



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 040 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 3, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 3, 2014

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1105)

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I invite the House to take note of today's use of the wooden mace. The wooden mace is traditionally used when the House sits on February 3, to mark the anniversary of the fire that destroyed the original Parliament Buildings on this day in 1916.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT

The House resumed from November 29, 2013, consideration of the motion that Bill C-473, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act (balanced representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak on Bill C-473, legislation that would amend the Financial Administration Act to achieve balanced representation of the number of women and men serving as directors on boards of parent crown corporations, by establishing the minimum proportion of each.

I want to commend my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for an initiative which builds on the work of the senator for Bedford, Quebec.

Before I discuss the merits of the legislation, I would like to note that women's rights are human rights and there are no human rights that do not include the rights of women. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each of us to give expression to this fundamental message through concrete action and to understand that the tools to promote the objectives of equality are in our own hands. That is, we must commit ourselves to this cause without delay. Canada ranks 20th among 133 countries regarding the gender gap, behind Nicaragua, Latvia, Cuba, and Lesotho. Status of Women Canada has a \$29.6 million budget and only four offices. The government has yet to launch an inquiry into the 600 missing and murdered aboriginal

women and girls. Violence drives 100,000 women and children from their homes into shelters each year. Canadian women earn 81¢ for every \$1 that a man earns, and the government fails to value the enormous contribution that women make to the two-thirds of the 25 billion hours of unpaid work that Canadians perform every year.

While women make up 50.9% of the Canadian population, women hold barely one-quarter of the seats in the House. Canada ranks 42nd in terms of the gender gap in politics. This is a result of policy choices we have made and that we should change. While I will not go into the details here, we have examples from around the world, such as Norway and Sweden, that if we remove obstacles, including financial barriers, more women would run, more women would be elected, and we would improve gender parity in the House of Commons.

Beyond policy options to improve gender parity in Parliament, there are policy options with respect to equality more broadly, and that is what this bill is about. Bill C-473 is at second reading, and the question before Parliament is whether it should be sent to committee for further study. I believe the bill should indeed be referred to committee, so that witnesses can help inform the discussion and debate. I support the spirit and principle of the bill, as I believe gender parity is a goal we must pursue, and more importantly attain.

According to the research organization Catalyst, women make up 47% of the Canadian labour force, but only 14% of board seats among the 500 largest Canadian companies surveyed by the *Financial Post*. Women's representation on boards of publicly traded companies still stands at only 10.3%. There was new data out last night that suggests another study shows it may be 20%.

Many industrialized countries have discovered that legislation is needed to achieve balanced representation in the corporate world. Since 2008, at least nine countries, including Norway, Spain, France, and Italy, have adopted some form of quota requirements for diversity on corporate boards. Other countries do not have fixed quotas, but they have set targets for women that companies are either required to comply with or must explain publicly why they are not.

According to Deb Gillis, chief operating officer at Catalyst, "There really is a global conversation going on right now about the issue of women on boards". Yet, in Canada, progress has been glacial. *The Globe and Mail's* annual "Board Games" report on corporate governance found that 41% of companies in the benchmark S&P/TSX index still have no women on their boards.

Private Members' Business

There are some questions to be addressed in committee regarding the scope and implementation of this bill. One question is whether the legislation goes far enough, in that the number of women on boards may not be an accurate indicator in and of itself of women's progress more broadly. Let me provide an example.

Just because we have gender parity on a board heading a science agency does not mean we are doing enough to encourage women to enter and remain in the sciences, or that women are equitably represented in decisions regarding science policy. We all hope that if more women are on boards, these boards and agencies will adopt policies and perspectives that are inclusive and sensitive to the need for minority representation.

However, we might wonder whether there are other metrics to be considered in this regard, such as compensation. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the bill seems to be silent on the matter of sanctions. That is, it does not outline penalties or remedial action for failure to adhere to the objectives outlined in the bill.

It specifically states:

An act of the board of directors of a parent Crown corporation to which section 105.1 applies is not invalid on the sole ground that the composition of the board is not in compliance with that section.

In other words, any decision made by a board without the designated gender representation is not invalid if the board does not meet the appropriate gender representation requirements. This clause would seem to lessen the strength of the bill.

I think we have to investigate whether we might have some sort of mechanism whereby we do not merely say, as this bill does, that failure to meet the required parity is just business as usual and we are sorry. Ultimately, without any consequence for failure to meet the quotas, this entire initiative may become an exercise in symbolism, which I am sure the hon. member who introduced the bill did not intend to be the principal impact.

There are multiple approaches to this question. Those studying the bill at committee should perhaps question what the goal should be, and if and when sanctions should be put in place. For example, should the goal be 50% parity in the statute and that sanctions be mandated with a figure of less than 40%, or should perhaps some other number be achieved?

We need to hear expert witness testimony before the committee. While Canada has seen little improvement in women's representation on boards, other countries have seen marked improvement. For example, in France, where mandatory quotas will take effect in 2017, women comprised 16.6% of directors in 2011, up from 9.1% just 2 years earlier.

I hope we can send this bill to committee so that witnesses will provide the evidence that we as parliamentarians can then use to inform our perspectives and the subsequent debate.

Before concluding my remarks, I would be remiss if I did not note that all issues of gender parity are not solved by this bill, though it is certainly a step in the right direction. There are indeed many other concerns, both domestic and international, that time does not permit me to address, including pay equity, ending violence against women, an inquiry into the 600 missing and murdered aboriginal women,

matrimonial real property, gender budgeting, women in armed conflict, etcetera, on which I would encourage the government to adopt a more progressive and inclusive approach.

Until that time, I hope more private members' bills such as this will seek to advance the equality cause that arguably the government has abandoned.

• (1110)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to speak on Bill C-473, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act (balanced representation), which concerns balanced representation on the boards of crown corporations.

We are at second reading, which is the point at which this House determines if a bill has the merit to be sent to a committee for further study.

I want to thank my colleague who submitted this bill, the member of Parliament for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, and also her predecessor, Irene Mathysen, who did a lot of work on this issue as well. I thank them—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I remind the hon. member that she must not refer to other members of this place by their given names, but rather by their constituency.

• (1115)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I meant to refer to the member for London—Fanshawe. Thank you for that reminder.

Mr. Speaker, the bill is an important measure about gender equity, and specifically it proposes that the representation on the boards of crown corporations achieve gender parity within six years, and I will be more specific in terms of what it is proposing.

The bill would seek to increase the representation of women to 30% after two years of coming into force and 40% after four years; six years after the bill comes into force, 50% of the board members be women. The bill does not suggest that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I am not sure what the cause of the disruption was, but the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has the floor.

The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I notice there is a group who might be very enthusiastic about this New Democrat private member's bill. I hope that is the case for their comments.

The bill seeks to improve the representation of women on the boards of crown corporations. It does not, at this point, seek to change any representation of companies, corporate entities, financial institutions, or publicly trade companies, but we do believe that this is one important step toward gender parity in our public institutions.

Why is that important? It is important because more than half of our population is women, and these are public institutions that are paid for with our tax dollars and deserve to have the input and the representation in a balanced fashion.

My colleagues opposite may say they do not want anything that interferes with the merit principle, but I would argue that the current lack of representation of women on our boards of crown corporations, which is less than 30% today, is ignoring the merit of more than half of the population, which is women and ought to be represented in these public institutions. That is what the bill is seeking to do.

Diversity on boards of directors is vital to the good governance of organizations. It allows a more holistic view of the environment and better representation of those who are clients, shareholders, and so on. The bill aims to achieve balanced representation among women and men in the management of public finances over a reasonable time horizon and to position Canada as a world leader in gender representation on boards and boards of directors of crown corporations.

Women are still underrepresented within our country's decision-making authorities, and the NDP is the only party suggesting concrete action to promote the equality of women and men, which includes equal representation in managing our public affairs. That may well be because we are the first party to achieve 40% representation among our members of caucus here in the House.

Diversity within corporate boards enables organizations to seek out women with exceptional expertise or specific skills. Boards of directors can gain access to vital, complementary competencies, allowing women to contribute to their full potential.

As the member of Parliament for Parkdale—High Park, I live in a riding in Toronto where we have an incredible diversity of talent, women and men. I note that there are many artists, professionals, and leaders of community organizations. Of the two city councillors, one MP, one MPP, and one school trustee in our community, all but one are women; so we have an incredibly talented base of people in our riding. The fact that they are not equally represented in our public institutions, in the House, nor in our crown corporations, is an incredible waste of talent.

● (1120)

[*Translation*]

At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the participants concluded that only equal participation of women and men at all levels of the decision-making process could allow us to achieve the balance needed for democracy to work and grow stronger. The most recent data indicate that there are 2,000 Canadians who hold positions in more than 200 crown corporations, agencies, boards of directors and commissions across the country, but women are under-represented on boards of directors, where they currently hold only 27% of positions. According to the list of heads of crown corporations drawn up by the Library of Parliament, in Canada's 84 crown corporations, 6 of the 84 presidents are women, which translates to only 19%.

Quebec is the only province to have passed legislation aimed at achieving gender parity. In 2006, Quebec passed Bill 53, An Act respecting the governance of state-owned enterprises and amending various legislative provisions, with a view to achieving gender parity on boards of directors of crown corporations by 2011. That legislation required that the boards of directors of all such

Private Members' Business

corporations include an equal number of women and men as of December 14, 2011.

In December 2011, which marked the end of the five-year period by which crown corporations were to have achieved gender equality, 141 women and 128 men held positions on the boards of directors of 20 Quebec crown corporations. Women therefore made up the majority, or 52.4%. What a success.

[*English*]

I know my time is rapidly winding up, but I just want to affirm that countries that have legislative quotas have made tremendous progress. Even those that only require mandatory reporting and transparency have shown tremendous progress; they are well in front of Canada. It shows the talent is there. If we want to use it, we need to allow women to fully participate in our crown corporations.

I want to close with a rather, I think, indicative statement from the former head of the Conference Board of Canada, Anne Golden. At a 2010 Senate committee she said that, at the current rate of women's representation on boards and agencies, it would take 151 years before women are represented on boards to the same degree as men. This is unacceptable. That is why I am urging all my colleagues to support the bill today.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise and speak in strong support of Bill C-473, an act to amend the Financial Administration Act (balanced representation). I commend my colleague, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, for her hard work on this important initiative.

I first want to discuss what this bill is designed to accomplish. Then I want to address some of the arguments that may be aligned against it.

At the outset I want to say that I am deeply indebted to my constituent Ms. Nancy Singh, who has been a tireless researcher and passionate advocate for this very issue. Her analysis has been helpful to the presentation I will make today.

Bill C-473 aims to achieve gender parity in representation on the boards of directors of crown corporations over a period of six years. It is a gradual, phased-in initiative. It would also have the effect of indirectly forcing crown corporations to widen their search for qualified high-calibre applicants and target non-traditional recruitment pools.

What the bill would not do is in any way legislate measures for companies, private sector corporate entities, financial institutions, or the like. As an NDP opposition, we believe that taking steps to gender equity on government corporations would set an example desperately needed in the private sector to achieve balanced representation in the management of our important industries, and it would mirror the demographic makeup of our very country.

Canada is one of the few western countries with no policy or legislation on women's representation on corporate boards. Therefore, we are depriving ourselves of the talent women would provide to decision making. Most experts who have studied corporate governance have concluded that this is a positive contribution that should be made.

Private Members' Business

There are obviously enough women qualified to serve in these capacities. For many years I taught at a law school. Year after year women were in the majority of applicants. Also, that composition has been or is being achieved in many of our provincial superior courts. However, as I will discuss in a moment, that has not been the case on corporate boards or in the crown corporations of Canada.

In March the *Toronto Star* reported on a report entitled “Get on Board Corporate Canada”, written by Ms. Beata Caranci, the deputy chief economist of the TD Bank. She stated that nearly half the companies listed on the TSX composite index have only one female board member and just over a quarter have no women on their boards.

This is why an example must be set. She said that based on a widely accepted international measure, termed the GMI index, just 13.1% of corporate board seats in Canada were held by women in 2011, a figure that actually dropped from sixth to ninth place among industrialized nations over a three-year period. In other words, it is getting worse, not better.

There is no strategy at all, no cohesive government policy to address this issue.

Many have talked about a policy whereby, if a corporation cannot comply, it must explain why not. That has been the latest option in some of the private sector. As has been pointed out by no less than the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, this voluntary measure is having little or no impact. That is why it recently asked the Ontario Securities Commission to require all public companies to have at least three women on their boards. It is not tokenism. Rather, it is a requirement that it recognizes to achieve better decisions on boards reflecting the diversity of this country, so we have a more holistic view of the environment in which these corporations act. It is no different in crown corporations.

Since 2008, we have had at least nine countries around the world—Norway, Spain, France, and Italy—that have some sort of quota representation requiring diversity on corporate boards. Other countries have set targets. What has Canada done? Canada has done nothing.

In 2012, the EU justice commissioner announced that European countries would be forced to hire a female candidate over an equally qualified male or face sanctions, unless women occupy at least 40% of board seats in Europe by 2020. Other countries are getting serious about this problem. What is Canada doing? Canada is doing nothing.

• (1125)

So what about crown corporations? Most recent data show that among the 2,000 Canadians who hold positions in more than 200 crown corporations, agencies, and commissions across this country, women are currently under-represented. They hold only 27% of senior management positions. The Library of Parliament tells us that according to the list of directors of crown corporations, out of 84 crown corporations in Canada, only 16 of those 84 presidents are women, or 19%. Women are over 50% of our population.

Quebec has done something. Quebec is the only province that has passed legislation to attain gender parity on the boards of their crown corporations. The goal was to do so by 2011. What has happened in that period? The results have been impressive. In December 2011,

the deadline to have achieved parity, 141 women and 128 men held positions on the boards of 22 state-owned enterprises in Quebec. Therefore, women have become a majority of board members. The task now is to balance representation in each board of state-owned enterprises covered by the legislation. It can be done. It has been done in other European countries; it has been done in Quebec; it can be done at the federal level.

That said, what is the problem? Why would people be opposed to this, if indeed there are any people opposed? Let me suggest that there are probably three arguments.

The first might be that appointments to a board must be based solely on merit. We agree. However, there are so many women with the very credentials and skills needed who are not being brought forward that we have a problem. There are qualified people, and that has of course been proven elsewhere.

The second argument is that there somehow is a quota system, even a temporary one, and it imposes a rigid straitjacket on the appointment process. I too find the word “quota” an ugly word, and in Canada it has an ugly connotation and an ugly history. However, we must work to ensure that there are opportunities for women and girls coming forward. The government has to show leadership. I believe that introducing a quota is a last resort, but the status quo is simply not working. This must be a function of what is termed “effects discrimination”. We cannot look at the statistics I have quoted without coming to a different conclusion.

For example, a woman named Guylaine Saucier has been a very prominent director on Canadian corporate boards. She was on the board of the French food giant, Danone. When France announced it was creating a quota requiring corporate boards to have at least 40% women directors, she was initially an opponent. However, Ms. Saucier has come around to an entirely different view. The *Globe and Mail* reported:

“I’m beginning to evolve,” she confesses. “Yes, they appointed some token women, no doubt about that. But at the same time, I do see coming on board women that really were not known and are really good... And I’m sure I can bet you that they would never have been invited to boards without this legislation... I am more pleasantly surprised than I thought I would be”.

The third argument, I presume, is that the law is not necessary. It is necessary. The Quebec example obviously demonstrates that the opposite is true. A selection process can remain very simple, and a corrective measure like imposing quotas balances the representation on boards within a realistic timeframe. Women are willing to participate in the administration of large corporations, and certainly are more than ready to participate in large Canadian crown corporations.

It is proven that the simple passage of time does not translate into a significant increase of women on boards. We have tried, but nothing meaningful has occurred. It is time for action. It is time for Canada to join with its European counterparts, to join with the Province of Quebec, and to get into the 21st century, to show the kind of diversity that we desperately need in our boards.

I strongly support this initiative and hope my fellow members of Parliament will do so as well.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-473, which was introduced by my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. Because I am fortunate enough to share a desk with her, we have had a number of discussions about this bill.

This bill would introduce progressive measures to address the under-representation of women on crown corporation boards of administration. This bill is about professional equality between men and women. Equality in every dimension results from a long process of democratization that leads to recognition that both sexes have the same rights.

Nevertheless, women with the same skill sets as men still do not have equal access to senior positions. This problem affects both boards of directors and senior management teams.

This bill expresses the political will to fight this type of inequality. Politicians can commit to taking meaningful action to foster gender equality in the realms where it is possible for them to do so. I want to emphasize that it takes political will to walk the talk and pass this bill, a bill that can change things.

Women entering the workforce was a major change for our democracy. Our country is relatively young, but in its early days, there were hardly any women in the labour force. Things changed very fast. Now women are in the workforce. The labour market has also become more democratic over time. We have to keep up the fight and take meaningful action to conquer this kind of inequality.

Economically, implementing social policies that encourage women to join the labour force is a win-win situation. It is a technical win because when there are more women in the labour force, there is more taxable income, which means higher tax revenues for the state.

It is also a win because when men and women play an equal role in governing public corporations, their decisions take a much wider range of perspectives into account. Influenced by different viewpoints, their decisions are more thoughtful and effective. It is no secret that men and women often see the same problem from different angles.

When we have the views of both men and women on how to address specific problems, the outcome is more effective. Companies are usually at an advantage when they choose to include more women on their boards of directors or management teams. In fact, research conducted by Catalyst has shown a positive correlation between a company's sound financial results and a high number of women in its executive ranks.

Private Members' Business

For instance, the crown corporation Canada Post says it has financial difficulties, but its vision is probably more masculine. If more women had been on its board of directors, the visions would have been more varied and the corporation would have taken more acceptable and effective actions.

● (1135)

The vision of Canada Post would have been much broader. As we can see in the case of private companies, such a vision leads to better financial results. I think the government would benefit from adopting this type of policy, since it has a positive effect on financial results.

This legislation remains an effective tool for achieving the goal of gender parity. By examining international experience in the area, we can see that, unfortunately, voluntary incentives in no way lead to the expected results. When you rely on people's goodwill and you encourage them without putting legal measures in place, you will not achieve the desired results. In our example, what really matters is the outcome. Once we realize that a voluntary approach does not work, I think it is very important to take a stand and pass the appropriate legislation.

In addition, when legislation is not passed, inaction often seems to reinforce inequalities. The longer we wait to pass a piece of legislation, the more the situation worsens or at least does not improve. I think this clearly demonstrates the need to pass this legislation.

Once the bill comes into force, the objective of ensuring gender parity on the boards of crown corporations must be achieved within six years. Practically speaking, this means that it is important to pass such legislation quite quickly.

A gradual approach is used so as not to shake things up too much all at once and to allow people to adapt and slowly achieve their objectives. Quite often this means there will be one or two more women a year. At the end of six years, the target will be met. This is done gradually to give the organizations the time to develop new recruitment strategies. They will definitely need it. Often, women need to be encouraged to join boards of directors and they have to be sought out. Nonetheless, there are just as many well-qualified women as men. Sometimes women need to be sought out and encouraged to join boards of directors. The skills that these women have acquired and developed throughout their careers would be taken into consideration. This timeframe would allow the crown corporations to explore new labour pools and adjust their recruitment policies in order to bring qualified executives into their boards of administration.

Private Members' Business

The NDP has clearly demonstrated that it is leading the way in Canadian politics, and one way we have proven that is with our nominations. Fifty percent of NDP candidates are women. This has been good for democracy. I think I am a good example among my peers. By doing something tangible we are leading by example. The NDP currently has the largest female caucus in Parliament. It is important to do something tangible.

If women do not make up 50% of the parties' candidates, then it will be hard to have more female members of Parliament. We have to force the hand of the authorities in place. By having female candidates, we are able to have female MPs. The same goes for boards of directors. By passing legislation and forcing their hand a bit, we will end up with excellent women contributing to our crown corporations. The government can then also contribute to the increased use of professional practices that are based on balanced representation and that, I hope, will go beyond those of the public enterprises in question.

In other words, the bill before us can truly provide a concrete strategic advantage to our crown corporations. What is more, considering that some crown corporations are in financial difficulty, this might even help them face the future much more effectively.

I think this bill will truly benefit Canada, and I recommend that all members support it.

● (1140)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as both a woman and a member of the NDP, I am pleased to support Bill C-473, which was introduced by the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. This bill is designed to ensure that crown corporations have balanced representation.

I would like to talk about my own experience in politics. In 2009, I had the opportunity to run in a municipal election as a candidate for Project Montréal, a party in the Island of Montreal that encouraged women to run in municipal politics. That was my first experience, and then I had the opportunity to run again, this time for the NDP. The NDP encourages women to run for politics, and we can see the results.

That led us—the caucus and me, as a female politician—to think about the obstacles that keep some women from going into politics. The ripple effect from the 2011 election and the fact that many women ran for political office is proof of the NDP's desire to encourage women to join various fields of endeavour. All of that relates to Bill C-473.

Government is often regarded as a mover and innovator when it comes to building a better society, and this bill does just that. It sets out principles that would allow Canadian crown corporations to gradually work towards better gender parity.

We need to do this. Women have come a long way in recent decades, but there is still a long way to go. The document titled *Women in Canada 2010-2011*, drafted by Statistics Canada and Status of Women Canada, notes that there is greater representation of women in management positions. In 2009, women represented 37% of those employed in management positions, up from 30% in 1987. However, women have greater representation in lower-level management positions as compared to upper management positions.

In 2009, women held 31.6% of upper management positions, but 37.4% of management positions at other levels.

There is still progress to be made, and it is not because women are not qualified for the job. The latest statistical profile from Statistics Canada shows that more women are completing post-secondary studies, are very well educated and can rise to the challenge.

Mr. Speaker, my riding of LaSalle—Émard is lucky to be represented by a woman, and furthermore, the mayor of the riding is also a woman. Several municipal councillors are women, and that is also the case in the Sud-Ouest borough, which is next to my riding. More and more women are rising to the challenge and answering the call. That has to continue. We have to eliminate barriers by establishing progressive policies that will lead to a fairer representation of women in crown corporations.

● (1145)

When the government sets an example with crown corporations, the private sector often follows suit. That is our hope.

An article in today's *Globe and Mail* notes that women account for 20% of seats in boards of directors, especially those of very large Canadian companies. However, if we consider small, medium-sized and large businesses overall, this statistic drops to 12%. That is really not a lot.

If the government sets an example, as the Quebec government did, by establishing progressive measures leading to increased gender parity in crown corporations, I am sure that private businesses would follow suit.

What is interesting about Quebec's example is that not only did it implement measures, but it also ensured that they produced results. Quebec measures results against goals, studies the barriers that could keep women from executive positions and finds ways to help them overcome some of those barriers.

I want the government and the Minister of Status of Women to show some leadership to ensure that there is balanced representation on boards of crown corporations. This will create a ripple effect and ensure that women—who represent more than 50% of this country's wealth, as we have already heard—have an opportunity to actively participate in running crown corporations and also private companies.

It is time for this government to show some leadership and commit to ensuring that more and more women are able to assume management roles and that they have the means to take on these positions and be involved in politics. By “means”, I do not necessarily mean financial means, although that helps. We must ensure that there are no barriers hindering women's promotion to these positions.

Private Members' Business

By breaking down these barriers, we would not only be helping Canadian women, but also advancing our society so that it is more just and fair and so that everyone has the opportunity to participate for the greater good. This has been proven in the research that my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles did when drafting this bill. It has been shown that diversity, including gender diversity, on governing councils and boards of directors can have a positive impact on debate and dialogue. Diversity also encourages boards to consider all aspects when making decisions and to take into account the experience of every individual on these boards.

• (1150)

A bill to achieve balanced representation on the boards of crown corporations will not only enable women to be promoted to these types of positions, but will also enrich Canadian society as a whole, in many respects.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to have this opportunity to rise again in the House today to continue the debate on my bill, Bill C-473, which proposes changes to the Financial Administration Act.

The purpose of the bill is to improve the representation of women on boards of directors of crown corporations and only crown corporations. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that gender equality must be a priority for Canadians. In its Constitution, Canada recognizes that men and women are equal. However, when it comes to economic independence, equality in decision-making, violence against women, pay equity and other issues, there remains a great deal of work to be done in order for men and women to be equal in economic, social and political spheres in Canada.

In previous debates, some of my colleagues raised a number of questions that should be clarified for everyone's benefit. I hope my responses here today will answer their questions. First, I would like to remind everyone that the heads of crown corporations—even though those corporations operate at arm's length of the government—are appointed by the ministers. The government therefore has the power to take the necessary corrective action to put an end to any undue discrimination currently practiced against women in the hiring process.

During my last speech, my main argument was that Canadian women are more qualified than ever, and accordingly, the government needs to bring in measures that maximize the potential of all that talent. Thus, I have to be critical of the parliamentary secretary's tactic of using misinformation when she stated the opposite of what I said. As I explained last time, the problem has nothing to do with qualifications, but rather with accessibility. Women have the skills needed, but they are not recruited as much because their resumé's do not make it onto the minister's desk.

The solution is simple. We have to make sure that, during the appointments process, CVs from women and men with equal skill sets are provided to the minister's office. Quebec is a perfect example of how that can work. Contrary to what the parliamentary secretary said, there have been no problems and no negative repercussions on performance. There has been nothing rigid or arbitrary about this process, simply a pool of male and female candidates to choose from. My colleague opposite also presented an argument based on the effectiveness and benefits of the voluntary measures put forward

by the government. Norway tried the voluntary approach, but it did not work. The Conference Board of Canada says that it will take another 150 years to reach parity if we rely solely on the voluntary approach.

I also want to mention the brave step that Morocco took in introducing legislation after the Arab Spring. Female representation in that Arab country went from 19% to 50%. Here in Canada, the voluntary approach has resulted in women being under-represented on boards of crown corporations and holding only 27% of senior management positions. How can the government claim to be doing everything it should be doing when the figures are clear and do not lie? There has been no progress on this issue. That is clear proof that the voluntary approach does not work and does not produce the expected results.

In a speech she delivered last fall, Christine Lagarde, managing director of the IMF, supported the introduction of quotas “because nothing has changed in the past 25 or 30 years!” I would therefore urge all of my colleagues to recognize the obvious and take appropriate measures to ensure that we achieve the goals Canada wishes to set for itself in terms of gender parity.

In response to other questions that some of my colleagues had, I would like to add that I am very aware that this bill does not fix all of the problems related to women's rights, especially not access to senior positions. However, I sincerely believe that Bill C-473 is a step forward, a corrective measure. Without it, a laissez-faire approach will change nothing.

I strongly suggest that we refer this bill to a committee so that we can give more thought to issues such as transgender individuals and sanctions in cases where boards do not achieve parity by the deadline. Experts, including people who were in charge of implementing the new process in Quebec, will be able to advise us on this matter.

It is our responsibility as parliamentarians to pass corrective legislation so that women can benefit fully from their rights. The NDP has always been and will continue to be a champion of women's rights.

• (1155)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Business of Supply

• (1200)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 5, 2014, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ATM FEES

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian consumers face unfair Automated Teller Machine (ATM) fees as a result of an uncompetitive marketplace and that the House call on the government to take action in Budget 2014 to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees.

He said: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, it is important to inform you that I am splitting my time with the fantastic MP from Québec.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to my motion, the NDP-sponsored motion calling on the Minister of Finance to announce action in budget 2014 to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees.

From my great riding of Sudbury to St. John's, from Val-d'Or to Victoria, every Canadian has at some point stood in front of an ATM in stunned silence staring at the screen showing just how much they have been gouged for taking out cash from their very own bank account.

Canadians are angry, and rightly so, that their families are being nickelled and dimed by banks reaping record-breaking profits while they struggle to put food on the table and pay for the other necessities of life.

According to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, withdrawal fees can cost consumers as much as \$5.90 per transaction at a bank-operated ATM. If we contrast the cost being forced down the throats of Canadian consumers with those being charged to consumers in other developed countries, it makes the cost of using an ATM in Canada even more unsettling.

For instance, in many European Union countries, withdrawals from ATMs are free. In the U.K., 97% of transactions are free of cost. In fact, a report from the British Bankers' Association comparing its banking system to those of ten other developed nations found that Canada had the highest fees for ATM withdrawals from their own bank.

This raises the question of why people in the U.K. and Europe get a break from their banks while ordinary Canadians continue to get gouged. Although estimates range, analysts agree that Canadians pay somewhere in the range of \$400 million a year for the privilege of using ATMs, representing nearly 5% of the revenue of the biggest banks in Canada.

Thus, it is not surprising that Canadian banks are reaping record profits, amounting to \$29.4 billion in 2013, up 5% from last year despite the weak economy, because they are doing it on the backs of hard-working Canadian families.

How did we enter this cycle of ever-increasing fees? Surcharging on ATM withdrawals have become standard operating procedure for Canada's banks since 1996, when the ban on surcharges was lifted following a ruling by Canada's Competition Bureau. In 2000, many banks began adding a new convenience fee in addition to their Interac fees for those consumers who use an ATM owned by a different institution or operator. This has led to ATM use becoming more and more expensive.

The most shocking part of ATM fees is that on average the real cost of processing a transaction today is estimated to be around 36¢. Where does the rest of the money go? We know that 0.7¢ goes to offsetting the cost of operating Canada's world-leading, not-for-profit Interac network. While there is obviously a cost to operating and maintaining these terminals themselves, the rest is going to pad the profits of the big banks, the big card networks, and independent machine owners.

Currently, there is no limit on what the operator of an ATM can charge a consumer for using their machine. This is unfair, and it is a policy we as parliamentarians must address head on. These fees are rip-offs, plain and simple, and the government has the power to act immediately to drive down the cost of ATM fees.

Some of my colleagues on the other side of the House may think that \$2, for example, is not a burdensome cost for Canadians, but here is the unfair thing about it. When the average person going to an ATM machine takes out \$20 or \$50 to get them through a day or two, that person is charged \$2.50 for accessing that money, yet someone else may withdraw \$500, and they pay the same \$2.50. This means that the financial burden of ATM fees falls disproportionately on low-income Canadians, and that is grossly unfair.

That is why groups such as the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Option consommateurs, and ACORN support the NDP call to cap ATM fees.

• (1205)

At one point, the Minister of Finance seemed receptive to the idea of limiting these outrageous ATM fees. In 2007, in response to the NDP campaign to ban ATM fees, the minister told the House of Commons finance committee that the government agreed with the NDP that the banks ought to do something for consumers with respect to ATM fees and to try harder. However, in the end, after talking to the banks, the minister climbed down, and no action was taken to protect consumers from these outrageous fees.

Now, because of the minister's lack of action, ATM fees continue to rise for lower-income Canadians such as seniors, students, and persons with disabilities, for whom the minister expressed particular concern.

Business of Supply

While the Conservatives talk a big game about the importance of protecting consumers from the most abusive practices of Canada's largest corporations, their failure to crack down on ATM fees and the plethora of other consumer abuses undermines this claim. Here is an opportunity for the Conservatives to prove they are serious and actually do something tangible for consumers. A failure to do so will make the government's priorities clear: Bay Street over Main Street.

The minister's friends at the banks will argue that capping ATM fees would significantly decrease the number of ATMs that banks offer to Canadians. However, according to the World Bank, Canada has the highest number of ATMs per capita in the world, with 204 ATMs for every 100,000 people. The OECD average is 74 ATMs per 100,000 people. However, if we think about the cost that Canadians have to endure every time they use an ATM, it is no wonder the banks have so many of these ATMs out there.

Moreover, the banks claim that the ATM fees must be high enough to cover all chequing account-related costs. That is undermined by the fact that banks also charge many other high consumer fees under the premise of covering those exact same costs. Canada's banks charge consumers scores of other fees for maintaining and accessing funds in their chequing accounts. There are monthly fees, overdraft fees, failed payment fees, fees for failing to maintain a minimum balance, e-transfer fees, and many more.

Given that banks are already recouping their costs through these other fees, the NDP's call for a 50¢ per transaction cap for ATM fees seems entirely reasonable. With a cost of 36¢ per transaction to the bank, this would still give them the ability to recoup their operating costs while maintaining a healthy profit margin. It would also restore a sense of fairness and balance to what is truly an asymmetrical relationship between consumers and their bank.

The Conservatives claim to be on the side of consumers, but time and time again this Conservative government, like the Liberals before them, has sided with the big banks by refusing to crack down on excessive bank fees. New Democrats have put forward a practical solution that would restore a certain amount of fairness to the relationship between consumers, their families, and the banks. By supporting the motion and including a provision to limit ATM fees in the upcoming budget, the government has an opportunity to help hard-working Canadian families who are already overburdened by household debt and are struggling to maintain their way of life.

I conclude that a failure to do so will demonstrate that hard-working Canadians cannot trust the Conservative government to do what is best for them and their families. We need experienced leadership that puts Canadians, not bank profits, first. Canadians deserve better.

• (1210)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are all for consumer protection too. We put forth a lot of work over the last year in terms of making sure that consumers are put first.

I have a couple of questions, which I hope are generic and non-partisan, around this particular motion. When my colleague is talking about the \$2 fees, is he looking at customers withdrawing cash from their home branch or those who are withdrawing from other branches and generically owned ATMs as well? Does my

colleague know what the aggregate cost per year would be to Canadians?

Also, do you know what the revenue created by those independently owned ATMs would be compared to the larger banks? In terms of small business ownership, what would the impact be if it was capped? I am just wondering if you consulted with these stakeholders in terms of what the impact would be on their business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Minister of State was asking me the question, but I believe it is her colleague, the hon. member for Sudbury, whom she would like to answer the question.

The hon. member for Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I am more than happy to answer as best I can.

The first thing I need to make clear is that what we are talking about here today are the ATMs that are operated by our federally regulated financial institutions, the chartered banks. The ATMs that are privately owned in pubs or corner stores are in provincial jurisdiction. What we are talking about specifically are the financial institutions.

I have an account at a specific bank here in Canada, as most Canadians do, or a credit union, and I pay a monthly fee. I am going to make this number up. Say I pay \$14.95 and I have 20 transactions that will I not be charged for. Once I go over that limit, even though I am using the same bank, the one that I am a member of, I get what is called a regular maintenance fee. The banks eliminate what they call a foreign fee. The foreign fee is actually a convenience fee, which is charged when using another bank's ATM. Then I have to pay a dollar for that, plus pay the other bank two bucks. It is starting to skyrocket out of control because it is unregulated. We need to hamper this and that is what this bill and motion are talking about today.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to solicit some clarification.

The member made reference, I believe he said, to banks' being able to charge consumers a 50¢ cap. My question is again related to the independent machine operators, a store that purchases a machine and wants to attach its own fee, whatever fee that might be. My understanding, based on what the member has said, is that would not apply. Therefore, any independent machines that are not administered through one of our national banks would, in fact, be excluded from his comments.

Is that a fair comment?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Once again, I would request all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair rather than their colleagues.

Business of Supply

The hon. member for Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I will address my answer through you, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully we can set an example moving forward.

The question relates again to the specific ATMs that are owned by John Smith or Mary Smith who has a convenience store. That is provincial regulation. I am hoping that what we can do today, to answer through you, Mr. Speaker, my hon. member's question, is to lead by example. We have an opportunity to ensure that our banks do not continue to gouge Canadians. When there are record profits of \$29.4 billion going to the banks, it is being done on the backs of hard-working Canadian families.

The one thing we are saying very clearly is that we understand that the banks need to make a profit, that the banks need to recoup their costs, that the banks need to make money to service this network. That is being addressed by folks in the United States. Senator Durbin in the U.S. prepared a great report, 36¢ per transaction. We should talk to stakeholders here in Canada. If we are similar, we should be able to have it capped at 50¢ per transaction, which would still allow the banks to do what they need to do and keep more money in the pockets of Canadian consumers so they can invest in their families and communities.

● (1215)

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the deputy critic for consumer protection, I feel it is important that I speak to this worthwhile motion moved by the hon. member for Sudbury. I must say that he does an outstanding job, especially when it comes to protecting consumers.

This motion calls on the government to take action in the 2014 budget, which will be tabled very soon, to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees.

Banks have been allowed to charge withdrawal fees at ATMs since 1996. However, ATM fees are not currently regulated in Canada, and Canadians have been seeing a steady increase in those fees over the past 18 years.

ATMs are everywhere. There are nearly 20,000 private ATMs in Canada now. They are expensive to use, and an increasing number of businesses only accept cash as a method of payment. If customers do not have any cash, they have to make a withdrawal from the nearby ATM.

Let me explain that it is unfortunately not just the retailers' fault if they do not accept payment by credit card. The credit card transaction fees charged to the retailer are just as outrageous. That is another thing this Conservative government will have to act swiftly on.

Most consumers do not realize that the fees indicated on the screen are not the only ones they will be charged. The ATM screens indicate that the fees are in addition to the regular banking fees. Most people think that refers to the usual fees of 50¢ per transaction, for which it is possible to negotiate a monthly rate. However that is not the case.

These bank fees also include the \$1.50 fee for the Interac network, and that amount only appears on the bank statement. One could

conceivably pay up to \$6 in total just to withdraw \$20. That is 30% in fees. It is unbelievable. That is a significant tax that the Conservatives are imposing on us by refusing to take action. It is totally unacceptable. Canadian consumers are paying up to \$6 to get access to their own money.

Many banks have started charging new convenience fees, in addition to the Interac fees, to clients who use an ATM that belongs to another institution or a private operator. That is why the costs of using ATMs keep increasing. Banks are now charging all those who are not their clients the same fees charged at privately-owned ATMs, such as convenience fees of \$1.25 or \$1.50 in addition to Interac fees, which are generally \$1.50, and transaction fees. Fees, fees and more fees.

The show *La Facture*, on the French network of the CBC, managed to get a comment from the Mouvement Desjardins spokesperson, André Cajolais:

...why would Desjardins members using another bank's ATM pay convenience fees, and a banking client using a Desjardins ATM not pay the same fees?

That is an intriguing position that confirms the importance of the NDP's proposal to regulate ATM fees in order to have a single fee. The Desjardins spokesperson went on to say:

If convenience fees disappeared from the entire industry tomorrow morning, Desjardins would stop charging them.

That is the crux of the problem. The Canadian banking sector is a difficult market to penetrate and is dominated by a few large banks. It is anything but a free market. In more competitive banking markets, such as the market in the United Kingdom, ATM fees are very low or even non-existent. However, in the less competitive Canadian market, consumers can be charged as much as \$3 or \$4 to simply access their own money. These fees can sometimes be \$6, as I mentioned.

● (1220)

This situation is completely unacceptable, especially since the banks made a record \$29.4 billion last year. There is no reason to let them continue to exploit consumers through ATM fees. It is uncalled for.

The NDP is suggesting a cap on ATM fees, so that Canadian financial institutions can no longer charge more than 50¢ per transaction. Unfortunately, Industry Canada's Office of Consumer Affairs stopped publishing an important annual report on the costs of Canadian banking services, and there is very little information on ATM fees. According to the last report published in 2002, there was a significant increase in transaction fees, so we can only imagine what the situation is now.

Furthermore, according to a study carried out by the Federal Reserve System Board of Governors in the United States, based on the best data available, the cost of processing an ATM transaction rarely surpasses 36¢. In light of these studies, the NDP believes that a 50¢ limit per transaction is reasonable for consumers and also for banks, which will continue to earn a profit—although perhaps not one as astronomical as they do now.

All too often we hear both the Liberals and the Conservatives—six of one and half a dozen of the other—talk about the middle class and consumer protection. This is finally an opportunity for them to show that they mean it. In 2007, the Minister of Finance told the banks that he was not satisfied with their explanation of ATM fees and that they had a responsibility to provide answers to consumers.

However, in the end, the Conservative government did not introduce any measures. ATM fees continue to increase even though there is no reason why Canadians should pay such high fees when banks are making enormous profits and these charges are lower or non-existent in comparable countries. The banks maintain that capping ATM fees will lead to a significant reduction in the number of machines available to Canadians. However, the truth is that Canada already has the largest number of ATM machines per person in the world.

As household debt reaches a record high of 166% of disposable income, there is every indication that consumers have reached the breaking point. The NDP is currently conducting a major campaign to make life more affordable and we intend to stand up for consumers every step of the way.

I heard some Conservative and Liberal MPs asking how the 50¢ transaction fee would be applied. Obviously, when you turn a blind eye to the problem you cannot solve it.

That is why we need an NDP government that cares about people and consumers and that can relate to what they are going through. People pay exorbitant ATM fees. That is theft. People want to have access to their own money. The situation makes no sense. Based on the number of interviews I have given about this subject, I know that people are passionate about it. They have had enough. This government has to take a stand and include this measure in the next budget.

I am warning the Conservatives: if they do not get going and finally bring forward real measures for consumers, the NDP will propose other motions. It will not give up until 2015, when it will assume power and, finally, people will get their money's worth.

•(1225)

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not really sure why the member is so angry about this. I can sense her passion and I appreciate the comments that she made.

I wonder if she is aware of these prepaid credit cards that have a huge fee up front and so many other fees every month. In fact, it is becoming more common for parents to buy these for their children at university and college. A \$50 prepaid credit card sometimes has a \$5 initiation fee and then a further couple of bucks every month.

Business of Supply

I agree that those are excessive charges. I wonder if the member could answer why they are not in this particular bill.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member opposite because I can see that he, too, is concerned about these issues. I am pleased to see that the members on the other side of the House are finally thinking about consumers. They understand that this is likely the issue of the 21st century.

A budget will be tabled soon, and we are hoping it will contain tangible measures. We do not want to hear a throne speech in which the government says it wants to take certain measures and then come to realize, months later, that nothing has been done. That gets us nowhere.

Prepaid cards are a problem, but today we are discussing the motion regarding ATM fees. I would like to hear what the Conservatives have to say about this. Really, there is no reason to oppose this motion.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is an important aspect to this issue.

There are 46 municipalities in my riding of Laurentides—Labelle. The majority of them are small municipalities that are far from major highways. There are often no financial institutions in those areas. The banks have centralized their operations where it is the most cost-effective to consolidate services. There is not even an ATM in Mont-Saint-Michel, where I am from. The owner of the corner store helps people out and allows them to make a withdrawal with a debit card. People often live an hour away from their financial institution. When they have access to an ATM, it is most likely not their bank's ATM.

Could my colleague explain some of the problems that can cause?

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments.

I think it is also important to talk about the need for local services. I would like to quote John Lawford of the Canadian Consumer Initiative, who appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance on April 17, 2007. He said:

We've noticed that something odd has been happening over the last decade [so, for over 15 years now] with automated banking machines and fees. While there are more ABMs and more competition, prices have increased and service has decreased. Canadian consumers are calling on elected representatives [including Liberal, Conservative, Bloc and Green Party members] to help them out of this obviously dysfunctional market.

The solution could be the one proposed here today. Clearly, the market is dysfunctional and must improve.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise to speak to this motion today.

I guess it will not be totally surprising to indicate that I will not be supporting this motion, and I do not believe that most of my colleagues will either. It is not necessarily because of the arguments put forward by the member for Sudbury, but because I think that separating the banks from everything else is not realistic. We have to look at our ATM and ABM network as an integrated network of not only banks but also the private providers that we often see out there.

On that basis, there are a couple of things at stake, such as convenience and the competition issues. However, I think there would be unintended consequences of merely trying to throw a fixed fee on this network.

I would also say that I believe our government is going about this correctly in regulating in a smart way via the information that is out there for our consumers to make wise and informed financial decisions. Number one is the regulatory approach that we are taking, but I also want to talk for a few minutes about our comprehensive financial consumer code, which we are out consulting about right now.

Over the past number of years it has been interesting to watch the proliferation of technologies. Banking has changed significantly. I remember not so many years ago, a few decades ago, that some of our farmers and other people would leave their house in the morning with a pocket full of cash and then come back at the end of the day and check the amount in the other pocket. They would know whether they had made a profit that day if there were more money in that pocket. Also, back in the days when my father was in the provincial legislature in New Brunswick, I remember that he always carried cash and hardly ever did anything on a credit card or anything of that nature. He always had cash.

To me, when we look at the proliferation of technologies, I think we have definitely made things much more convenient as time has gone by. We can see that with the number of transactions and the data from the Canadian Bankers Association on those transactions. When we look at cash withdrawals from 2005 to 2012, they have gone down, and so have deposits and bill payments. As we go to electronic commerce and online banking, we are starting to see those changes.

I agree with some of the points made earlier in that there are some cases where a business only takes cash, and in those cases we certainly need it. However, when we look at these types of things, we can look at being a futurist as well.

It seems to me that at some point in time we will live in an era where we might have a chip, perhaps in our rear end or somewhere else, potentially. As we go through a store, it would be scanned and the money would be transferred. If there would be a charge for that, then the NDP would be really bummed, I can imagine.

That is just speculation, but I would love to be a bit of a futurist to know where this will go. From the strides we have made in the past number of decades, we can certainly anticipate that we will very much be a non-cash society, and probably very quickly.

When we look at the economics of the ATM, regulating a fixed fee such as this is misguided, because we forget about the convenience aspect of ATMs. Here, one of the points made by my hon. colleague across the way was about his store not having an ATM and there being no bank ATM in his community. In my community there is no bank ATM either. I live on the outskirts of Fredericton where there is no bank ATM. However, there is an ATM at my local convenience store and the surcharge is \$2.25 to use it. I asked how much the ATM was used, and the answer was “significantly”. It is used a lot, which is somewhat surprising, but in some ways it is not.

● (1230)

As I said before, what people fail to take into account is the cost. In each of these cases, there is a cost to purchasing the machine, and this particular person is sharing in that cost. There are a lot of private white label ATMs. Space in a store costs money, as does the communications and encryption that goes along with these types of transactions. There is a cost to the physical security required, although there may be a bit of control when the machine is located inside as opposed to outside a store. Signage, advertising, fraud and upgrades also cost money. In most cases vendors in convenience stores, at least in this person's case, actually guarantee the float for the ATM as well, so there is an opportunity cost with respect to the vendor's own money being used to ensure that the machine is stocked with cash.

From that standpoint, if there were no surcharge in place, there would be no ATM at that location. Would the bank put in an ATM at that location? Around the outskirts of towns in my riding, some Irving convenience stores have a bank ATM because there is volume and when a store gets volume, transaction costs can be kept down.

I would argue that capping would affect the integration of these ATMs. If banks eventually cannot service some of these lower volume areas, they are going to get out of that business. They would sell those ATMs, which would go to a private operator, and the resulting surcharges could be anything, even extensive.

We should be a bit careful when we say that we want to have a fixed fee like this because there could be dire consequences. It was not too many years ago that the only choice that people had in some small rural communities and other places was to physically go to a bank. That bank would be open probably from 9 to 4, not some of the business hours banks have today. They would actually have to go and wait in line and take out who knows how much cash. However, that being said, there is an opportunity cost for those people from convenience stations. They can go to a place very close by and not burn gas to go maybe 30 or 40 miles at \$1.25 or \$1.30 a litre. They are better off than they would have been had they gone to a bank in the community.

Therefore, let us be careful and ensure that we do not do something with unintended consequences, which I believe would mean that we would maybe have fewer ATMs.

In the late 1990s, the U.S. had a big debate about this. It was proven that as surcharges went up, the ATM network actually expanded. More ATMs went into places like convenience stores, and private operators were doing that. This is one of the items they ran into.

Business of Supply

Without an adequate return, these surcharges would discourage the deployment of ATMs to our rural areas as an example, and that would mean less choice. That would mean there will be slower growth, a limited number of the access points, and in effect, maybe some of the ATMs will be sold to non-owners.

The second point I would like to make is about regulating in a smart way and doing it from an information standpoint. The point was made that if people want to take out their own money, then it should be free. If a person takes cash out of an ATM in a convenience store and it is not a bank ATM, that person must realize that the money is coming out of his or her account but is not his or her cash. As I previously pointed out, the cash belongs to the vendor who loaded up the machine, so there is a cost to that transaction. It is not as simple as saying that is double-dipping.

•(1235)

With respect to the regulatory side, we have had some success over the past little while on this. I would like to comment on a couple of things that have happened in the dialogue with the banks. We have actively engaged the banking industry on the issue of ATM fees and have stressed the importance of consumer choice. One of the comments made before was about seniors, the disabled, and students. The banks have reacted to that and have responded by expanding some of their ATM networks near colleges and universities to help students avoid fees. The banks have also started unveiling low-fee accounts for seniors and students and are improving access for the disabled.

That is not all. The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada has provided consumers with information on banking costs, such as ATM fees. The more information that is out there, the more informative it will be for the actual consumer, because there are cases when consumers actually back away because they are provided that transaction fee. When they actually see it and are asked if they want to go ahead with the transaction, many people decide not to.

From a regulatory standpoint, that is why we have taken those numerous steps. For instance, recently the Minister of Finance announced new prepaid products regulations. A comment was made earlier about prepaid cards.

I would also like to comment on the work actually being done, as we announced in economic action 2013, on the comprehensive financial consumer code. The main goals are to better protect consumers of financial products and to ensure that they have the necessary tools to make proper financial decisions. The tools must be adaptable to suit the needs of consumers today.

As I pointed out, there has been light years of change since even a few decades ago. I remember when people taking a trip would actually go to the bank and get travellers' cheques and sign all the cheques and take them with them. I am not as young as I look. We would take all these travellers' cheques or take out big wads of cash. At the end of the day, these debit cards have provided us with a much more secure environment, so there is an opportunity cost as well.

However, we also want to provide an exclusive and comprehensive consumer protection regime. That is why this consultation we are doing with the public will be important as we develop similar

products and services to replace a fairly wide and broad mix of legislation and regulations. The consultation process is on the way. That will be a better way for us to address some of the impacts we might run into.

It is important that we look at these ATMs and ABMs not just on the bank side but as a network. As I pointed out, the integration of these services is very much in play. In our rural areas, there is an impact from these private producers.

In conclusion, I would point out a couple of things. One is the regulatory side. The government is tackling this with the right approach. We are trying to keep taxes down for families so that they have more money in their pockets. That is a responsible approach.

I also think it is important for us to ensure that when we regulate, we regulate in a smart manner and not in a way that will hurt competition. Maybe we need to look at ways to provide more competition in the market and more ATMs as opposed to putting a cap on fees, which could lead to unintended consequences for consumers.

I will close on that, and I am open to questions from the opposition.

•(1240)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was very interesting. We went from the days of travellers' cheques to speculation that in the future, we are going to pay through a chip in our rear end. I am not going to go there. I am more concerned about what else consumers are getting in their rear ends right now.

I heard a lot of talk about convenience. When I talk to senior citizens, this is not an issue of convenience. The banks are not interested in serving their communities, so the only way they can get their money out is through ATMs, and there is a \$2.50 charge. My colleague says that it is great for competition.

I was just over in the U.K. I saw ATMs everywhere, where I was not being gouged. There I was, an international traveller. Yet I am looking at the fees people are being asked to pay. We pay a regular account fee of maybe \$1. On top of that is an access fee, which could be another \$1.90. There is a convenience fee. My friend was talking about convenience. The convenience fee is another \$5, so we could be paying \$7.90 to one of these private operators. The member said that the banks need something to make it worth their while.

Is there any fee that would bother the current government? I am not surprised that it is not standing up for consumers. I am not surprised that it is defending the big banks. However, when I have senior citizens who have to pay for their groceries so they take \$40 out and pay \$7.90 for that, I think that is outrageous. My constituents think that is outrageous.

Is there any fee the member would think is a problem, or should we just allow the banks to gouge people whenever they want?

Business of Supply

•(1245)

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, I would have to disagree with the previous speaker from Sudbury. As I pointed out earlier, data from the Canadian Bankers Association says that 75% of these transactions are taking place at people's home banks where, in many cases, there are no transaction fees. That is what people are doing.

However, at the end of the day, there is convenience, and for that convenience to be out there, someone has to be willing to make that investment. If the investment is not made, guess what? There is not going to be any ATM in that location at all. I am not sure how seniors are going to feel then if they have to drive 30 or 40 miles to go to a bank because of the hollowing out of the ATM market in rural areas.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have had in Winnipeg North in relatively recent years is banks actually closing. As a result of those banks closing, it is a lot more difficult to get banking services. Fortunately, a number of credit unions have taken an interest and have replaced the banks.

Does the current government feel that it has any role to play in terms of protecting consumers?

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is, yes. I think there is a role for the government to play in the regulatory environment. I talked about the financial code and the consultations we are having. We have actually seen some very good information from these cross-country consultations, which could very well lead to some very good ideas and suggestions about how some of this could be regulated.

However, I also believe that in many cases, from my point of view, having that information out there makes me an informed consumer. When I am an informed consumer, I make better decisions. I know the product I am purchasing. In fact, a number of consumers, as I pointed out before, have actually backed away from some of these ATM machines because of the information that has been provided. I think those are good things. That is a good start, and there is probably more to do.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this morning I heard an answer in which it was clarified that the substance of this debate was on ATMs specifically run by federally regulated institutions.

I wonder if my colleague would clarify. Has there been any modelling that shows what the tipping point is between profit margin and service provision in low-volume areas? What would the impact be of these unregulated ATMs going into that space should they be vacated by federally run regulators, if the profit margin is not there? What would the modelling be in terms of the actual cost to consumers?

I guess the last thing I would ask him is a more esoteric question. What is the cost of the convenience, from an opportunity-cost perspective, of having access to cash 24 hours a day versus the cost of federally regulated banks running banking hours and allowing people to only have cash access through there?

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, there are two issues. I will tackle the second one first on opportunity cost. I think there is a huge

opportunity cost in not having these, especially in some of our communities. I can point to some of the rural communities in my area. There would be a significant drive for people to actually go to get money, because the closest place could be 30 to 40 miles away. In many cases, we have a significant number of seniors in our rural areas. In some of these rural areas there has never been a bank. It is beginning to be harder for some of these seniors and folks to actually get out and travel. From that standpoint, it has actually been made better.

With respect to the points on the charges, I am hopeful that these consultations we are having will be helpful in that regard.

I would suggest that there would be a minimum of a couple of dollars added to charges once these ATMs are handed over to a private operator as opposed to the banks. That will happen more and more, because the low-volume areas will just dry up without the higher cost.

•(1250)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I approach this motion with a sense of disbelief that we are spending an entire day on this issue.

I know that a lot of people are upset with the banks. I am looking at the banks' profits. The five big banks in Canada in 2013 had a \$2 billion increase over their profits of 2012. They are now up to \$29.5 billion a year. I would like to talk about some kind of sensible corporate taxes on these kinds of profits. I think we are starting at the wrong end of the debate by talking about ATM fees.

That said, I would like to ask my hon. colleague across the way if he does not agree with the point that with the record profits of the Canadian commercial banks, it is time to look at reasonable taxation rates.

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, I talked about the ATMs and their being linked. We cannot separate the issue. It is a service.

With respect to banks profits, raising taxes is not going to happen. We are certainly not looking at a high-tax environment. I can tell the NDP members that in addition to not supporting this motion, I suspect that they should not wait for us to have a carbon tax in the budget. They should not wait for us to raise CPP taxes. They had better not wait for us to raise corporate taxes, because we will not do that.

At the end of the day, we should also look at these corporations, which pay significant dividends to pension funds and others. Those are accruing to seniors and are benefiting our communities.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the one hand, the member wants to lower taxes, but on the other, he refuses to legislate to set limits on the fees that banks can charge. This means it would simply be a transfer of money. People will have a little more money in their pockets because they will pay less in taxes, but at the same time, they will have less money because the Conservatives refuse to legislate on the ATM fees people are being charged. Basically, is that not a covert way of raising taxes?

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out before, consumers can look online and see the different rates and different charges for different accounts. It is easy to see that information.

I think the member is clouding the issue of bank fees and ATM fees, because 75% of these transactions take place at people's own banking institutions. Therefore, in many cases, people are actually not paying a transaction fee. I think we are muddying the waters on those two fees.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to join the debate that has been put forward by the official opposition today.

I think a more useful debate that we could have had today is around the issue of the security breach and what exactly has been going on in our country. That would have been much more in keeping with our role here. As much as I support focusing on the consumer agenda, I do believe that our role as federal legislators is to focus on the bigger issues that affect all of Canada, like the security breach, which I am sure we will be hearing more about later today.

I am pleased to speak to the motion put forward by the member for Sudbury, calling on the government to include measures in the 2014 budget that would reduce ATM fees. The wording of the motion before the House is more nebulous than the party's position, which is to bring in a cap on ATM fees of 50¢ per transaction. That position is a change from his party's previous position, which was to outlaw bank ATM fees altogether.

I find it interesting that my colleague from Sudbury put forward a motion that is less precise than his party's position. Quite possibly he will want to speak to that to clarify the difference between the two positions. It is this lack of precision in the motion that leaves a lot to interpretation.

I will conclude my remarks today with an argument for a narrow interpretation of this motion.

First, I want to talk about prevalence and the cost of ATM services in Canada. I would also like to discuss the government's agreement with the banks for low-cost bank accounts and how these agreements relate to this motion we are dealing with today.

The market for ATMs in Canada is a big market. Prior to 1996, there was a clear lack of competition in Canada's marketplace for ATMs. In the early 1990s, the Competition Bureau investigated members of the Interac Association for anti-competitive behaviour. This investigation led to the Competition Tribunal issuing a consent order in 1996, which opened up the market for white label ATMs. That consent order also required Interac to permit surcharging for the use of its network.

Today, Canada has the second-highest number of ATMs per capita in the world, after South Korea. In 2012, there were more than 60,000 ATMs across Canada, and a third of those ATMs were owned by chartered banks.

While the number of bank-owned ATMs has risen steadily in the past 10 years, the use of ATMs is actually declining, as Canadians are clearly moving toward a cashless society. The number of deposits and withdrawals at ATMs has dropped almost 20% since 2005.

Meanwhile, some ATM fees have gone up considerably. The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada monitors ATM fees in Canada, and according to the numbers provided by the agency, these fees can vary widely, depending on which ATM is being used.

For example, if someone uses an ATM that belongs to the financial institution where one has an account, using that ATM can cost anywhere from between \$1, \$2, or nothing at all. However, if someone uses an ATM that belongs to a financial institution where one is not a customer, then that transaction can cost anywhere between \$1 and \$6. If someone uses a white label ATM, which is an ATM owned by a private operator, one can pay up to \$8 for that transaction.

Many Canadians, when they first started using those machines, did not realize the difference between Toronto Dominion Bank's machines and the Bank of Nova Scotia's machines. Then when the white label ATM was introduced, people had no idea of what they were being charged until they had made a few transaction. It was significant.

As Liberals, we recognize that affordable access to basic banking services is essential for all Canadians. We believe that the government has a legitimate role to play in establishing rules—and we did just that previously—that ensure Canadians can access a reasonable level of financial services at a reasonable cost. That is why, under the previous Liberal government, then finance minister Paul Martin introduced a framework to reform Canada's financial services sector.

• (1255)

As part of the many reforms that were made at the time, legislation was also passed that guaranteed access to basic banking services for all Canadians, including low-income Canadians. The reforms also established rules prohibiting banks from placing a hold on government cheques of \$1,500 or less. They required signed agreements with banks to provide consumers with low-cost bank accounts at a cost of less than \$4 per month, the affordable banking accounts. We also established the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada to monitor the banking sector, enforce these agreements, and help protect consumers.

Under the federal government's agreements with banks, the low-cost accounts include a free debit card, a free monthly statement, free deposits, and between 8 to 12 transactions each month, including ATM transactions, at no extra charge. That was the last time that significant reforms were seriously looked at, and those changes were brought in to protect consumers, especially low-income seniors. All of this was done at a cost of no more than \$4 or less a month. These agreements are monitored and enforced by the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada and have the exact same effect as regulations. If the banks were to fail to live up to these agreements, the federal government could easily turn these agreements into binding regulations because of the legislation passed by our previous Liberal government.

Business of Supply

As I said, under these agreements, most Canadians can avoid high ATM fees by using low-cost bank accounts. In fact, I know many Canadians who do not pay any ATM fees whatsoever, thanks to the work done by the previous Liberal government. Instead of paying high fees, they plan ahead; only use ATMs that belong to their financial institutions; use the cash-back service at participating retailers, of which there are many; and stay within the monthly limit of transactions that are covered by their low-cost accounts. I understand that the banks are committed to expanding the number of transactions included in low-cost accounts, and those discussions are ongoing. That is something that I believe all of us would support.

Poor implementation of this motion, though, could put these low-cost accounts at serious risk, or it could result in the imposition of higher fees on services that are not directly covered by legislation. A limit on ATM fees that effectively acts as both a price ceiling and a price floor could also mean that Canadians who do not pay any ATM fees now would then have to pay 50¢ per transaction. If this were to happen, there are Canadians who would be worse off.

A limit on ATM fees could also result in closing down ATM operators who provide a legitimate service to Canadians. After all, there are Canadians who are willing to pay a premium for this convenience. Some people prefer to use the white label ATMs in their buildings rather than go across the street or down the block to a bank-owned ATM. There is a white label ATM in this building, and there are times, where for convenience or time, I am sure many of my colleagues have used that ATM, even if they dislike the \$6.50 or \$4.50 they are charged. However, because of convenience and time, they end up using it. They are willing to spend a few dollars per transaction for that convenience.

Where Canadians have a choice of which ATM to use and avoid ATM fees altogether, is it appropriate for the government to get further involved, to reduce consumer choice and legislate ATMs out of business? Does the NDP also believe that government should outlaw convenience stores that charge more for milk than the grocery store down the road? At what point do we decide that we are interfering too much? I cannot believe that New Democrats would want that, of course, and I am sure they would not, but to do so would be a ridiculous infringement in the marketplace.

• (1300)

Canadians should have the choice to pay a premium for convenience. That said, there are some Canadians who live in communities, especially rural communities, without bank-owned ATMs. Not everyone has the option of planning ahead to avoid ATM fees. Instead, some Canadians only have access to higher-cost white label ATMs. These Canadians can face unfair ATM fees as a result of an uncompetitive marketplace. In rural communities where they do not have the option, the question should be, should it not be required that the major banks ensure there is a proper ATM machine, or that they look at what is being charged at white label ATM machines?

While some Canadians do face high ATM fees, I would urge the government to be careful in how it would go about limiting these fees. The government should be careful to avoid unintended consequences, such as raising the price for Canadians who currently do not pay ATM fees, eliminating a legitimate business model that

provides Canadians with a convenient service, or reducing access to ATMs in communities that are already underserved.

Let us go back to the wording of the motion. It states:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian consumers face unfair Automated Teller Machine (ATM) fees as a result of an uncompetitive marketplace and that the House call on the government to take action in Budget 2014 to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees.

If we ask ourselves whether all Canadian consumers face unfair ATM fees as a result of an uncompetitive marketplace, the answer clearly has to be no. Canada has the second most ATMs per capita in the world. In Canadian cities, there is no shortage of ATMs to choose from. As I said earlier, if a person lives in a community with bank-owned ATMs, one can plan ahead and avoid the ATM fees altogether.

However, if a person lives in a rural community that only has high-cost white label ATMs, there is an argument to be made that the marketplace in that community is not competitive. If the only ATM a person has access to charges \$8 per transaction, he or she is clearly facing unfair ATM fees, which is what I believe my colleague was trying to profile today.

To make it clear: there are cases where I believe this motion should apply and cases where it should not. For example, if people are at a bar or an adult establishment that has a high-cost white label ATM and they do not want to walk across the street or down the block to their bank's ATM, then I do not believe this motion should apply to them. I do not believe that in such cases the government should step in and act as a nanny state to save people from themselves. They should be free to spend their own money how they see fit. However, if they are in a rural or remote community and their only option is an ATM charging \$8 per transaction, there is room for the government to step in and take some action.

Because of the nebulous wording of this motion, I believe the government should take a very narrow interpretation of it. The government should not regulate ATMs out of business. It should not reduce consumer choice and eliminate options of convenience. However, in cases where Canadians have no other option but to pay excessive fees at white label ATMs in order to withdraw cash from their accounts, there is room for the government to take action.

Clearly, the intent of this motion is to give people who require white label ATMs a better option than being hit with fees of \$8 per transaction. The very people who are getting hit the most with these \$8 transactions are the very people who can least pay them. I believe the intent of the motion is to make sure we are putting options out for people who are not able to pay \$8 every time they need to withdraw \$50 from their bank account.

Business of Supply

There should be a better option. If we were to look very carefully in to regulating this, it might be the way to go.

• (1305)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear the member say that she thinks Canadians have a choice to pay a premium charge. The reality is that most Canadians, especially in smaller and rural communities, or where banks have left their communities, have no choice but to use ATMs. The motion being debated today is about how people are being ripped off.

I would point out to the member that we are talking about federally regulated ATMs. It does not cover the ones she was speaking about, in grocery stores, convenience stores, or gas stations. We are talking about federal regulation. The motion has been very clear on that, and the debate today has been very clear on that.

I would like the member to explain, because it was not clear from her remarks, whether or not she and other members of her party support the motion today, on the basis that we do need to protect consumers.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, quite clearly, the intent here is to get some sort of control over the unwarranted gouging of consumers. That gouging clearly occurs on these white label ATM machines, when people are charged \$8 or more for using that machine. Often, people do not find that out until after they have used it, or they have no choice.

We are supporting the motion going forward, to have a look at ATM fees in that particular area. We would be supportive of seeing some sort of cap put on it, but very carefully, because we do not want to discourage another successful business in our country. However, at the same time, Canadians have to be well aware that when they use those machines they are going to have to pay a higher fee. The secondary issue is to make sure that there is more access in these rural communities and that they are better protected from the \$8 to \$10 fees they are sometimes charged.

• (1310)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, following on my colleague's last question, whenever we are debating economic principles it is not just a matter of if we do this then this will happen. Oftentimes it is, if we do this this might happen and then five other things that we have not modelled the assumptions around.

I would like my colleague who just gave her speech to expand on a couple of things. First, we talked about how this motion may well not be subject just to the federally regulated banks, that it does not in theory include the private ATMs. If the federally regulated ATMs were pulled out of a market because of profit margin losses and replaced by private sector ones, would that not affect, or could it not affect, a certain demographic that uses those machines disproportionately? What would the impact of that be on Canadians?

Second, because I love to debate economics in this place, I wonder if she could expound on the appropriateness of the government to legislate informed choice in this matter. Do consumers not have the choice when they put their card in and the fee is listed to say yes or no as to whether they will accept that fee?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, a big part of all of this is about educating consumers and making sure that they are fully aware when they use any banking machines.

I recently had to open a new bank account. I was told verbally and in writing about all the different banking fees, quite clearly and in really good consumer language. It is much better than it used to be earlier. It is about educating the consumer to be fully aware. It is not about putting competitive businesses out of business, because we need competition in the marketplace. We are talking very specifically in today's motion about the white label ATMs that are charging unfair amounts to the very consumers we are concerned about.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague, the Liberal critic for industry, for her remarks here today.

The motion itself is quite vague. It does not specifically refer to federally regulated ATMs. It simply says "by limiting ATM fees". It is helpful that the NDP member who presented this motion has clarified that it is only intended to apply to federally regulated financial institutions.

I represent a riding in rural and small-town Nova Scotia. When I stop at Douglas Sanford's corner store on the way to Cheverie on a Friday evening, one of these machines is there. Sometimes I will use it as a matter of convenience, but it has a higher fee.

We have to think about the people for whom that ATM represents their only access to cash and to target an approach in such a way that would help them attain the cash they need without paying extra for it. It may be the only place they can get to. I am thinking of a senior, or someone with a disability or with limited transportation. I think that is what the hon. member is getting at.

Does the hon. member agree that it is not only in rural and small-town Canada but also in some inner-city communities where the same situation may exist?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, every time I see someone using a white label ATM, the one with the \$8 fee, it always seems to be the very people who can least afford it. It is why I go back to the issue of educating the Canadian public on the difference.

I know that when people use the machine, it says they are going to get hit with a certain fee, but it is always the poorer person who is not well enough to walk the distance who ends up using these machines.

It would be a very good thing for the government to take a serious look at the motion we are debating today and how it can, without removing choice and interfering in competition, attempt to regulate a more reasonable fee and to have some consistency across the country.

Business of Supply

●(1315)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very troubled in this debate. The Conservatives seem to be arguing against this motion calling for a reduction in user fees for ATMs by quoting data from the Canadian Bankers Association. We need to recall that the office of consumer and corporate affairs, which does not exist any more, used to monitor these costs. We had government actually governing and oversight on behalf of consumers.

It is deeply troubling that the government would turn to the bankers who, by the way, apparently reported more than a \$30 billion profit last year. We know that Canadian families are suffering under record family debt. Compare that to the \$30 billion and they lose a lot of credibility, and oh, the poor bankers will have to shut down ATMs if we lower the fees. There is a real lack of credibility.

There has been some criticism that the motion is too narrow. Would the member like to speak to the fact that it is a critical role of government to protect Canadian consumers and make sure that there are not overly usurious rates imposed on them?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I am very much aware of the role of the federal government because it was a Liberal government that brought in the current rules we are dealing with, as far as protecting people from being gouged by the banks is concerned. I think we have all been through that experience over the years of arguments with the banks, as they make their billions of dollars and are nickel-and-diming each and every one of us as we use their facilities. It was the previous Liberal government that brought in the changes that protect consumers, capped the fees, and worked out the current regime we are working under.

The issue of the white label ATMs and the \$8 is one that was nonexistent at the time and is clearly an opportunity for the government to look at to ensure that consumers have choice and that smaller communities have access without having to pay ridiculous fees.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I should say that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay.

I am pleased to rise here today on the opposition day motion moved by my very competent colleague, the member for Sudbury. I will read the motion, because sometimes when we begin a debate, we lose track of the issue and forget what we are debating:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian consumers face unfair Automated Teller Machine (ATM) fees as a result of an uncompetitive marketplace and that the House call on the government to take action in Budget 2014 to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees.

Thus, it is pretty straightforward. We are calling for concrete action to protect consumers.

To put this into context, ATM fees have been charged in Canada since 1996, that is, for the past 18 years. However, surcharging is not regulated. There are absolutely no regulations to protect consumers.

Banks can charge whatever fees they want for transactions that people make to access their hard-earned money. That really is a problem. Furthermore, since 1996, these unwarranted fees have been

rising steadily. There are administrative fees, but they are not very high. I will come back to that later.

People currently pay up to \$6 per transaction to access their money. In my opinion, that is unacceptable. My colleague from Timmins—James Bay and the NDP clearly agree with me.

Let us talk about household debt. We know very well that setting a limit on ATM fees is not the magic solution to household debt. However, it would help a lot. The cost of living goes up every year, whereas incomes have declined by 7% in the past little while.

Paying \$6 to access one's own money is irritating. It hits people in their pocketbooks. A \$6 charge may seem small, but several \$6 charges in one month can blow the budget and force people to buy lower-quality food. That is a problem.

Once again, the middle class and low-income people are paying the price. The government is squeezing the middle class more and more.

As I was saying earlier, several measures are needed in order to address household debt. Quality jobs must be created. We agree with that. In addition, workers' incomes must increase.

There are a number of other possible solutions. However, what we are proposing is very important and is part of a set of solutions that can help consumers.

We must put a stop to these bank practices that exploit consumers.

According to the former governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, household debt could be the biggest and most immediate threat to the Canadian economy. It could spur the government to take action. I do not know. We cannot ignore this important aspect of the Canadian economy. Right now, household debt has reached an all-time high of 166% of income. This means that when someone earns \$100, they owe \$166. I do not think I need a more concrete example. These figures give a good idea of the situation.

●(1320)

There is every reason to believe that consumers, especially those in the middle class, have reached their limit. Right now, Canadian household debt is at around the same level as U.S. household debt before the 2008 financial crisis. What else will it take for our government to take action? Finance is not my strong suit, but I know enough and I am smart enough to realize that this does not make sense. I am not the finance minister and I never will be, but if I were, I would take action.

Business of Supply

Could we not give middle-class and low-income Canadians a break and make their lives a little easier, simpler and more affordable? People are tired of paying, and I understand. Right now, banks are allowed to charge Canadians nearly \$6 per transaction. According to the best data we have, the average cost of a transaction is about 50¢. Someone is making a buck here, and it is not the middle class or low-income Canadians.

The Minister of Finance has made a few comments in the media and in the House about ATM user fees. I will quote him because I find this interesting. On March 6, 2007, he told the *Toronto Star*:

I tried to point out that, in my view, there are some legitimate concerns by Canadians on this subject, particularly seniors, students and persons with disabilities, many of whom have limited mobility so they don't have as much choice in terms of which banking machine they might be able to use.

Again in 2007, in reference to the NDP campaign in favour of banning fees—because the NDP has been working on this for a long time, even though it was not yet the official opposition—the Minister of Finance told the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, "...we also agreed [with the NDP] that the banks ought to do something in terms of consumers with respect to ATMs".

On February 16, 2007, in the *Globe and Mail*, the Minister of Finance also said that he was not satisfied with the explanation from Canada's banks for why they charge a fee when other banks' customers use their automated teller machines, and he asked them to try harder.

The Minister of Finance clearly has concerns, but no concrete action has been taken since 2007. The problem existed well before then, but the government did not start talking about it until 2007. It talks about it, says that this is appalling and that we should perhaps do something about this problem because it is hard on the middle class, seniors and persons with disabilities, but it does nothing. There is a real problem. This would be a good opportunity for the government to finally do something for consumers and the middle class, but it is doing nothing.

I have more to say on this, but unfortunately my time has run out. I would be pleased to answer questions.

• (1325)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite talked about access for consumers. I wonder if she could discuss the price elasticity assumptions that her party has made around the point at which the price of this service would affect the supply. That is, at a certain point people will look at a substitute good for this product, so if we regulate this, would this somehow not only provide a disincentive to the service provision or supply but also profit in a going concern?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, right now, services do not necessarily reflect the fees being charged. We are not asking that the banks suddenly close, fire their employees and force them into unemployment. We are also working on reforming employment insurance, which I wanted to mention as an interesting aside.

All we are asking is that the banks have a 50¢ ceiling. That is a reasonable limit for the banks; they can still make money. We know that these corporations must turn a profit; that makes sense. However, they do not need to crush the consumers who simply want access to their money at a decent price, which also makes complete sense.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one would question the importance of consumer-related protection. In fact, history would show that as a government we have on numerous occasions moved into that whole area in terms of how it is we can best protect consumers.

My question is in regard to the motion we have before us today, which targets ATM fees. However, it is very specific in that it is talking about banking ATM fees.

If we take a look at the province of Manitoba, for example, we see we have more independent operator machines, which is where we get the huge costs of \$5 or \$6 to use one of those machines. I understand that to be provincial jurisdiction in terms of regulating.

Given the importance of the issue and the importance that the NDP has put on the issue today, I wonder if the member could provide the feedback she has received from the provincial government in Manitoba, which happens to be NDP, on how it has attempted to address this issue. Has it brought in regulation? Can the member inform us on how it has dealt with the bigger picture of those independent machines?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has always worked with the provinces, unlike what the government is currently doing. We have every intention of consulting the provinces on this project and working with them.

• (1330)

[English]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, relating to the comments made earlier by my colleague from the Liberal Party, he forgets that it was his government that actually cut the consumer affairs ministry back in the 1990s. He also forgets and did not ask the question that relates to the very specifics of the provincial jurisdiction.

We are making sure we would lead by example at the federal level. However, the member is not recognizing that the banks are cutting branches in rural locations and small cities and putting in ATMs. This is forcing people to utilize ATMs rather than go to their banks.

One of the member's hon. colleagues talked about people being lazy. What about the disabled? What about seniors?

I would like to hear comments from my colleague that folks are not lazy but they are tired of Conservatives and Liberals forgetting about consumers and not addressing the important issues they are talking about each and every day.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his excellent question.

Business of Supply

Yes, we are indeed seeing that the government is doing absolutely nothing to address this issue. We are also seeing that the most vulnerable members of our society are the ones who are penalized by all these measures taken by the banks and that the government is doing nothing to address. This affects a lot of people. I am talking about low-income and middle-class Canadians, seniors and people with disabilities. It also affects those who live in rural areas where, as my colleague said, branches are closing their doors, forcing people to use ATMs. Since people with disabilities have a harder time getting around, they use their card every time, instead of going to a bank.

That is often the case with the current government: it is the most vulnerable members of our society who are affected.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour, as always, to stand in this House to represent the great people of Timmins—James Bay and to speak to their concerns about the issues of affordability and fairness. Those at home who are watching from ridings like my own, very rural with a lot of senior citizens, will see the flip-flopping and back-flips from the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. They desire that we do not debate this.

The Liberals said right off the bat that they thought it was very unfortunate we were debating this. They talk about the issues of choice and say we should not interfere in the wonderful marketplace. It is the same argument I hear from the Conservatives about the mythical land of Adam Smith, where we have the little baker and the little blacksmith and the market regulates itself. Then of course we have the little banker and the big dread hand of government coming in and squeezing down.

My colleague from the Liberal Party talked about the creation of a nanny state. It shows the incredible disconnect between the Liberals and Conservatives and what is happening with real Canadians right now in 2014. We have the highest record of household debt ever, at 166%. We have mortgage debt over \$1.1 trillion. Consumer credit debt has reached \$500 billion. Average debt for the average person is now about \$30,000. This includes their credit card debt. It also includes their student loans and their car payments. The issue is that when people are being gouged by the banks, it hurts.

My colleagues keep talking. They are twisting themselves into knots today to try to hide behind high school economics text books as opposed to talking about what is happening in the real world.

When my daughters went down to Toronto to go to school, they tried to get bank accounts. The banks were not interested in their business. They needed this form and they needed that form, so they had to get support from back home through the *caisse populaire*. Thank God the *caisse populaire* was there to represent them. However, it means that when my daughters are in Toronto, they do their banking with their ATM cards because they do not have the banking services at hand.

In many of our regions the banks have pulled out because they are making record dollars. They made over \$29.4 billion in profits. Of that, they are making \$420 million in ATM fees. It is not worth it to them to service the little towns. It is not worth it to them to service senior citizens, so they will stick them with the ATM machine.

My colleagues in the Liberal and Conservative Parties say that people have a choice. Choice is a false word. Consumers have a choice, but suddenly they do not have banking services. When they have to get money out, it costs them \$40. They are getting dinged sometimes \$7 on hidden fees.

My colleagues, the Liberals and Conservatives, say people could make an informed choice, as though they think people are stupid and lazy and do not bother to look at the screen. When they look at the screen and it says it will cost \$2.25 to take out their own money, the screen does not tell them about the hidden fees. People are being ripped off and people are being gouged.

My colleagues, the Conservatives and the Liberals, talk about how the whole system will collapse if we make any efforts to help consumers. Oh, my God, the ATM business will run out of business. We would be intervening in the marketplace, the dread marketplace. The Conservatives intervene, by the way, any time they feel it will help their friends in the oil patch; they are more than willing to intervene in the marketplace. However, when it comes to helping the senior citizens who are getting gouged \$7 to take \$40 out to buy their groceries, oh my God, they see the dread hand of the socialists stepping in.

Let us look at other markets. I was just in the United Kingdom where they do not have ATM fees. There is no shortage of ATM machines; they are all over the place, and all over Europe, where they have dealt with this. That is not to say there should not be a fee, because it is a service and people pay for a service, but the question is this. When a person goes to an ATM and the regular account fee is \$1—\$1 on \$40, okay—that seems fair, but then they get the network access fee, which is another \$1.90 on top of that, so now it is \$2.90. Then there is the convenience fee of another \$5.

Both the Conservatives and the Liberals have been saying it is so important to protect the concept of convenience. They tell the consumers that when they go to their local corner store and they do not have a bank, and they try to get \$40 out, it is a convenience. It is not a convenience to the consumer; it is a convenience to the banks, because they are getting 40% off consumers.

• (1335)

It is a rip-off. It is a gouge. However, we do not hear them say that. They will say anything else other than it is a gouge, because their heart, fundamentally, is with the people who are doing the gouging. That is where they feel more comfortable. If people are getting gouged, well, that is the wonder of the market, the great thing about consumer choice. If people have no bank, that is where they have to go, and they get gouged. Is capitalism not a beautiful thing? We should all hug it every single day.

We have seen the failure of the big banks to live up to the social contract and to represent fairness. They can still have record profits and they will still have record profits, but I find it unconscionable that in this day and age someone could be charged \$7 to take out \$20.

Business of Supply

The Liberals have never pretended to be consumer friendly, so I am not going to worry too much about them. However, we see the Conservatives have been on the road to Damascus and have suddenly decided that consumer issues are important, so they have taken out some TV ads to beat up the telecoms. They will not do anything about it, but they will make them the enemy. However, the Conservatives will not do anything.

We have the big, tough finance minister, who was going to go in and read the riot act to the banks. Do members remember that? It was in 2007. A *Toronto Star* editorial said that for several months the finance minister has told the banks that he was not satisfied with their explanations. Whatever the banks did, the consumers wanted answers.

Then, of course, the Minister of Finance went in, in March 2007. It was his big showdown with the banks. He was going to stand up for consumers. He stood up, all right. He came out like a schoolboy after seeing the nuns. We never heard anything more about it after that. The banks continued on.

What we are talking about is the rightful place of the federal government. The federal government has a role. This is not interfering in the market; it is about establishing certain standards of fairness.

What we have seen with continual deregulation is this idea that if there is deregulation, if the industries are allowed to look after themselves, there will be more choice, and prices will drop. We actually do not see prices dropping; we see prices going up because they can gouge more. As well, because we have a government that does not want to stand up for consumers, the gouging gets higher and higher.

My colleagues on the other side always talk about price elasticity and at what point the whole market falls apart. I have not heard the elasticity of the government's backbone on at what point the gouging becomes unacceptable. Personally, I think that when it costs \$5 for a convenience fee on top of the other \$1.90 and the other \$1 that are being charged, that is not acceptable addition.

What we are talking about here are some very simple practical steps.

It is getting more and more difficult for people in my community to get by. For young people, paying off \$50,000 on their student loans coming out school is an enormous burden that was not there when my generation was at university age. Senior citizens are getting ripped off on their hydro rates in Ontario. They are paying through the nose for their own hydro when Ontario creates the cheapest hydro in the world, dumps it on other markets, and then forces senior citizens in northern Ontario to pay through the nose so that we can cover off the fact that the Liberals decided that they would gouge consumers for \$1 billion for two gas plants in their own backyards. People in my region think that is criminal.

Senior citizens tell me that they cannot pay their hydro bills because of the Liberal smart meters. In northern Ontario, smart meters have shown pretty clearly how dumb they are. People are paying double what they used to pay for electricity. We know we are creating hydro in northern Ontario at 5¢, 6¢, and 7¢ a kilowatt hour, and people are paying 40¢ for it. That is people being gouged.

Do people want a little bit a fairness? They certainly do. When they go to the banks, they want to know that the dollars they have in their pension cheque or in their savings are going to stretch as far as they can.

I am asking my hon. colleagues to do the right thing and think of the people back home. As they say in the big McDonald's ads, "You deserve a break today", but I doubt we are going to hear it from the government and we are definitely not going to hear it from the Liberals. They are going to shove that Big Mac of consumer choice down our throat.

I would say that we should do the right thing and give people a break on these outrageous gouging and ATM fees.

• (1340)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing my colleague opposite and I share is that we are concerned about Canadian consumers and their ability to get jobs and we are concerned about creating economic growth. I would hope that we are concerned about that.

When a company makes a profit or, let us say, people make extra money in their households and have that money in their bank accounts—let us call it liquidity, being liquid—that allows people to be flexible in times of economic change. When it happens with companies, it allows them to retain jobs and make different investments. When we make profit and have liquidity, it means we have stronger economic resiliency in times of economic downturn.

Given that this is a basic economic principle—and I hope my colleague will not use the kind of rhetoric that he used in his speech to answer this question—what level of liquidity does he think it is appropriate for banks to have? What is the level of profit that we should regulate to? He brought it up. He insinuated that somehow what we are talking about today is the level of profit that a going concern should make. I am curious if he could argue what he and his party really think in terms of the appropriateness of going concerns being able to be economically resilient in times of downturn.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, it is quite a simple answer. I think that a 39.5% fee on a \$20 withdrawal is outrageous. I would imagine that most Canadians think that is outrageous. I do not think the Conservatives say that; they say we have to look at liquidity in a downturn.

This is not about liquidity. We are talking about record profits year after year while credit is being cut off and the banks have not reinvested, yet they are charging upwards of 39.5% on an ATM withdrawal. I have not heard anybody on the Conservative side say that is unfair.

The question is the elasticity and liquidity of the Conservative base. I am sure that base does not believe in this, either. Does my hon. colleague not think that at a certain point, gouging people is wrong?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of points that I could challenge the member on with regard to some of his statements.

Business of Supply

One thing Manitobans take great pride in is having the cheapest hydroelectricity rates in North America. There may be one state somewhere down south that might be a better, but he cannot stake the claim with regard to energy costs for the province of Ontario.

I find the member to be somewhat of a self-proclaimed consumer advocate. The reality is that there many consumer advocates in the House and definitely within the Liberal party caucus.

What seems to upset the member the most is the fact that there is a \$7 fee for a \$20 withdrawal. Those are the numbers the member used. The greatest abuse of that nature is not necessarily with the banks but with the independent operators of the machines, and that practice is provincially regulated.

My question to the member, being a self-proclaimed consumer advocate, is this. Can he tell us what the NDP provincial government has done to deal with the outrageous fees that he refers to, or does he believe the provinces have any role? Maybe he believes that the national NDP, if ever given the opportunity to govern, would put a 50¢ cap on provincially regulated institutions also.

• (1345)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this a first. We should mark it down in the history book.

I want to thank my hon. colleague for his excellent observation. Yes, the cheapest hydro rates in North America are in the province of Manitoba, under a New Democratic government, because it understands the importance of having proper hydro rates, just as in the province of Quebec. If we look at Ontario under the Liberals, we see that people are being ripped off by a corrupt government that spent \$1 billion moving two gas plants to save the rear ends of some Liberal MPPs and that then told every senior citizen in Ontario that they were going to pay for this for the next 20 years because they had to protect some Liberals in Ontario.

It is the first time ever, but I think the member is bang on the money. That is the difference between a good government in Manitoba and the corrupt, lazy Liberals in Ontario who are gouging our senior citizens into the ground.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity today to address the NDP's motion suggesting that our government is not concerned with protecting consumers. This could not be further from the truth. To make such a claim only shows that the member opposite does not understand how our government approaches the budget process.

To be clear, in every budget our government focuses on the priorities of Canadians. That means jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity. If members across the way took some time to read our government's budgets, they would realize that measures that benefit consumers underlie the priorities of Canadians and are featured prominently.

One of the most effective ways to help consumers is to maintain a low-tax environment. Our government has put tax relief at the core of all our budgets, and we have a proven record of continuously lowering taxes and tariffs to the benefit of all Canadians. Since coming to office in 2006, our government has reduced the goods and services tax from 7% to 5%, providing tax relief for all Canadians.

In addition, our government has introduced more than 160 tax relief measures, providing almost \$160 billion in tax relief for Canadian families and individuals over a six-year period ending in 2013-14. Overall, these tax reductions have helped the average family of four to save close to \$3,400 in taxes in 2014. What is more, the federal tax burden is at its lowest level in more than 50 years.

Clearly, our focus on reducing taxes for all Canadians has brought real and tangible results. While the NDP talks about standing up for consumers and Canadian families, our government has actually taken action and kept more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians.

Shamefully, the NDP has voted against all of our tax reductions. Those members repeatedly voted against consumer protection and had the audacity to present themselves as being on the side of the consumer. It is simply unbelievable.

Unfortunately, not only has the NDP voted against all of our tax cuts, but those members have also opposed all of the consumer protection measures we have introduced. Let me repeat that: they have opposed all of the consumer protection measures we have introduced. I wish that rather than advocating higher taxes, such as their \$20 billion carbon tax, the NDP would congratulate us as we stand up for consumers.

Our Conservative government has consistently put the interests of consumers at the core of our decisions. This includes making the right decision to create more choice in the wireless sector, which has resulted in lower wireless rates and more jobs in the industry.

We listened to Canadians who demanded that measurements at the gas pumps accurately reflect what they are paying for. We responded with regulations for fairness at the pump to protect consumers from inaccurate measurements when purchasing gasoline.

Our government introduced anti-spam legislation that would make the online marketplace safer for businesses and consumers.

We implemented stronger labelling regulations so that Canadians can rest assured that they are not being misled when purchasing drugs.

We have also taken action on copyright modernization to balance the rights of consumers and creators.

Furthermore, our government has ensured greater fairness in airline advertising so that consumers can feel more confident they are getting what they paid for.

The list goes on and on.

Business of Supply

We have also taken action to help consumers when dealing with financial services and products. Unlike the NDP, our government recognizes that in today's fast-paced world, financial services and products such as credit cards, mortgage agreements, bank statements, and more are becoming increasingly more complex to navigate. For this reason, our Conservative government believes that consumers of these products should be presented with clear information so that they know the terms and conditions around using these products. That is why our government introduced targeted measures in 2006 to make financial products more consumer friendly. Let me quickly share some of these with members today.

Our government is protecting consumers with new disclosure rules around credit cards and regulations that outlaw other anti-consumer business practices. We are developing a financial consumer code that will better protect consumers of financial products and ensure that they have the information they need to make responsible financial decisions. This code will reflect the realities of increased use of electronic financial products as well as respond to the needs of those requiring unique assistance, such as seniors and people with disabilities.

• (1350)

Our government is bringing in a code of conduct for the credit and debit-card industry to help small businesses deal with unfair practices, which would help ensure fairness, encourage real choice and competition, and protect small businesses from rising costs. It is shortening the cheque-holding periods and ensuring immediate access to the first \$100 of a cheque and protecting Canadians from predatory payday loan companies by working with provincial governments to regulate such institutions to better protect vulnerable Canadians. We are more than doubling the maximum fine on financial institutions that violate consumer provisions, from \$200,000 to \$0.5 million. Our government is better protecting Canadians using prepaid cards issued by federally regulated banks, with increased transparency and new consumer protection rules, and so much more.

Allow me to unpack some of these measures, all of which are tangible ways our government is helping consumers every day, and all of which the New Democrats have opposed. In order to help Canadian borrowers better manage their finances, regulations relating to credit agreements, including lines of credit and credit cards, came into force in 2010. These regulations limit business practices that are not beneficial to consumers, and require the provision of clear and timely information to Canadians about credit products, with a particular emphasis on credit cards.

To name a few, the regulations specifically mandate an effective minimum 21-day, interest-free grace period on all new credit card purchases when a customer pays the outstanding balance in full. They lower interest costs by mandating allocations of payments in favour of the consumer, and limit debt-collection practices that financial institutions use in contacting a consumer to collect on a debt. The regulations prohibit over-the-limit fees solely arising from holds placed by merchants; mandate advance disclosure of interest-rate increases prior to their taking effect, even if this information had been included in the credit contract; and require that any disclosure

be made by a federally regulated financial institution in language presented in a manner that is clear, simple, and not misleading.

In addition, in budget 2011, our Conservative government proposed to develop measures to enhance the consumer protection framework with respect to payment network-branded prepaid cards. In order to support consumer awareness and informed decision-making, the prepaid payment products regulations require federally regulated financial institutions to provide consumers with information that is clear, simple, and not misleading. The regulations require that institutions disclose fees in an information box that appears prominently on the exterior packaging. The regulations also require that information pertinent to the prepaid payment product's use be available on the product, including where to access the full terms and conditions of use and a toll-free number to make a balance enquiry. Going even further, another regulation that came into force in 2012 deals with cheque-hold periods. The access to funds regulations provide Canadians with greater leverage for financial management by reducing the maximum cheque-hold period to four days from seven days for cheques of less than \$1,500. The regulations also provide consumers with access to the first \$100 within 24 hours.

However, wait; our initiatives go beyond law-making and regulation and include public outreach and education. Last year, our government passed the Financial Literacy Leader Act, a piece of legislation the NDP actually voted against. It provides for the appointment of a financial literacy leader within the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada. When the leader is appointed, they will collaborate and coordinate activities with stakeholders to contribute to and support initiatives that strengthen the financial literacy of Canadians in general, with a specific focus on the needs of seniors. This initiative will allow the government to broaden its efforts and help Canadians make informed choices for themselves and for their families. Indeed, it is when consumers have all the relevant information and when fees are clearly disclosed that consumers can make informed financial decisions. This is the cornerstone of any effective consumer protection framework, but not everything.

Another key element is competition. When consumers have more choice in the marketplace, they pay lower prices. This is basic economics that even the New Democrats should be able to understand. That is why our government has engaged the banking industry on the issue of ATM fees.

• (1355)

Indeed, we have highlighted that some consumers, such as seniors, those who are disabled, and students may not have had access to different banking options.

Several banks acknowledged our concerns and responded by expanding ATM access in or near colleges and universities to help students avoid fees; unveiling low-fee accounts for seniors and students; and improving access for the disabled.

Statements by Members

However, we have not stopped there.

The NDP may not realize this, but the Federal Consumer Association of Canada, or the FCAC as it is frequently referred, is an entire federal agency devoted to consumer issues. The FCAC provides consumers with objective, reliable, and free information on banking costs, including the cost of ATM fees and how to avoid paying these fees.

Yet, that is not all. The FCAC has a number of resources for consumers on almost any consumer issue. For example, the FCAC can help consumers shop for the most suitable credit card, as well as banking packages, including low-cost accounts.

I would encourage the members opposite to take some time today to visit the FCAC website. If they were to do so, they would see how beneficial the resources are that the FCAC provides in order to help Canadians get answers to their banking questions.

While our government has a solid record on introducing measures to protect consumers, I would not want to give my NDP colleagues the impression that our government thinks the job is done. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Perhaps the NDP missed our government's recent Speech from the Throne. If the NDP had paid attention, it would have noticed a number of commitments by our government to further enhance affordability for Canadians. These include: ending "pay to pay" policies, so customers will not have to pay extra to receive paper bills; expanding no-cost basic banking services; working with the provinces and the territories to crack down on predatory payday lenders by supporting ongoing efforts to make consumer protection regimes more robust; empowering consumers by requiring disclosure of the cost of different payment methods; and taking further action to end geographic price discrimination against Canadians.

Clearly, it is this Conservative government that puts consumers first. While we are the ones who are actually finding solutions to the issues facing consumers, all the NDP can do is oppose measures that would actually help consumers.

For once, it would be refreshing to see the NDP actually support consumers, by standing to vote for our consumer protection measures.

● (1400)

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

The time for government orders has expired.

The hon. parliamentary secretary will have seven minutes remaining when this matter returns before the chamber, after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently announced \$100,000 in funding from the eastern Ontario development program for the establishment of a gaming and

entrepreneurship lab at the Idea Hub in Port Hope, Northumberland's business incubator.

Independent game development studios are part of a thriving and rapidly evolving industry in Ontario, an industry that is linked to a global market that is forecast to grow to \$55 billion by 2015. This partnership of the Northumberland CFDC, the Idea Hub, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, and the gaming and entrepreneurship lab will provide a facility where innovative products can be developed and brought to global markets.

Opening this April, the gaming and entrepreneurship lab will be a key resource for digital entrepreneurs in eastern Ontario.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is a time when we remember the contributions of the people of African descent not only to this country but to the world. We remember the great works of the men and women of the arts and letters, such as Joseph Boulogne and Alexandre Dumas. We remember Ira Aldridge, Josephine Baker, Lorraine Hansberry, and Oscar Peterson. We celebrate Djanet Sears, Dany Laferrière, Austin Clarke, and Oliver Jones.

The men and women of science include Booker T. Washington, Rebecca Cole, Dr. Charles Drew, and Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott. We salute the pioneers who helped to build this new world, including Mathieu Da Costa, Jean-Baptiste Point du Sable, the loyalist settlers of Nova Scotia, and the settlers of Amber Valley and Salt Spring Island.

This is a small fraction of a vast history, but why is it important? It is important because by exploring our history, we begin to know ourselves.

To those not of the hue, I offer this. Knowing our history is for others to know their own, because our histories bind us. Black History Month is not simply the history of a people; it is part of the collective history of the world.

* * *

HOCKEYVILLE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday I was pleased to attend events in support of Prescott, Ontario's bid for the title of Kraft Hockeyville 2014. People in the community have embarked on a huge campaign to earn a spot in the nominations for the title, and have spent many hours outside in the cold and snow, holding parades and rallies.

Beyond the usual rallies and festivities associated with the bid for this title, members of the community are hoping to collect 2,014 Kraft food items for the Food For All food bank in their community. They are decorating their houses and other structures in the blue and yellow colours of the competition's sponsor.

Prescott's own NHL Hall of Famer, Leo Boivin, who played with the Boston Bruins and my team, the Toronto Maple Leafs, in the late 1950s and 1960s, and whose name graces the local arena, has thrown his support behind the group.

I encourage everyone to help support this group so that Prescott can win the title of Kraft Hockeyville 2014.

* * *

PRIME MINISTER'S AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize and congratulate two P.E.I. educators, Richard Baker and Sandra Dennis. Both are recipients of this year's Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Childhood Education.

Mr. Baker, of Bluefield High School, received the certificate of excellence. A teacher, librarian, and coach, Mr. Baker helps his students to achieve their potential and to find school a positive experience. He has won numerous grants for his school, and engages his students to broaden their horizons.

Ms. Dennis, of Holland College Early Learning Centre, received a certificate of achievement. An educator who keeps her students excited to go to school in the morning, Ms. Dennis works tirelessly to keep parents involved in their children's early education and ensure that everyone feels welcome and enjoys school.

These certificates are evidence of their hard work and dedication to improving our children's education. On behalf of myself and the House, I extend to them our sincerest congratulations.

* * *

WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are counting down the hours to the start of the 2014 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Sochi. I would like to take this opportunity to wish two individuals from my riding of Newmarket—Aurora the very best on their quest for gold.

Figure skater Gabrielle Daleman, one of our youngest Olympians at 16, will be representing Canada as a member of the figure skating team. Huron Heights Warriors football alumni James McNaughton will compete as a member of our exciting four-man bobsled squad. Both earned their spots through determination, hard work, and the desire to be the best that they can possibly be.

To Gabrielle and James, all of Newmarket—Aurora will be encouraging you every step of the way on your historic journey. I wish the best of luck to the entire Canadian Olympic team in Sochi. We are proud of them.

Go, Canada, go!

* * *

● (1405)

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as of July, the U.S. Foreign Account Tax

Statements by Members

Compliance Act, or FACTA, will require all Canadian financial institutions to provide the U.S. government with confidential financial information on Canadians deemed to be U.S. persons. Millions are affected. This includes Canadians who emigrated from the U.S. and their children born in Canada, and Canadian citizens who share accounts, investments or property with an American spouse, as well as small family-owned businesses in Canada with a U.S. family member.

Negotiations are being held behind closed doors with a complete lack of transparency. Our Minister of Finance is on the record saying that the Canada Revenue Agency will not collect U.S. tax liability or penalties on Canadian citizens.

However, we must do more. I call upon the Prime Minister to inform the U.S. President that Canadian financial institutions will not provide any financial disclosures about Canadian citizens to the U.S. Internal Revenue Agency.

This is not only a blatant violation of our constitutional rights and privacy, but also an attack on Canadian sovereignty.

* * *

HEART MONTH

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February is Heart Month in Canada. Remarkable progress has been made tackling cardiovascular disease. In fact, death rates have declined by more than 75% over the past 60 years. This means that 90% of Canadians who have a heart attack and 80% who have a stroke will survive.

While this is great news, we cannot lose sight of the fact that heart disease and stroke are two of the three leading causes of death in Canada. Today, heart disease and stroke take one life every seven minutes.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation, thanks to its 140,000 dedicated volunteers and two million donors from across Canada, continues to make a real difference in reducing deaths and disability from heart disease and stroke.

We all have a part to play in helping Canadians live the healthiest lives possible. We need to support our constituents in their efforts to make the right choices for their health. By supporting the Heart and Stroke Foundation this February, we can make a real difference for all Canadians.

* * *

FRANCINE LALONDE

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the president of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, I rise to pay tribute to our former colleague and long-time member of Parliament, Francine Lalonde, who passed away from cancer on January 17.

Madame Lalonde was the association's vice-president from June 2006 to March 2008 and stayed involved as a member of the executive committee thereafter.

Statements by Members

I travelled to Europe with Madame Lalonde on numerous occasions. She was always very well informed on the issues affecting relations between Canada and the European Union. I can say without hesitation that she served both Quebec and Canada well.

While she and I did not always agree on matters of Canadian politics, she was an able and engaged colleague when it came to our dealings with our elected counterparts in Europe.

On behalf of the members of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, I wish to express my condolences to Madame Lalonde's family and friends.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC WINTER CARNIVAL

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw everyone's attention to the fact that the Quebec winter carnival night parade will be taking place on February 8 in my riding, Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

For over 30 years now, this colourful event has brought the families of the greater Quebec City area together, as they join in celebration of what our part of the country is so well-know for—winter and snow. People of all ages are invited to come and delight in the spectacle of floats, dance troupes, marching bands and other entertainers who will no doubt make this a magical event. Of course, Bonhomme Carnaval will be there to greet everyone and warm their hearts, despite the frigid temperatures we have been having this year.

I would like to congratulate the carnival's organizers, as well as all the participants involved in putting on the evening's event, a tradition that we are so proud of. I invite everyone from Charlesbourg and all the Bonhomme fans close by to come out and take part in the largest winter carnival in the world. Greetings, Bonhomme, and see you soon.

* * *

●(1410)

[English]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AWARDS

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize 36 pre-eminent Canadian scientists, engineers, and industrial partners from across Canada who are in Ottawa today. Tonight they will be awarded top honours for their achievements.

They have been selected by their peers to receive prestigious prizes from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council for keeping Canada at the forefront of discovery and innovation.

The highest honour, the Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for Science and Engineering, Canada's version of the Nobel Prize, is awarded to Dr. W. Ford Doolittle of Dalhousie University, who is one of the world's top molecular geneticists. Dr. Doolittle will receive \$1 million in research funding over the next five years.

I invite all members to join me in congratulating these award recipients.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tourists spend billions of dollars in northern Ontario supporting thousands of jobs. Clearly, that does not matter much to the government, which cannot stop penny-pinching on the backs of small businesses that are the heart of the region's tourism economy.

Last year, a showdown with the province threatened to cancel the season for the *Chi-Cheemaun* ferry and Manitoulin Island tourism.

This year they are blaming CN after killing a subsidy that offset some of the losses from the Algoma Central Railway's passenger service from Hearst to Sault Ste. Marie.

[Translation]

It is unbelievable. Although the government recently invested in upgrading rail passenger cars, now it is forcing those same cars off the rails.

[English]

Most tourist operations in northern Ontario are small and family-run. They work especially hard and do not deserve last minute roadblocks from the Conservatives. Just as they are drumming up business for the summer, they are forced to wonder if they will have a season at all.

Why will the government not sit down with the stakeholders to find a way to ensure a long healthy future for the ACR's passenger service and the communities, including the town of Oba, and the businesses and people who rely on it?

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in celebration of Black History Month. Over the month of February, events will be held across Canada to commemorate the exceptional contribution of black Canadians to building our great nation.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War I and the 75th anniversary of the beginning of World War II. This year, through the theme "Proud of our History", our government pays tribute to the contributions of black Canadian soldiers during these wars and other military campaigns.

The commemorations will also reflect on two historical communities, Africville in Halifax and Hogan's Alley in Vancouver. Both of these communities played significant roles in black Canadian history.

I encourage all Canadians to visit cic.gc.ca/blackhistorymonth to learn more about these communities and the many inspirational stories of heroism of those who proudly served our country, and to participate in the many celebrations throughout February in honour of Black History Month.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's Sherbrooke declaration is in direct conflict with the Clarity Act and a Supreme Court ruling on separation. Roy Romanow said over the weekend that a vote of 50% plus one is not acceptable to break up Canada. He is not the only senior NDP to speak with clarity.

Former NDP leader Ed Broadbent stated:

I believe a majority of 50% plus one, even if clear, is morally insufficient in deciding to break up any established democracy, including Canada.

The NDP member for Winnipeg Centre said this about the Clarity Act:

...let sleeping dogs lie. I voted in favour of it, and I still feel strongly that it was the right thing to do.

The NDP member for Toronto—Danforth has introduced a bill to repeal the Clarity Act. Why will he not put his bill before the House for a full debate and vote? Is it because he and his leader know that their position is opposed by senior members of their own caucus and party?

Canadians deserve better. The NDP leader should listen to Mr. Broadbent, Mr. Romanow, and others and reject the 50% plus one position and put unity first.

* * *

•(1415)

LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning the Liberal justice critic told CBC Radio that a survey I sent to my constituents is fearmongering, because it reported the outcome of the Liberal plan to legalize marijuana. I noted that the Liberal leader had smoked weed as an MP while voting for tougher penalties against drug dealers; that the Liberal leader had promoted his plan to school kids in a school; that the Liberal policy is to legalize pot; and that the Liberals plan to sell marijuana in stores.

The Liberals do not want Canadians to know what will happen if pot is legalized, yet I take their leader at face value when he said, "My vision of what the legalization of marijuana would look like is loosely based on how we control alcohol".

There are only two examples of how government regulates the sale of controlled substances: alcohol and tobacco. What other models are there? Alcohol is sold in stores all over Canada. Under the Liberal plan, pot too will be available in local stores, and if it is not, why legalize it?

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has already earned a spot in the Conservatives' hall of sheer incompetence for his handling of the F-35 fiasco and for believing that Haiti's problem is the garbage in the streets. Even though his incompetence is legendary, he continues to be rewarded by the Prime Minister for who knows what reason.

Oral Questions

This minister's most recent exploits are the closure of veterans' service offices and the insults he hurled at the men and women who fought for our country. After shedding crocodile tears last week, the minister still believes that veterans' complaints are all a union ploy. For heaven's sake. He still believes that closing these offices will not result in cuts to services. The reality is that there have been massive cuts in his department.

Veterans deserve better than the minister's wishful thinking. After everything they have done for us, they deserve much better than Conservative MPs who are trying to save money at their expense.

* * *

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's proposed unity bill in fact does the opposite. Our government supports the Clarity Act. The NDP's so-called unity bill supports a lower threshold that would make it easier to break up our country.

Former NDP premier and elder NDP statesman, Roy Romanow, has defied the NDP leader in coming out against the bill. We congratulate him for standing up for Canada. The unity bill would reopen old wounds and make it easier to break up our great country, an objective that, clearly, the NDP is working toward.

All Canadians are pleased to see the Bloc Québécois reduced to three seats, but it is a shame that they can now count on the NDP leader and his caucus to undermine the Clarity Act.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

VETERANS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Veterans Affairs was forced to apologize after he insulted veterans. However, over the weekend, he said that he had done nothing wrong and that the whole thing was nothing more than a union plot against him.

If the minister claims to have done nothing wrong, why did he apologize last week?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this government has a strong record when it comes to working, defending, providing benefits and services, and investing in our veterans. We have now created an additional 600 points of service. We will continue to work hard on behalf of our veterans.

Oral Questions

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs said that he “[did] nothing wrong” when he told off a group of veterans. He said that he considers demands that he resign over his conduct to be a “badge of honour”. A big strong record indeed.

Why did the minister retract his apology?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the real question here is, why is it that the NDP has opposed virtually every single initiative that our government has brought forward to help veterans. These are simple benefits, such as cutting their grass, shovelling their snow, cleaning their homes, preparing meals at their homes, or delivering meals to their front doors?

* * *

● (1420)

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of National Defence could not confirm that the Communications Security Establishment had never spied on Canadians in our airports. The minister avoided answering by talking about a culture of respect for the law and for the privacy of Canadians. That is not an answer.

Has CSEC collected information on Canadians in our airports?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that certainly is a mischaracterization of my comments on Friday.

What I did refer to on Friday, which I will refer to again, is the independent commissioner for CSEC who released a statement on Friday that said, “Past commissioners have reviewed CSEC metadata activities and have found them to be in compliance with the law and to be subject to comprehensive and satisfactory measures to protect the privacy of Canadians”.

That should have the support of everyone.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve honest answers, but instead the minister is once again evading simple questions about the activities and oversight of Canada's national security agency.

On Friday, and again today, the minister refused to say whether CSEC had been conducting domestic operations. Canadians are worried that their government is spying on them.

Will the minister now tell us if Communications Security Establishment Canada has been collecting information on Canadians at our airports, yes or no?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just does not get it. That is why we have an independent commissioner, to have a look at these activities.

Again, I refer the member to the statement that was issued on Friday by the independent commissioner and what the commissioner has said. He praised CSEC's chiefs who have spared no effort to

install within CSEC a culture of respect for the law and for the privacy of Canadians. What is his problem with that?

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, that is evasion, pure and simple.

We are not asking what the commissioner for CSEC has said in the past, or on Friday. We are asking the Minister of National Defence what he knows now. Canadians deserve answers and they are not getting them from the minister or the government.

Was CSEC collecting personal information at Canadian airports, and did it share this information with other foreign countries?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that this individual is required to be a former justice, a former judge, or a supernumerary judge. These are respected individuals who have taken on that task. Again, these commissioners have come forward and they have indicated that there is a culture of respect and compliance with the laws of this country.

I would refer the member to the reports of the commissioners over the years, who have all reported favourably on CSEC's activities.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians continue to be shocked and concerned at revelations that CSEC is monitoring Canadians. Just how far will the government go in its surveillance activities? The Minister of National Defence can play with words, as he has just been doing. However, when Canadian citizens transferring through airports and using Wi-Fi have their metadata collected, that, simply put, is spying.

Will the minister just admit to the government's involvement in these illegal activities of monitoring the personal information of Canadians?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker, because that would be ridiculous.

Again, what I would point out to this individual is the statement put out by the commissioner on Friday. He found that CSEC's metadata activities are in compliance with the law and are subject to comprehensive and satisfactory measures to protect the privacy of all Canadians.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us go to the statement of the commissioner in his annual report tabled in June. The commissioner, in that report, stated on page 20, “However, a small number of records suggested the possibility that some activities may have been directed at Canadians, contrary to law”.

Could the minister tell Canadians, did he not know of these activities because he was wilfully blind, or did he or his predecessor actually authorize CSEC activities monitoring Canadians under section 273.65 of the National Defence Act? Which is it?

● (1425)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the commissioner, in his 2011-12 report, said that the focus of CSEC activity is foreign intelligence. In that report that the hon. member mentioned, he highlights that all reviewed CSEC activities were authorized and carried out in accordance with the law. Again, what is his problem?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not happy to learn that Canada's spy agency is spying on them.

No one has the right to monitor the movements of honest Canadians or to know what they are writing in their emails. Someone needs to monitor the people who are doing the monitoring, which is clearly not happening right now. The Liberal Party has long been calling for the creation of a parliamentary committee to oversee CSEC's activities.

When will the minister take action?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, CSEC's foreign intelligence mandate specifically dictates that its activities be directed at foreign entities, not at Canadians or anyone in this country. It is in the business of protecting Canadians, and that should have the support of the Liberal Party.

* * *

[Translation]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of State for Democratic Reform tell us why he did not consult the Chief Electoral Officer when he was coming up with his plan to reorganize Elections Canada?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the member wants to ask questions based on facts that are not true.

The truth is that I had an excellent meeting with the CEO of Elections Canada, and I read his reports thoroughly before we drafted the bill that will be introduced.

[English]

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, consulting Elections Canada on changes should have been step one, if the government were actually serious. We know there were no consultations. A spokesperson for Elections Canada said the Chief Electoral Officer was not consulted on the bill.

The Minister of State (Democratic Reform) says he is proposing a major overhaul to Elections Canada. These will affect every Canadian. Can the minister tell us why he failed to speak to the country's top elections expert, the Chief Electoral Officer, or explain how he thinks he consulted with that person?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is false. I did meet with the CEO of Elections Canada some time ago, and we had a terrific and a very long meeting, at which I listened carefully to all of his ideas. The fair elections act would keep everyday citizens in charge of democracy by putting special interests on the sidelines and rule breakers out of the game altogether. It will give law enforcement sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand, and it will crack down on and close loopholes to big money in politics.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that delaying this bill as long as he has is deliberately reducing the likelihood of any changes being allowed to it.

Let us remember when, in 2008, this minister claimed that Elections Canada singled out the Conservative Party for that party's in-and-out election expenses scandal. He also claimed that Elections Canada invited opposition parties to a raid on the Conservative Party headquarters.

Now we should trust him to reshape Elections Canada. Does the minister still believe that Elections Canada targeted the poor Conservative Party?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fair elections bill will keep everyday Canadians in charge of democracy by putting special interests on the sidelines and pushing rule breakers out of the game altogether.

It will close loopholes to big money, and it will give law enforcement sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

* * *

● (1430)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in another striking example of Conservative mismanagement, we have learned that the RCMP is considering even more significant cuts to essential national police services.

These are cuts that will frustrate police investigations and further delay prosecution of criminals. Instead of helping protect Canadians, Conservatives are forcing more budget cuts on the RCMP.

Keeping the public safe should be job one for any government, so why is the government trying to balance the budget on the back of essential police and public safety services?

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to giving our front-line police officers the tools that they need to do their jobs.

We are taking steps to streamline the delivery of forensic lab services. The level of service will not be impacted. In fact, by consolidating there, we will be improving on the backlog.

The Auditor General recommended a more efficient system in her 2011 report, and despite the NDP objections, that is exactly what this Conservative government is doing.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives cut police services, then tried to convince people that theirs is the law-and-order party. Honestly,

Oral Questions

Services such as the Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, the National DNA Data Bank of Canada, the Canadian Bomb Data Centre and the national sex offender registry are critical to keeping our communities safe. Our communities will pay the price for Conservative cuts.

What is their plan for maintaining the integrity of RCMP services despite these cuts?

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find that question very rich, considering the NDP has opposed every single measure that we have tried to implement to improve the services for all law enforcement across this country.

Shamefully, the New Democrats have voted against different measures that we have implemented, including the Safe Streets and Communities Act and Combatting Terrorism Act. In fact, while I was a member of the immigration committee, this NDP member and the Liberals adamantly opposed and obstructed a bill that would revoke the citizenship of convicted terrorists.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a ceremony commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Korean War is planned for Thursday in Rimouski. The Bas-Saint-Laurent Royal Canadian Legion had asked me to take part and hand out certificates to veterans of that conflict. However, it appears that Veterans Affairs Canada told the Legion that it had to replace me with an official from the department. I informed the minister of this situation in writing.

Can the minister confirm whether there are any directives stipulating that opposition members must be replaced by a departmental official during ceremonies?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to speak to the member opposite if he would like to bring the issue to my attention. I would convey that to the minister and provide an appropriate answer.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister has retracted his apology and claims he did nothing wrong. He lost the faith of veterans and he must resign.

Retired Sergeant Major Barry Westholm tore up his Conservative Party membership this weekend; even Conservative Party members are disgusted by the government's lack of respect for veterans.

Will the minister reinstate those closed veterans offices and start giving Canada's heroes the respect that they deserve?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have invested almost \$5 billion since coming into office, in additional funding to help veterans and to provide them with services and benefits.

Out of the eight district offices that are being merged with the Service Canada locations, five are in the same building and two are within one kilometre. There is only one office that is approximately four kilometres away. In each one of these locations, we have made sure that there is a fully-trained VAC employee present at the Service Canada location to assist.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs really has a lot of nerve. Last week, the minister gave a half-hearted apology, not because he had insulted our great veterans, but because he had arrived late. This past weekend, the minister showed us just how sincere his apology was by saying that he has done nothing wrong. Worse still, he considers all the calls for his resignation as a badge of honour. Does that not seem incredibly arrogant? Will the minister offer an unconditional apology and admit all of his mistakes?

• (1435)

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure members the Minister of Veterans Affairs is extremely committed. He is dedicated to helping veterans in his portfolio.

As a matter of fact, all members of our government, all members on this side of the House, work every single day to speak to veterans, to listen to their issues, to listen to their concerns.

We will continue to do that, even though the NDP and the Liberals oppose every single measure we bring forward to help our brave men and women who are veterans.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us see. A year ago, the member for Calgary West fell asleep during a veterans committee and then accused the veterans presenting of being friends of Vladimir Putin.

Then, we have a minister who displayed rudeness to veterans who came to the Hill.

The other day, we had the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke say, “the stigma that has to be overcome is a stigma within themselves”, when referring to our men and women in the military who are prematurely released before their tenth year.

We know that over 200 military personnel were removed from the military because of their post-traumatic stress disorder.

Does the Minister of National Defence agree with the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, or is the stigma within the Conservatives themselves?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take all issues with respect to the mental health and the well-being of our men and women in uniform and our veterans very seriously. As a government, we have invested over \$100 million more into health care. We have almost 400 full-time mental health professionals. We have to make this a priority and we will continue to make it a priority. We all have a stake in that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are closing veterans' service centres and laying off nearly a quarter of the staff at Veterans Affairs Canada. At the same time, they are expanding their ministerial regional offices and hiring more and more staff for those offices. On top of that, the Minister of Veterans Affairs insults the veterans who come to see him. Why are the Conservatives cutting services to our heroes while ignoring the consequences?

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this sounds very rich coming from the Liberal Party over there, whose critic for veterans affairs, on Remembrance Day, disrespected our brave men and women and veterans. Let me quote what he said about giving money to veterans:

...that's like hanging a case of beer in front of a drunk.... They get a lump sum, they go and spend it, either trying to buy a house or buying a fast car or spending it on booze or addiction.

They need to fire that critic right now.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am asking the government to listen to Canada's veterans and stop arguing with them. These are men and women who respect authority, follow orders, and put themselves in harm's way for us, for Canadians.

Last week, a veteran told me he is losing services at his local office. He waited one hour on the phone to talk to Service Canada and then he was told, sorry, it could not help him with that.

We owe Canada's veterans respect. We owe them better than this. When will the government do the right thing and reverse the budget and service cuts to our veterans?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure this House our government is committed to helping and investing in services and benefits to help Canada's veterans.

The question is: Why is it that the Liberal Party over there has opposed virtually every single measure we have brought forward to help Canada's veterans, almost \$5 billion in additional funding since taking office in 2006?

They can continue to oppose it. We will continue to stand up for Canada's—

• (1440)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary says that veterans will be able to get their services a kilometre down the road. What they will be able to get a kilometre down the road is one former Veterans Affairs counsellor

taking over the responsibility of 17 counsellors who lost their jobs when the Conservatives shut down the office.

We are able to debate freely in this chamber because of these veterans' sacrifice. When will the government give them the respect they have earned and the services they deserve?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems like it is only the Liberals and New Democrats who do not get the math.

We have created 600 additional new points of service to help Canada's veterans right across this great nation.

There are hundreds of cities and towns across this country where veterans did not receive the services. Now they will be able to go to Service Canada, to that point of service, and will have altogether 650 locations across this country where they can obtain information.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families are finding it difficult to make ends meet.

Middle-class Canadian workers are poorer today than they were 35 years ago, and they are being crushed by debt. They need action in the upcoming budget, not just promises, as in the throne speech.

Will the Conservatives support the NDP motion to limit ATM fees and include this policy in the budget?

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will have to wait patiently until February 11, only eight more sleeps, to know what will be in the budget.

Unlike the New Democrats who have constantly talked about hiking tax rates for consumers, our Conservative government is continually taking action to protect consumers.

We have banned unsolicited credit card cheques. We have required clear disclosures around credit agreements. We have ensured that prepayment of credit cards never expires.

After eight more sleeps, there may be more.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister of state can make light of this, but even the Minister of Finance knows that this is a legitimate problem and has said so, especially so for seniors, students, and persons with disabilities. He just refuses to do anything about it.

Oral Questions

There have been eight consecutive budgets and no action. Now the budget once again is around the corner. Will the government finally take action to expand help for small business, to reverse the damaging cuts it has made, and to help vulnerable Canadians by capping ATM fees? Will it do that?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has provided record support for low-income Canadians. For example, we have removed one million low-income Canadians, 380,000 of whom were seniors, from the tax rolls.

We have increased the amount Canadians can earn without paying any income tax. We have created the landmark working income tax benefit to support low-income Canadians who work.

As highlighted in the Speech from the Throne, our government will take further action to expand no-cost banking options available to Canadians.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in cities across Ontario, the automotive industry supports 90,000 good, middle-class jobs. These are jobs put at risk by Conservative economic mismanagement.

A well-negotiated deal with South Korea could create real benefits for Canada, but a bad deal could destroy thousands of good jobs. For once, will the minister stand up for fair trade and make sure Canada's auto sector benefits from any new trade deal with South Korea?

• (1445)

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, and the House should know, the negotiations remain ongoing between Canada and South Korea. The United States, the European Union, and Australia have all signed trade agreements with South Korea. As a result, we have seen a \$1.5 billion loss in exports from Canada. Therefore, we are moving to ensure the one in five jobs attributable to trade are there for Canadians.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, never has a government been more proud of being such bad negotiators. The last time the Conservatives tried to negotiate an agreement with Asia, we ended up with the Canada-China FIPA, an agreement so bad, so flawed that the government is too ashamed to ratify it.

Canadian families that depend on the auto sector deserve a better answer than that. Let me ask again. What specifically is the minister doing to ensure that 90,000 good, middle-class jobs are not bargained away in negotiations with South Korea?

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is sad to see the NDP multi-generational opposition to trade, particularly when one in five jobs are attributable to trade.

Our negotiations with South Korea will ensure that there is a level playing field, and non-tariff barriers will be specifically addressed so our world-class industries, including the world-class auto industry in Ontario, will thrive.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to keeping our streets and communities safe. My constituents are very concerned that the Supreme Court of Canada recently struck down certain sections of the Criminal Code related to prostitution. I believe prostitution is harmful to our communities and facilitates the exploitation of vulnerable people, particularly women.

Could the Minister of Justice please inform the House about the actions our government intends to take to respond to the Supreme Court decision?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question but also for her outstanding work to protect woman and girls in our country.

I share her concern over the Supreme Court's decision to strike down some of Canada's prostitution laws. In fact, the court did suspend the effects for some 12 months, giving Parliament time to fill that void. We are currently reviewing legislative options across the country on the harms of prostitution, particularly the exploitation of women and girls. We intend to provide assistance and prevention measures, as well as legislate in this area. We believe, unlike the Liberal Party, that doing nothing is not an option, and we will table new laws and programming to protect Canadians in the future.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Commonwealth Fund has published the results of its health policy survey, and they are rather alarming. Canada is at the bottom of the list in several categories, including the number of people with access to a family physician and wait times in emergency departments and for appointments with their own family physician.

Will the government quickly take note of this report, seriously study its recommendations and work with the provinces to improve our health care system?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we co-operate on an ongoing basis with provinces. In fact, I just got off the phone with one of our provincial health ministers with whom I work very closely.

Oral Questions

The member should also know that, while there are areas in which Canada can improve, there are also areas where Canada is number one in the world. There are always improvements that can be made, which is why we must collaborate.

The provinces are very thankful for what now is long-term, very stable, predictable funding that will reach up to \$40 billion by the end of the decade. That is record funding to support the provinces and territories. In our field, of course, we are investing \$1 billion in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, supporting over 13,000 research projects, ongoing, right now.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that does not mean anything to the more than half of Canadians who cannot get a same day or next day appointment with their family doctor. That is way behind the international standard. Even the best performing province is behind the U.S., which is second last on the list.

Because of this poor performance, 50% of Canadians are ending up in emergency rooms for cases that could have been treated by a family doctor. When will the government act on this and work with the provinces to give all Canadians access to family doctors?

•(1450)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, beating up on the provinces is not the answer. The answer is to work closely with them to make sure we support them in the areas we are able to.

I am sure the member knows that according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information's most recent reports, in 2012 we saw the highest level of physicians per capita in Canadian history. We are no longer seeing the brain drain of medical professionals to the U.S. We are seeing people return to Canada, which is a positive thing.

We will continue to work with the provinces to ensure that we do have enough physicians available to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister should not hide behind the provinces. This is about a lack of federal leadership.

The fact is, the Conservatives have also abandoned anti-smoking advertising. Instead, since 2007, the government has focused its tobacco advertising on contraband tobacco. This is very odd, as it happens to be the exact same priority as the lobbyists of big tobacco.

Why has the minister abandoned important anti-smoking advertising? Is it because she is bowing to the demands of well-connected Conservative lobbyists? Is that what she is doing?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I happen to be a vehement anti-smoking advocate. I can reassure the member that if there are any opportunities to close any existing loopholes the member might see, she can come and speak to me, because I would happy to look at them.

The reality is that smoking now in Canada is at an all-time low, dropping from 22% to 16% over the last decade. A lot is in response to not only advertising campaigns but to changes we have made to

packaging. A lot of that has been targeted at our youth, and we have seen huge success.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the tobacco companies got everything they wanted from this government. It is not surprising, though, given who was doing the lobbying: Ryan Sparrow, communications manager for Philip Morris, a former senior spokesman for the Conservative campaign; Keith Beardsley, a lobbyist for JTI Macdonald Corporation and the Prime Minister's former deputy chief of staff; and Chad Rogers, a lobbyist for Benson & Hedges, who is known to have ties to the Conservative Party.

Clearly, it is more lucrative for these companies to fight smuggling than it is to fight smoking. However, is that a good policy in and of itself, or did the Conservatives simply give in to their friends in the tobacco lobby?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should be proud and aware that Canada actually has one of the strongest anti-smoking regimes in the world. Smoking is at an all-time low in Canada.

Frankly, when we look at the cost of smoking to the health care system, I am always open to looking at more ways in which we can cut down on tobacco use and encourage people to get off tobacco and find a more healthy lifestyle.

This government is proud of the legislation we have introduced to prevent tobacco companies from using flavours or additives in cigarettes that appeal to children and in prohibiting tobacco companies from advertising in magazines or any other—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources accused President Obama of ragging the Keystone XL puck. The minister unfortunately does not seem to realize that he is the one that is offside, and therefore, the President has to rag the puck until the minister gets serious about GHG emissions.

Therefore, when will the minister get onside with greenhouse gas regulations? When will he stop delaying the game? When will he allow President Obama to put the Keystone XL puck in the net?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, aside from misrepresenting what I said, the member also misunderstands what the final environmental impact statement on Keystone said. It concluded that if the project is not built, GHG emissions would rise by 28% to 42%. Therefore, opposing this project would not only block tens of thousands of Canadian jobs, it would also exacerbate the problem of climate change.

We are working with the Americans on a whole series of issues, and we will continue to do that. This project is ready, from an environmental point of view, for approval.

Oral Questions

●(1455)

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a year of rhetoric and another multimillion dollar advertising blitz, the Canada jobs grant is a complete failure. Worse yet, current labour market agreements will expire in 56 days, flushing \$300 million away from provincial unemployment programs. The provinces have a plan, but they need a real partner.

Will the Conservative government get off their fake action plan and work with those of us who really want to create jobs and ensure that they have a positive future for middle-class Canadians?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would thank the member for the question, except that it has very little to do with reality. The truth is that it was this government that created the labour market agreements and the half-billion dollar annual transfer to provinces in addition to billions of dollars in additional spending that we offer in skills development and job training.

We have been having good conversations with the provinces about how we can ensure that they continue with some of their good programs while at the same time moving toward more employer-led training, where there is more employer investment in skills development and where jobs are guaranteed at the end of the training. It makes a lot of sense, and perhaps that is why the Liberal Party does not support it.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, VIA Rail service in the Gaspé has been suspended for six months now.

CN's announcement that it is going to abandon a section of rail line in New Brunswick will turn the temporary suspension into a permanent closure. Both the Quebec and New Brunswick governments have spoken out in support of our rail system.

What about the Conservative government?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, VIA Rail is an independent crown corporation. As such, it is responsible for its own operating decisions.

As the member has pointed out, CN has indicated its desire to discontinue the line in New Brunswick. It is a private company. It is a private decision based upon their business practices. VIA will still have the ability to have the Montreal to Halifax run through a different part of New Brunswick.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder how much that is going to cost.

[Translation]

Not a single one of the eight Conservative MPs from New Brunswick is defending the province's rail service. It is time to clean house.

Thousands of people in eastern Canada will find themselves without rail service.

Instead of opening ministers' offices left and right and spending—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement: He is going to blow.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Stand back, he is going to blow.

An hon. member: Breathe.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the member speaking.

Please continue.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, it is pretty hard to breathe when they want to take everything away from the Atlantic. It is pretty hard to breathe when we have members of Parliament who do not listen to the interests of New Brunswick. It is pretty hard to breathe when we see the Atlantic going down the tubes.

My question is to the minister. When is she going to get up for the interests of New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that my response will be founded more on fact than it will be founded on emotion, but what I will tell the member is that CN has offered up for sale that portion of the line that the hon. member has indicated is up for discontinuance. It is up for private sector cooperation. It is also there for the province or the municipalities to purchase the line. If there is passenger and freight service on that line, I am sure somebody will step up and take advantage of the opportunity.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an amazing country. We have charitable organizations at work providing crucial support to our communities. In my own city of Calgary, I am proud to say there are 2,200 registered charities, and they provide important things like support for individuals, like helping new immigrants to resettle, like providing sports programs for our kids.

Now, charities cannot continue their work without donations. Will the Minister of National Revenue please tell us what this government is doing to promote donations from generous Canadians?

●(1500)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Calgary Centre for the opportunity to recognize the good work of Canadian charities.

Oral Questions

In economic action plan 2013, this government proudly introduced the first-time donor super credit. This provides an extra 25% to first-time donors in addition to existing federal and provincial credits. In 2012 tax relief from charitable donations was over \$2.9 billion. We want to see that number grow so that Canadian charities can continue to provide the very welcomed support for our communities.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, reports say a pro-democracy demonstrator in Ukraine was quite literally crucified at the hands of the Yanukovich regime.

The world needs to be more emphatic in its outrage. Canadian visa restrictions on unnamed officials who may not seek to come to Canada anyway are probably not sufficient. Are tough personal sanctions targeted precisely at Yanukovich and his henchmen being developed? What work has been done so far with the U.S. and other allies to devise a plan to freeze their assets and prevent their foreign travel?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously we are watching with horror what we see going across Ukraine. We are deeply concerned about the actions of the senior leadership in this regard. That is why the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration placed visa restrictions and visa bans on a number of senior officials who we believe hold some responsibility for these actions.

I can tell the member opposite that we are working closely with the United States and with the European Union and others on what our next steps will be to crack down on the deplorable actions that we see taking place in Ukraine.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two organizations in my riding, Carrefour jeunesse emploi and the Community Futures Development Corporation, are facing lengthy processing times for their applications to the skills link program.

It seems to be a common issue across Quebec. Projects could be in jeopardy, and our youth will suffer the consequences.

Will the Minister of Employment clean up his department so that young people in Berthier—Maskinongé and elsewhere can access the labour market?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has made unprecedented investments in job training and in job training for youth across our country in particular. We are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on this. I am not up on each of the thousands of applications for funding, but I will talk to my officials.

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Bell Canada reported that the information of over 20,000 users was compromised in a cyberattack. As more and more day-to-day activities of Canadians migrate online, it becomes more important than ever to secure information online. Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety please tell this House what the government is doing to keep Canadians safe online?

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was our government that brought in Canada's first cybersecurity strategy. Canadians should know that the previous Liberal government took no action on this file. In fact, they then proceeded to vote against this initiative with the help of their NDP buddies.

Our government takes cybersecurity extremely seriously and operates on the advice of security experts. In fact, our government recently made significant investments of \$245 million in our cybersecurity strategy designed to protect consumers and defend against electronic threats, hacking, and cyberespionage.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' irresponsible cuts to health care for refugees are endangering not only asylum seekers with serious illnesses, but also pregnant women and children.

The situation is such a big problem that doctors were forced to dispute these changes in court, and the provinces decided to take on the costs for humanitarian reasons.

Will the minister finally listen to his partners and reverse these dangerous and inhumane cuts?

● (1505)

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to listen to the Canadian taxpayers and voters who were very passionate in calling for a reform of our asylum system and who are very happy to see an 87% decrease in refugee claims from safe countries. That is a good outcome.

We have never prohibited refugees with refugee status from receiving generous health care benefits, but fraudulent claimants should not benefit from the generosity of Canadian taxpayers.

*Routine Proceedings***ETHICS**

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the government quietly announced that Conrad Black was being removed from the Privy Council, but it remained completely silent about another problem appointment to a select group that, in theory, is supposed to advise the Prime Minister.

Arthur Porter, the former president of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, who still refuses to be held accountable on charges of fraud, is still a member of the Privy Council.

I would remind members that he was appointed by the Prime Minister himself, with the support of the NDP and the Liberals.

When will the Prime Minister kick Arthur Porter out of the Privy Council?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I addressed this on Friday. Proceedings are under way, and it would be inappropriate to comment any further at this time.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, I joined the northwestern Ontario veterans to mourn the closure of the Thunder Bay veterans office. Thunder Bay—Superior North and everyone in my riding stand firmly behind our veterans and against this reckless decision, but Conservatives closed eight Canadian centres on Friday.

In northwestern Ontario alone, over 2,000 veterans will find themselves without support. Will the minister reverse this awful decision, or will he resign for his shameful treatment of our veterans?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has created 600 additional new points of service across this great nation. The member opposite mentioned Thunder Bay. I can assure him that the Service Canada office is within only four kilometres of the district office that was there. We will make sure that we have a fully trained VAC employee present, along with Service Canada employees, to assist veterans in need.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, last September an 18-year-old man attempted to board an international flight out of the Edmonton International Airport with a homemade explosive device. The device was discovered and was suspected to contain narcotics, but when the drug tests came back negative, CATSA actually attempted to return the bomb to the passenger, who did not want it.

The RCMP was not informed of this event for several days, and the Minister of Transport was not made aware until several months later. Can the Minister of Transport please explain to the House what remedial actions have been taken and what additional training has

been provided to her Keystone security cops to ensure the safety of the air travelling public?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, the safety of Canadians and the travelling public is always going to be our first priority. Indeed, just to fix some of the facts that were misquoted in the question, first of all, I was made aware of the incident when the RCMP was made aware of it, as was my staff, in September. We immediately directed officials to talk to CATSA to review its procedures and processes to ensure that this kind of thing does not happen again.

Obviously, it has gone through the court process and the individual has been charged, but the reality is that he should never have been allowed to get on the plane, and we have corrected that with CATSA.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of a delegation from Yukon, led by the Hon. Darrell Pasloski, the Premier. The delegation includes the following ministers: the Hon. Elaine Taylor, the Hon. Brad Cathers, the Hon. Wade Istchenko, and the Hon. Scott Kent.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1510)

[*English*]

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Multiculturalism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I am pleased to present, in both official languages, the annual report of the operations of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act for 2012 and 2013.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

PETITIONS

CANADA POST

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, petitions are flooding in from people who are concerned about Canada Post and have a sincere desire to save Canada Post because they know that the changes that were announced will mean the loss of 6,000 to 8,000 jobs and that five million households will lose home delivery over the next five years. They also know that the cuts will hurt seniors and disabled Canadians the most. They are concerned about the drastic increase in postage rates. As a result, they call upon the Government of Canada to reverse the cuts to services recently announced by Canada Post and to look instead for ways to modernize operations.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure today of presenting a petition on behalf of the residents of Thunder Bay and Kenora who are concerned about the current status of the Experimental Lakes Area.

They are quite worried as to whether this pioneer in whole ecosystem research, not only in Canada but worldwide, will be transferred in a timely fashion. The centre does very important work on ecosystems and freshwater environments, and without adequate resources this centre's research will be lost. Therefore, they ask for recognition by the current government to continue that work and transfer the ELA in a timely and efficient manner.

UKRAINE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition signed by many concerned Manitobans in regard to what is happening in Ukraine today. The people of Ukraine have become outraged with the ongoing protests, which have proven to be violent and deadly. The petitioners are asking for Parliament to stand with the Ukrainian people during this difficult time and to continue to forcefully oppose all efforts to repress their rights and freedoms.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure and an honour to present two petitions today, the majority of signatories to both being residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The first petition is primarily from residents of Pender Island, and some from Victoria. They are calling upon the government to refuse the Enbridge northern gateway pipeline. It is a risky pipeline and tanker scheme. The overwhelming consensus of the community members in my riding, based on numerous town hall meetings through the month of January, is to say no to this project.

• (1515)

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of Galiano Island and Victoria in support of my private member's bill, Bill C-442. I am pleased that it has now been set down for second reading. It is the bill I will put forward as a private member's bill for a vote in early March. These residents call upon the House assembled to create in a non-partisan

Business of Supply

fashion a national Lyme disease strategy to deal with this dreadful illness.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ATM FEES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: On debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. The member has seven minutes remaining on his speech.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to rise again to complete my response to the NDP motion being debated here today regarding ATM fees.

Our government has a solid record on introducing measures to protect consumers, but our job is not done. Perhaps the NDP missed our government's recent Speech from the Throne. If the NDP members had paid attention, they would have noticed a number of commitments by our government to further enhance affordability for Canadians.

These include ending pay-to-pay policies, so customers will not have to pay extra to receive paper bills; expanding no-cost basic banking services; working with the provinces and territories to crack down on predatory payday lenders by supporting ongoing efforts to make consumer protection regimes more robust; empowering consumers by requiring disclosure of the cost of different payment methods; and taking further action to end geographic price discrimination against Canadians.

Clearly it is this Conservative government that puts consumers first. While we are the ones who are actually finding solutions to the issues facing consumers, all the NDP can do is oppose measures that are actually helping consumers.

Business of Supply

For once, it would be refreshing to see the NDP actually support consumers by standing up and voting for our consumer protection measures. That is why I find it somewhat ironic that the NDP is so concerned about what is in the budget. History has proven that all they end up doing is voting against it anyway. They continually vote against our positive economic measures to support job creation and economic growth, measures that have made Canada the second-best country in the world in which to do business, according to Bloomberg. Canada has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio and the best employment record in the G7, thanks to solid policies.

The New Democrats are not fooling anyone. We know that all they want to do is engage in reckless spending and impose higher taxes on Canadians. Not only would they impose a \$20 billion carbon tax that would raise the price of everything, but the leader of the NDP is determined to impose new taxes on job-creating businesses. How will this help consumers?

If New Democrats were actually concerned about consumers, they would not be advocating for higher taxes that would make life less affordable and cost Canadians their jobs.

Thankfully, our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians: helping to create jobs and supporting economic growth. That is why economic action plan 2014 will help grow Canada's economy and create jobs, while keeping taxes low and returning to balanced budgets.

While New Democrats do not understand the concept of balanced budgets, they should know that it was our government's prudent fiscal management that helped Canada weather the 2008 global economic recession better than any other country in the G7.

Balanced budgets keep taxes and interest rates low. They help attract investment and they give us the fiscal room to manoeuvre to ensure sustainable social programs for generations to come. Balanced budgets signal stability, and there can be no real affordability without stability.

Our economic action plan has seen Canada through the worst recession since the Great Depression. Despite this, we cannot become complacent. Economic action plan 2014 is the next chapter in our government's long-term plan to strengthen the Canadian economy in an uncertain world and create jobs and growth, while keeping taxes low for families and businesses and balancing the budget in 2015.

Taken together, the measures our government has introduced since 2006 and those in economic action plan 2014 will continue to keep taxes low and help Canadians succeed in the global economy, creating jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

• (1520)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague, and there was a lot of yackety-yack, but there was no substance. Of course he hides behind the Conservatives' line, "oh, bad NDP carbon tax". The Minister of Foreign Affairs stood on January 24, 2008, and said that the Conservative government would put "a price on carbon". It was \$14 a tonne. Conservatives promised Canadians that they were going to be the ones putting the price on carbon.

This is just another broken promise, like when the Minister of Finance said he was going to deal with the pricing of the big banks on ATM fees. He said there was a problem and he was going to deal with it. That was in 2009. What happened to that promise? Nothing happened.

When Conservatives talk about the economy, they do not talk about average Canadians. They talk about the GDP, but they do not talk about the fact that we have the highest debt ratios in history, that people are not able to access banks in many parts of the country. When people go to an ATM, they are being gouged to a level of up to \$7.90 for a \$20 transaction.

I have not heard yet from any members of the Conservative Party if they have a problem with seniors being gouged. They seem to think that is the wonders of the market.

Is there any fee, any level that would actually cause the Conservatives to say enough is enough? I would certainly think that a 39.5% fee on a \$20 withdrawal is outrageous and should be dealt with, but I know the Conservatives will flip over backward for big industry on any given day of the week; so 39.5%, 40%, 41%, 42%—is there any level at which the Conservatives think Canadians are being unacceptably gouged?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, if the NDP members really cared about protecting consumers, they would get onboard and start supporting our consumer protection measures, but they have not. In fact they voted against every single one of the consumer protection measures that we have introduced since 2006. However, do not take my word for it.

Here is what the NDP has voted against. It voted against introducing new credit card rules that require consent for credit limit increases. It voted against requiring a minimum 21-day grace period on new purchases. It voted against shortening the cheque holding periods. It voted against more than doubling the maximum fine on financial institutions that violate consumer provisions. It voted against banning negative option billing for financial products. It voted against requiring greater disclosures of mortgage prepayment charges. It voted against making mortgage insurance more transparent. It voted against banning unsolicited credit card cheques. It voted against better protecting Canadians using prepaid credit cards issued by federally regulated banks by ensuring more unused balances never expire.

The NDP is very good at voting against every single consumer protection measure that our government has introduced. It is about time the members got onboard and started walking the walk.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance is about services to rural and small-town communities, where often access to banking services in general are non-existent. For many citizens of rural and small-town Canada, an ATM in a local convenience store may be their only option.

Business of Supply

Does the member have some public policy prescriptives that the government is considering to help address the high cost of bank fees in some of these bank machines in rural and small-town Canada, in convenience stores, as an example? Can it be implemented in such a way that will not actually reduce the number of these machines over time? Is there a way, perhaps through income support, to effect a change that would ensure the continuation of the access to bank machines in some of these communities but at the same time protect some of our most economically vulnerable Canadians from usurious fees?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question from my hon. colleague because, in fact, we have engaged with the banks to get more access to more ATMs, and the banks have responded and acknowledged our concerns. They have expanded ATM access, for example, to more colleges and universities, so that students will have access to the banks they bank with, so that they will not have to pay extra fees. They have also responded by unveiling low-fee accounts for seniors and for students and also improved access to ATMs and to banking services for disabled Canadians.

We will continue to work with the banks and engage the banks, so that they will continue to expand their ATM networks and continue to expand no-cost or low-cost banking options available to all Canadians.

• (1525)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate with great interest. We just had a question from the member for Kings—Hants, and he talked about small towns and villages and how convenient ATMs are.

Some of us in this place are old enough to remember a time when it did not cost us any money to get our money out of the bank, but we could not do it on the weekends. We had to attend between Monday and Friday during banking hours and in many cases between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Then modern technology came along and we have banking machines. Now we can access the money we have in our accounts 24 hours a day almost anywhere in Canada, even in small towns and villages.

However, we know that in some small convenience stores there are companies that provide those ATMs. They are not usually owned by the bank, but by somebody else, and we pay a little higher fee for that. However, before, those people did not have the ability to access their money, period, unless they had a friend who had a few extra dollars they could borrow or something like that.

So what this debate is all about, and what the hon. parliamentary secretary can talk about, is a plethora of financial tools that the government has assisted Canadians with in order to reduce their costs and to do many things. However, it is necessary to keep in mind the way things used to be and the way things are today.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could expand on some of the things he has been saying about the good things this government has been doing.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that question, and also for pointing out that banking services today are more accessible than they ever have been in history. In fact, 75% of all ATM transactions are charged no fee at all. As long

as we use the ATM machine from our own bank, we will not be charged an extra fee. It is only when using an ATM of another bank or in a convenience store, for example, that we get charged that extra fee. I do want to point out that banking services are more accessible today than they ever have been. Our government will continue to work at solutions to getting more low-cost and no-cost financial services to all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will speak slowly so the parliamentary secretary can understand my question.

Since the introduction of ATM user fees in 1996—that was supposed to be a temporary measure, by the way—banks have kept cutting costs, and their profits have kept on growing. In 2012, the banks made \$29.4 billion. If they pooled their resources in the interest of civic engagement, they could put a dent in Canada's debt.

Banks have cut staff and front-line services, and cheques are becoming less common. Bank cards and payroll direct deposit have been introduced, and ATM fees have steadily increased, which means that profits have steadily increased.

Does the member agree that letting banks get rich at the expense of the poorest taxpayers has got to stop?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I really have to shake my head when I hear an argument like that. Here is somebody who is criticizing the Canadian banks who, for the sixth year in a row, have been ranked the number-one banks in the world. We should be proud of our banking sector. Our banking sector pays huge taxes to the Canadian government, so we can use those taxes for social programs and helping out those who need help.

It is those banks that also hire tens of thousands of employees. Many pension funds have their funds invested in banking stocks and, as a result, have done very well, so we should be proud of our Canadian banks and our Canadian banking system.

At the same time, our government, the Conservative Party, is the only party that is actually fighting for consumers. The NDP keeps voting against every single consumer-protection measure we have introduced. The New Democrats have voted against them, and it is time for them to get on board.

• (1530)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today and speak in support of the motion put forward by my colleague from Sudbury, a hard-working member of Parliament who has travelled right across the country and listened to Canadians as they explained to him the pressures they are feeling in their pocketbooks.

Business of Supply

I have been at a number of those meetings, and I have seen how quickly he connects with them. Today the motion specifically deals with capping the fees on ATMs, automated teller machines. We are calling on the government to take action on this immediately.

Before I go on much further, I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Nickel Belt, another MP who works incredibly hard to represent his very diverse community.

In the last few minutes of the debate, and even this morning, I have been hearing talk about how the Conservatives are the champions of consumers, asking how dare the NDP vote against some of the measures they read out. However, the Conservative members forget to say that those measures were buried in omnibus budget bills that were thicker than a telephone book for most of the cities around this country. I think it is a little disingenuous to use that particular argument.

Getting back to the capping of these fees, it is a very small measure that would go a long way. We are not really talking about businesses that are struggling to make ends meet. We absolutely recognize that our banking system is secure. It has seen us through the depression years. During that time, we have to remember that the banks were the recipients of some largesse from the government.

However, in 2012, the banks recorded profits totalling \$29.4 billion, and yet these same banks are gouging Canadians when they go to take their own money out of their own accounts. There is a way to do this differently. We can look at examples from other countries. Let us look at some international examples.

In Ireland, the central banks actually forbid all ATM usage fees. That is a step in the right direction to protect consumers. In Australia and Finland, cash withdrawals are free for those with ATM cards. Not only those with ATM cards can withdraw money; I know people with VISA cards can.

In the U.K., 97% of cash withdrawals are free, due to public pressure. The Reserve Bank of India has issued a directive to all commercial banks to abolish ATM service fees. Here in Canada, with a banking sector that makes profits in the billions, we have fees being charged that go as high as 39.5% in the private sector and as high as 29.5% in the regulated banking sector. That is gouging. I just do not know how else to explain it.

I also heard the arguments earlier today from one of my colleagues about how people can get special deals with their banks if they negotiate a service fee. Paying those service fees is a huge burden on many Canadians, including many students who maybe cannot afford the ultra-deluxe package that would give them free ATM, only at their own banks. There are many who do not have that privilege. These ATM fees, once again, target those in our communities who are the most vulnerable.

•(1535)

Members have heard me talk about the rising debt that our students leave universities with. We also know that students, once they graduate, are spending longer and longer periods in part-time jobs and are not able to make a sustainable living for a number of years after they have graduated. When these students are in university and college, and even in high school, they do not all

have the money to buy cars and run to their own banks, so they are forced to use ATM machines. They do not have a lot of money and are paying these huge fees. Most students cannot afford to take out \$500 at a time, so they only pay flat fees that go anywhere from 5% to 29.5%. If they take out \$20 and \$4 out of that disappears into ATM fees, that is a huge burden.

ATM fees also create a huge burden for those who have middle to low incomes. Not everyone has the ability to get into a car and drive to a bank. For many people, whether single moms or people with low incomes, they rely on going to local corner stores or shopping malls where they can get their money out of ATMs. Once again, they are not going to be drawing hundreds or thousands of dollars. They are going to be withdrawing \$20, \$40 or \$60, and once again, the charge on that is a huge burden. I would like my colleagues across the way to think about that.

Of course, technology has changed. When we look at it, the actual cost to the banks is around 38¢ or 39¢ for that transaction, and yet they are making a huge profit on the people who are taking their own money out of their own accounts. To make that kind of a profit from those who cannot afford it, or even those of us who work very hard to put money in the bank and are struggling to make ends meet, is just not right.

The NDP proposal is fairly straightforward. At 39¢, the banks can still make a little profit. After all, is \$29.4 billion not enough? We are saying that it should be made a flat fee of 50¢. In order to be reasonable, we have not said that there should be no fee, which is the case in some countries. We are saying it should be 50¢, which would more than cover the costs and remove the burden from working families.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know about you, but I live in a very diverse riding that is not only culturally diverse but also economically diverse. I deal with local residents all the time and a growing number of seniors are beginning to feel the pinch. Their pensions are just not going as far as they thought they were going to go, and they do not have the extra \$4 or \$6 to pay the bank. This is money that could be in their pockets to help them buy food and the other necessities they need.

We are talking about a Canada where the individual debt burden is growing. It was a shock to me when I learned that the average family's household debt has nearly doubled in that last 20 years. Canadians now owe, on average, \$1,600 for every \$1,000 of disposable income, which is huge. That is why, when we address ATM fees, it is one small way of addressing some of the strain that families are feeling when they live payday to payday.

Business of Supply

As we know, there are other pressures on families. First, the number of decent-paying jobs in Canada is actually on the decline. There are a growing number of part-time jobs that do not pay a livable wage, so there are more and more families having to work a couple of jobs. There are rising housing costs. I do not know about where you live, Mr. Speaker, but in my riding there are incredibly high costs for housing, never mind the gouging that happens with credit cards. There are all kinds of pressures on families. I urge my colleagues to think about the Canadians I have talked about and for their sakes to support this motion the NDP has put forward.

• (1540)

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a lot from the Liberals and the Conservatives today about protecting the consumer, but here is the state of play after 20 years of successive Liberal and Conservative governments. The average family household debt has nearly doubled. Canadians now owe over \$1,600 for every \$1,000 of disposable income and so on.

In 2012, bank profits totalled nearly \$30 billion. Yet, we are asked to believe that it would be an economic catastrophe for the banks to put some constraint on these ATM fees.

Meanwhile, overseas, we have other countries that have done so. The Central Bank of Ireland forbids ATM usage fees. In Austria and Finland cash withdrawals are free for those with ATM cards. The sky has not fallen.

How do we reconcile what we are hearing from the Conservatives and the Liberals today in the House about a potential economic catastrophe from this motion with what is happening overseas, where these kinds of measures have actually been implemented?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the sky has not fallen in the other countries where they have got rid of ATM fees.

However, the critical part here is that we have a banking industry that is sound, that is making almost \$30 billion in profit. Yet, I have colleagues across the way who do not find it in their hearts to change these fees, or who are speaking against a motion that would actually give the banks more money than the actual transaction costs at an ATM. They would rather support banks' gouging Canadians up to 30%-plus in the way of fees. That is just wrong. It is time to put consumers first, and the NDP will and always has done.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the chance to speak earlier and the Liberal Party actually had a presentation on the motion, indicating its support in principle of it moving forward or voting in favour of it.

The question I have for the member is, to what degree does the NDP nationally want to be able to address all of the ATM fees? I am sure that the member would be aware that the most outrageous ATM fees are actually not associated with the regulated banks, which are federal responsibility. There is also provincial regulation and provincial responsibility, for example, for independently operated ATMs where there are many of these fees that the NDP oppose.

Are viewers and Canadians to conclude that the NDP would in fact impose a 50¢-levy on all usage of ATMs, whether they are the ATMs of banks or independent operators?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, what we are debating here today is what the federal House of Commons could actually do. Right now, the motion specifically addresses that.

I know there are private ATM fees that are under provincial jurisdiction. We would urge the provinces to take a look at them. I think our finance minister should be working with the provincial finance ministers.

The motion specifically targets those that fall under federal jurisdiction. We can do something in the House to alleviate pressure from the banks' ATM machines. That is where we should be putting our energy first and foremost.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy today to lend the support of Nickel Belt and my constituents to this opposition day motion that would cap the banks' ATM fees.

First, I want to congratulate my Sudbury colleague for introducing this motion. His work on behalf of consumers is a reminder of why the good people of Greater Sudbury elected New Democrats in both the Sudbury and Nickel Belt ridings in 2008.

The Sudbury Star editorial last month noted the change in colours in the region from red to orange. The editorial stated:

The NDP influence is gradually sweeping over the city, with [my] taking the federal riding of Nickel Belt, succeeding [a] Liberal...and [my colleague in Sudbury] knocking off [a] long-time Liberal...in 2008. What was once a city of Liberals and New Democrats, is becoming a city of New Democrats and some Liberals.

I believe this happens when people see their MPs actually working for them. They want representation that stands up for northern Ontario, representation that stands up for consumers.

Today we do it again, dealing with this question of how more and more people find life so unaffordable. Affordability is a real issue for Nickel Belt. It is a question for Canadians at the kitchen table as bills pile up. It is a question for Main Street, not Bay Street, something our former late leader, Jack Layton, noticed in 2007 when he went to bat for folks against the banks and these fees. Our current leader has returned from a tour that confirms how big an issue this still is with Canadians.

Business of Supply

Let us do the math here. On the one hand, some members over there in government, or down the aisle here, might simply shrug at a couple of dollars here or there in people's budgets. What could be so wrong with throwing a toonie at a bank? Well, the banks' own figures tell us how wrong it is. The estimated real cost of this transaction has been put at 36¢. Charging \$2 or \$2.50 or more to give people back their money becomes a 600% or 700% profit margin. It is not fair and adds to the nickel and diming of people struggling to get by. We need the banks and credit unions. We need private enterprise. There is nothing wrong with that. However, we also need fairness and limitations on run-away profits when and if, as they often are, they are gained on the backs of people who increasingly find they are taking one step ahead only to fall three steps back.

I want to address this broader question of helping average Canadians deal with these mounting bills so that little is left behind. The Conservatives love to tell Canadians to save, to use their RSP and other investment vehicles. They offer breaks for corporations or those people who are well off. However, they too seldom create opportunities for real savings, when we have to pay these fees to the banks or rising gasoline prices at the pumps. Again, New Democrats offer a sensible solution there, wanting an ombudsman and some reasonable regulation of these gas prices that all magically go up simultaneously from all the companies just before a long weekend.

New Democrats are committed to making life more affordable for Canadians. This motion to cap fees is one such example, and it is finding support across the country. Just seeing all the media attention this weekend and today on the NDP motion reminds me of how popular our campaign is.

On the other hand, the government opposite and its Prime Minister and Minister of Finance believe in a trickle-down economy. Generate wealth at the top and the theory says it trickles down to the rest of Canadians. This is utter nonsense. Canadians do not see the wealth in their bank accounts. They do not see the wealth given to their Conservative friends reach them anytime soon. What is trickling down is disdain from most politicians. The Conservatives take care of their own and a handful of people on Bay Street and former cabinet ministers. Their wealth, along with the growing income gap, is a testament to how little actually trickles down. It would take decades for people in the middle class or those living below the poverty level to share in any generation of the wealth meant for a few vested interests.

In truth, the government that prides itself on being a good economic manager blows money hand over fist. The current government is more interested in self-congratulatory billboards and ads for fictitious programs than in helping Canadians.

● (1545)

Susan Delacourt's new book, *Shopping For Votes*, demonstrates this well, noting that we now have Canada's first marketing prime minister. As we know, there has been an avalanche of ads trumpeting supposed achievements that are not there. We have recently learned about the government spending \$2.5 million to plug a job action program that does not exist. We learned that the government, with its sorry record on actually helping soldiers and vets, now has officials looking for vets who have good news stories on what the

government has done. Good luck on that one. One would think that with the Minister of Veterans Affairs and all the bad news that the government would use the time of civil servants to fix the problems.

● (1550)

[Translation]

The government passed reasonable regulations that protected Canadian banks during the financial crisis. The problem is that it refused to do anything to protect Canadian consumers.

Today, the big banks are making record profits. Last year, they made \$29.4 billion. There is no reason banks should be allowed to keep exploiting consumers by charging unfair fees. That simply does not make sense. Low-income Canadians do not deserve to be punished because the banks close branches in their neighbourhoods.

[English]

Hearing about the motion to cap bank ATM fees, one gentleman named Andy told me this on social media:

Any type of fees from the banks are outrageous. They profit in the billions and all we get in return for interest is nickels and dimes. The matter was brought up by the NDP and [all the Prime Minister] said was "instead, focus on the economy". With an answer like that, he wants the banks to get richer, and we get poorer.

It is time for the government to stop the fiction on the great job plans and actually focus on the real economy.

In more competitive banking markets, like the United Kingdom, ATM fees are very small or have been waived. Ireland has no fees. Other European countries regulate them. However, in Canada, in less competitive markets, Canadians can be charged \$2 or \$3 to access their own money. These fees are a double whammy for low-income Canadians and many people in my large and partly rural districts.

Canadians are punished as bank branches are closed down in their neighbourhoods. There are fewer banks and fewer bank branches, forcing them to use ATMs and pay those fees. One would think that with more and more ATMs, this might have led to some competition and lower fees. However, prices have increased. The nickel and diming of Canadians, with \$2 and \$3 fees, adds up in this weak economy. Incomes of middle-class Canadians are simply not growing. The cost of living goes up each year, but income for a typical Canadian family has fallen by 7% in the last 35 years.

Business of Supply

Listening to the Conservative finance minister in 2007, one would think there would have been some action on these fees. In 2007, in response to the NDP campaign to ban ATM fees, the Minister of Finance told the House of Commons finance committee, “We agreed that the banks ought to do something in terms of consumers with respect to ATM [fees]”. However, the government has done nothing and the banks continue on their merry way.

Our motion, and other measures in the NDP affordability campaign, would help address the alarming concerns about growing household debt. Former Bank of Canada governor, Mark Carney, said that household debt now represents perhaps our greatest and most immediate threat to Canada's economy. Household debt is at a record high of 166% of disposable income, and evidence suggests that consumers may have reached their limit. Canadian household debt now stands near the same level as U.S. household debt just before the financial crisis in 2008. It makes real economic sense to reduce the household debt so we can stimulate the economy in other ways.

Let us help Canadian seniors, people with disabilities, and other people with limited mobility. They too should not face huge fees for using the limited number of ATMs that are accessible to them. I invite the government and all parties today to stand with Canadians who support a cap on ATM fees.

[Translation]

Together, we can put an end to banks ripping off consumers. With this government, we have already put an end to unfair payday lending practices and fees for paper billing. Now we have to do something about excessive bank fees.

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member compared our ATM fees with a couple of other countries, the United Kingdom and Ireland. My concern is that the definition of remote in those countries is very different from what it is in Canada. If we look at remote areas in rural Canada, it might cost a significant amount of money to service an ATM machine.

My question is for the member. I know the NDP has proposed capping ATM fees at 50¢ per transaction. It is conceivable that in some remote areas it may cost more than that. Would the NDP be willing to be more flexible in its current policy? If we want to make sure that rural Canadians have access to their money, could we take into account the potentially higher cost of servicing an ATM machine, rather than simply having a blanket 50¢ per transaction fee?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I might remind the hon. member that each ATM transaction costs the bank 36¢. If we cap the cost at 50¢, the banks would still make enough money for it to be profitable.

I would also remind the member that in the most rural areas the banks have shut their doors and installed ATM machines, which makes them even more profitable. At 50¢ a transaction, that is a lot of money.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech and for bringing up a

very important point. What we are seeing in many northern and rural communities, like mine of Sudbury, a city of approximately 170,000 people, which is not small, is that the banks are shutting down branches and laying off all of the tellers. For people who relied on going to their community banks, that has now disappeared.

What has been put in place are the ATMs. These ATM fees are actually having a significant impact on savings. If we look at the average cost of what Canadians are spending on accessing their own money through their own bank, it is approximately \$500 to \$1,000 per year.

When banks start closing branches, like they are doing in my colleague's riding, they cannot just put in an ATM and say it is the same service. I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comments related to that, how it is actually less service but more cost.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleagues in this House that the hon. member happens to be best MP that Sudbury has ever had, bar none.

Going back to my colleague's question, it is not only less service and fewer banks; it is also more profits for the bank. The banks are closing branches in remote areas. They are installing ATM machines and making huge profits, as demonstrated by their financial reports for 2013.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the big banks are double dipping, and last year they posted nearly \$30 billion in profits. They charge excessive fees to retailers and to people making simple transactions at ATMs just to access their own money in their own accounts.

My colleague and I share a rural reality. We have a lot of small municipalities scattered throughout our ridings. Chartered banks have pulled out of these small communities, and the people living there have even bigger problems.

I would like my colleague to say a few words about that aspect of the problem.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take that very good question from a very good MP from Quebec who represents a rural community like mine.

He is dealing with the same problems in his riding as I am in mine. In the small rural communities, banks have been replaced by ATMs. The banks' profits keep going up, while services keep going down. This motion can put an end to that today if we get the support of the Conservatives and the Liberals.

Business of Supply

•(1600)

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to be here today to speak to the opposition day motion. I want to say nice things about my colleague from Sudbury. He is concerned and has spoken many times in the House about consumer issues, and I believe he has done a good job representing his party on some of those issues here today.

It does not mean that I have to agree with what the New Democrats have brought forward today. I have not been here all day, but I have heard a number of speeches that have talked about capping, which seems to be around the 50¢ mark. The motion itself reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian consumers face unfair Automated Teller Machine (ATM) fees as a result of an uncompetitive marketplace and that the House call on the government to take action in Budget 2014 to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees.

I want to thank the NDP. I was a member of the finance committee for six years, and I cannot remember New Democrats bringing forward concrete budget ideas. This is one. They have brought forward a budget idea. However, with eight days left before the budget is produced, it is a wee bit late and a little bit thin.

Today's motion is focused on ATM fees, which consumers have to know are charged through chartered banks. They are also charged through what I think are called "white machines", or private sector companies that are not banks but provide machines in restaurants or bars where they charge money to get one's own money out.

I will congratulate the members. They have an idea for a budget, and I appreciate their focusing on some financial and consumer issues, as the Conservative Party has been focused on consumer issues since we have taken office.

We have done a number of things on a variety of issues, from banks and credit cards, which I will highlight in a few minutes, to the telecom business. We have been trying our darndest to make sure we have a very robust and competitive marketplace. We believe that competition is what will drive prices down and give consumers more choice.

I am a little confused by some of the comments, and I want to make sure it is on the record as to how I understand that an ATM works at a chartered bank. I am a member of chartered bank *A*. When I go there to take money at any of its branches, I do not get charged for removing my money from the account. However, because of convenience and timing, if I go to a branch of another bank, I would be charged for taking money out of my account. Yesterday, I made a conscious decision, as a consumer, to take \$200 out. There was a \$2 charge, 1%. I made the decision that the 1% was the amount I was willing to pay to take money out of my account at a different bank so that I could get to my appointment at a more convenient time.

As with the mover of the motion, my town also has a population of 170,000 to 180,000 people. We have a branch at every corner. There is a branch of one type or another virtually everywhere in my community. I can easily access my own brand of bank that I have chosen for my personal accounts, and I pay zero fees. If I had a credit card or a card from a department store, let us say Winners, for

example, I have an agreement with Winners and bank *A*. I do business with that particular bank. I do not do business with other banks in my area. I cannot use my Winners card if I go to Fortinos, which is my grocery store. The store does not allow it to be used there.

•(1605)

We are very lucky in this country that we are able to access our money from different banks and different machines. We have a world-renowned banking system. During the recession, other countries, even our neighbours, had difficulties with their banking systems. Canada's banking system has been ranked number one, and part of the reason is the relationship our banks have with each other and other financial institutions. They are able to share information. They can tell each other that someone has *x* dollars in an account with bank *A*. Bank *B* will accept a bank *A* card and bank *B* will allow money to be taken out. There is a small fee.

I agree that consumers have to make a conscious choice. Do I spend that 1%? If I only want to take \$20 out, it would be 10%, and I would think that was way too high. I would walk across the road and go to a branch of my bank and pay no fee. I make the choice as the consumer.

We on this side of the House believe that we need to provide the infrastructure and the system. We need to provide business with the ability to do business. We need to provide consumers with the ability to make choices. All we are dealing with today is the ATM.

We need to be able to make choices. I can give the House some examples of how we recognize that.

I was never a fan of reverse billing. People would not be forewarned that their contracts were up. A company would automatically re-bill people without asking if people wanted to continue with the contract. We outlawed that. We changed the law so that consumers had a choice. Individual Canadians, looking at their needs, could make the choice. We changed the law so that the company could not make it for them. Canadians had to decide whether they wanted to continue to do business with that company or go somewhere else.

That is a concrete example of us taking action on behalf of consumers, which was the appropriate approach for us to take.

We have, without having to regulate, made some changes to the banking system. The white label ATMs are in a different bailiwick altogether. The motion before us today deals with banking institutions that have ATMs.

We have indicated to the banks that people need a cooling off period when they use credit cards from a bank. We have introduced a 21-day cooling off period. Why? We did that to protect the consumer. It was not to protect the bank or the credit card company.

We have indicated to the banking industry that we do not think it has done a quality job when looking at its customer base in terms of students and seniors and making sure that they have access.

Business of Supply

I have two daughters in university. Access to their bank machine is a big deal to them. Access to a bank machine on their campus made a difference with respect to which bank they would deal with. They made the choice of which bank to choose.

• (1610)

The motion says that it is “uncompetitive”. I have to differ with that opinion. There is choice for consumers. Do we have thousands of banks in Canada? No. We have five big banks, seven other banks that are close, and a number of credit unions. We do have choice.

The other thing we have is considerable confidence in our banks and banking system. The bank will be there tomorrow. Our money is safe in that bank, and we can rely on access to our funds, which does not happen, including in this past year, in some banking systems around the world. All of a sudden, a bank was closing up and people were lined up trying to get their money out. That has never happened in Canada, not in my lifetime. I am not sure what happened during the Depression, to be frank, but in terms of the modern banking system we have now, we do not have those concerns, which is an important piece.

The opposition says in its motion that it is uncompetitive. We on this side of the House encourage competition, particularly in the banking system, as we do in other areas. That is one reason we have looked at trying to open up the market to an approved national credit union system.

At present, the credit unions are under provincial jurisdiction. We have offered to make some changes. I continue to talk to the lobbyists groups with the credit unions to see if they are taking up the cause. There are a few that are big enough to branch out across the country to provide further competition. I am not saying that there cannot be more competition, but I would not phrase the present situation as uncompetitive. However, we are doing some things in this area.

My wife works for Easter Seals, which helps physically disabled children in the province of Ontario. She has indicated to me in the past that there are some important services in the banking area that could help physically disabled people. I know that we on this side have indicated to the banking system that it needs to improve in that area. It needs to make it much more accessible for those who are disabled. That number, unfortunately, is not going to go down, as we have an aging population, including me. There are going to be more people with physical needs accessing these branches and ATMs.

I have heard today that branches and ATMs are closing and that the service is not quite there. It was not that long ago that I was a bank employee. I lasted six whole weeks with the bank. I did not really like it, and so I left. The branch I was in opened at 10 a.m. and closed at 4:30 p.m., and it was not open on Saturdays or Sundays. It was a main branch in a major city in Ontario.

Things have changed, and we have improved access. There is access now through the Internet, which all the banks have for paying bills. I have not paid a bill by mail or at a teller in probably five or six years. I pay everything online out of my account.

In terms of access, the banks are working on it. We need to keep pressuring the banks on that, but I have no issue with it.

There are other things we have done to protect consumers in this realm. For example, the bank used to send me a cheque with my credit card bill. I could use the cheque, and it would go against my credit card. We have ended that practice. We understand that there have been issues. The Minister of Finance has been clear that there have been issues.

• (1615)

The other thing that is very important is to make sure that these issues are brought to our attention by our constituents. We also need to put pressure on the banks and the financial system to improve their customer service and to provide more transparency and information.

There needs to be an understanding of financial literacy. There needs to be an understanding by all of us, including me, of financial literacy so that I understand that when I go to bank B and use my card, it will charge me extra, but if I go to my own bank, they will not. Those kinds of issues need to be taught.

I know it is hard to believe, but as I said, I have one daughter in university. At her school, the one area that has been excellent is that it has a required course on financial literacy. They are university kids. They are managing lots of money, paying their bills, and financing their education. It is an important piece. I think it should be done at a younger age so that people do not get into bad financial habits and go to those white machines to get cash and pay well over \$2 or \$1.50, just because they are convenient. People have to think about what their financial goals are and how they can manage their money more effectively.

I am working on putting on a financial literacy seminar in my riding. I am finding it a little more difficult than I anticipated to attract people to come to that seminar, but we are working on it, because it is terribly important to make sure that we do.

One other area, particularly with young people in a household, is unsolicited credit cards. We have ended that practice. Nothing drove me crazier than when a bank or a credit card company sent a card to people's houses and said that they had been pre-qualified for an *x* limit, without actually asking for one iota of information about people. That was, in my view, a formula for disaster for those who were not able to understand what they were signing up for. Our side, looking out for consumers, decided that it was not an appropriate program, and we ended it.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left?

Hon. John McKay: Too much.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, too much. That is somewhat hurtful, but I can take it.

Business of Supply

The issue we have here today is important. ATM fees affect us all. There is no doubt about it. However, I am not sure the appropriate response by government is to limit the fees and to make the decision on behalf of consumers about what they are going to pay and where they are going to pay.

My concern would be that the Government of Canada would say that banks can charge only 50¢, and then every bank, whether people have an account there or not, would start charging everyone 50¢. It is a dangerous approach. There are other ways to influence the banking system to give consumers proper transparency and to influence consumers to make the appropriate choices, particularly in their banking and financial literacy.

For that reason, I will not be supporting the motion as it is worded. However, I do want to say that these are the kinds of issues we should be debating in the House of Commons, as they affect every riding and every constituency. I appreciate the time, and I look forward to answering any questions.

• (1620)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his well-presented speech. While I did not agree with everything that was in there, I do agree with him when it comes to financial literacy. As parliamentarians, we can do a better job at ensuring that Canadians are well informed of the importance of financial literacy.

He talked about some of his concerns relating to the language that we used in our motion. Part of it was that he did not like the word “uncompetitive”. While I can respect the opinion, I disagree with it. If we look at what we have out there from all of the financial institutions, almost every one of them is charging the same amount, between \$2 and \$4. That is anti-competitive. It truly is. There is no competitive practice. If some financial institution were to say that it would charge 50¢, we would see more Canadians looking at that.

I can provide a perfect example. We have had a debate in the House on credit card merchant fees or swipe fees. Mastercard was at 1.85%, for example. I stood right here and asked the Minister of Finance why we were allowing Visa to raise its rates. Visa responded that it was matching that of Mastercard. The rates went up.

We have not seen the banks say that because the ATM fees are costing Canadians millions of dollars, maybe they should lower the rates. It is time for us to act as parliamentarians. This is anti-competitive. There are no lower rates. If people have a chequing account at a bank, they will receive 20 transactions free, after which they will be charged for them.

I would encourage my hon. colleague to look at his bank account.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I will explain why I say that the uncompetitive piece is not accurate. I will use my own example from yesterday.

I was at a bank that was not my own bank. I am not trying to brag, but I had been at the office and doing a little banking for my office account. It is a long story. I use a different bank than I do for my personal banking.

I was having a Super Bowl gathering at my house and I needed \$200. I could have done one of four things. I could have got the

money from this bank while I was doing the banking. I was in a mall, so I could have walked across the mall to a different bank that charges \$1.50 instead of \$2 a transaction. I could have got in my car and gone across the road and got it for free at my own bank. I also could have gone to the convenience store beside the place where I was getting the wings and use a white machine, because it has a white machine there, for which I would have probably paid \$3. There were four choices available to me, all within two or three minutes of each other. My decision to do it there was made out of convenience. It cost me 1%, and that was worth my time.

I do not think our system is uncompetitive. What we need to do is have people think about it and make decisions. When my younger kids go out, instead of waiting to get their cash at the white machine at the local pub, they go to their own branch and get it for free, and that is what they should be doing.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my concern is for some of the rural locations where if only the so-called white-label ATM machines are available, sometimes these charges can be as high as \$7 or \$8.

That is quite a lot of money. Is it obvious that the market for ATMs in those locations is competitive, or should we be taking a look at those areas and whether there really is competition?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I will be frank. I cannot speak for rural areas. I do not have a rural area and I do not live in a rural area. It has been a long time since I lived in a rural area. I used to live outside of Brockville, in Athens, not too far from Kingston, but the fact is, I have never been to a machine that has cost me \$7 to get cash out. It may exist; I just do not know that it exists. It probably does not exist in Burlington, I think because of competition, as people could go somewhere else for it.

However, the member is making a point in the sense that we need to make sure that people have an understanding about these fees. That white-label machine would not be there if the business did not think it would make money and people would use it. Although a lot of banking can be done online, people have to get their cash from somewhere, so if people stopped using it and had another alternative for their banking, that white-label machine would not exist in that particular location.

We need to do a better job of making sure that consumers make choices, and it is those choices that will force business to change its practices.

• (1625)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I represent a large rural area. A lot of the smaller communities in my riding are serviced by a credit union or an Alberta Treasury Branch if one of the main banks does not have a branch there. I want to ask my colleague a question about convenience, which he touched on earlier.

When people go to their own banks, they are typically not charged for the use of the ATM. Most of us can make those arrangements in our daily lives to ensure that we are not. I did it this morning. It was actually a little inconvenient for me to park where I had to park to get to my bank, but I saved myself a couple of bucks because I am a Conservative and a little frugal.

Business of Supply

Also, from time to time, I need to have some convenience. For example, I need the convenience of being able to hear myself talk in the House when New Democrats are talking. From time to time, I like to have a bit of convenience.

When I go to the 7-Eleven, I do not expect to pay the same for eggs as I do if I go to my local grocery store. If I go to another country, for example, I am encouraged to use a Visa card or my bank card to get the money out because I know that if I pay at the kiosk in the airport terminal or whatever, I will get rooked on the exchange rate and I am better ahead using the ATM.

We have to understand that Interac was bought and paid for by the major banks in this country. It was not something that was set up magically for free. It is not like the road system that was provided by the government. This system was bought, paid for, invested in, researched, and installed by the various banks across this country, and they are going to make a profit. Banks are going to make a profit whether we like it or not. We can drop the rates on credit card fees and ATMs, but the banks are just going to push up the fees on something else somewhere else.

My question for my colleague over here is ultimately this: does he really believe, as the NDP does, that if we legislate the price on the convenience of using an ATM, it will actually make things more inconvenient? I ask because nobody is going to be interested in working for what the NDP is proposing.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good point about whether we can legislate convenience away.

The other thing the member said that got a lot of jeers from the other side was about bank profits. They look at all of their services and decide which services will attract which fees to be able to make a profit. I am 100% in support of banks making a profit. My CPP is fully invested in Canadian banks. Most union pension plans are fully invested in Canadian banks. The more stable and profitable the banking system is in this country, the better off 99% of Canadians will be in the long term, because we have a quality banking system that helps support an investment community and our retirement savings. We will have a good quality of life for many years to come partly because of the quality of the banking system we have in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Montcalm, Canada Post; the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, The Environment; and the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, Veterans Affairs.

• (1630)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Last Friday during question period, during some heated exchanges, some unparliamentary language was used by myself. I regret the language that I chose that day and I apologize to members across and to anyone who may have heard something unparliamentary coming from me. I wanted to take this first opportunity that I have had since I have been back in Ottawa to ask for time to extend that legitimate apology to my colleagues across the way.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion before the House moved by the NDP. I would also like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

This motion does not promise anyone the moon. What it does is put forward extremely concrete and practical measures that could make a difference in the everyday lives of average Canadians. As I see it, this is what sets the NDP apart a little. We are mindful of the impact that we can have on people's day-to-day lives. The NDP is constantly looking at what it can do to improve people's lives and put forward concrete solutions.

The subject of today's debate is ATM fees. ATM fees have been around since 1996. Since they were first introduced, they have continued to increase at a relatively rapid pace. Moreover, these fees are not regulated. This is something the federal government could do. However, it has deliberately chosen not to act on this matter. That is its choice. This is what this opposition motion aims to demonstrate today.

The NDP is proposing with this motion to bring in regulations to protect consumers from abusive, unregulated fees charged to them. These fees continue to rise daily. It is a well-known fact that banks do not necessarily need all of this revenue to survive. They continue to post ever-growing record profits. The fees charged to consumers who use ATMs add up. Various fees can total from \$2 to \$6 per transaction. Allow me to elaborate further.

On the one hand, banks charge fees for regular accounts. Institutions charge a fee when a customer withdraws funds, regardless of the ATM used. Often, these fees are rolled into the monthly banking fees charged by the institution. A fee is also charged to access the network. By that I mean the banking institution charges the consumer a fee specifically when money is withdrawn from an ATM that does not belong to that particular institution. These are fees over and above those I mentioned earlier. In addition, we have convenience fees, network fees and fees charged by ATM operators to non-clients.

Business of Supply

Clearly, this adds up. Once again, people have to pay to access their own money. Is this necessary? From the beginning, my colleagues have been arguing that without this system, people would not have services or would lose the ability to withdraw money from ATMs whenever they want. Those are the arguments the Conservative Party often uses. The banks are saying they have to charge extra or make cuts and that we have no choice. On the contrary, we do have a choice.

In other countries, in many European countries for example, there are no fees for withdrawing money from ATMs. In the United Kingdom, 97% of withdrawals are free. Why? The public had had enough. They decided to lobby the government on this and regulations were put in place.

Is our country exactly the same? No, of course not. However, what I can say is that it is not so far-fetched to propose that this be regulated. Of course doing so requires a study and consultations. What we are proposing with this motion is to work on a similar concept and come up with a concrete measure that is suited to our country and our situation.

Over the past few weeks, I have talked to people in my riding about the cost of living in general and about certain concrete measures that the NDP and I are proposing in order to protect consumers and improve the cost of living. Among other measures, I was talking about ATM fees.

• (1635)

I think it is always important to speak on behalf of the people of Pierrefonds—Dollard in the House, in this Parliament. I would like to share with the House some of the comments people have shared with me. They are very interesting and relevant to this debate.

One woman said to me:

The cost of living keeps going up. I am not sure who is responsible for that. Maybe a change will make a difference.

These are people who do not know where to turn to any more because they are promised the moon, but they have not seen any change from year to year despite the elections and all the election promises. The cost of living keeps going up. That woman said she would accept any change if it produced concrete results.

Another person wrote to me about the cost of living. That person said:

[English]

I do really support your efforts and sentiments, indeed the cost of living has gone up. I urge and encourage you to push forward hoping that a meaningful change will be forthcoming.

[Translation]

This is another example of someone saying that the cost of living is going up, that something must be done and that meaningful changes must be made.

In fact, over the past 35 years, the Canadian economy has grown. We can be proud of this, but the incomes of middle-class Canadians have not kept up with economic growth. The cost of living has increased, but the incomes of typical Canadian families have dropped by 7% over the past 35 years. Middle-class families are feeling the pressure, and household debt has reached record levels.

There is no silver bullet. I am not saying that this motion, with a wave of a magic wand, will do away with household debt and the concerns of Canadian families, but there are things that can be done, tangible measures that, one at a time, will ultimately provide some relief for Canadian families in terms of their household debt and for the middle class in general.

It is the people in my riding who want to see these changes. These changes are possible if we work together.

Here is another comment from a woman who is discussing the cost of living, and it brings us to other matters. Perhaps her comment can give the House some ideas about other ways of making life more affordable for middle-class Canadians:

[English]

I am a pensioner since I was 60 years old and now soon 70 years old. My Quebec pension and OAS is inadequate for me to survive.

[Translation]

This senior citizen is asking us to do something because she cannot go on, because she is drowning and because the income she receives is not enough for her to live decently.

This is a good example of other things that can be done. They will not necessarily be implemented with today's motion, but the NDP has fought to keep the age of entitlement to old age security at 65, in order to increase retirement income. Improving the Canada Pension Plan and provincial pension plans is another measure that can be taken to make life more affordable for people and help them make ends meet.

Here is a comment that comes from a mother:

[English]

The middle class is being killed by the cost of living. Gasoline is outrageously expensive and continues to be. I am raising my daughter, single mom, and my budget can barely be met. Food costs more now, too. Help us out. Roll back the cost of gas and cap it.

[Translation]

Her statement suggests real solutions, but it is also a passionate appeal from a single mother who wants to give her daughter a decent, affordable life.

It is not easy to implement those kinds of measures on gas prices. It is very difficult, but the NDP has other suggestions to bring a little more transparency and regulatory clarity to gas prices.

It is possible to do so. Canadians are fed up with having a government that is not on their side. Of course, all of the businesses that have a great deal of power and great deal of money will threaten parliamentarians by telling them that, if such measures are taken, businesses will have to cut jobs and reduce services, but ultimately, it is possible. The only thing we need is a little bit of political will from the people's representatives. This is why we are here, to take a courageous stand and set limits so that ordinary Canadians no longer have to shell out to institutions that make billions of dollars year after year, without any kind of regulation.

Business of Supply

•(1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to continue a line of questioning by the previous NDP speaker concerning the NDP proposal to cap the ATM fees at 50¢. The reasoning behind this is that the average transaction cost is 36¢, and there is plenty of profit to be made between 36¢ and 50¢.

The problem is that is an average transaction cost, and the cost must be more for rural areas because it costs more simply to send out somebody to refill the ATM. Sometimes there is only one machine out in a rural area, so the cost must be more.

It is not right to compare that 50¢ the New Democrats are proposing as a cap to the average cost of 36¢. The reason is that economic decisions are made on the margin. What is the marginal cost of an ATM in a rural area?

There needs to be some flexibility in that 50¢.

Would the member be willing to change that NDP proposal, to have that flexibility to account for higher costs on the margin in rural areas?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: I thank my colleague for his question.

The goal is obviously not to lose services available to the public. That is not the NDP's goal. The figure proposed today was taken from the most credible study that most closely reflects our reality. According to this study, the operating costs for an ATM are around 36¢.

We would take a look at other figures if institutions in Canada's regions are prepared to give them to us. However, this is the figure we have right now, and we want to ensure that Canadians are not always paying more. That is the goal of the NDP's motion today. Current fees are not \$1 or \$2. Consumers are paying \$5 or \$6 because there are absolutely no regulations.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Pierrefonds—Dollard, a riding that is very close to mine on the Island of Montreal.

I would like to hear her speak more to her meetings with the public. Both of our ridings have large immigrant populations. Does she find that families are having a hard time finding jobs, as is the case in my riding? Even though these families work very hard, they are still having a hard time making ends meet.

Is that the case in her riding as well?

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from LaSalle—Émard for her question.

Our ridings and constituents have similar characteristics. However, all members of the middle class in Canada, not just the people of Pierrefonds—Dollard and LaSalle—Émard, are seeing their purchasing power and income decrease while their debt increases. It is about time that the government did something.

I would like to share a quote before I conclude. The Minister of Finance himself admitted the following in 2007, with respect to ATM fees. I quote:

...in my view, there are some legitimate concerns by Canadians on [ATM fees], particularly seniors, students and persons with disabilities, many of whom have limited mobility so they don't have as much choice in terms of which banking machine they might be able to use.

The Minister of Finance admitted in 2007 that he had some legitimate concerns. What has he done since then? Values and ideas are all well and good, but once you get into power, you have to do something about it. Otherwise people lose their faith and trust.

•(1645)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud today to once again defend my constituents who are fed up with seeing their purchasing power disappear like melting snow while the government stands idly by and does nothing.

The people of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles are fed up with having to pay all kinds of ridiculous fees at a time when household debt in Canada is increasing at an alarming rate while salaries are stagnating or shrinking.

The fees charged by the major banks and white label ATM owners are part of the price Canadian families pay simply to access their money. This situation is patently unacceptable. For that reason I rise today to support the motion by my colleague from Sudbury.

Among other things, this motion calls on the government to take action in budget 2014 to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees. Canadian consumers face unfair ATM fees because of an uncompetitive marketplace.

In order to fully understand the issue before the House today, it is important to review certain facts and look at where matters stand in other OECD countries.

ATM surcharging is not regulated in Canada. ATMs come under federal jurisdiction, whereas white label ATMs fall under provincial jurisdiction.

The ban on ATM surcharging was lifted 18 years ago, further to a ruling by Canada's Competition Bureau. The lifting of the ban opened the door to abusive practices on the part of the banks, which have regularly increased ATM withdrawal fees.

Furthermore, in 2000, many banks began charging convenience fees to their depositors who use another institution's ATM or a white label ATM, over and above the Interac fees charged. According to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, ATM withdrawal fees currently range from zero to \$5.90 per transaction.

Business of Supply

Three different types of fees are charged to consumers who only want access to their own money on deposit with a financial institution. There are standard fees charged by banks to consumers for withdrawing funds from any bank. These fees are often included in the overall services provided by the consumer's banking institution.

In addition, the consumer's bank charges a network access fee when its depositors withdraw money from a non-bank-owned ATM. These fees are over and above standard bank account fees.

Finally, white label ATM owners as well as financial institutions charge "non-depositors" convenience or network fees for using their ATMs. These convenience fees are in addition to the network access fees and standard bank account fees.

An ATM user is considered a non-client when he or she uses a debit card from a different financial institution.

To look at a very concrete example, we could say that a client who withdraws \$20 from an ATM belonging to another bank, because his own financial institution has no machine in a given area, may be charged between \$1 and \$5.90 to make a single withdrawal. This represents a cost of 5% to 29.5% for a single withdrawal.

Clearly, the consumer should not have to pay such a staggering proportion of the amount of his withdrawal to get his money, when it has been shown that the actual cost of a transaction for the financial institution is about 36¢.

These are the same financial institutions that reap billions of dollars in profits every year, while families keep tightening their belts more and more. We are talking about \$29.4 billion in profit in 2012, representing a 5% increase over the previous year, despite the weak economy.

Other countries have also seen major changes in the banking sector and their citizens' consumption patterns over the past few decades. If we look at how these countries have handled the transformation, it seems obvious to me that Canada has plenty of models that could serve as inspiration for establishing a better balance between fair treatment for consumers and profits for the banks.

Indeed, in a number of European countries there are no fees for withdrawals from ATMs. In the United Kingdom, 97% of withdrawals are free of charge, as a result of pressure from the public. The Central Bank of Ireland bans ATM user fees. In Austria and Finland, cash withdrawals are free for any owner of a card for the national network of ATMs.

• (1650)

For their part, the banks contend that caps on ATM user fees lead to a significant reduction in the number of machines they make available to Canadians. However, it should be noted that Canada already has the highest number of automated banking machines per capita in the world.

There are over 60,000 bank machines in Canada and 18,303 of these are bank-owned ABMs. According to the World Bank, Canada has the highest number of ATMs per 100,000 people, that is, 204. The average for OECD countries is 74 ATMs per 100,000 people.

I think that rather than closing ATMs in order to save money to the detriment of people living in rural areas, banks should find a fair balance between profit, physical access to ATMs and appropriate fees imposed on the consumer.

It is the NDP's opinion that a cap of 50¢ per transaction is a reasonable way of reaching this fair balance, as it will enable the banks to maintain a certain profit level for an activity that of course does cost money, while at the same time giving consumers a bit of space. This is only one in a series of changes that the NDP is proposing. It is a step forward in defending the interests of Canada's middle class.

If the government really meant what it said in its last Speech from the Throne, it would not wait until the next election to give Canadians election-style gifts. It has to act now with the 2014 budget to show Canadian families that it can take meaningful action to ensure they have more cash in their pockets at the end of the month.

Canadians deserve better. They deserve a little breathing room. They deserve a paycheque that covers their needs and allows them to live decently without going into debt. We can take practical measures now to make life more affordable for Canadian families, and that is what the NDP wants to do.

Is the government ready to do that? I hope that we will all vote in favour of this motion to stand up for the interests of the people we are supposed to serve: our constituents.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in knowing to what degree the NDP would like to have a universal cap of 50¢ per transaction implemented. They have been talking a great deal about the banking industry, in particular, our major banks, whose ATMs make up a significant but minority percentage of the ATM machines out there across Canada.

Would she in an ideal world want to see that 50¢ cap incorporated for all ATM machines?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, the motion as written applies only to existing ATMs.

Banks will still make a huge profit even if they charge only 50¢.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for her speech. She pointed out that the cost of living is going up, but people are not making more money.

I would like her to comment on another aspect related to our economy. Can she comment on the fact that we have lost so many well-paid full-time jobs in various industries? I understand the Quebec region has been hit hard by industries shutting down. Those well-paid jobs are often replaced by less stable, poorly paid jobs.

Business of Supply

•(1655)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, the member will understand that that is not exactly the topic that is on the agenda. However, that is indeed the case. One could say that our well-paying jobs have been replaced by ATMs.

The banks are making bigger profits in part because they have replaced staff who dealt directly with the customers who went to the bank. Those employees have been replaced by ATMs. If one million people per hour pay \$2 to use an ATM, the banks instantly make a \$2 million profit. In the past, there were more jobs in the banks and people went to the counter. That was a lot more costly for banks. Indeed, they have eliminated those high-quality jobs.

Perhaps the banks need to stop wanting to increase their profits all the time and think about whether people might stop using them one day because they will no longer have the means to pay for it.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her excellent speech.

I have noticed in the House today that Liberal and Conservative members have asked only two or three questions, which we have already answered and on which we all agree. I have to wonder why they keep asking the same questions. That raises certain doubts.

The motion is simple: all we are asking for is that it be regulated. We have proposed a cap of 50¢, which we have left open. I do not understand why the members opposite would not want to leave consumers a little financial wiggle room.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, we need to leave consumers with a little more pocket money because families really do have too much debt, and that can lead to social unrest.

This morning, we heard about ATM installation, upkeep and maintenance costs. I was doubled over with laughter. Just now, I heard a member ask whether people who live farther away should be charged more.

Why are they asking such questions when we know that it is simpler and quicker to use an ATM? The money accumulates at the same time everywhere. As I pointed out, if one million people pay \$5 to a cable company to watch a movie, the company makes \$5 million, less maintenance, upkeep and regional costs. It is terrible to think that way. Profits continue to increase. In 2012, banks turned a profit of \$29.4 billion.

[English]

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity today to speak on such an important topic. Let me begin by saying that I find it passing strange that the NDP members are trying to label themselves as the party of consumer protection when it has been our Conservative government that has actually taken action to protect Canadian consumers.

What has the NDP done for consumers? The answer is nothing. Unlike the NDP, our government recognizes that financial decisions are some of the most important choices Canadians make. At the same time, we also recognize that financial products are becoming increasingly complex. Our government believes that the cornerstone

of any consumer protection framework is one in which there is competition, fees are disclosed, and consumers can exercise choice.

That is why our government has engaged with the banking industry on many occasions on the issue of ATM fees. In fact, we have highlighted that some consumers such as seniors, the disabled, and students may not have access to different banking options. Several banks acknowledged our concerns and responded by expanding ATM access in or near colleges and universities to help students avoid fees, unveiling low-fee accounts for seniors and students and improving access for the disabled.

The NDP may not be aware, but we have an entire federal agency devoted to consumer issues, the Federal Consumer Association of Canada, or FCAC as it is frequently referred to. Through the FCAC, consumers can access information on banking costs such as ATM fees. The FCAC developed innovative tools to help Canadians understand the different types of financial products in the marketplace. For example, in addition to information on ATM fees, the FCAC has resources to help consumers shop for the most suitable credit card, as well as banking packages that most effectively meet their needs. The NDP should know that this objective, reliable, and free resource is available to all Canadians to help them make sense of the everyday financial questions they face.

I would encourage the members opposite to take some time today and visit the FCAC's website. They will see how this service is helping Canadians acquire the skills they need to be informed financial consumers. However, that is not all we are doing to help consumers.

Business of Supply

The NDP might be interested to know that in 2010, our government introduced regulations to enhance Canada's consumer protection framework. These regulations protect consumers by requiring clear and timely disclosure of financial information related to credit frauds. Specifically, these regulations mandate an effective minimum 21-day interest free grace period on all credit card purchases when a consumer pays the outstanding balance in full; lower interest rates by mandating allocations of payments in favour of the consumer; allow consumers to keep better track of their personal finances by requiring express consent for credit limit increases; limit debt collection practices at financial institutions used in contacting a consumer to collect on a debt; provide clear information in credit contracts and application forms through a summary box that sets out key features such as interest rates and fees; help consumers manage their credit card obligations by providing information on the time it would take to fully repay the balance if only the minimum payment is made every month; and mandate advance disclosure of interest rate increases prior to their taking effect, even if this information has been included in the credit contract.

In addition, these regulations require that any disclosure by financial institutions be in plain language and presented in a manner that is clear, simple, and not misleading. However, for a reason known only to themselves, the NDP members did not think that clear and transparent disclosure is important for Canadian consumers. That is right: the NDP voted against each and every one of these measures.

I find it the height of hypocrisy for the NDP to stand here today and pretend to be on the side of consumers. What party that claims to defend the interests of consumers votes against increased transparency and disclosure on credit products? Apparently the NDP does.

Not to worry, we will not be discouraged by the NDP. Our Conservative government continues to introduce measures to protect consumers. For example, in action plan 2010 our government committed to bring greater clarity to the calculation of mortgage prepayment penalties. However, in typical NDP fashion, it voted against this as well. Clearly the NDP does not want Canadians to have important information at their disposal when they want to purchase their home, possibly the most important financial decision a family will ever make.

● (1700)

Now let us take a close look at what NDP members have voted against.

They voted against providing families an explanation of the differences between mortgage products and the prepayment privileges that they can use to pay off their mortgages faster without having a prepayment charge. They voted against providing families with an explanation of how prepayment charges are calculated and a description of the factors that could cause prepayment charges to change over time. They voted against requiring banks to provide clear disclosure on the amounts families must pay to the lender if they prepay their mortgage and on how the amounts are calculated. They also voted against allowing the borrower the opportunity to speak with a staff member who is knowledgeable about mortgage prepayments.

I have asked this question already, but I have to ask it again. How can NDP members pretend to be on the side of consumers when they opposed our government's action to provide Canadian families with clear information before making the most important financial decision of their lives?

Thankfully, our Conservative government understands the importance of having this kind of information available, and others agree. Here is what the Canadian Bankers Association had to say:

With the new Code, every year bank customers will receive information that will help them better understand mortgage prepayment charges and how they are calculated if they want to pay their mortgage off early. The Code also builds on the advice that banks have always provided to make sure the customer is making an informed decision.

Thanks to this code, a young family can make the decision to buy a first home with confidence. Now that is what I call real action for consumers.

Unfortunately, there are still more examples of our government's consumer protection measures that the NDP voted against.

As part of economic action plan 2011, our Conservative government built on our strong record of consumer protection by introducing even more measures that benefit consumers. The NDP may not realize this, but a number of credit card issuers offer what is referred to as "credit card cheques". These credit card cheques allow funds to be withdrawn directly from a credit card and are considered to be cash advances, which can accrue higher interest rates and fees and do not allow for an interest-free grace period. To ensure that consumers were not taken advantage of by these products, our government banned the unsolicited use of these credit card cheques.

Clearly, if NDP members really cared about protecting consumers from high interest rate products, they would have voted to ban this practice with us. Rather, they voted against restricting the use of these products. However that is not all they opposed; there is more.

In recent years, many Canadians have come to rely on the use of prepaid payment products, commonly referred to as "prepaid credit cards" for their daily purchases. Our Conservative government believes it is important that, when Canadians use these products, they understand what fees and conditions apply. By having this information, they can make informed financial decisions. In many cases, there were fees associated with prepaid credit cards that were not entirely clear to consumers. Thanks to our Conservative government, new regulations were introduced to ensure consumers are informed on fees and requirements related to prepaid credit cards.

For example, our government's regulations require that fees be disclosed to consumers in an information box displayed prominently on the product's exterior packaging. Furthermore, they require that other information associated with these products is provided in a manner that is clear, simple, and not misleading, prior to the card being issued.

Business of Supply

These regulations also limit certain business practices that could be harmful to consumers. For example, they prohibit the amount on the card from expiring and they prohibit any maintenance fees for at least one year after activation.

These regulations will ensure that Canadians get the full value of their hard-earned dollars when using these products. Unfortunately, this is yet another proposal that the NDP did not support. Shamefully, the NDP voted against it in yet another vote against Canadian consumers.

Not only do NDP members continually vote against the interest of consumers, but their love for high taxes clearly shows that they have no desire to save consumers money. If NDP members had their way, they would introduce a \$21 billion carbon tax that would raise the price of everything.

Our Conservative government would never do that. In fact, we have been doing the opposite. The fact of the matter is that this government has kept more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians and their families than any other government.

In fact, since 2006, we have cut taxes over 160 times, reducing the federal tax burden to its lowest level in over 50 years. Overall, our strong record of tax relief has meant that the typical Canadian family will save almost \$3,400 in 2014.

• (1705)

We have cut taxes in every way government collects them. This includes personal taxes, consumption taxes, business taxes, excise taxes, and much more. Unfortunately, the NDP has voted against each and every one of these tax cuts.

Let us list off some of the tax cuts that the NDP has voted against. It voted against cutting the lowest personal income tax rate. It voted against increasing the amount Canadians can earn without paying tax. It voted against pension income splitting for seniors. It voted against reducing the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, which has put over \$1,000 back in the pockets of the average family. It voted against the introduction and enhancement of the working income tax benefit. It voted against the tax free savings account, the most important savings vehicle since RRSPs. It voted against increasing the age credit, the pension income credit, and more.

More Canadians and their families are keeping more of their hard-earned money in their pockets because of the low tax agenda of our Conservative government. Furthermore, this tax relief is helping families at all income levels. Our government's low tax plan has helped remove over 1 million low-income Canadians from the tax rolls, including 380,000 seniors. For the NDP to suggest that our government does not stand up for consumers is simply absurd. There can be only one explanation: the NDP must be ashamed of itself for voting against each and every one of these consumer protection measures and against each and every one of our tax cuts.

As I said earlier, the NDP's indifference toward Canadian consumers will not discourage our Conservative government. We will continue to stand up for consumers. We will empower consumers, and we are taking bold steps to do so.

In today's marketplace, financial literacy has become a necessary skill for Canadians. Financial literacy, however, is not just a skill for

adults. It has to start at an early age, and it should continue throughout one's life. As technology marches forward, so has its effects on financial services and products. With financial markets innovating constantly, it can be difficult for Canadians to manage the exceedingly complicated financial decisions they need to make. That is why financial literacy is a skill more relevant today than ever before. Clear and concise financial information and increased financial literacy can translate into higher savings levels and decreased indebtedness. It gives consumers the information they need to select the financial products and services that are right for them.

Our government is firmly committed to strengthening financial literacy across the country. Let me be clear: with economic action plan 2009, we created the task force on financial literacy with a mandate to make recommendations for a comprehensive national strategy to strengthen Canadians' financial literacy. It was this report that resulted in our government introducing legislation to create the office of the financial literacy leader. The financial literacy leader will work collaboratively with stakeholders and coordinate their efforts across Canada to contribute to financial literacy initiatives.

It is clear that the NDP does not have the interests of Canadian consumers at heart. While it claims to be an advocate for consumer protection, the fact of the matter is that it has done nothing to help consumers. On the other hand, our Conservative government has, time and time again, stood up and taken action to ensure that consumers are protected and have access to the information they need to make informed financial decisions.

We have no intention of resting on our laurels. Our Conservative government committed in the recent Speech from the Throne to further expand Canada's consumer protection framework. Our government made a commitment to take further action to expand no-cost banking options available to Canadians.

The NDP should stop pretending to advocate for consumer interests. It is clear from its record that it has no interest whatsoever in consumer issues or protecting consumers in any way. If the NDP truly cared about the Canadian consumer, it would have supported the government on the countless consumer measures we have introduced.

It is because of the NDP's hypocrisy on this issue that I will be voting against this motion, and I urge all members of the House to oppose it as well.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. H el ene LeBlanc (LaSalle— emard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide another statistic, and I would appreciate it if my Conservative colleague would answer my question.

The profits of Canada's six largest banks rose from \$19.1 billion in 2007—the Conservative government came to power in 2006—to \$28.4 billion in 2012. Clearly, the Conservative government has really helped Canada's six largest banks, given that their profits increased by \$10 billion between 2007 and 2012.

How does my colleague explain this?

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, our government remains focused on what matters most to Canadians, and that is jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity. We have the strongest economy relative to all other G7 nations. We have created over one million net new jobs. We have the most sound banking sector for the sixth year in a row, rated by the World Economic Forum.

Only the NDP would consider profit to be a dirty word. It is passing strange. I would expect, from what the New Democrats are saying here today, that they want to go back to the founding fathers of the CCF in 1932-33, back to the Regina manifesto where they called for the nationalization of banks. This is where they seem to be going.

Profit is not a dirty word in our country. Profits mean jobs, prosperity, and opportunity for Canadians.

• (1715)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for York Centre, for a very passionate speech and a very timely one, because we are talking today about ATM banking fees, which are very important for our consumers. For example, I deal with a bank but I know that because there is a free market I have the opportunity for convenience. I can choose whether to withdraw money at a bank that I do not have an agreement with—that is available to me—or go to my own bank, where there is, perhaps, no payment for that.

One of my NDP colleagues brought up the issue with our banks and profits. I was wondering if the member could comment about the importance of a strong banking system, especially with our pension plans? Most pension plans are invested in our banking sector, even the Canada pension plan. The NDP says it is consumer friendly, but has he ever heard of something called the \$20 billion carbon tax? Perhaps he could comment on that.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, the member hit the nail right on the head by saying that the New Democrats may call for reduction of ATM fees and they say profits are bad, but what they want to do at the end of the day is to impose a \$21 billion carbon tax. That is just for starters.

It is interesting to go back, as I did the other night. I had absolutely nothing to do so I took out the old NDP platform from the 2011 election. What I found in there was that the NDP called for a credit card fee cap at 5% above prime. This would have encouraged more people to go further into personal debt and would have led to a huge problem in our consumer sector. It is interesting because the NDP seems to be calling for very anti-consumer friendly policies that would only hurt job creation efforts.

I suggest New Democrats get on board with our government, on the side of Canadians and Canadian consumers, to help create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity in our country.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is fairly simple. Does the member believe there is any room whatsoever, in a targeted way, where there are situations where there might be a need for the government to look at ways to ensure that banking fees are in fact reasonable, making specific reference to

ATMs? Could he further expand on that by looking into, for example, certain areas, whether in rural or even in certain urban areas, where banking facilities are maybe not as numerous as they are in the suburbs? If he could provide comment on that I would appreciate it.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, 70% of ATMs in our country are considered to be white label. White label ATMs are under provincial jurisdiction. That means only 30% are covered by federal jurisdiction. Therefore, for us as a government to be heavy-handed, as the NDP wants us to be, in a command-style economy, to go in there and perhaps even nationalize banks and impose a limit on ATM fees, would create a lack of confidence in our economy. It would create a Stalinist kind of approach to government that we in our country certainly do not accept.

The question from the member for Winnipeg North was a good one. It would be difficult for us as a government. We would prefer the banking sector co-operate with us, as it has done so far. We find that to be a much better system than imposing the heavy hand of government.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague likes to talk numbers. I do not want to talk about \$1 million; I would rather talk about the 50¢ ATM transaction fee limit that the future NDP government will propose.

Right now, when someone withdraws money, it costs the financial institution a mere 36¢. We do not want a free market because, unfortunately, that led to abuse of the system. Over the years, that abuse has only gotten worse and fees can go as high as \$2, \$3 or even \$6 per transaction.

Does my colleague think that a 50¢ limit on transaction fees is reasonable for consumers, yes or no? If an ATM transactions costs the banks 36¢, they would still make a small profit.

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, what I do not find reasonable is the NDP's claim that somehow profits are bad. Profits help Canadian consumers. They help to create jobs and create prosperity in our country. It is the labour unions that have invested in our public pension plans and that own stocks in the banking sector. They own stocks in Toronto-Dominion and the Royal Bank. The more profits that the banking sector makes, the better the labour unions and working Canadians do.

I suggest that my hon. friend go back to his labour union bosses and have a heart to heart discussion about banking fees, the banking sector, and the need for a strong economy, which Conservatives have created in Canada as a result of the economic actions plans of 2006 right through to 2013.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is astonishing to see how our speaking time can be used here in the House. Our Conservative colleague spoke to the motion for 30 seconds and then spent another 15 seconds touting his performance in recent years.

Business of Supply

We are proposing that the 2014 budget include measures to protect consumers by limiting ATM transaction fees. There is no pressure. We simply want to take the time to think about what we can ask of our banks to save money for consumers and bank clients. I do not see what would be so onerous about that. The committee can conduct the necessary studies to determine the ceiling required to ensure that these people are well served.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, these truly are crocodile tears that New Democrats are crying. Conservatives have brought in budget after budget of consumer-friendly, consumer-supportive regulations and laws, which have helped consumers through lower fees and lower taxes. The only thing that New Democrats stand for is a \$21-billion carbon tax, plus tax upon tax.

They talk about profits being a bad word. On the other hand, they talk about how important it is for government to tax out of existence people's jobs, prosperity, opportunities, and hope. Conservatives and Canadians find that unacceptable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share my time with the member for LaSalle—Émard.

I listened to the member for York Centre. That takes some nerve. He gave the House a real million-dollar answer. The member just told us that businesses should make a profit and that the NDP is against that. A business is usually pretty darn happy if it makes a 10%, 15% or even 20% profit. We know what kind of profits stores and other companies make.

That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about the fact that it costs banks 36¢, but they are charging \$3 or \$4 instead of 50¢. That is not a 10%, 20% or 50% profit. That is a 200% profit. That is a massive profit, and for whom? The banks. Who are the banks? Friends of the Conservatives. These are the same banks that made \$22 billion in profits, and the government lowered their taxes.

In the Conservatives' budget that the NDP proudly refused to support, there was \$40 billion in tax cuts over five years. The banks were getting tax cuts. They are being given tax cuts after they generated \$22 billion in profit and were handing out bonuses. I want the member for York Centre to hear this. They handed out \$11 billion in bonuses.

The Conservatives are not here to protect the consumer. Banks are not the ones voting for governments. It is the public, consumers, ordinary Canadians, the people who get up every morning and build our country all day long. They work hard. It is the men and women from all classes of society who are forced to give 200% to the banks and financial companies.

Some countries have said that this will no longer happen. For example, in the United Kingdom, 97% of withdrawals are free, as a result of public pressure. That public pressure did not come from the banks. Not from the Conservatives' buddies. It came from the public, the ordinary people who get up every morning, the men and women who work hard for their money.

Now, if someone shows up with cash, they are not even welcome anymore. You need a debit card. Everyone wants that card. The debits are done right away and the store has its money.

The member for York Centre said that the reason credit card interest rates are high is that people get themselves in too much debt. Boy, does he have faith in Canadian consumers. Basically, he said they are irresponsible. What he really said was that if interest rates were lower, Canadians would run up unbelievable amounts of debt, but it is actually the opposite. Before, people could go to the bank and get a loan at 6% or 7%. Nowadays, banks are refusing to loan people money and are sending out credit cards with 19% interest rates instead. If people miss a payment, the interest rate goes up to 23%. They are crucifying Canadians. That is what the Conservative government is doing.

The Conservatives say that they are all for protecting consumers. They claim that the NDP says employers and companies should not have the right to make money. That is not what we are saying. We are saying that people have the right to live. People have the right to earn money so they can buy things for their families. That is what we are saying. People have that right, and they have the right not to be ripped off at the ATM. That is what is happening.

What is the NDP's motion? It is not an extraordinary motion. It simply says:

That, in the opinion of the House, Canadian consumers face unfair Automated Teller Machine (ATM) fees as a result of an uncompetitive marketplace and that the House call on the government to take action in Budget 2014 to protect consumers by limiting ATM fees.

• (1725)

It clearly states "by limiting ATM fees". Right now, it is a free-for-all.

[*English*]

As we say in English, it is a free for all. When we go to an ATM, it is not normal that we want \$20 and pay \$3 to get our own money. It is not normal that we want \$50 and pay \$3 to get our own money. It does not make sense. That is what is happening right now in Canada, where some other countries have abolished the fee or brought it right down to 97% that they just cannot charge anymore, or do not charge. That is what we are saying. We have to put a limit on that.

We have to put a limit on the credit card, as I said a few minutes ago. At one point in time, we used to walk into a bank and the manager would ask if we wanted some money. They do not ask if we want money anymore. They send us credit cards to our homes. It is so easy to get credit. They are saying the reason that the interest rate is high is to stop people from using their credit cards. That is not what is happening. They are putting people in debt, which is unbelievable. Instead of giving them a loan at 6% or 9%, they give them a credit card, which is easy to get. Instead of bothering to go to the bank to borrow money, it is easier to take a credit card with a limit of \$20,000 or \$30,000 and buy what we want. After that, we get charged an interest rate of 19%. If we miss a couple of payments, they bring the interest rate up to 24% or 28%.

Business of Supply

It is unbelievable that the Conservative government that says it is here for the consumer does not do anything to save the consumer money or protect the consumer. The Conservatives do not do anything to protect the consumer, other than speaking words in the House, saying that companies have the right to make money and people have the right to make money. Yes, they do, but not on the backs of the citizens in the way they are doing it now, by gouging them when they go to the ATM. They do not have that right.

Many countries stand up for their consumers because they are the citizens of the country. They are the people, the men and women who get up in the morning and work hard for their money. They are working hard to earn money, and they have banks making billions of dollars of profit. We have the CEOs of the banks paying themselves millions of dollars of wages on top of it. A few years ago, the banks made \$22 billion of profit and the CEOs paid themselves \$11 billion of bonuses in this country. That is where the government should say that this is not right in our country; the banks do not have the right to do that. They are there to help consumers. They are there to help small and medium-sized businesses to build business instead of doing what they are doing right now.

That is why I believe the citizens will see that we have a good motion and that it should become the law of our country. They will see where the NDP is coming from with this, to protect the consumer. It is not like the Conservatives saying that they are protecting the consumer.

• (1730)

[Translation]

They are not protecting consumers, and this is becoming increasingly expensive.

Today we are asking this government to vote in favour of our motion, to support it and really support consumers and the citizens of this great country.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat a question that I have asked other colleagues of the member from the NDP. It is in regard to the universality of having that 50¢ cap. Does the member believe that a 50¢ cap should be applied to all ATMs, not just one-third of them, but all ATMs? What is the member's personal opinion on that issue?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, we have to evaluate. The motion is not a bill; it is a motion. We are asking people to sit down together and say what should be charged.

We are looking at a cap of 50¢. The fact is that there is no cap right now. It is a free-for-all. It is a free-for-all, and it is not right. It is not right that Canadian men and women have to pay that. Everybody uses ABM cards now. They do not use cash anymore. Everybody has a card and uses it, but then consumers are being abused in the same way they are abused when they use a credit card.

The cap is something we should discuss. It is totally not acceptable for Canadians to have to pay that. In some countries it is nothing at all. They do not even pay in some countries. Why should we do it here in this country?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst for giving a speech with all the passion and verve he is known for.

I would like to know how the measure proposed by the NDP can help his constituents. Many of us realize that people in various regions across Canada are finding life less and less affordable and increasingly difficult, depending on the demographics of each region of the country. I would like to know a little more about how this is playing out in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. I think the same is happening everywhere, in all ridings. These days, people use their debit cards on a daily basis. They do not think to themselves that today is payday so they will go and withdraw \$300 from their account and put all that cash in their back pocket, wallet or purse and use it later. People use their debit cards every day. When you add up \$3 here and \$2 there, then another \$2, \$1.75 or \$3, at the end of the month, people can spend \$35 or \$40 on ATM fees alone. Some people need that money. Some people need that money for their children who are in school or to meet basic needs.

The Conservatives say that financial institutions need to make money. I am sorry, but they are making money; they are making billions of dollars. The ones who are not making money are the Canadians who cannot even make ends meet. That is the situation where I come from, and I am sure it is the same across the country.

• (1735)

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, whom I greatly admire. I would like to point out that the profits on these transactions exceed 1,000%. The members opposite say that we are against profits, but that is ridiculous. We are not against profits for banking institutions that do their job, that lend money to a small business that needs it to create jobs, earn money and pay back that loan so the bank can in turn earn money. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about 1,000% profit on a simple transaction.

I would like to give my passionate colleague another opportunity to talk about how unconscionable this is.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, that is why there used to be banks on every street corner. Today, there are no banks in our regions. The banks are closing because it is easier to earn money fast with ATMs. There is no effort required. They know that people have no choice and they use that to their advantage. They have found a way to make money without doing anything. It is true. They make 1,000% profit. That is not right. What company makes 1,000% profit these days? There are many companies that would like to make 1,000% profit without doing anything. They do not even need employees. Everything is done by machine.

Business of Supply

This does not create jobs. Again, machines are taking away jobs in our country. The banks are benefiting and putting machines everywhere. It is like casinos popping up everywhere. It is a carrot dangling in front of the rabbit that the rabbit is going to eat. That is what the banks are doing and the Conservative government is letting them. It is not good.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in the House to support the NDP motion by the member for Sudbury, which proposes a measure that will make life more affordable.

I would like to start with an anecdote. About thirty years ago, in the 1980s, the job market and the economy were somewhat precarious. However, my mother and father had taught me that debts had to be repaid, which was done by cheque at that time. I was always very careful when I wrote a cheque. I always made sure that there was money in my bank account.

Near the end of the month, one of my cheques bounced, as they say. I could not understand why because I knew that there was money in my account. I bounced over to the bank where a woman simply told me that administrative fees were debited every month. If my memory serves me well, the fees were \$12 a month. Then the woman told me that if I had \$1,000 in my bank account, I would not be charged administrative fees. So I told her that if I had \$1,000 in my bank account, I would have no problem paying the administrative fees. That is the banks' logic. However, I understand that we have to pay for services.

Some 30 years ago, I went through periods of financial difficulty. In 2012, a large portion of the population went through the same thing, and the situation is not getting any better. A few years ago we had the Occupy movement: Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Montreal, Occupy Toronto and Occupy Vancouver. This is an excellent example of the 1%. It is worth repeating that since 2007, the profits made by the six biggest banks in Canada have risen from \$19.1 billion to \$28.1 billion, an increase of over \$10 billion.

In many respects, Canadians are tired of paying to pay or to access their own money. Furthermore, I am not just talking about the economic situation of the 1% and the profits the banks are raking in. I am also talking about the 99%. I am talking about people whose economic situation is becoming more and more precarious. I would remind the House that the debt load is currently 166%.

The Conservative members say that they have made sure that people understand the financial situation better and that fees are not hidden. These are all good measures for financial literacy. However, the fact remains that the average Canadian debt load right now is 166%. Canada has been lucky, because the gap between rich and poor was not that big.

• (1740)

However, the OECD criticized the fact that the gap between rich and poor in Canada is growing and is increasing more quickly here than in other OECD countries. That has been the case for the past 10 years, and it is extremely disconcerting.

There have been announcements about factories closing and well-paying jobs being lost. They are not always connected. Last May, 9.7% of people worked in the manufacturing sector. Earlier in the

decade, in 2003, that number was 15%. I am using the example of the manufacturing sector because the sector had stable jobs that paid very well, and it still does. At first, we lost a large part of our manufacturing sector to China, for example, because production was moved there. More and more, production is being moved to the United States. In addition, a number of Canadian companies have been bought by foreign investors. We are not opposed to foreign investment, but when an increasing number of Canadian companies are bought by foreign investors, the sector and, in turn, a large part of our economy become weaker.

Statistics show that well-paying jobs have been lost. The manufacturing sector has lost scores of jobs and plenty of ground in the past decade.

However, when we look at the picture that Statistics Canada paints of the workforce, we can see what has replaced those manufacturing and public sector jobs. Quite often, they have been replaced by more precarious part-time positions in the retail sector. Far be it from me to say that those jobs are not gratifying. I have worked in retail, and I must say that it is demanding work that requires versatility in dealing with the public and providing customer service. Those are very important jobs, but this sector is the largest in Canada right now.

That means that some jobs may not pay as well or that they are more precarious because they depend on the current economic climate. Families who move from sector to sector have unstable income.

In my riding of LaSalle—Émard, a large segment of the population lives under what is known as the low-income cutoff. Forty per cent represents a lot of people who find it difficult to make ends meet, experience financial difficulties and have fewer and fewer options, such as choices about credit or ATM fees, and so on.

As the critic for co-operatives, I would like to point out the lack of choice that we talked about. That is often a fact of life in the regions.

• (1745)

The banks have abandoned the regions. Fortunately, there are more than 2,000 credit unions in various communities. Over 1,100 of those constitute the only financial service available in their communities. I am very pleased that they are there.

I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work done by the Association coopérative d'économie familiale, which helps put people on a solid financial footing.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the impression, as the hon. member pointed out, that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening in Canada. I believe that studies have proven it.

Although the Conservative government boasts a lot about having cut taxes, the excise tax has increased on items such as strollers, hockey helmets and other imports. At the same time, there has been a decline in the number of manufacturers, a massive reduction in the number of public servants and an increase in certain fees on different things.

Business of Supply

Furthermore, we give the wealthiest, such as banks, free reign on, for example, the interest charged on credit cards. There are no limits. We keep allowing the rich to get even richer.

What does the member think about that?

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for her question.

That is one area of concern for us in the NDP and for others as well. It is also a concern for an increasing number of economists and analysts. For instance, *The Globe and Mail* has published a series of articles explaining the growing gap between the rich and the poor in Canada. I also mentioned the OECD, among others.

We will certainly have to come up with lasting solutions to ensure that our economy creates well-paying jobs that will bring the Canadian economy into the 21st century and, more importantly, that will be there for future generations.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Jack Layton, a number of years ago, advocated that there should be no fees, that in fact we should bring in a law that would disallow a bank from charging a fee if someone wanted to withdraw money from an account.

I wonder if the member could explain what has changed in terms of the NDP's position on that particular issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for raising questions and contributing to the debate.

In fact, the purpose of our measure and the NDP's current campaign is to make life more affordable for Canadians.

Since there is a lot of talk about the middle class, I would like to add that I have the opportunity to meet with a lot of people in my riding. They let me in their homes and talk with me. I would like to address those who do not have a voice, who have a hard time making ends meet and who are looking for a representative who will stand up for their needs and be committed to ensuring that governments are really fighting poverty.

I think the motion before us is a proposal not only to help people make ends meet, but also to fight against poverty.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. It is very clear today that there is only one party in this House, the New Democrats, that is talking about the issue of household debt and the pressures families are facing.

We all know where the Conservatives stand. They are on the side of the big banks. That is clear, but it is the Liberals who have been weaseling and undermining every single question to try to make this an issue that is silly or that we should not be debating, when we are talking about families and seniors who are being gouged by outrageous fees.

When senior citizens have to take money out of an ATM because they do not have access to a bank, and for \$40 they have to pay \$7, the Liberals seem to think that is perfectly okay. That it is the market. They have even called people lazy for not going to their banks. For us it is a question of fairness.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague why she thinks the Liberals have such a tin ear when it comes to the issues of ordinary Canadian families.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague once again. He knows exactly how to put into words the issue we are debating. He mentioned fairness. The concept of fairness is very important. Right now, as he so aptly said, in my riding, there are retired people with low incomes and single women with small pensions who must cope with the increases in the cost of living and in various fees. It is very important for me to be here in order to make their voices heard.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start off with the comments of the member for Timmins—James Bay. When he is in debate on this issue, one gets the impression that he might be somewhat nervous about the Liberal Party. I do not quite understand why he feels obligated to give misinformation. At the end of the day, I can assure the member and others that there are many advocates for consumer legislation and ideas in the House. A good number would be within the Liberal Party caucus and in other caucuses also.

When we talk about consumer prices, there are the big three, if I could put it that way. The price of gas is an issue that comes up constantly. Constituents want to hear what members have to say about the price of gas and what can be done. The price of cellphones is a huge issue that constantly comes up, and of course, banking fees is another issue that comes up quite frequently.

I recall back in November 2011 feeling very frustrated about gas. A number of constituents were asking what they could do. It is a very tough issue. It was suggested that what might be best is for consumers to target a particular station and declare that they will not purchase gas if it exceeds \$x for a litre of gas. The point is that it is very frustrating. A lot of people believe that gasoline is nothing but a huge tax. The amount of tax on the retail sale of a litre of gas is a smaller percentage than what most people actually think it is.

I could go on forever talking about cellphones and some of the frustrations with cellphone pricing, such as the length of contracts, the way things are advertised, the exceptionally small font, and so forth.

Banking fees, again, is a very important issue. People who consider themselves consumer advocates, as I do, want to ensure that not only my constituents but all Canadians have reasonably priced fees for the services they are getting. There is an important role for government in monitoring to make sure that there is healthy competition. We also need to recognize that there are pockets, which is why we have talked about targets, that need to be looked at or taken into consideration.

Business of Supply

If we look at it from the perspective of banking as an industry, I believe we would find that there has been movement from within the Liberal Party to deal with that particular industry. In fact, a member commented earlier about how healthy our banking industry is today. Many, including me, would go back to the 1990s, when the Chrétien government made significant changes in regulations that ultimately prevented the banking industry from becoming larger through the acquisition of other banks, such as TD maybe amalgamating with the Royal Bank. I am not suggesting that those would have been the two banks. However, there was a push by the banking industry to become larger.

We know about the issue of loans, in particularly mortgages. We saw a change in policy by the Government of Canada with regard to loosening the amount of money required to get a mortgage. I believe it went from 10% to 5%, something the Liberals opposed. We argued that it was not in the best interests of the economy or consumers. We are glad to see that the government has reversed that.

• (1755)

The point is that the Liberal Party has a history of recognizing the need for the Government of Canada to play a role in the banking industry. We have seen that in terms of consumer products. My colleague, our critic, referred to low-cost banking. That was something put into place during the 1990s, when, through legislation, we were able to virtually guarantee low-cost banking services. That would have ensured, for example, that with a low-cost banking account, people would get free bank cards. It put in some minimum transactions to take place. We needed to ensure that the consumer was in fact being protected and that, yes, the government did have a role to play.

I have asked government members about how they feel regarding the whole issue of banking, particularly ATM fees. The response has not necessarily been surprising. It has been somewhat disappointing. If we listen, for example, to the member for York Centre, one would take away from his comments that the Government of Canada has absolutely nothing to worry about and that it should not get directly involved in any fashion. Leave it the way it is. There is enough competition that one does not have to worry about it.

That is the wrong attitude to have about such an important industry. There is no choice. If we live in a modern society, we have to engage with the financial industry. There is no choice, living in Canada.

It is important that members of the Conservative Party recognize, as we have recognized, that there is a role for the government to play. Unfortunately, I do not think that the member for York Centre is alone within the Conservative caucus. Many within his caucus believe the same. I find that to be somewhat unfortunate.

We need to look at the issue in its simplest form. In Canada, we have an estimated 60,000 automated teller machines scattered all over the place. A number of speakers before me stood up and said that within a five-minute walk or drive, there are a few accessible ATMs. In certain areas, there is a very high concentration of ATM services and a good sense of competition. However, we need to recognize that there is different service being provided by the industry.

We have the banking industry, and this is where the NDP seems to be focusing all of its attention this afternoon. Within the banking industry, we might have one third of all the ATMs out there, so if there are 60,000, it is probably just under 20,000. For example, in the province of Manitoba we have somewhere in the neighbourhood of just over 500 ATMs, making up approximately one third of the total number of ATMs.

Within the banking industry, it varies quite significantly. If people do their banking at a particular institution and withdraw or deposit money there, quite often they will find there is no ATM fee.

• (1800)

Hypothetically speaking, if one banked at CIBC and went to the TD bank, there is a higher risk that one would in fact pay some sort of fee to use that ATM. I have not heard of a \$6.00 to \$8.00 charge for withdrawal of money through our banking industry or our big banks. I do not mean to sound overly naive about it, and I am open to others giving some examples of where there is a \$6.00 to \$8.00 fee. I am aware that there are other ATMs throughout the country, and quite often the service fees at those machines are quite high. I suspect that when we hear from time to time about charges of \$8.00, that is most likely where those fees are being charged.

Individuals or corporations that use those machines vary quite significantly. For example, someone who has a corner grocery store may have made the decision that it is in his or her best interest to get an ATM installed in a corner of the store and would use it as a source of income subsidizing that particular store, or it might be for a multitude of reasons. Some might want to have it so people could withdraw money to spend in the community store.

I do not necessarily claim to understand why it is that everyone out there makes the decision to get an ATM in their store, but I do know it is a growing area. We have more and more independent operators wanting to acquire ATMs.

We need to recognize that there is a substantial difference. For example, NDP members are saying they want to put a cap on ATM fees, but it is important we recognize that they are talking about the smaller percentage of ATMs. All they are talking about are the ones that are regulated federally. If they want to deal with the majority of them, I would suggest they would have to start working with the provinces, which have jurisdiction, to try to see if there is in fact some sort of consensus that could be achieved.

However, there is no one-price-fits-all, which would even apply to the smaller number, those within the banking industry. I do not believe there is a one-price-fits-all, which is something that needs to be taken into consideration.

We in the Liberal Party recognize that there is a need for us to advocate for and protect our consumers. Therefore, in principle, we will be supporting this particular motion. However, I think we have to be very honest with Canadians in terms of exactly what it is that the motion is purporting to do.

Business of Supply

In fact, there have been some changes, which I put in terms of a question to the previous speaker. At one time the NDP did have a position. Jack Layton did say there should not be any fee whatsoever. The NDP has now made a change and is saying that there should be a 50¢ flat fee, which is based on the fact that it is resentful of the billions of dollars that banks are making on an annual basis.

What I am most concerned about in terms of Winnipeg North is the banking industry as a whole and the impact it is having in my riding and communities across Canada. I can say that, yes, people are concerned about banking fees—there is no doubt about that—but there are many communities that are concerned about banks closing branches, as a major issue, and the impact that has on our communities.

● (1805)

When a bank closes a branch, quite often it then puts individuals in a position where they have to go to ATMs where they will be charged these huge fees.

I think it would have been a healthier discussion if we would have had today's debate more on the bigger picture. If we wanted to deal with ATM fees, maybe it should have been with respect to the banking industry as a whole. There are many aspects of that industry we could talk about that actually have an impact upon consumers. I think there is a great deal of merit for that.

We need to recognize that the banking industry has changed considerably over the years. There were the limited hours during which we could go to the bank; some suggested 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., from Monday to Friday, which was very real. Then there is today, where it is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week because now it can be done online. From having to wait in long lines in banking institutions to being able to sit in front of a computer in our homes, and everything else that has happened in between, we recognize that the industry has changed tremendously over the years.

I especially appreciate our credit unions and the phenomenal role they have played in terms of moving into areas where the banking industry has pulled out. Here, I am talking more about locations because that is of concern to my constituents.

We need to take a look at how we can ensure these fees that are being charged are appropriate. The bigger issue, I believe, is looking at where we might be able to improve, by working with the different levels of government, our provinces, and taking more of a holistic approach at dealing with the issue of banking fees, in particular the ATM fees. That is why I posed the question earlier today in terms of my home province of Manitoba, which has a New Democratic government. I posed the question in terms of what it has done to deal with the ATM fees because that is the larger percentage of fees in the province of Manitoba. I had thought that the member might have been able to inform me, as I do not know the details. However, to the best of my knowledge, it has not.

I do believe that if we take a holistic approach at dealing with the financial industry and how it services our constituents, we might be able to learn something from that. If we base it on the past, we will find there is a need from time to time for the Government of Canada

to play a leadership role in providing guidance within our financial industry.

We have done that in the past, whether it was Paul Martin or Jean Chrétien or others. Legislation has been brought in and third parties have been brought in to ensure there is competition. There is that need, and that need is very real.

As much as the Conservatives will likely end up voting against the motion, as many of them have implied, I think they are being shortsighted. They could do consumers and all Canadians a favour, at the very least by recognizing a need for the Government of Canada to watch over and ensure there is competition, that there are reasonable rates, and to work with the different levels of government to see if there might be something that could be done.

● (1810)

It is called having an open mind. I do not see an open mind coming from the Conservative government on this issue.

I understand that we will probably end up having a vote on this tomorrow or whenever the vote is. I trust that the government members might have an opportunity to rethink their position and put the consumer first, along with Canadians. I think we could—

● (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, the NDP requests that the division be deferred until tomorrow, Tuesday, February 4, 2014, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders.

I see the Chief Government Whip is rising on a point of order.

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would request that we see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is there unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN FORCES

The House resumed from January 30 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant relating to the business of supply.

• (1840)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(*Division No. 47*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Ayala	Bélangier
Bennett	Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Caron	Casey
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	MacAulay
Mai	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinity	MacKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Papillon	Pécllet
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Rathgeber

Business of Supply

Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Turnell — 117	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Davidson
Dechert	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Falk
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hillyer	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Payne	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace

Adjournment Proceedings

Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 146

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1845)

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the opportunity to ask the minister responsible for the Canada Post cuts whether there were any ways to continue providing service to Canadians with functional limitations. The minister said:

[*English*]

“...it will accommodate the situations it may be facing with respect to people with disabilities, or seniors. It does that already...”

[*Translation*]

She thought the service was already being provided.

Today, I can tell the minister that I checked with Canada Post and they told me that they do not do that.

We contacted Canada Post's customer service to ask whether measures were being taken to deliver the mail to seniors and persons with disabilities. They said no. Instead, Christine, the person who took my call, referred me to a 26-page document on the changes to Canada Post. There is no special mention in that document on how the changes to Canada Post will respect the different needs of persons with disabilities.

The changes proposed to Canada Post's services include the termination of home delivery, which will create more problems for all the Canadians who have reduced mobility or are visually impaired. Those changes will turn the simple fact of receiving mail into a difficult or costly task, making communications complicated and increasing dependency and social exclusion.

Currently, people with reduced mobility or a visual impairment might think that having to go to a community mailbox is impossible because of the distances involved.

The larger the geographic area, the less likely it will be that the mailbox will be within a reasonable distance for people with a disability. This means that more people will have to depend on others and will probably have to pay out of pocket to get their own mail.

This concerns people living in poverty as well, not only because some of them do not have access to the Internet, but also because of the cost of gas or taxis, or even the need to pay someone to get their mail.

As we all know, Canadians with reduced mobility or a visual impairment must use para transit to get around in their community. Will they have to use it just to go to their mailbox? This will overburden these services, which are already unable to meet the needs of their clientele in a number of communities.

The most vulnerable Canadians still rely on the mail. Taking that service away from them will make them more isolated and even more vulnerable. Taking something as basic as home delivery away from them will only limit accessibility and marginalize them. In addition, it will shift the burden onto them—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, when people are speaking in the House, I remain silent because I know I must show them respect. I would like to be shown some respect today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member still has the floor. I would ask all of the hon. members who wish to continue their conversations to leave the House now.

The hon. member for Montcalm.

● (1850)

Ms. Manon Perreault: Therefore, to deprive these people of something as fundamental as home mail delivery will only limit accessibility and marginalize them, as well as place an additional burden on these individuals by making them more dependent on others for something as basic as getting their own mail.

Where does this leave us? The minister is telling the public that the Conservatives have a plan to meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities, but when we check, there is no evidence of any such plan.

In the minister's response to my question, she said that I could verify this five-point plan, and that is what I did. What I learned is that the government has no plan to provide adequate service to seniors and people with disabilities.

I therefore wish to repeat my question: will the Conservatives guarantee funding to accommodate people with reduced mobility, to help them access their mail?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me start off by saying that Canada Post Corporation operates at arm's length from the government. In fact, since 1981, Canada Post has had a mandate to operate on a self-sustaining financial basis. It is also important to know that Canada Post is responsible for meeting that mandate in managing its own operations, including day-to-day business and financial decisions.

The NDP is refusing to see the reality of the Canadian postal system. Let us look at the facts. Canadians are choosing to communicate in ways other than sending letters. Due to the lack of demand, mail volumes have dropped almost 25% since 2008, and they continue to fall. In 2006, Canada Post delivered one billion more letters than it did in 2012. Put another way, that is one billion less in 2012 than in 2006. This is placing a huge strain on the corporation's finances. In 2013 alone, Canadian Post lost \$129 million before tax in just the third quarter, despite solid growth in parcel mail. Transaction mail volumes fell by 7.3% in the third quarter compared to that same third quarter period last year. That represents 73 million fewer pieces in the quarter compared to the same period last year. The Conference Board of Canada projected that Canada Post could lose roughly \$1 billion a year by 2020. It is clear that the traditional postal business model that worked so well in the pre-digital era is increasingly out of step with today's reality. Everyone may love getting mail, but who wants to keep funding antiquated business models that are only drifting further into irrelevance with the march of progress?

Canada Post recognizes that changes are needed to how it handles its business. Let me be clear: the Conference Board projected that Canada Post could lose roughly \$1 billion a year just six years from now. This is a substantial amount of money, yet here is what the NDP member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca had to say last week on this issue. He said, “We definitely do not have a crisis at Canada Post...”. Only the NDP would think that losing \$1 billion a year is not a crisis.

Here is the reality. Not only do we send fewer, if any, cards and letters, but bills, statements, and payments are being sent and paid digitally more and more often. Most companies and governments are actively encouraging Canadians to switch to electronic alternatives to save money and time and to increase security. Polling confirms that Canadians' habits are changing. Almost half of households say they now send two pieces of mail or fewer per month. This is reflected in far less business for Canada Post.

The direction of change is clear and it is irreversible. It is clear that the status quo is simply not an option. Not only parliamentarians but all Canadians should be very concerned that the corporation is posting significant losses. Canadians expect us to be sound stewards of the government's finances. They do not want to be on the hook for the significant losses that have been forecast based on the current business model.

Canada Post's actions are in line with the global transformation of postal services; they are changing to meet modern-day demands. Strategies laid out in its five-point action plan will help to ensure the corporation is on solid financial footing and better reflect Canadians' choices and needs.

• (1855)

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, to answer my colleague, I am not refusing to see the reality. On the contrary, I am well aware of how the budget cuts at Canada Post will affect people with disabilities.

I am almost tempted to invite my colleague to come to Montreal in the dead of winter and try to just get to a mailbox outside when the

Adjournment Proceedings

sidewalks are covered in snow. It is very disheartening to see that the government does not recognize the problems this is going to cause.

That said, when you use paratransit, you must provide a starting address and a destination address. In between, in many cases, paratransit asks you to wait in the same spot for at least one hour. If you have to wait outside in -25°C to go to the mailbox, that is a heck of a long time. I am not sure these people understand that.

Is there no way to set up a service so that people with disabilities can get their mail at home?

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, in the first nine months of 2013, mail volumes declined by 184 million pieces compared to the same period in 2012. This trend has been ongoing since 2006 when Canada Post delivered one billion more letters than it did in 2012. This, I repeat, is placing a huge strain on the corporation's finances, which ultimately will become the financial burden for hard-working Canadian taxpayers unless action is taken. The NDP refuses to see this reality. Again last week when debating a motion in the House, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca said, “We definitely do not have a crisis at Canada Post”.

The Conference Board has projected a Canada Post loss approaching roughly one billion a year just six years from now. Our government is concerned that it is posting significant losses and understands that the status quo is simply not an option.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the spring I brought up the issue of a sunken boat that is off the northeast coast of my riding. It is in Notre Dame Bay. It is off Change Islands, and it is called the *Manolis L*. It is primarily a paper carrier boat, and it went from the Port of Botwood to the open ocean and on to the high seas, and from there into the European markets.

The problem is that it sank around the mid-eighties. It hit a rock just off Change Islands. It was on there for a few days, and then it slowly slipped into the sea. It sits at about a hundred metres or so under the water. That was quite some time ago, as I said it was the mid-eighties. The problem now is that we are seeing oil washing up on the shoreline of Change Islands, Fogo Island, New World Island, and Twillingate Island as well, and that has caused quite a reaction among the local politicians and the citizens of the area.

Recently, the bird hunting season started and many of the hunters noticed that oiled birds were showing up. It was quite prevalent. I had public hearings in the riding in four different places, to ascertain how bad this is.

People said they could smell the oil before they could see it. They could see the sludge washing up on the shoreline; the birds were covered in it. We are just about to get into the sealing season and then the fishing season, which could cause many headaches, as this will get involved in the ecosystem. This is a grave situation.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have brought up the question, but not in the context of what is now being done. Right now work is being done by the Canadian Coast Guard to provide band-aid solutions for the hull that has split open near the bow. They have created what they call a cofferdam. It is like a funnel that is turned upside down. It is put on the boat, and when the cofferdam fills up with oil it is extracted from that. However, it is not a long-term solution, and that is the sentiment there. The long-term solution that people are looking for goes to the Department of the Environment spearheading this thing. I had a conversation with the former minister of the environment in the spring, who said they were monitoring the situation and that something would happen, hopefully soon, at Treasury Board, to make this long-term solution come to fruition.

What bothers me is that it has been handled mostly by the Department of Fisheries, which is fine, if I were asking about short-term measures. However, it is the long-term solution that the people of my riding are looking at. I should not say just my riding either; I should say the entire province, if not the entire eastern coastline of this country.

My question is, what is the long-term solution that is being offered beyond what is going on? We have one cofferdam. It was moved because it was damaged. It was put back. A new one was built as a temporary measure. Hopefully, over the next little while we can get a clearer picture.

If we want to permanently take the oil out of the boat, the capacity to do that belongs to several companies. It is a private sector endeavour. By way of example, there was a boat sunken off the British Columbia coastline called the *M.G. Zalinski*, and recently there was an operation to extract the oil from that boat. It was not like the *Irving Whale* in Prince Edward Island. They did what is called a hot tap. The oil is heated up within the boat and withdrawn, but it is a big operation. A Dutch company did it, and now tenders have to be issued. We have a short window because of the weather. I am fearful of what is about to happen. Is there a long-term solution?

● (1900)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend, the member of Parliament for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, for bringing forward again this issue relating to the sunken wreck of the *Manolis L* off the Change Islands. I know he serves his constituents diligently and is following this issue very closely. I may not be able to tell him very much new that he does not already know, but perhaps for others who are less familiar with the issue or for his constituents who might be watching, let me give the government's perspective on where we are on this issue.

As he probably knows, the Canadian Coast Guard is the lead federal agency for all ships, oil spills, or mystery pollution incidents in waters under Canadian jurisdiction. In cases in which the polluter is unknown or is unwilling or unable to respond, the Canadian Coast Guard will assume the overall management of the incident. In all cases, the Coast Guard will ensure an appropriate response.

Since March 2013, as my colleague has mentioned, when the Canadian Coast Guard first became aware of pollution off the Change Islands, the Coast Guard, Transport Canada, and Environment Canada have taken action to mitigate the threat of pollution.

They continue to monitor and manage the site of the *Manolis L* and, in my opinion, have done a commendable job.

Since the first reports of oil on the water, Transport Canada has conducted aerial surveillance flights to provide information the Canadian Coast Guard uses to manage the on-water situation. In addition, the Canadian Coast Guard has worked closely with Environment Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service to manage the impact on wildlife and has installed a noise-making device to keep seabirds away from the area.

The Canadian Coast Guard has conducted several underwater missions using a remotely operated vehicle to survey the entirety of the wreck. During the first inspection, two small cracks were identified in the vessel's structure. The first was sealed with an industrial neoprene gasket; the second, due to extensive damage to the bow of the vessel, was covered with a cofferdam designed to trap oil that might escape from the hull.

On December 23, 2013, the Canadian Coast Guard again conducted underwater operations to reassess the *Manolis L*. This inspection confirmed that the neoprene gasket placed near the middle of the vessel is continuing to work effectively, but the cofferdam that was installed to capture oil from the second leak in the forward part of the hull had shifted four to five metres due to unanticipated heavy underwater currents in the area. The latest reports of oil were the result of this unexpected shift in the cofferdam. However, once again—and this is the good news, I think—the inspection did not find any new or additional cracks or tears in the hull.

On January 19 of this year, the Canadian Coast Guard installed a new, streamlined cofferdam that is capable of withstanding the strong ocean currents and containing any further leakage, along with scientific instruments to monitor the subsea environment. A complete survey of the vessel was also conducted, and no further leakage was detected.

The Canadian Coast Guard, along with its partners, will continue to monitor the area this winter. They will return after the ice season to remove any oil from the cofferdam and to conduct another full underwater survey to verify that the containment system is working properly.

Safety and protection of the marine environment are two of the Canadian Coast Guard's main priorities, and I am pleased with its prompt efforts to date in responding to this incident in a challenging and dangerous environment.

● (1905)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank the parliamentary secretary for answering this question this evening. The description that he gives, the scene that he lays bare and describes in the House, is an accurate one. It is one that is of great concern, however.

Despite that, I want to commend the individuals who work with the Coast Guard and the work that they are doing in the tremendous weather that is happening right now. Let us face it: this area is iceberg alley, and it is called that for a reason. The weather is absolutely phenomenal, and they are out there doing it, so I want to join the parliamentary in commending the Coast Guard and what it does.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have one very quick question. Does this cofferdam that we have been talking about, which in my opinion is a temporary measure, serve as a long-term solution for the potential of disaster? Just less than 500 tonnes of bunker C oil is within that ship. That is what went down with the ship. As well, there are just less than 100 tonnes of diesel fuel involved in this wreck, which sits on a ledge just beneath the waterline at several hundred feet. It is of grave concern.

Very quickly, is this cofferdam the long-term solution that we have to settle for?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. With respect to the Coast Guard and the work that it has done here, a resident of Fogo Island, Barry Brinson, said, "I think they've done an awesome job, I really do". I think we would all agree that it has really gone beyond the call of duty, in many respects, to make sure that this does not become a disaster.

The answer to the question is that the long-term solution is for the cofferdam and the instruments that are in place, and the inspections that will be done will continue to monitor this. If it continues to work, that will be the solution, but if at some point it is no longer working, other actions will have to be taken.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am following up on a question I asked last year of the Minister of Veterans Affairs concerning the Conservatives' treatment of our servicemen and women. I notified him at the time that Thunder Bay's mayor and city council had voted unanimously to condemn the closure of the Veterans Affairs Canada offices in Thunder Bay and across Canada, but the minister went ahead and closed the offices anyway.

I told him that I had received hundreds of messages from Canadians who are angry at the government's poor treatment of our veterans, but instead of reconsidering and ending the clawback of benefits to injured and disabled soldiers, the minister actually insulted and further outraged veterans who came to visit him.

One veteran that he insulted was my constituent. Roy Lamore is a World War II navy vet from the Branch 5 Legion of Thunder Bay—Superior North. I joined him last Friday at the Veterans Affairs Canada office in Thunder Bay, along with dozens of other vets and constituents, and we had a memorial service for the closure of this local office. Mr. Lamore was outraged that the minister had treated him and his fellow vets so badly, after coming all the way to Ottawa. He said it was a complete disgrace that the office that he and other vets depend on is closing. Many people I meet say the same thing.

The local Thunder Bay office served a vast area, all the way from the Manitoba border to past Sault Ste. Marie. It served over 2,000 veterans and their families and employed 10 hardworking, skilled people. On Friday, the Conservative government closed that office. This shows a complete disregard for the needs of our veterans, the opinions of the people of Thunder Bay—Superior North, and all of our servicemen and women.

It is ridiculous to say they will get the specialized support they need through a 1-800 number or some byzantine website. They are now supposed to go through Service Canada, which in Thunder Bay—Superior North is already way overworked after deep cutbacks

and layoffs there. My own constituency office is now doing much of the work that Service Canada is supposed to do, and now my two hardworking staffers, Shannon and Vicki, will have to try to replace the services of 10 expert, laid-off Veterans Affairs staff. Our veterans have specific needs that require specialized training, yet Conservatives think that a general Service Canada employee, who does not have the knowledge or the experience, will be good enough as a replacement.

Veterans Ombudsman Guy Parent has called for the government to rectify failures in supporting veterans. He found that veterans who sustained serious and permanent injuries are all too often left with little or no support and are at high risk of falling into poverty. Vocational rehabilitation programs for those under 65 are deficient, and families left to care for wounded or addicted soldiers are left without the necessary resources.

In short, the Conservative government is leaving our servicemen and women in their time of need. It is shameful. What is even worse is the tragic rash of suicides by veterans over the last two months. One can only imagine how abandoned they felt. There has never been a worse time to abandon our vets. Things are so bad that veterans have actually sued the government for disability support. Imagine, not only has the government been derelict in its responsibility to veterans, it is actually arguing in court that no such responsibility even exists. The government feels that there is no special obligation to veterans who were injured in Korea, Bosnia, Afghanistan or World War II. That is incredible.

I ask the minister, will he stop fighting our veterans in court, reinstate the disability supports, and replace vital services, or will he resign?

• (1910)

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, but after having heard the comments made and the question asked, I find it unbelievable how much misinformation is loaded in them. It is extremely unfortunate.

I would encourage the member opposite, first of all, to familiarize himself with the different benefits available for Canada's veterans. I also point out the fact that he is a former member of the New Democratic Party. Virtually every single initiative this government has brought forward to assist Canada's veterans, the NDP has voted against. The hon. member was a member of that party and now he sits as an independent member. He was also part of that voting process, and has continued to vote against the government on different initiatives that we have brought forward.

Adjournment Proceedings

Just to give members an idea, since coming to office in 2006, our government has invested almost \$5 billion in new, additional funds in services for our veterans. We will shovel their snow. We will cut their grass. We will clean their home. We will deliver meals to their front doors. In the event a veteran is unable to drive to a district office, if he or she is seriously injured, we will also send a registered nurse or a case manager to the comfort of the veteran's home to assist him or her and the necessary assistance will be provided.

We will continue to do all of these things for our veterans because we recognize the tremendous sacrifice they have made for our country, and for the freedom we enjoy. This is the commitment that our Conservative government has toward all men and women in uniform, all veterans who have served our great nation.

As another example, this fiscal year we are investing \$785 million in additional funding compared to 2005, for instance, when the Liberal Party was in power and the Liberal government was in place.

Also, with regard to the district offices that are being merged with Service Canada offices, five out of eight of those district offices are in the same building as the Service Canada office, so there is really no change. A couple of other offices are within a kilometre. There is only one office, in Thunder Bay, that is approximately four kilometres away.

I would encourage the member opposite to recognize the fact that we now have 600 additional points of service across this country. So veterans across this great nation now have the benefit of going to a Service Canada office and receiving the information and assistance they need so they can be helped.

• (1915)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, this is a very different story than the one I hear directly from veterans in Thunder Bay—Superior North, and I know whom I believe.

Almost nothing the Conservative government does surprises me any more, but this is a new low. For years, the Conservatives have wrapped themselves in the flag and pretended to be the best friends of the Canadian Forces. However, doing right by their duty means more than just pretty words, patriotic rhetoric, and wasting \$20 billion on F-35s.

Our servicemen and women deserve action and not just words. Unfortunately, the actions of the current government have done our veterans a great disservice. Veterans have served us well, but the Conservatives refuse to serve them. We owe it to our veterans to have proper support for them when they return from duty with serious injuries, mental health traumas, addictions, or any disabilities.

So I ask the question again, will the minister take responsibility and rectify this big mistake, these gross errors, or do the honourable thing and resign?

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, the only thing I agree with the hon. member opposite on is that actions speak much louder than words. There is no doubt about that. That is exactly why our government has brought forward initiatives and has invested billions of dollars so that our veterans can be looked after with the services and benefits we provide. That member and all opposition parties can continue to vote against them. Our commitment is that we will continue to stand up for Canada's veterans, and we will do that.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a. m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:19 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, February 3, 2014

House of Commons

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin) 2447

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Financial Administration Act

Bill C-473. Second reading 2447
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North) 2447
Ms. Nash 2448
Mr. Rankin 2449
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue) 2451
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard) 2452
Mrs. Day 2453
Division on motion deferred 2454

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—ATM Fees

Mr. Thibeault 2454
Motion 2454
Ms. Rempel 2455
Mr. Lamoureux 2455
Ms. Papillon 2456
Mr. Goodyear 2457
Mr. Morin (Laurentides—Labelle) 2457
Mr. Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac) 2458
Mr. Angus 2459
Mr. Lamoureux 2460
Ms. Rempel 2460
Ms. May 2460
Mrs. Day 2460
Ms. Sgro 2461
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East) 2463
Ms. Rempel 2463
Mr. Brison 2463
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona) 2464
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot) 2464
Ms. Rempel 2465
Mr. Lamoureux 2465
Mr. Thibeault 2465
Mr. Angus 2466
Ms. Rempel 2467
Mr. Lamoureux 2467
Mr. Saxton 2468

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Regional Development

Mr. Norlock 2470

Black History Month

Mr. Benskin 2470

Hockeyville

Mr. Brown (Leeds—Grenville) 2470

Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence

Mr. Easter 2471

Winter Olympic Games

Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora) 2471

Canada-U.S. Relations

Mr. Atamanenko 2471

Heart Month

Mr. Wallace 2471

Francine Lalonde

Mr. Tilson 2471

Quebec Winter Carnival

Mrs. Day 2472

Science and Technology Awards

Mr. Braid 2472

Rail Transportation

Mrs. Hughes 2472

Black History Month

Ms. James 2472

Federal-Provincial Relations

Mr. Casey 2473

Legalization of Marijuana

Mr. Williamson 2473

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Dubé 2473

Federal-Provincial Relations

Mr. Menegakis 2473

ORAL QUESTIONS

Veterans

Ms. Leslie 2473
Mr. Gill 2473
Ms. Leslie 2474
Mr. Gill 2474

National Defence

Ms. Leslie 2474
Mr. Nicholson 2474
Mr. Harris (St. John's East) 2474
Mr. Nicholson 2474
Mr. Harris (St. John's East) 2474
Mr. Nicholson 2474
Mr. Easter 2474
Mr. Nicholson 2474
Mr. Easter 2474
Mr. Nicholson 2474
Mr. Garneau 2475
Mr. Nicholson 2475

Elections Canada			
Ms. Turmel	2475		
Mr. Poilievre	2475		
Mr. Scott	2475		
Mr. Poilievre	2475		
Mr. Scott	2475		
Mr. Poilievre	2475		
Public Safety			
Mr. Garrison	2475		
Ms. James	2475		
Ms. Doré Lefebvre	2475		
Ms. James	2476		
Veterans Affairs			
Mr. Caron	2476		
Mr. Gill	2476		
Ms. Mathysen	2476		
Mr. Gill	2476		
Mr. Chicoine	2476		
Mr. Gill	2476		
Mr. Stoffer	2476		
Mr. Nicholson	2477		
Mr. Garneau	2477		
Mr. Gill	2477		
Ms. Murray	2477		
Mr. Gill	2477		
Mr. Cuzner	2477		
Mr. Gill	2477		
Consumer Protection			
Ms. Nash	2477		
Mr. Sorenson	2477		
Ms. Nash	2477		
Mr. Sorenson	2478		
International Trade			
Ms. Charlton	2478		
Mr. O'Toole	2478		
Ms. Charlton	2478		
Mr. O'Toole	2478		
Justice			
Mrs. Smith	2478		
Mr. MacKay	2478		
Health			
Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	2478		
Ms. Ambrose	2478		
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	2479		
Ms. Ambrose	2479		
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	2479		
Ms. Ambrose	2479		
Mr. Boulerice	2479		
Ms. Ambrose	2479		
Natural Resources			
Mr. McKay	2479		
Mr. Oliver	2479		
Employment			
Ms. Sgro	2480		
		Mr. Kenney	2480
		Rail Transportation	
		Mr. Toone	2480
		Ms. Raitt	2480
		Mr. Godin	2480
		Ms. Raitt	2480
		Taxation	
		Ms. Crockatt	2480
		Ms. Findlay	2480
		Foreign Affairs	
		Mr. Goodale	2481
		Mr. Baird	2481
		Employment	
		Ms. Brosseau	2481
		Mr. Kenney	2481
		Public Safety	
		Mr. Carmichael	2481
		Ms. James	2481
		Citizenship and Immigration	
		Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	2481
		Mr. Alexander	2481
		Ethics	
		Mr. Fortin	2482
		Mr. Calandra	2482
		Veterans Affairs	
		Mr. Hyer	2482
		Mr. Gill	2482
		Air Transportation	
		Mr. Rathgeber	2482
		Ms. Raitt	2482
		Presence in Gallery	
		The Deputy Speaker	2482
		ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
		Canadian Multiculturalism Act	
		Mr. Uppal	2482
		Government Response to Petitions	
		Mr. Lukiwski	2482
		Petitions	
		Canada Post	
		Ms. Charlton	2483
		Experimental Lakes Area	
		Mr. Hyer	2483
		Ukraine	
		Mr. Lamoureux	2483
		The Environment	
		Ms. May	2483
		Lyme Disease	
		Ms. May	2483
		Questions on the Order Paper	
		Mr. Lukiwski	2483

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—ATM Fees

Motion	2483
Mr. Saxton	2483
Mr. Angus	2484
Mr. Brison	2484
Mr. Norlock	2485
Mrs. Day	2485
Ms. Sims	2485
Mr. Kellway	2487
Mr. Lamoureux	2487
Mr. Gravelle	2487
Mr. Hsu	2489
Mr. Thibeault	2489
Mr. Lapointe	2489
Mr. Wallace	2490
Mr. Thibeault	2492
Mr. Hsu	2492
Mr. Calkins	2492
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe	2493
Mr. Hsu	2495
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	2495
Mrs. Day	2495
Mr. Lamoureux	2496
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	2496
Mr. Tremblay	2497
Mr. Adler	2497
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	2499

Mr. Carrie	2500
Mr. Lamoureux	2500
Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	2500
Mr. Tremblay	2500
Mr. Godin	2501
Mr. Lamoureux	2502
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	2502
Mr. Lapointe	2502
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	2503
Mrs. Day	2503
Mr. Lamoureux	2504
Mr. Angus	2504
Mr. Lamoureux	2504
Division on motion deferred	2506

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Canadian Forces

Motion	2507
Motion negated	2508

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Canada Post

Ms. Perreault	2508
Mr. Watson	2508

The Environment

Mr. Simms	2509
Mr. Kamp	2510

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Hyer	2511
Mr. Gill	2511

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>