinds of initiatives we need and we put these forward. Maybe the Conservatives will pick them up as they have picked up some of our other ideas and it will help Canadians and that is a good thing.

We are going to spend close to half a million dollars, according to the department, to change the name from Human Resources and Social Development to Employment and Social Development. I am wondering about the wisdom during these very difficult times of spending half a million dollars on changing stationery and letterhead and all else that it takes, when people are really hurting.

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Let me say once again that in my riding I have a very diverse riding in Newton—North Delta, which is part of Surrey and also crosses into the Delta municipality. Some of my constituents are working two or three jobs just to make ends meet. They do not find that things are getting better. They are having to work longer hours just to make ends meet. They tell me their lives have become like a gerbil in a cage, where they are running all the time just so they do not fall flat and their children do not go hungry. I live in a riding where we have a homelessness problem, so affordable housing is an issue. We have very high usage of our food bank. I am seeing nothing in the budget to address that.

The government is allergic to daycare, yet there is sound evidence and the Canadian Payroll Association survey found that 40% of employed Canadians are spending all of, or more than, their net pay, and 45% of those polled are putting only 5% or less of their pay into savings. We know that the debt load is growing for Canadians and there is nothing in the budget to address that.

I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion. I move that notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, clauses 125 to 158, 176 to 203, 277, 278 and 294 to 470, related to public sector employee relations and sweeping changes to workplace health and safety regulations, be removed from Bill C-4, a second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures, and do compose Bill C-9; that Bill C-9 be deemed read a first time and be printed; that the order for second reading of the said bill provide for the referral to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities; that Bill C-4 retain the status on the Order Paper that it had prior to the adoption of this order; that Bill C-4 be reprinted as amended; and that the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel be authorized to make any technical changes or corrections as may be necessary to give effect to this motion.

● (1620)

I am moving this motion in order to make more sense out of this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for that very impassioned speech.

I want to touch upon the democratic aspects of this piece of legislation. There have been a number of omnibus bills, which some of us refer to as ominous bills, and what we see in this particular piece of legislation in part is to correct a mistake made in previous omnibus bills. The member has very rightly attempted to move a motion dividing out a piece of the legislation. I wonder if she could comment specifically on the lack of democratic process, where members of Parliament are not given adequate amounts of time to fully debate complex pieces of legislation and to avoid the kinds of mistakes that we saw with, for example, the credit union tax.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her thoughtful question. It is a question that all of us are rethinking over and over again about parliamentary democracy and the role of parliamentarians in parliamentary democracy.

It is with a great deal of sadness, even when I visit students in high schools, that I have to share with them that as parliamentarians, we are sent here to debate all issues, speak on them and give our input. However, with the movement of time allocation and omnibus, or ominous, bills, as we have seen over and over again, that kind of debate does not take place in the House. For example, moving time allocation on 300 pages when buried into the bill are items that have nothing to do with the budget, obviously these are things the government does not want the public to know about and does not want opposition members to comment on. It bundles things together and then rams things through because it has a majority. This is a gross abuse of a majority government and undermines parliamentary democracy.

● (1625)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both the member and I at one time were immigration critics for our respective parties, and in the last couple of days government representatives have stood in their places and talked about processing claims, the backlogs, and so forth. The member would be aware of the fact that in one of the last budget implementation bills the government deleted tens of thousands of files of individuals who were abroad and had gone through the proper process to be able to immigrate to Canada. Unfortunately, the way in which the government dealt with the backlog, at least in good part, was just to hit the delete button.

Given the member's past on immigration matters, I wonder if she would like to express some of her thoughts on that particular issue.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the member of Parliament is very vociferous in the House and does an amazing job representing his riding.

The question he asks is really about how the world views Canada and its policies. How can we hit the delete button on people who have put their lives on hold, who actually applied in good faith following the rules we as Canadians made? They did not make the rules, by the way; we made the rules. They followed our rules and we told them to join the line and their turn would come, so they joined the line. Then the minister woke up one morning and said that the files of anyone who applied before 2008 were gone and they had to reapply. I have talked about that issue many times in the House. That is grossly unfair to those people.

We all want responsive and coherent immigration policies and systems. That is how Canada was built. However, we have to look at how we treat people as well.

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Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great enthusiasm that I rise today to speak to Bill C-4, which would build upon our budget introduced last March.

What ought to be the motivation of the government when we construct a budget? What ought the government consider?

Consider this. Canada is a land that stretches 5,187 kilometres, from Cape Spear, Newfoundland, to Mount Saint Elias in the Yukon Territory, and 4,627 kilometres, from Cape Columbia on Ellesmere Island, to Pelee Island in Lake Erie. It encompasses 9,984,670 square kilometres. This land is blessed with enormous wealth in natural resources: lakes, trees, minerals and rivers. However, these attributes are worthless without the human investment to turn them into value.

Canada is blessed with those resources and we have human talent that has come to this country from every corner of the globe. It is a little strange to find corners on a globe, I must say. From Germany to Japan, from Ireland to Iran, from China to Chile, and from England to Ecuador, the people of Canada and the people who have come to Canada are the ones the government must consider when we prepare a budget, a budget that would help people in Nunavut and New Westminster, in Halifax and Hamilton, in Moncton and Montreal, and yes, in Newmarket—Aurora as well.

How would we help? We would help by ensuring that these great individuals who make up the best of this land have opportunities. That is what Bill C-4 is about, creating opportunities. Canadians know how to work and they work hard. They work to provide for their families. They want jobs, they want growth, and they want prosperity for Canada. That is what the budget implementation bill is about.

Since 2006, our government has been putting in place the foundation for that prosperity. We began by paying \$40 billion off the debt, and I was glad to hear my colleague from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound talk about that a bit earlier. When the financial pillars of the global economy were shaken in 2008, and other economies teetered precariously, Canada was resilient. In those dark days, our government acted with determination and decision. We ensured, through shovel-ready projects, that Canadians stayed working through investments in our community infrastructure.

Newmarket and Aurora both saw benefits in the rehabilitation of community centres, the beautiful Riverwalk Commons in downtown Newmarket, sports facilities, and heritage structures. Now, as we look to a brighter future, the foundation in place, it is time to build upon what we have already put in place. The global economy is still fragile. Many countries still have economies that are on life support, but not Canada. Our government has taken the steps to grow our economy. How?

First, give people back their own money and they will spend some of it. Canadians, being prudent, will also save some of it for a rainy day. We gave them back their money. We cut the GST. We raised the personal tax deduction. We implemented tax credits for kids' sports and arts, for transit, and for apprenticeships. We also created the tax-free savings account, and we gave seniors pension income splitting.

Shall I go on? The list is enormous, but wait, we have other measures to grow the economy.

We named this budget a plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. We know that the job creators are those businesses such as the ones that belong to the Newmarket and Aurora chambers of commerce: manufacturers such as Axiom and Canada Plastic, restaurants like Al Casale's and Cachet, and the UPS Store that Faizy owns in the 404 Plaza at Leslie Street and the 404. These are the businesses that are the job creators.

• (1630)

As Jerry Moran said about the American economy, "...innovation and entrepreneurship is the opportunity and best opportunity we have to grow the economy".

We need to free these job creators to do what they do best, because Faizy has a dream. He came from Iran for opportunities, and better opportunities for his kids. Faizy works, and he works hard. What did he do? After he bought the UPS franchise, he created two new jobs. We are helping Faizy keep those employees by reducing EI payroll taxes. Faizy has also invested in training for these folks. That costs him money. He wants to keep these employees working. He has also invested in equipment: printers, photocopiers. These are high capital costs for a small business, but we are helping Faizy with that as well by addressing capital cost writeoffs. We helped Faizy return to profitability more quickly.

Is that all we have done? Not for a minute. Our government continues to provide the best economic policies for Canadians to promote jobs, growth and economic prosperity. How is our government doing that? Bill C-4 will implement other tax measures that will be helpful for many other Canadian small businesses and their owners.

For instance, the lifetime capital gains exemption will be increased to \$800,000, and for 2014 and subsequent years, the lifetime capital gains tax exemption will be indexed for inflation.

However, it is not only businesses that our government's tax measures will be helping. Our government is also introducing an income tax measure that will help Canadians in the event of making an honest mistake in the event of over-contributing to a registered pension plan. Bill C-4 streamlines the process for pension plan administrators to refund the contribution made to an RRSP when such a mistake is made. These tax measures and others will be greatly beneficial for all Canadians.

Our government is looking out for the best interests of Canadians. These income tax measures are being implemented to encourage Canadians and Canadian businesses, not to spurn their growth.

However, this is not all we are doing. Encouraging economic growth is an important part of our government's mandate, and following in this tradition, our Prime Minister recently signed an agreement in principle for a new trade agreement with the European Union. I know this is not a topic of the Bill C-4 discussion; however, the Canada-EU comprehensive, economic and trade agreement will bring many benefits to Canadian citizens and businesses. New opportunities for investment, business and the ability to consume new products will appear with the opening of the vast European market.

Key sectors of interest to Canadian investors, such as the aerospace, energy and business services industries, will benefit greatly from this agreement. My riding of Newmarket—Aurora, which is home to many companies that operate within these sectors, will see first-hand the benefits of this agreement. I look forward to the hon. Minister of International Trade introducing this new trade agreement in the House of Commons.

However, to stay on topic, I return to Bill C-4. The measures in Bill C-4 will ensure that the goals of jobs, growth and economic prosperity will continue to be met.

I strongly urge all my colleagues to support the passage of the bill so that Canadians can start reaping the benefits.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member said “growth and prosperity”. That is not what I read in *The Economist*, the authoritative magazine that wrote about the Canadian economy. It said that consumption is starting to falter and growth is projected to reach only 1.6% this year. It adds that the government is desperately looking for other sources of growth, but does not seem able to find any. The *Toronto Star* ran an article along the same lines, in which David Olive said the same thing in a different way.

Budget equals choice. The Conservatives are happy to spend millions of dollars on advertising for the economic action plan while telling Canadians that they have to tighten their belts because there is no money for essential services, employment insurance, old age security and so on.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question for our side of the House.

It was not us, although I am sure that we all would do the same thing, who voted this Minister of Finance as the best finance minister. It was the G7 countries that voted our Minister of Finance as the best finance minister in the world. We have a stellar record. We are going to stick with the record we have.

The Minister of Finance told us during question period that he just had a meeting this morning with many economists from across this country. They have said that we have the record to follow. They have endorsed the policies we are following. We are going to stick with that record.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after that long string of self-congratulatory comments

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about their finances, I would like to ask my hon. colleague the following question.

After the first two years the Conservatives were government, by 2008, after inheriting two years of massive surpluses from the previous Liberal administration, they started building up a debt, which today has added \$160 billion to our national debt.

From 2008 to 2013, five years, that works out to a little over \$30 billion per year that the government has added to the national debt. That is equivalent to \$1,000 for every man, woman and child every year since 2008. Of course by the time that \$1,000 gets repaid, it will be a lot more than that because it is part of a huge debt with a lot of interest.

I wonder if that has been communicated to the Canadian public.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I remind my colleague that the Liberal government only paid off the debt on the backs of the provinces. I saw what happened in Ontario when we had \$25 billion cut out of health care and education.

It was my kids who suffered in schools without textbooks. It was my kids who suffered because health care was not available to them.

We are going to stick with the record we have of working hard for creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for this country. That is our record. That is the record of this Minister of Finance. We are sticking to it.

• (1640)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that my Liberal colleague did not choose to mention the \$52 billion in EI premiums that is somehow missing and in the general revenues, and nobody knows where it is, or the \$40 million from the sponsorship scandal; we still have no idea where it is.

My question is for my colleague. I thank her for the address on the economy. All of us host pre-budget consultation round tables in our ridings. Over and over again, we hear about the importance and the significance of the accelerated capital cost allowance, which not only is being extended but is also extending now to the clean energy sector.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on some of the businesses in her riding that are really benefiting from this accelerated capital cost allowance, which allows businesses to invest in cutting-edge equipment that keeps them competitive on the global market.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I just visited a company in my riding that is part of the aerospace industry; it has indeed invested in the last couple of years in new equipment.

It has told me that without the ability to do that, it would never have been able to stay competitive, and it is very grateful to our government for doing that.

I will just read a quick comment from a constituent of mine, who says, “This country is filled with some of the most talented, skilled and innovative people on the planet, and I believe we should solely focus on developing our existing population with the knowledge to fill jobs that are in demand”.

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We are going to focus on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-4, as my colleagues have done. As hon. members know, Bill C-4 is an omnibus bill that is 300 pages long and currently amends 70 pieces of legislation.

Logic would suggest that we should be given time to properly consider the bill. I am wondering whether this government would agree to sign a 50-page contract immediately or within a few hours. Logically, the government should automatically say no because it would want time to examine the contract before signing it.

Nevertheless, that is what the government is asking us to do today. The Conservatives have introduced a 300-page bill that amends 70 laws and, at the same time, it is telling us that we have no choice but to pass it immediately. However, only 24 hours passed between the time the government introduced the bill and the time we started debating it in the House.

I would also like to remind hon. members that some information was provided in committee in only one language, making it impossible to properly discuss and debate the bill in order to gain a proper understanding of it.

That is very little time to debate a 300-page bill that addresses sometimes complex subjects that have no relation to each other.

What is more, 48 hours after we saw the content of this massive bill, the government was already imposing a gag order in order to ram the bill through. It is unacceptable for the government of a country like Canada to pass most of its laws in this manner.

The use of a time allocation motion should be limited to emergency situations. I am certain that no one on this side of the House would be opposed to debating a bill if there were an emergency situation and that no one would be opposed to amending it as needed before passing it.

The Conservatives introduce a huge number of bills in the House. The government deliberately delayed the work of the House by a month by proroguing Parliament, yet the government is now telling us that it is urgent that we pass Bill C-4. One has to wonder whether it is logical for the government to prevent the House from returning on the scheduled date, doing its work and examining the bill, only to tell us a month later that it is urgent that we pass the bill. It does not make any sense.

Canadians are perceptive. They know full well that the government is using the gag order to prevent us and all the stakeholders affected by these changes from having enough time to examine the impact of Bill C-4.

As a parliamentarian and a Canadian, I could never support this Conservative attempt to avoid the scrutiny of Parliament and Canadians. Obviously, we will vote against this bill in its current form. We will oppose this bill in principle because we are not being given the time to do the job we were elected to do. We must represent the people. We will also vote against the bill because of its content.

The previous three budget implementation bills taught us that we need to be wary of this government. In the previous bills, the Conservatives took aim at environmental assessments and protections for most of Canada's lakes and rivers. Those bills also resulted in \$36 billion in cuts to health care transfers and increased the retirement age from 65 to 67.

Bill C-4 is not that different from the other three budget implementation bills in that it is setting society back. It sets out significant changes to the Canadian work environment. Now, the minister will have the bulk of the powers once granted to health and safety officers by the Canada Labour Code. It is a legislative step backwards for health and safety.

Bill C-4 also takes aim at an employee's ability to refuse to work in unsafe conditions. At the very least, Canadians should be able to maintain their right to work in a healthy and safe environment. However, as we can see, the Conservatives do not seem to share that opinion.

In reading Bill C-4, we can also see that the government is not going to abandon its war on the public service anytime soon. It has become its pattern to go after the hundreds of thousands of people who provide Canadians with the services to which they are entitled.

● (1645)

This time, the government is torpedoing the Public Service Staff Relations Act by eliminating the arbitration process as a method of settling disputes. It is also making changes to give the minister the discretionary ability to determine which services are essential. This measure could ultimately be used by the minister to completely remove certain workers' right to bargain, a right that is recognized by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The all-out war being waged by this government against the people who work in the public service has caused a great deal of damage in my riding of Hull—Aylmer. The latest Statistics Canada figures show that 17,000 of the 19,200 job cuts planned in the public service will occur in the Gatineau-Ottawa region.

These cuts are resulting in a major slowdown in economic activity. In fact, the Conference Board of Canada has indicated that the economic forecast for our region, which is the fifth-largest in Canada, has been revised down by about 50%. In other words, the cuts are hurting the affected regions economically.

Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that the measures in budget 2012-13 will cost 67,000 jobs. According to Statistics Canada, there are currently 6.5 unemployed workers for every reported job vacancy in Canada. That is a very poor record for a government that claims to be such a good economic manager. We would have expected the government to use Bill C-4 to fix this situation, but it is doing nothing. Instead of attacking workers, this government should focus on creating good new jobs, but it is not doing that.

Since coming to power, the Conservatives have been going on and on about the fact that the cupboard is bare and more cuts are needed. The nation's finances should be managed responsibly, but it is important to set priorities.

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Since 2006, the government has spent \$1 billion on organizing the G8 and G20 summits, \$500 million on advertising and \$1.3 billion a year on tax breaks for its friends in the oil industry.

I would also like to point out that this government did everything it could to bill taxpayers \$40 billion for fighter jets. I can see why Canadians are shocked when they hear that there is no money and the Conservatives cannot give them a helping hand to make ends meet. This government continues to cut services that Canadians are entitled to while giving billions of dollars to companies that already make billions in profits.

It cannot be said often enough that public services primarily serve middle-class families. They are the ones who use them the most. I can also understand why Canadians are outraged when they learn that over 400 veterans among those with the most severe disabilities are not eligible for the Canadian Forces pension plan.

This is all a matter of priorities, and obviously, the Conservatives' priorities are quite different from those of all other Canadians. The Conservatives have clearly picked sides by using Bill C-4 to attack workers' rights, rather than reducing inequality and creating good jobs.

The government can be sure of one thing: every time it tries to attack labour rights and proposes measures that increase inequality, it will have to deal with the NDP.

• (1650)

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

The government says that the cupboard is bare. This poses a problem for me. If the cupboard is bare and the Conservatives have created a million jobs, the government should collect taxes.

This bill changes labour relations in the public service by eliminating binding arbitration as a method of dispute resolution in the public service.

In her opinion, why is the government doing this?

Ms. Nicole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question about arbitration in the public service.

As I mentioned, it is a right recognized by the charter, and accredited unions and groups had the right to choose arbitration. What we are seeing now is a potential increase in conflicts between the employer and employees.

The reality is that all public services have been cut by this government. As members, we are seeing more and more lineups, needs and people in our offices who want their files dealt with as quickly as possible. Because of government cuts, files are not being processed and this has resulted in long delays, whether for family reunification or assistance for people from other countries who want to immigrate to Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the shortcomings of the government has been in dealing with any form of national housing strategy.

It does not matter where one is in Canada. From coast to coast to coast, there is a need to deal with housing shortages for a wide spectrum of individuals. We could talk about housing revitalization programs. We used to have some great ones, such as the residential rehabilitation assistance program. There is the concept of infill homes and housing co-ops.

There just does not seem to be any genuine, tangible interest by the Conservative government in looking at ways to make affordable housing a reality in Canada.

I wonder if the member could comment on why it is important for the national government to put a higher priority on ensuring that Canadians are in a better position to own homes and fix their homes into the future.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to thank my colleague for his question on affordable housing and government programs.

As I mentioned in my presentation, the government has set its priorities, which are not necessarily those of families, which have certain needs. To secure the future of our young children and grandchildren, there are pressing needs to be met. However, the government is refusing to put in place affordable housing programs. We deplore that.

We are well aware that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, is experiencing challenges because of the government's positions. That is another area where negotiations and discussions should take place in order to help municipalities and the provinces create affordable housing so that people have decent living conditions and children have enough to eat.

• (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague would comment briefly on her impression of the importance of the \$1000 EI credit that is going to help small and medium-size employers create more jobs. In my area, most of the jobs created are created by small and medium-size employers that employ between 10 and 50 people. The hiring credit in my area is a very important part of the budget, of Bill C-4. I wonder if my colleague could comment on the importance of that in her area.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I really like that question. That is precisely what we want: to divide Bill C-4 and pull out the measures that could help people.

The government puts 70 measures in a 300-page bill and tells us that we have to accept all or nothing. That is what it is forcing us to do. We cannot support the majority of the items in Bill C-4. We could support others, but if we want to work on dealing with the economic situation for all Canadians, we need to have discussions. This will not happen if the government keeps holding in camera meetings and gagging members when we are talking about a bill.

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[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to rise today to speak on behalf of my constituents from Selkirk—Interlake about how important the building Canada fund is to our municipalities and about the importance of our economic action plan to our farmers, commercial fishers, and small businesses throughout the riding.

This fall, as I do every year, I went on a tour. My riding is bigger than Nova Scotia. It is 56,000 square kilometres. I went out in September and drove over 6,000 kilometres. I visited more than 55 communities, multiple times, to see how things were going, to talk to people on the street, to visit people in the coffee shops, to meet with my municipal leaders, and to meet with businesses and tour their operations. It was to just get a good feel for how things were going.

I can tell the House that the one thing my municipal leaders were telling me was that they are excited about the new building Canada plan. They really believe that the \$53 billion commitment we would make over the next ten years would greatly benefit them.

The one thing they are extremely excited about is the community improvement fund. There would be over \$32 billion available to them to invest in their public community places, roads, and recreational facilities.

They really appreciate that first of all, we have made the gas tax fund a permanent fixture in ongoing transfers from the federal government to municipalities. They appreciate that we doubled the gas tax fund a couple of years ago. Now we would untie it so that they could actually use it for whatever they see as being important to them rather than just for green infrastructure or things that help with mass transit. These do not really work well in rural municipalities, because we do not have buses in most of my communities. We do not have a rapid transit system in any of them. Actually having the gas tax fund untied so that they could use it on roads and public places, such as halls and recreational facilities, skating rinks, or the curling rink is important to small, rural communities. It is important, because that is where people gather, meet, have fun, get healthy, and see their kids or grandkids participate in sports. It is important to have those community focal points invested in through the gas tax fund, and now through the building Canada fund, because of the changes we would make to the community improvement fund.

There would be over \$14 billion in the building Canada fund to be used on provincial, national, and regionally significant investments. We know that this could be anything from investing in port facilities to help with our trade to ensuring that we have expanded highways and artery systems to move our truck transports and commuter transports to make our roads safer. I know that it is also extremely important to my communities.

We would also see the ongoing investment of \$6 billion for the continued existence of the infrastructure programs we already have in place with the provinces, municipalities, and territories for 2014-15 and beyond.

These are big, significant improvements for those municipalities or major projects that want to look at private-public partnerships.

The P3 fund is also there for them. We have renewed that at \$1.25 billion.

Of course, the riding of Selkirk—Interlake is a large, agricultural riding with grain farming, ranching, and a lot of mixed operations. The measures in the budget really do speak to their ability to continue to grow and prosper and take advantage of marketplaces, as we just saw with the new comprehensive economic and trade agreement with Europe. The European Union is a huge market that is now available to my farmers, ranchers, grain farmers, and beef and cattle operations. They are all really excited about that trade deal.

One thing in this budget they are excited about and that really would help the next generation enter farming is the doubling of the restricted farm loss income tax rule. For more than 20 years, it has been \$8,750 per person who works part-time. They can claim that amount of their off-farm income as a restricted farm loss. That actually works to their benefit. We would double that to \$17,500. That would really help with those new entrants who still have off-farm jobs. In reality, if we look at it, about two-thirds of farmers today have off-farm employment.

• (1700)

This is a really good measure to help out younger farmers and to help those who rely on off-farm income take some of those earnings and use them against any of their farm losses. It is a really positive measure that people in my riding are talking about.

The other thing they appreciate is our changes to the lifetime capital gains exemption. Not only have we increased it to \$800,000 per person, but we have indexed it to inflation so it will not erode. We will not have to continually increase the lifetime capital gains exemption for those farmers who are exiting the industry or making sales. This exemption will be in place against any of their lifetime capital gains.

This is important not just to our farmers, but to our commercial fishers and our small businesses. It helps with the intergenerational transfer of those operations, whether it is the ma and pa store, or a family farm operation, or a family commercial fishing operation. It helps with those transfers to the next generation.

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We often talk about those farmers who live pretty much cash poor and asset rich. They are sitting on a lot of land or sitting on a lot of capital assets, but they often do not realize their true economic net worth, because they have had some difficult times in the marketplace. If they have had good times, like they are having this year in both the cattle industry and the grain industry, they invest back into the farm, buy more land, more equipment and machinery and pay off debt. The only time they really get to cash out is when they transfer their farm operations to the next generation. This really comes into play for a farm operation, whether it is a family operation, a partnership with other families, or a corporation. Even corporate farms in my area are still family farms. They have just been incorporated because that is the best way to go forward from the standpoint of a tax basis.

The other big announcement is our continued support for Genome Canada of \$165 million. The biggest benefits that have been generated in both western and eastern Canadian agriculture have been through animal and plant breeding. Those increases in productivity, the ability to reduce the need for more input into our farm operations because of better plant and animal breeding really does pay off dividends and puts money into the pockets of our farmers. The cattle industry, the hog industry and the grain and oilseeds business are really excited about that.

A lot of people are often shocked to learn that Selkirk—Interlake in Manitoba, out in the Prairies, has a huge commercial fishery. It too will benefit from things that will happen through the budget. I talked already about increasing the lifetime capital gains tax exemption and indexing it to inflation, but our fisheries overall, from both the commercial and recreational standpoint, is so important, like at Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba.

This budget contains a \$10 million conservation fund to help enhance the fishery and to help protect wildlife habitat to ensure that those highly-valued fish species that people want to catch, whether it is walleye, northern pike or even mullet, are protected and that it will not just protect the habitat, but enhance tourism and opportunity and work toward the overall fishery from both a commercial and recreational standpoint. The focus really is on recreational fishing and all the tourism dollars and the enjoyment that people get out of fishing.

The streets in my community are completely loaded with small business enterprises. This budget really speaks to them. The main reason we have seen one million net new jobs is because of our small businesses first and foremost. They represent 98% of all businesses in Canada. Over two-thirds of Canadians work in small and medium-sized enterprises, and they make up a large portion of my riding from a business standpoint. The lifetime capital gains exemption works for them.

The budget also contains a hiring credit for small business of \$225 million for one year. This will help them increase employment and job opportunities in our riding. We are extending and expanding the hiring credit for small businesses. The costs associated with creating those jobs will be offset as a result of this budget.

We are excited about what is happening and how it is impacting my riding of Selkirk—Interlake.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

Since the Conservatives got a majority in 2011, environmental regulations have been deteriorating and we have been seeing some problems with science in particular. For example, the government has eliminated some scientist jobs and has prevented scientists from speaking.

My question is about a provision in Bill C-4. Why continue in the same vein? My colleague represents an agricultural riding and he has young girls. I know he has a very lovely family. Why is the government eliminating jobs at the country's most prestigious research centre, the National Research Council of Canada? Why is it attacking science? Why is it eliminating nearly half of all scientist jobs?

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the compliment to my family. We have had a chance to work together on a number of issues and I do appreciate her comment.

On the issue of environmental permits, we as a government have reduce the redundancy and duplication of services between different jurisdictions. That has saved money for municipalities, provinces and businesses, including agricultural operations, on having to go through the exact same process at the municipal, provincial and federal levels to get permits. It is not about reducing the need for science, because science is still the determining factor on the environmental permit. Rather, we just do not need every level of government rubber-stamping the exact same process.

We are trying to make it simpler, easier and reduce red tape, not just for businesses but for the farmers, fishers, municipalities and provinces that are trying to do the right thing and ultimately still putting the environment first.

● (1710)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had an opportunity to go to my friend's riding of Selkirk—Interlake. It is a great spot. We visited just after the major floods that I believe happened about four years ago. I know a lot of the talk around that time concerned global warming and was that what was to be expected going forward.

The concern I have, which is not dissimilar to the last question, has to do with science and the science sector. We see this outcry from scientists over the last number of months, and really the last couple of years, stating that science has been devastated. We have heard that from Environment Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I am sure the government is taking money from all other sources and, like a shell game, moving it around.

What is my colleague's take on the outcry from the science community? Are we to pay no attention to what it has been saying? It is adamant that the government has turned its back on science. I would like his comments on that.

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Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, in the last Parliament I chaired the environment committee. I am proud of the work that we do through Environment Canada. A lot of people do not realize that Environment Canada is the fifth largest research organization in the world. The four larger ones are in the United States. However, the largest in Canada is Environment Canada. Its scientists are still undertaking significant research, publishing peer review papers and out there speaking.

Whether it is Environment Canada, or Agriculture Canada or Health Canada, those scientists are out there making their presentations and talking to the media. We may hear from a few sour grapes from time to time because some scientists have not been able to get out there and say what they want. However, that is because they are not talking about their science. Rather, they are talking about other issues. If they go through the proper steps and processes, they can get out there and speak about their research. We see that all the time. There are thousands of documents published annually, hundreds of speeches given by our scientists and that has not changed one iota.

The overall science need has not been reduced. It has been refocused. We want to ensure that we address the concerns brought forward by Canadians. That is where we are focusing our work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank you for giving me the floor today. Having the chance to speak to the budget implementation bill is very important.

Again, the federal government is using a so-called budget bill that is being described as “mammoth” to push its regressive ideology and pass controversial measures that have never been discussed in public before.

Before we can even debate the substance of the bill or consult people and interest groups, the government imposes a gag order. This is generally recognized as a practice to be used as an exception. The government is once again limiting review of budget Bill C-4.

This bill and the measures it contains are far too important to pass hastily without any real debate or a true impact study that would inevitably take place.

This bill is more than 300 pages long and affects more or less 70 statutes. It would have been important, even essential, for us to take our time and split the bill to do it justice and make proposals to amend it and make general changes, which would have allowed us to work on it properly.

The Conservatives claim that the bill focuses on the economy, but that is far from true. Bill C-4 will, once again, affect a host of different areas, and some of the changes that will result from the bill will have an adverse effect on Quebec, the regions, businesses and workers.

I have some examples. Bill C-4 would eliminate the federal tax credit on labour-sponsored venture capital corporations, which, back home, are commonly referred to as workers' funds. They are very common in Quebec and they play an important role. For instance, there is the Fonds de solidarité FTQ and the CSN's Fondation.

These funds are quite prevalent in Quebec. Traditionally, they served as significant development tools in our communities and helped create and maintain tens of thousands of jobs, strengthen communities and breathe life into the economy where regular instruments, such as bank loans, were not as appropriate and could not play the important role that these workers' funds could play as development tools.

In my riding alone, I found real-life examples of cases where, at some point in time, these funds were crucial to a company's development. I can list some businesses that used them and benefited from that money when they needed it. Those companies include BSL Wood Products, Projexco, Meridien Maritime, Richard Poirier & Frères Électrique, La Pourvoirie de la seigneurie du lac Métis, Les Distributions Arnaud, and the list goes on and on. Those funds useful to those companies because they gave them access to venture capital at an important point in their development.

Here is another example. In the bill that has been introduced, which once again penalizes Quebec, there is talk of Supreme Court justices. The federal government has picked a fight with the Government of Quebec by appointing a Supreme Court justice who was not on the list submitted by the Government of Quebec and does not meet the criteria set out in legislation.

The Supreme Court has to include three justices from Quebec, and with good reason. Civil law is quite different from Canadian law, and the justices who sit on the highest court must be able to rely on sufficient expertise to be able to rule on significant, complex civil law issues. In addition, in many of the existing legal cases—between Ottawa and Quebec, for example—it is only natural that Quebec should be able to rely on three justices who are attuned to the province's unique characteristics.

Justice Nadon decided to step aside temporarily because his appointment is being challenged. That was the right thing to do, except that the federal government has decided to refer Justice Nadon's case to the Supreme Court. Now, the Supreme Court will be both judge and judged in this case. That is absurd. There should have been an independent review to clarify this unthinkable situation.

● (1715)

Not wanting to be defeated in this dispute, the federal government is trying to use Bill C-4, which is before us today, to amend the Supreme Court Act to make Justice Nadon's appointment legal—after the fact, of course.

For the Bloc Québécois, the changes in Bill C-4 that have to do with the period of time during which an appointee had to be a member of the Barreau du Québec are nothing short of an admission of the shortcomings that tarnished the entire procedure to appoint Justice Nadon.

I would point out that that appointment was unfortunately approved by the Conservatives, but also by the Liberals and the NDP, who included Justice Nadon on their list of the three top candidates.

Rather than changing the legislation to try to save face, the federal government should just face facts: it must appoint judges to the Supreme Court who really represent Quebec, from the list submitted by the Government of Quebec. There is no other option.

This is not the first time Quebec has been aggrieved in a situation relating to the role of the Supreme Court. Hon. members may recall, for example, the allegations made by historian Frédéric Bastien, who revealed that the Supreme Court had overstepped the bounds of proper behaviour.

Bill C-4 also includes a measure to eliminate the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board. We saw this coming. There is nothing really surprising about this government and its way of doing things.

This was clear with the employment insurance reform, for example, and all the measures meant to restrict access to that system, even though it is essential in some regions and for all workers who, at some point in their lives, face a situation where work is not available in their field, whether because of the seasonal nature of their work or because of an economic downturn.

It has become very clear that the Conservative government, like the Liberals before them, has no problem using employment insurance for political ends and, above all, taking any surpluses in the EI fund and using them for other purposes or adding them to its regular budget if it so chooses.

What was the purpose of that board? The best way to explain it is to look at how it was described when it was created. The definition is especially clear:

The Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board (CEIFB) was created as a Crown Corporation in 2008 to ensure that EI premiums are used exclusively for the EI program. This followed extensive public discussion on the need to improve the transparency and independence of EI financing.

Now, however, we must point out coincidence of sorts between the abolition of the board and the government's express desire to get its hands on the money. It has done so on many occasions in order to divert income from premiums to general government revenue, rather than return the money to workers when they need it.

As we read that description, we can better understand the Conservatives' desire to abolish a body that was opposed to their getting their hands on the money and pilfering the surplus as they are doing at the moment.

This year alone, \$2 billion will be taken out of the employment insurance fund in order to pay down the deficit or indulge Conservative whims such as military procurement, gifts for the Queen, and celebration of conflicts, debates or battles two centuries old, such as the war of 1812.

The bill also includes major changes to labour legislation. In recent labour disputes, such as at Air Canada and CP, we have seen that the Conservatives are allergic to any kind of pressure from employees. The mere possibility of strikes worries them so much that they enact special legislation to prevent them.

Bill C-4 goes even further. Now the Conservatives are making major changes to the way in which services are deemed essential because they want to pre-empt any possibility of employees exerting

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pressure. From now on, the Conservatives are giving the employer the exclusive right to determine whether a service is essential and the number of positions needed to provide that service. Previously, the essential services designation was agreed upon between the union and the employer.

● (1720)

These are major changes because they affect the fundamental balance that must be in place between employers and employees. Even worse is the fact that Bill C-4 politicizes the workplace health and safety process. In fact, in Bill C-4, the minister appropriates the power to issue directives to employers and to make certain decisions that were once made by health and safety officers.

This is a complete travesty.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will try not to go over my speaking time.

I found the hon. member's speech very interesting. I am particularly interested in clauses 471 and 472 of Bill C-4, because they deal with the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court.

I would quickly like to correct a statement my colleague made. The proceedings of the committee, which includes members from all the recognized parties in the House, and the votes in this committee, are confidential. We had to sign confidentiality orders, so we cannot disclose how the vote was held and we certainly cannot assume that one or the other party voted in favour of the appointment of Mr. Nadon just because his name was selected.

Furthermore, there is an even more significant issue. How does my colleague explain that the government can, by means of Bill C-4, especially clauses 471 and 472, which are the subject of the second reference to the Supreme Court—

● (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia has the floor.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, we could easily avoid any ambiguity or problems, like the appointment of Justice Nadon, by simply referring to the Government of Quebec, which has its own list of eligible candidates.

In this way, I think we would avoid any imbroglio that would ensue from challenges on either side.

Unfortunately, I did not hear the second part of the hon. member's question because her microphone was off.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the question regarding the appointment process.

The other day I had the opportunity to ask a question related to what the minister responsible was saying in the province of Quebec. The question I posed to the Prime Minister was on the importance of being consistent with what we say. For example, if we are saying something to the francophone media, it should be consistent with what we would say in English to the anglophone media. There is a responsibility for the government to do just that.

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I wonder if the member would like to provide some sort of comment on the consistency in what is being said in different regions of the country on important issues such as this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He put his finger right on the problem.

The Conservative government is visiting the regions of Canada and talking out of both sides of its mouth. In Quebec, it is trying to minimize the impact of Justice Nadon's appointment. The Government of Quebec, as well as all of the parties represented in the National Assembly, have made the point that the future justice will have a hard time complying with the law and making rulings with the necessary knowledge of Quebec civil law. Quebec has every right to expect this from a Supreme Court judge who will have to make important rulings.

One may wonder why there are three judges. Some cases may be made public and may involve Quebec. Take, for example, the firearms registry, which could eventually end up in this court.

The Conservatives are always saying one thing to Quebec and another to Canada, but we are not fooled. We can see this is going on. With Bill C-4, the Conservatives are trying to legitimize this appointment decision in a roundabout way. However, the fact remains that Justice Nadon is not qualified to sit in Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to speak to Bill C-4, the budget implementation act.

For the most hopeful among us, promise was in the air for a little while this past summer. There was talk of reset and of change. It seemed clear enough when this place shut down for the summer last June amid the Senate scandal that there was cause for the Conservative government members to pause and reflect on the way they conduct themselves as government.

I would, however, note that this speech and all speeches on the bill are delivered under time allocation. It is the 50th time the government has moved to limit debate in the House, so there has been no change.

A diagnosis of what is happening to Canadian politics under the current government would identify the same disease infecting all of what the Conservatives do. It is about a lack of transparency, a lack of accountability, and a lack of respect for the process of democratic politics.

Canadians elect us, all of us, to come here to give voice to their concerns and to pursue their wishes on their behalf. When the government will not allow those voices to be heard, what we have at the heart of all of this is a government that does not respect the people whose country this actually is.

Conservatives have become occupiers of the institutions and abusers of the practices that have been established for the collective benefit of all Canadians. We know that these institutions and practices are not perfect and never have been; I would point to the Senate down the hallway. From time to time we need to change so

that our institutions and practices keep up with maturing notions of democracy and what best serves that collective benefit.

We would call it modernization, perhaps. Conservatives once called it reform, in a day when we all at least had in common, it seemed, a commitment to transparency and accountability in the institutions of government and the practices of politics.

However, reform has not come from the supposed reformers. Hope has been betrayed by the government again, and there has been more disappointment for any Canadians left whose disposition allows them to remain optimistic about the government.

For those who could not escape the suspicion that the government would not and could not change its ways—and I am among them, unfortunately—the bill we are debating today was so entirely predictable: omnibus in nature, amending 70 pieces of legislation, and burying deep in its 300-plus pages two completely new pieces of legislation. It is legislation, I might add, as with all new legislation, that is worthy in its own right of full debate in this place.

How predictable that one of these pieces of legislation has to do with a gas project. Extraction and the fire sale of Canada's natural resources is all the government knows and all it does in the form of an economic plan. How fitting, especially in light of the evidence emerging every day from the Conservative government with an obsessive-compulsive disorder to control and manipulate, that the Mackenzie gas project impacts fund act would seek to eliminate the independent arm's-length bodies charged with mitigating the socio-economic impacts of the Mackenzie gas project and bring these matters directly under the control of the minister and the government.

Of course, we would not recognize a Conservative budget bill or implementation act without an attack on working people. From the elimination of useful dispute resolution processes to the undermining of health and safety provisions, attacks on workers have become the hallmark of the Conservative budget process. It is attack but never help; destroy but never build.

However, what I want to talk about today is the need to build urban economies and the need to help people who work and look for work in our cities, something Bill C-4 fails to do. I would like to point to a number of recently released studies in the hope of bringing to the attention of the government and Canadians just how far off the mark Bill C-4 is.

One such study, entitled "It's More than Poverty" and carried out by McMaster University and the United Way of Toronto, was released in February of this year. Having found that precarious employment has increased by nearly 50% over the last 20 years, so that barely 50% of people in the study are in jobs that are both permanent and full-time, the authors of this study describe precarious work as "the new normal" for many in the urban workforce.

● (1730)

This new normal is not a good normal. People in precarious work earn 46% less and report household income that is 34% less than those in secure jobs.

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Just this month, the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity and the Martin Prosperity Institute, both at the University of Toronto, released a study entitled, “Untapped potential—Creating a better future for service workers”. In this study, the institutes point to the increasing precarity of work in the Toronto labour market, particularly in what they call the routine service sector of the labour market, jobs that account for almost half of Toronto's workforce.

Defining precarious work as work that is temporary, part-time and paying below the low-income cut-off, the institutes note that the number of routine service jobs that have become precarious over the last decade has increased by one-third. The point that the institutes want to make with this study of precarity is not just about the implications of these changes for those working in this sector but as the study's title suggests, the untapped potential in this sector from which we can all benefit. The point is that unstable, low-wage and low-skill positions deflate disposable income and overall prosperity. The institutes urge policy-makers, and that is us, to assess what policy tools are needed to boost job security and wages within these occupations.

There has been no such assessment coming from the other side, and there are no such tools in Bill C-4. I am thankful that at least we on this side of the House are on the job. I would point to my colleague, the member for Davenport, and his recently tabled urban workers bill, which I proudly co-sponsor, as a response to the circumstances described in these studies. It is a bill of legislative relevance to Canadians, and particularly to urban Canadians.

Finally, I would like to point the government to a recent study done by the Wellesley Institute in Toronto, called “Shadow Economies: Economic Survival Strategies Of Toronto Immigrant Communities”, also released just this month, which focuses on the economic poverty of newcomers. This study finds that only one-third of households were able to fully cover their household expenses on income through formal employment, forcing people, as both workers and consumers, into the informal economy to make ends meet.

It is in this context that the government enters with an economic plan that according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer would be responsible for 67,000 less jobs by 2017, and a GDP reduction of 0.6%.

I do not know if it is possible for anybody to draft a stronger indictment of the government as economic manager than the one it has penned for itself with this very bill, Bill C-4. It is not just irrelevant to the lives of the vast majority of Canadians, proving once again how remote the government is from the population and their cares and concerns, but it is actually harmful and hurtful to the people I came here to represent.

● (1735)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for a very thoughtful and measured speech. I would like to ask the member where he might see the country going in terms of innovation.

Several years ago, in a previous government led by then-minister Allan Rock, now the president of the University of Ottawa, a very comprehensive Canadian strategy was put in place to pursue an innovation strategy for the country. Four or five round tables were

struck, and at the time I had the privilege of chairing an environmental technologies round table, to take a closer look at where we were going. Back then, around the year 2000, in the national capital region, we were receiving 60% of all the venture capital monies in Canada. That has been cut now by over 80%. We have also lost half of our high-tech firms.

What is the member's view with respect to an innovation strategy for the country? How does he see that dovetail with manufacturing and with information technology?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the question. It is a very interesting one and very relevant to my portfolio as urban affairs critic and my comments about the urban workforce and urban economies. Innovation is a social process. It is a process of sharing knowledge. There is a spatial requirement, or in fact a geography, to the process of innovation. It is a distinctly urban process. What we have coming from the government is nothing that addresses the issue of urban economies. Eighty per cent, maybe 85%, of Canadians live in cities and depend on government to do something for them about urban economies, to make them strong economies and for innovation. The \$350 million tax on the labour venture funds will do nothing to enhance innovation in this country.

● (1740)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we look at the innovation ecosystem across Canada from the start of product development and research, we have increased funding to the research councils for basic research and applied research. We have also had a series of measures, including tax measures, incentives in different fiscal policies to ensure that products can get to market. We also had the venture capital fund, which was announced in this particular budget. Also, through our regional development agencies, we have included targeted funds to see prototypes taken from the bench to market in repayable loans.

Which part of the innovation life cycle does he feel is not funded right now and why has he not voted for all of these measures? I am talking about a specific measure in the innovation life cycle, because all I hear is platitudes and generalities in his comments.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I look to what is happening in our cities and what is actually happening to our economy and I find it so curious that the government keeps referring to its programs, its paperwork and its administration of these matters. I sat on the health committee when we did the study of innovation and health technologies in this country. Time and time again we had innovators coming to our health committee with grievances about the lack of venture capital in the country and the lack of support from the government for an innovation agenda. Those were the witnesses that the government brought to the committee to talk about these issues.

The Conservatives should think about what their programs are doing, stop wasting Canadian taxpayer money and do something about innovation and urban economies in this country.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I understand correctly, there is a blatant lack of transparency in Bill C-4. This is yet another mammoth bill for which debate is being limited by a time allocation motion. It is not good for consumers, workers, veterans, the public service or the environment.

That being said, there is one issue that is particularly worrisome to me. I would like to ask my dear colleague, who so ardently defends his constituents, why the Conservative government would move forward with its harmful \$350-million tax on labour-sponsored funds. What effect will this have on workers and the economy in general?

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I can only assume that the attack on the labour capital venture fund is because it is associated with labour. That is the only explanation.

The government claims to be a proponent of innovation and science in the country and yet it muzzles scientists. We had a member talking about sour grapes. There are protests on the streets of our country by scientists about being muzzled. We have scientists coming to our health committee talking about a lack of support and capital funding for innovation in our country. Whatever the government thinks it is doing on innovation in this country, it is failing.

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-4, the budget implementation act, which of course is part of economic action plan 2013, which is very appropriately entitled jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Before I get into the details of my comments and start expanding on where I want to go, I will take this opportunity to once again thank the people of Saint John for giving me the honour and the privilege of serving them in this great House.

The reason I bring up the riding of Saint John, which I am so pleased to represent, is that a lot of my comments tonight will be focused on Saint John, and all my comments will be focused on the region of southern New Brunswick and new Brunswick as a whole. As I speak to the budget implementation act and economic action plan 2013 tonight, I want to talk about some of the things that are on the horizon for Saint John because in Saint John we are really excited about some of the prospects that are out there for the future. A lot of those prospects are centred around resource development and the opportunities that exist for Saint John because of what we have to offer.

It is no accident that Saint John is very well positioned to take advantage of some of these opportunities, and more specifically, I speak tonight about the energy east pipeline project. We are excited about the prospects of the energy east pipeline. Why, members ask? Quite frankly, we are home to Canada's largest oil refinery.

The urban oil refinery is situated right within the heart of my riding. We are home to Irving Canaport, which is a deep water terminal for importing oil, and we will soon hopefully be exporting oil through that same terminal. We are home to Canaport LNG terminal, which is Canada's only liquefied natural gas terminal. That terminal is set up for imports, but at this point in time it is

undergoing a review to seek permission to become an export terminal.

These are some of the opportunities we face in Saint John, and it is specifically because of our proximity to deep water, ice-free deep water. It has given us a huge advantage and a huge opportunity with what we are talking about in this country, which is responsible resource development.

We are talking about developing a pipeline from Alberta to Saint John, New Brunswick. It will benefit the entire country. It will benefit Saint John greatly, and we want to be well positioned in Saint John to take advantage of those opportunities as they come. We know that with the potential of these developments, there will be great opportunities when it comes to employment, and there will be other benefits beyond the pipeline when that comes our way. We are holding our breath and hoping daily that it is getting closer.

There is a lot of optimism around that. The premier of the province of New Brunswick is very actively engaged. I was actively engaged. The mayor of the city of Saint John and the officials from the port of Saint John are actively engaged in trying to impress upon officials in TransCanada with respect to the business opportunity that was there for this pipeline to be developed through eastern Canada and to Saint John, New Brunswick.

That is a great opportunity that we see sitting out there. Members are probably wondering where I am going with this. I will get back to that point in a few minutes, because economic action plan 2013 directly speaks to what we are facing in Saint John. It gives us the tools to be equipped to handle some of those opportunities that are coming our way.

There is more than just the development of this pipeline. There is more than just the changes with Canaport LNG. There are shale gas opportunities in New Brunswick. The provincial government is working very hard to ensure that we are in a position to develop those resources. We are looking at the opportunities that are there and the provincial government is doing exploration work at this time to try to determine what sort of deposit lies there. That is another opportunity.

● (1745)

Potash is an opportunity that we have in New Brunswick, and we are home to PotashCorp's marine terminal. That terminal ships potash worldwide, and we have tremendous opportunities there. The company's people are looking at expansion of that marine terminal because of PotashCorp's mine in Sussex. It has put down a new shaft and is looking at taking advantage of the opportunities that are there.

All these opportunities that I talk about have led to discussions within Saint John about how we would best become prepared to take advantage of these opportunities. Economic action plan 2013 includes that very specifically, and it lays out some very important things that we need to be prepared for. There are infrastructure investments in economic action plan 2013 that are so necessary when a community is trying to develop itself and trying to move forward. The city of Saint John, the port of Saint John and the province of New Brunswick all have to take advantage of some of these opportunities. Therefore, we will give them the tools and the opportunities to do so with this budget.

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However, it is not only through community infrastructure, when we talk about infrastructure investments. There is equipment and our people for the opportunities that are there. We have the Canada jobs grant, which will certainly turn the page on how we train people in the country and it will give employers and the private sector a voice in determining where those investments should be made. This is so important. We talk about how we move forward. Do members not think it is important that we give the people who will make the investments, drive the economy and drive the prosperity in our country a voice and a chance to say where those investments should be made? They can tell us exactly where the opportunities will be and they can tell us if we need so many tradespeople or so many accountants. They can tell us exactly where we should be spending our job training dollars. This is so important. Not only would they get to give us advice on that, but they would also get to invest in an opportunity.

I had the pleasure of visiting one of the Irving mills in Saint John just recently with the Minister of Employment and Social Development. We have two Irving pulp and paper mills, so we visited Irving paper and we sat down and had a discussion with the officials from the human resources department about their needs. We talked about some of the things they were facing as they went forward and how they only hired people with at least two years of post-secondary education. That surprised me because we tend to look at some of the jobs in some of these organizations as not being highly skilled. These people are very highly skilled and they come in the door with a minimum of two years of post-secondary education and they are trained to do the jobs they need to do. The officials at the company are prepared to make the investment in these people and their futures.

It is so important that we are able to play a role and work with them, because it is more important that the business people who are actually hiring for these jobs, and not government bureaucrats, make the decisions on where these dollars go. Going forward, we should be giving business people a say in what they are doing.

However, we would also make huge investments when it comes to tax breaks. We are investing in the extension of the hiring tax credit and of the accumulating capital costs allowance for investments in new equipment and machinery. This will give the people who are in the business and industrial side of the equation the opportunity to invest dollars at home and to provide those highly-skilled jobs that we are talking about.

This budget, the economic action plan 2013, would give us the opportunity to be prepared for the future. There is a lot of opportunity on the horizon for the people of Saint John and the province of New Brunswick and by taking advantage of this program and of what is in this budget, we would be very well equipped to go forward.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

His speech did not cover all aspects of Bill C-4, but that is quite understandable. How could one possibly talk about all of the items contained in a 300-page bill in just 10 minutes?

Today, I moved a motion and I requested the unanimous support of the House to remove sections 290 to 293 from Bill C-4 so that they can be examined by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, which in my opinion is the most appropriate place to examine that part of the bill.

Can my colleague tell us why these sections pertaining to the permanent residency system in Canada have to be included in a budget rather than be examined by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration?

[*English*]

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite correct. I did not cover all of the details in Bill C-4. As I said very clearly at the beginning, I was going to focus on some aspects that are very important to my region, to my riding, and I did that very specifically.

I talked about some of the opportunities that are out there. I talked about how important this budget is, what it would give us, how it would give us the tools to go forward, and how it would better prepare the people of Saint John and the people of southern New Brunswick for the opportunities that lie ahead. I am very excited about that. I look forward to the opportunity to engage people on that level and to talk more about it. These are exciting times in Saint John, New Brunswick, and we look forward to continuing to discuss these things.

• (1755)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member is with respect to the advertising dollars that the government, over the years, has spent in promoting its so-called action plan, going into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

There is a sense of frustration when we look at the number of summer jobs that are needed for students. I recall seeing commercials last year during hockey tournaments. The equivalent amount of money spent on one 30-second commercial would have employed something like 25 youths in summer employment.

I wonder if the member believes that maybe the government might have gone too far in spending hundreds of millions of dollars just to self-promote its own budget.

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member's frustration. There is a lot of frustration over on the opposition benches.

However, to be quite frank, we are excited about the opportunities that we are putting forward. We are excited to tell Canadians about them, and Canadians are excited to hear about those opportunities. We make no apologies for communicating with our constituents. It is important they understand the work that their government is doing. We look forward to continuing to work with Canadians and to telling them about the great things this government is doing.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to comment on the article by conservative *National Post* editorialist Andrew Coyne. I will summarize the article about omnibus bills, such as Bill C-4, in just a few words: the bill makes a mockery of the confidence convention and serves to shield bills that would otherwise be defeatable in the House. It is impossible to know how legislators intended to vote. There is no common thread that runs between these different items and no overarching principle that unites them. They represent a sort of compulsory buffet. There is something alarming about the government wanting to oblige Parliament to rubber-stamp its whole legislative agenda at one go.

[English]

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfortunate that my hon. colleague across the floor feels he has been forced to do something here in this House, because none of us are forced to do anything. I stand here tonight talking about economic action plan 2013 with great enthusiasm because I see the opportunities that are there for Saint John, and I will wholeheartedly embrace the opportunity to vote in support of it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, listening to all of these exchanges and debates, we can see that, ultimately, Bill C-4 fails to respond in any way to Canadians' concerns.

Earlier, my colleague pointed out that job security and wage issues were not taken into account in this bill and that no progress has been made on those issues. Meanwhile, it is increasingly clear that families and income earners are becoming more vulnerable. What tangible measures is the government proposing to address those types of problems?

[English]

Mr. Rodney Weston: Mr. Speaker, to the member's point exactly, that is what my comments were centred around: what the bill has in that would benefit my region, my community, and my riding. I certainly look forward to embracing those opportunities, and I suggest that the hon. member might want to look at embracing them as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, these are interesting times. We understand and appreciate today, more so than the last number of days, why the Prime Minister was so scared for the House to resume.

Here we have the budget bill and one could easily spend a full 10 minutes just talking about some of the details in the 300 pages. The European Union trade deal was recently signed, another issue which, no doubt, would have generated a great deal of interest. We have what many are saying could be the beginning of the end of the Prime Minister taking place on the other side of this grand building, in the other house. In fact, I am getting a better appreciation for why he prorogued the session and why he felt it was necessary not to sit in September after hearing some of the presentations being made.

When a budget is presented and legislation is introduced, one thing that is really important for us to recognize is the integrity of the government. What is being questioned and called to task is the

performance of the Prime Minister's Office. If we look at the whole Nigel Wright affair—

• (1800)

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are all here to debate this bill. Members had more opportunity than anyone in the House to complain and make points about a different subject. Will the member use his time to talk about this bill or not?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. minister of state for his intervention. Members may know that there is a responsibility to present their ideas that are relevant to the question before the House. Having said that, members have a great degree of liberty to present ideas and eventually bring them around to their relevance. Perhaps the hon. member for Winnipeg North is in the process of doing that. I am sure he will be bringing it back on the topic in short order.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate why some members of the government would be absolutely nervous about what is taking place today. In fact, it is critically important when we talk about a budget, and this is the budget implementation bill, that Canadians have confidence in the people presenting it. The people who are presenting this budget are the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister of the country.

Quite frankly, what we are witnessing is calling into question what is taking place in the Prime Minister's Office. It is casting doubt on whether we can believe the Prime Minister, whether it is this budget document or other affairs taking place inside the office. For example, one day he says that Nigel Wright resigned of his own free will. We then find out that he was released, or fired. One day it is one individual in the Prime Minister's Office who knew, and now it is a few or 13 or whatever it might be. Today we find out that it is more than just one cheque of \$90,000.

It is an issue of integrity.

The people who present this budget, the Government of Canada, need to be more straightforward, honest, and truthful in what they are putting forward. In looking at this particular budget bill, we have to reflect on what is actually taking place today on Parliament Hill. A good number of Canadians are watching and are interested in finding out the truth on a wide variety of issues.

This particular budget bill is one of a number of budget bills the Minister of Finance has brought to the House. It is a bill that uses other pieces of legislation and attempts to pass them in one vote. In other words, other ministers approach the Minister of Finance saying that they have a bill and want to get it into his budget bill. The current Minister of Finance, more than any other in the history of our great nation, has used budget bills as a back door to pass government legislation that should have been introduced completely separately. He has set records. It is not something he should be proud of.

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What we have witnessed is a style of government. It is a Reform Conservative-style majority government that believes it can just walk all over the House of Commons or try to intimidate the other side or the Senate. We are saying that Canadians are catching on to this behaviour. They deserve better. The Liberal Party is going to push the Government of Canada to start being more honest, with the full details, whether it is the Prime Minister's Office or the type of material being provided in the budget.

What Canadians want is to see a government that has a vision and provides hope. The Conservatives have failed to meet those basic standards.

One would think that if the government was going to prorogue the session and then introduce a throne speech, there would be something relatively visionary in it or something that would provide a bit of extra hope in some important policy areas. Why not include something nice about our first nations, the environment, or how the government is going to deal with poverty in Canada? What about talking about health care and what we are going to do to ensure that health care will be there in the future? What about real, tangible job opportunities or programs that are going to make a difference? None of that was in the throne speech.

I believe that Canadians deserve better.

• (1805)

Ultimately, when I look at what the government has done over the past number of months, even though it spends billions and billions of dollars, it has failed to really deliver the goods to the average middle-class Canadian in any part of our country. The Conservatives need to start focusing not only on providing the full truth on a wide range of issues but on what is important to Canadians.

On a personal note, and I have raised this issue before and will continue to raise it, I believe health care is of critical importance to each and every Canadian. However, the Conservative government has totally ignored that file.

Paul Martin instituted the health care accord. It is that health care accord that has enabled the current government to crow as often as it does that they give more health care dollars than any other government. It is that health care accord that made it happen. It is Paul Martin who should be taking the credit for the amount of money we allocate to the provinces.

The Conservative government has not sat down with the provinces. It has not attempted to renegotiate a health care accord for the future. The single greatest expenditure a province has today out of general revenues is health care.

Every Canadian is concerned about the future of health care in Canada. They want to have that sense of pride in knowing that politicians truly care about health care delivery in our great nation. The government needs to do a whole lot more in providing that leadership, because there is a great void.

I have had the opportunity to talk about a housing strategy. Every region of our country needs more attention to housing. What about residential rehabilitation types of programs that could help with our older housing stock? What about enabling housing co-ops to get established? How many housing co-ops can the current government

take credit for establishing since it has been in office? I can tell members that we could probably count that on one hand. I look forward to some members picking up on that point. Tell me what the government has done to improve the quality of housing stock and in enabling our middle class to become homeowners.

These are the types of issues Canadians are concerned about: jobs, the homes they live in, the poverty situation, how the government is trying to improve economic opportunity—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time allocated for the member's speech is finished.

We will go to questions and comments with the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn that question back to the member who gave that speech. What about housing? What about the 250,000 people on the waiting list for affordable housing? In Toronto, one in four Canadians cannot afford the place they live in. The fact is, seniors in Toronto will actually die on the waiting list waiting for affordable housing.

It seems that most experts I have ever read blame the Liberals for killing affordable housing in this country during the 1990s as part of their massive cuts to spending and the downloading to provinces of their fiscal problems. What about that?

• (1810)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is being very selective in terms of what it is he is reading. If he really wants to be honest in what he is attempting to tell the viewers, he would recognize that housing is something that needs to be done in co-operation with the provinces and different stakeholders.

I come from Manitoba, and I can say that there are significant shortfalls. I was housing critic for a number of years, specifically when the NDP took the reins of power in Manitoba. That was a fairly dark day in many different social policy areas. I can tell the member that much.

However, the NDP could have done a whole lot better in terms of ensuring affordable, better housing. They sat on land banks and did nothing with some of them. It was not all of them. They did do some things, but they could have done a whole lot more.

As opposed to pointing the finger—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario).

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, while my colleague across the way may have been selective, which is the word that was used, let me not be so selective.

Obviously the member is older than 10 years of age; I am sure he is. Perhaps he has selectively forgotten the \$25 billion that Paul Martin and the Liberals cut from health care. Perhaps he has forgotten that they cut transfer payments for education and has forgotten that they cut science and technology by almost 10%.

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Is this member serious? In fact, perhaps I could ask the member if he would just give the Canadian people 5¢ for every word he uses in the House of Commons. We could get the whole European continent out of debt, not just North America. Perhaps that is all I will ask the member for: 5¢ for every word he uses.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the \$25 billion that the member refers to was not just with respect to health—it included social services and so forth—but it is interesting, because I believe the Reform Party at the time was saying it was not enough. We have to put it into the proper perspective of the time.

If we take a look at the bundle of health care transfers, social transfers, and equalization payments from the day on which the Liberals took office back in 1993 to the day on which the Conservative Party took the reins, never have any of the provinces received the types of transfer payments that they received at the time Paul Martin left the Prime Minister's Office. That is the reality.

When the Conservatives brag and boast about health care—

Hon. Jim Flaherty: That is nonsense. That is not true.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is the truth. The Minister of Finance might not like it, but that is the reality of it. He can stand and correct—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Clearly, members are enthusiastic about the hon. member for Winnipeg North's response to the last question.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the fact that we have just come through six years of deficits in a row and that after two fantastic years, 2006 and 2007, because of huge Liberal surpluses since 2008, we have added \$160 billion. If we break that down, it is about \$30 billion per year. That is \$1,000 of debt for every man, woman, and child every year since 2008.

I wonder what my hon. colleague thinks about the fact that we are strapping the future of our generations that will follow us with such debt. It will be more than \$1,000 per person—

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Do you remember something called a recession? Do you remember that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. There is too much noise in the House. I am sure that hon. members will want to know the response. We have a short time for the response.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if only I could have leave to explain in detail.

Suffice it to say what we do need is a reality check. As has been pointed out, the current Minister of Finance inherited billions of dollars of surplus. At the time before the recession he was able to make that evaporate and turn it into billions of dollars of annual deficit.

•(1815)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way talked about how these things were evaporating. His party saw more taxpayer dollars evaporate into the coffers of Quebec Liberal ad agency firms with \$40 million still owed to taxpayers. We have to ask: where is that \$40 million that the Gomery inquiry says that the Liberal Party owes to the taxpayers of our country?

As far as this budget implementation act goes, the Minister of Finance has done a tremendous job of putting together an economic program that is going to lead our country to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

I am from Atlantic Canada. Our region has struggled over the years with its economy, but it is starting to turn the corner for many reasons, the most important one being the economic policies put forward by our Minister of Finance and this government. A young child growing up in Atlantic Canada today can look forward to a bright and robust future.

A \$25 billion shipbuilding program has been awarded to the Irving shipyards. That is equivalent to 11,000 jobs in Nova Scotia, 55,000 jobs across the country.

Our government strongly supports the west-east pipeline to Saint John. That is going to bring a whole new industry of oil exports to Atlantic Canada. Oil will be refined, value-added, in Saint John and exported to countries all around the world.

We have invested in a loan guarantee for the Lower Churchill Falls project. That is a \$7.2 billion project. That means jobs and skilled tradespeople will be able to return from out west and take those jobs at the Irving shipyard in Saint John and in Labrador to fill those three large projects. We are taking steps in economic action plan 2013 to ensure we have the measures in place to provide the training so young people from Atlantic Canada fill those jobs and build a future for themselves and their families.

Our Minister of Finance, our Prime Minister and this government have a visionary approach to the future, unlike what we have seen from the opposition. Our Conservative government continues to get the job done for Canadians through economic action plan 2013.

On October 22, the Minister of Finance released the Annual Report of the Government of Canada for 2013. The report shows the continued downward track of Canada's annual deficit. In 2012-13 the deficit fell to \$18.9 billion. This was down by more than one-quarter, or \$7.4 billion, from the deficit of \$26.3 billion in 2011-12. This was down nearly two-thirds from the \$55.6 billion deficit recorded in 2009-10 at the pit of the largest economic recession since the Great Depression of the thirties.

Our government's responsible spending of taxpayer dollars has played an important part in the results we have seen in 2012-13, with direct program expenses falling by 1.2% from the prior year and by 3.8% from 2010-11. We are looking at program spending, at government spending, before we look at cutting transfer payments like the Liberal Party did in the 1990s.

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I am proud that our government is focused on helping to create jobs and growth and opportunities for Canadians. I am proud our government supports hard-working families. Families and communities will be safer because of the measures we are taking in the area of justice and always putting Canadians first.

According to the Minister of Finance, our government continues its efforts to ensure that every tax dollar is spent as efficiently as possible and wasteful spending is eliminated. We are keeping Canada on track to balance the budget in 2015 without raising taxes and without cutting those very valued transfer payments to the provinces.

As reported by the OECD, Canada's total economic net debt to GDP ratio, which includes net debt of the federal, provincial and territorial governments and assets held in the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan, stands at 34.5% in 2012. This is by far the lowest level among the group of seven countries which the OECD expects will average a net debt of 87% in the same year, more than twice as much. All Canadians should be proud of this success.

It is our solid economic and fiscal fundamentals that have ensured Canada remains one of the few countries in the world to continuously receive the highest possible credit ratings from all major credit rating agencies.

● (1820)

Having said that, we are not immune to the effects of slow global growth. We must build on our record by continuing to keep taxes low here in Canada, to work to expand trade, as we announced our trade deal with the European Union last week, to keep Canada on track for a balanced budget in 2015, and to grow our relationships not only here in North America but around the world so we continue to be a trading nation that people in other countries look to with great jealousy.

We are one of the few countries in the world, and one of the only industrialized countries, that has trade deals now with both the European Union and the United States of America, over 800 million people. We have free trade deals with the two most valuable markets in the world. Canada is the country that has that deal now. This is something that all Canadians should be proud of.

Much has been said in the past months about the temporary foreign worker program. We will ensure that the only purpose of the temporary foreign worker program is to provide temporary help where clear and acute labour shortages exist and where Canadians are truly not available for those jobs. We believe that is consistent with the wishes of Canadians.

We have over a million net new jobs that have been created since July 2009; 90% are full time and over 80% are in the private sector. We are getting the job done when it comes to job creation.

Our economic action plan 2013 is going to help many people in my riding and all Canadians through a number of key measures that will strengthen our local economies. In rural areas, in Atlantic Canada, we rely on seasonal employment. Sometimes that is not enough. Training will be required to help workers get into the workforce full time, year-round. As some of these large projects come online such as I mentioned at the beginning of the speech, we will need people who are trained to take those jobs up as we

transition from an economy that relies purely on seasonal employment, particularly in the summers, to one where we have full-time good employment for skilled tradespeople, year-round, in Atlantic Canada.

To that end, economic action plan 2013 will increase the skills and training to support these workers with a new \$15,000 Canada job grant. This will help retrain workers so they can find high-quality, well-paying jobs, something that will be of direct benefit to my riding and all of Atlantic Canada, as well as all Canadians across the country.

As parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development, I cannot stress enough the importance of training workers so that they can get into the workforce. Equally important is the strengthening of the apprenticeship program, which we put in place through economic action plan 2013. It will make it easier for apprentices to get the experience they need to get their journeyman status. With a skilled workers shortage in this country, reallocating \$4 million over three years to work with the provinces and territories to increase opportunities for apprenticeships will go a long way toward filling this gap.

We are listening to the skilled tradesmen and women and reducing barriers to apprenticeship accreditation. These include examining the use of practical tests as a method of assessment for apprentices. We are also putting these apprentices to work through measures that will support the use of apprentices through federal construction and maintenance contracts, investments in affordable housing, and infrastructure projects that are receiving federal funding.

An often forgotten segment of the workforce is the disabled. We have not forgotten them in this budget. We will introduce a new generation of labour market agreements for persons with disabilities by 2014 to better meet the employment needs of businesses and employment prospects of persons with disabilities. We will do this through the expansion of the opportunities fund. There will be an ongoing funding of \$40 million per year starting in 2015-16 to provide more demand-driven solutions for people with disabilities.

Nova Scotians and all Canadians will also benefit from an allocation of \$19 million over two years to promote education in high-demand fields, such as trades, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. These are the programs that will lead our young people to jobs in the future. We are supporting that now so those jobs will be filled by Canadians with proper training. Students are our future workers. Our Conservative government recognizes this need, and we are fulfilling that need with steps in this budget.

Adjournment Proceedings

We recently heard through media reports that first nations youth have only a 60% high school graduation rate in Canada. Our government recognizes that these young people need training and opportunities so they can join our larger economy. The aboriginal youth in this country are the fastest growing segment of our youth, and we need to take steps now to provide them the education and training they need to fully embrace the greatness that is this country, Canada.

• (1825)

Higher education is the pathway to employment, and our government is improving services for students who apply for loans and grants. The minister's authority to electronically administer or enforce the Canada student loans program is consistent with economic action plan 2013's commitment to examine new ways to transform the way the Government of Canada does business to improve service and achieve efficiencies within our programs.

This amendment would modernize the delivery of the Canada student loans program—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Questions and comments, the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the most recent budget, the Conservatives attacked labour-sponsored funds. The majority of chambers of commerce and investment organizations across Canada have said that this is very serious because these types of attacks harm investment and will create uncertainty among investors.

In budget 2013-14, the government attacks venture capital funds. This, too, will create uncertainty and will not promote investment in our country.

How can it attack labour-sponsored funds, small credit unions, co-operatives and capital funds, and then brag that it is supporting investment in Canada? Something is wrong.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, that is not true. What our budget is doing is bringing savings and streamlining practices, which will bring them in line with other jurisdictions. We are going to reform the system so that we can better support organized labour, our chambers of commerce, and our credit unions. We need to align our system with those different jurisdictions so that we can better administer these programs.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I preface my question by saying that I do not expect the member to be able to answer this particular fine point, although perhaps he could get advice from the members around him.

My question is about the National Research Council. The bill would reduce the size of the council from 18 to 10. Given the large geographic diversity in this country and the large diversity of research in the natural sciences, engineering, health sciences, and social sciences, should we not have a larger council advising the president at this time of very ambitious, large-scale change at the NRC?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, just because there are more people does not mean it is a better council. We believe on this side of

the House that any dollars spent should be targeted to the actual delivery of programs not to paying for bureaucracies to support those programs.

Whether the council is 18, 10, four, or three does not matter. What is important is whether the council is running effectively and whether those program dollars are being delivered the way they should be. That is what is important.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been here all day, and I have been listening to the opposition members saying that we should be spending more and more and more. Then in the same breath, they complain about the deficits the government has had to incur to get us through the financial crisis. It is not even logical that they would say the same thing on two opposite sides. It is hypocritical. Does the member agree that it is hypocritical for members to say to spend more and reduce deficits at the same time?

• (1830)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, the opposition parties in the House really—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I am sure members would love to hear what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development has to say on the question.

The hon. member.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, we know that calls from the opposition to spend more and more is what we typically hear. That is what we typically see from NDP governments when they are in place around the country.

In answer to my colleague from Burlington, a tremendous member of Parliament, who has actually completed several long runs in my province, he understands that what we are doing, particularly in Atlantic Canada, is investing in the future. We are making sure we keep taxes low. We are bringing our deficits down and returning to a balanced budget. We are making key investments in key projects that are going to lead to jobs and growth, like the urban shipyard deal, a \$25 billion deal; like Lower Muskrat Falls; like the west-east pipeline. It is targeted spending, making sure we also keep our taxes low, our deficits low and return to a balanced budget in 2015.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

* * *

[*English*]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I would like to talk about today is health and safety. The point I want to make is that the Conservative government cannot be trusted with the health and safety of our families and our children. I hope that the parliamentary secretary will be able to address this issue.

Adjournment Proceedings

It comes up in a survey that was released last week on the subject of the muzzling of federal scientists. This is a subject that has been discussed for a number of years. When it is brought up the government says there is a lot of money spent on science by the federal government, and there are a lot of papers published by federal scientists. Then it dismisses reports of the muzzling of federal scientists and the fact that they are not able to speak freely. It says a lot of papers are published and federal scientists are not being muzzled.

Counter to that, there is some very significant anecdotal evidence of scientists not being able to speak freely or on a timely basis with the media or the public. What came out last week was a survey performed by Environics. The survey had roughly 4,000 respondents, all federal scientists. It gives some hard data to back up what we are finding from anecdotal evidence. One conclusion of this survey is that 90% of the 4,000 respondents said that they could not speak freely about their research. This is just like the salmon scientists who could not speak freely to journalists or to the public about salmon genetics, which is a very strange thing given the fact that Canadian taxpayers have paid for that research.

If you push the government a bit with all these anecdotes about the fact that it is kind of silly that scientists cannot simply talk about their research about the natural world, the next thing the government will say is that the scientists work for the government. The Minister of State for Science and Technology has essentially made this point. They work for the government and they have to work according to the rules that the Conservative government has set up, just like someone doing research for a company has to work by the rules of the company they work for. The problem with that is really exposed by the results of the survey, which says that half of federal scientists have found that the health and safety of Canadians has been compromised by political interference.

Let me quote the report that came out. I will extract the important parts of the quote. It states:

Half of federal scientists...report being aware of actual cases in which the health and safety of Canadians...has been compromised because of political interference with their scientific work. ...in which their department or agency suppressed information....

That is the problem. That is why we cannot say the scientists work for the government so they have to obey the Conservative government's rules. It affects health and safety. Two thousand federal scientists are saying they know of cases where the health and safety of Canadians is compromised.

What I would like to say to Canadians tonight is that they cannot trust the safety of their children, of their family, to the government.

I began my question last week during question period by saying that middle-class Canadians expect the government to ensure safe and healthy communities in which to raise their children. That actually came from the throne speech. What I am saying is that the government's concern for health and safety is not real. It cannot be trusted with the safety of our children and our families.

• (1835)

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to comments made earlier by my colleague from across the aisle regarding the

communication of research and findings of scientists employed by the government.

Our government is committed to science, technology, and innovation, as was clearly stated in the Speech from the Throne just two weeks ago. We know and understand that research and innovation drive job creation, economic growth, long-term prosperity, and an improved quality of life for all Canadians. That is why, since 2006, we have made significant investments in science. In fact, Canadian science and technology is healthy, growing, and recognized around the world for its excellence, attracting world-renowned researchers to Canada and keeping the talent we train right here.

Our government is extremely proud of the world-class work that our scientists and researchers do. They help us achieve key social goals, such as improving public health, ensuring the safety of foods and products, building strong and vibrant economies across the nation, and ensuring a clean and healthy environment for future generations in order to improve the quality of life for all Canadians and for people around the world.

Our government is committed to ensuring that federally funded scientific research is shared widely with Canadians, and the numbers speak for themselves.

Each year, government departments conduct thousands of interviews. Similarly, federal scientists publish thousands of peer-reviewed articles, research reports, and data sets. Their findings are shared at scientific conferences at home and abroad and are made widely available to other scientists, to Canadians, and to scientific communities around the world.

However, we also recognize that there are different types of information, and there will be times when sharing information is not in the public interest. Examples include issues related to national security or when the disclosure of information creates privacy or legal considerations.

In these cases, departments and agencies must carefully balance the issues to ensure that the best interests of Canadians are being served. To support departments and agencies in fulfilling this function, the government provides guidance through its official communications policy. This policy directs departments and agencies to cultivate proactive relations with the media and to promptly address their inquiries.

We recognize the importance of sharing scientific research and innovative advancements. Effectively communicating these findings is crucial. That is why through our action plan on open government, we have committed to engage Canadians through open information, open data, and open dialogue.

We have launched the Government of Canada's open data portal. It provides a one-stop shop for federal government data, making thousands of federal data sets freely available to the public. We will continue to act in these areas to ensure that the benefits of federally performed science are fully realized for Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government has also made substantial investments to strengthen Canada's research advantages, and we will continue to do so. These investments have helped to attract and retain talent, support excellence in science, bring discoveries and innovation to the marketplace, and build science and technology infrastructure. Our government is committed to building on these successes and to further strengthening Canadian science in an open and transparent manner.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, in some sense it comes down to this for the average Canadian. I would ask the average Canadian, "Whom do you trust? Do you trust the Conservative government, or do you trust the scientists who work for your government?"

The scientists are saying, "No, we are not free to speak, and it is affecting your health and safety." This is what is new in this long conversation about the muzzling of scientists, which has lasted several years, from even before I was elected.

What is new is that there was a survey, and 2,000 federal scientists said they know of cases in which the health and safety of Canadians has been compromised because the Conservative government has politically interfered with scientific work and suppressed information.

That is what Canadians need to know. They can decide whether or not they trust what the Conservative government says, but they know now what federal scientists say.

● (1840)

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, of course this government understands the importance of open and transparent communication of federally funded science. We are extremely proud of the work our scientists and researchers do. The number of interviews they conduct every year, the number of conferences they attend, and the extensive body of work they publish is a testament to this work.

Canada's federal researchers share their work broadly with the media and the public through a variety of means. Like other public servants, Canada's federal scientists are guided by the Government of Canada's communications policy. This policy directs federal institutions to cultivate proactive relations with the media to ensure that Canadians are well informed about the government's work and policies.

As a government, we understand that the communication of science is extremely important. That is why our government has introduced several new initiatives to open Canada's federally funded research to Canadians and the broader scientific community. We will continue to invest in these areas to ensure that the benefits of our federal research are fully realized by all Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:41 p.m.)

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