



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 051 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 25, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 25, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

QALIPU MI'KMAQ FIRST NATION ACT

Hon. Rob Moore (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-25, An Act respecting the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band Order.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

GATINEAU PARK

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many of my constituents and people who live in the national capital region. The petitioners are calling on the government to pass legislation to fully protect Gatineau Park, which we love so much and whose facilities we have enjoyed over this very snowy winter.

I hope to have the government's support for my bill, which will protect the park's boundaries and allow our children and grandchildren to use it with confidence for years to come.

[*English*]

CANADA POST

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, petitions keep flooding in from residents on Hamilton Mountain who are vehemently opposed to the cuts to Canada Post.

I am tabling a huge stack of petitions today. They are signed by people of all ages, all faiths, and all socio-economic backgrounds. Despite their differences, the petitioners are all united in their belief that Canada Post has not done its due diligence. It should have investigated ways to modernize postal operations before raising the price of stamps and unilaterally taking an axe to postal services.

The petitioners call on the government to continue door-to-door delivery of mail, to protect the 6,000 to 8,000 workers who are set to lose their jobs, and to stop the drastic increase in postage rates.

While I know the rules of the House do not allow members to endorse a petition, let me say that I am delighted to present these documents today on behalf of the thousands of Hamiltonians who have signed them.

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a petition on behalf of constituents who are calling on Parliament to refrain from making changes to the Seeds Act or the Plant Breeders' Rights Act through Bill C-18.

POVERTY

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituents bring me many different petitions, and I am happy to present them all in the House.

Today, I have two petitions. The first one draws the attention of the House of Commons to poverty in Canada and calls on the House of Commons to pass Bill C-233, an act to eliminate poverty in Canada.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from voters in my constituency who are calling on the Government of Canada to consult Canadians about a new electoral system and who would like to support the introduction of a suitable form of proportional representation following these public consultations.

[*Translation*]

GATINEAU PARK

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my hon. colleague from Hull—Aylmer, I wish to present a petition concerning protecting Gatineau Park.

This park is one of the most frequently visited parks in Canada. It is home to about 90 plant and 50 animal species at risk, so it is important that the government protect its borders. I therefore present this petition, which is signed by many people.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a petition today that is signed by hundreds of citizens from my riding of Burnaby—Douglas.

The petition concerns the death of Helen Sonja Francis, a registered nurse who was tragically killed by an impaired driver in 2005.

The petitioners note that the perpetrator of this crime was never brought to justice because of an administrative error. All of the evidence in the case, including blood samples, was deemed inadmissible because the required warrant was not approved and signed within the four-hour time limit.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to change the current four-hour time limit by permitting warrants to be approved within a six-hour time limit.

I have had many constituents come into my office to discuss their concerns with what happened in this case, and I would urge the government to take this seriously.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise in the House today to present two petitions. The first is primarily from residents of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia calling on the government to recognize that, since 1972, there has been an acknowledged federal and provincial moratorium against supertankers carrying crude along the west coast of British Columbia. They call on the House to ensure that there be a legislated permanent ban against supertankers bearing bitumen or other crude products.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition deals with my private member's bill, Bill C-442. I have been heartened by support from many members of Parliament in different parties in this place. The bill will come for second reading on Monday, March 3. These petitioners call for the passage of Bill C-442, to provide hope for many thousands of Canadians who are dealing with Lyme disease and who know that working together we can share best practices and improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of this disease.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House on behalf of my constituents in Hearst, Cochrane and Hallebourg. The petition concerns Canada Post. Between 6,000 and 8,000 jobs will be lost because the Conservative government has decided to slash postal services.

The petitioners are saying that no consultation took place, which prevents those who will be most affected from having their voices heard. They are calling on the government to cancel the service cuts announced by Canada Post and explore new ways of generating income, such as providing banking services.

● (1010)

[English]

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the first of many petitions, containing signatures from hundreds of Canadians in my riding and across the country, in support of Motion No. 460, which urges the government to provide protection for the southern resident killer whales. It has been 10 years since they have been designated as an endangered species, and we still have no recovery plan in place.

[Translation]

GATINEAU PARK

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House to present a petition in support of protection for Gatineau Park, as it is home to approximately 90 endangered plant and 50 endangered animal species.

My colleague from Hull—Aylmer and I are speaking out, calling on the government to pass legislation to protect and preserve this park for future generations.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition calling for a national public transit strategy.

It is very important for the people in my riding of Terrebonne—Blainville and in Saint-Anne-des-Plaines to have efficient public transit. They are calling on the federal government to get involved and act on this issue. I am proud to present this petition today.

[English]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many residents, mainly in northern New Brunswick, regarding the fact that rail services are planned to be cut in northern New Brunswick. These residents are concerned about the fact that rail service is an important form of transportation, both environmentally as well as economically. They are also concerned, as Atlantic Canadians, that this will lead to a further reduction in service from Montreal to Halifax. It is something that concerns us all. I am quite happy to support this petition, and there are others that will be coming in ensuing days.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

SITUATION IN VENEZUELA

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am asking that you allow an emergency debate on the situation in Venezuela.

Since I rose yesterday with a similar request, there has been a growing number of protests in the cities across Venezuela against the government crackdown against peaceful protestors. This started on Tuesday, February 11, when a peaceful student protest became violent when government entities began shooting and hitting peaceful protesters. This resulted in six dead, including two Catholic priests, and many others being hurt. Hundreds have been arrested and imprisoned without due process; many have just gone missing.

These protests are the largest since the death of long-time leader Hugo Chavez nearly a year ago. These protests are sweeping Venezuela, rapidly expanding from the original student protests that began earlier this month into protests made up of a broader array of Venezuelans.

Reports are now coming out which support what the protesters have been saying, and they are requesting international help.

One report stated the following:

As dawn broke, the residents of a quiet neighbourhood here readied for battle. Some piled rocks to be used as projectiles. Others built barricades. A pair of teenagers made fire bombs as the adults looked on.

These were not your ordinary urban guerrillas. They included a manicurist, a medical supplies saleswoman, a schoolteacher, a businessman and a hardware store worker.

As the National Guard roared around the corner on motorcycles and in an armoured riot vehicle, the people in this tightly knit middle-class neighbourhood, who on any other Monday morning would have been heading to work or taking their children to school, rushed into the street, hurling rocks and shouting obscenities. The guardsmen responded with tear gas and shotgun fire, leaving a man bleeding in a doorway.

On Monday, residents in Caracas, the capital, and other Venezuelan cities, piled furniture, tree limbs, chain-link fences, sewer grates, and washing machines to block roads in a coordinated action against the government.

The president, Mr. Maduro, is struggling to contend with a deeply troubled economy and has taken a hard line on expressions of discontent, squeezing the news media, arresting a prominent opposition politician, and sending the National Guard into residential areas to quash the protests.

News channels, which are owned and managed by the government, have not been reporting the situation. The Colombian news channel NTN24, the only international broadcasting that is used, has been taken off the air in Venezuela by the government regulatory body, suppressing national laws and human rights.

Venezuelans are completely isolated and are relying on social media, which has been disrupted by slowing down the Internet, blocking images on Twitter, and even suspending the service.

The Venezuelan government has limited the access of international and non-governmental organizations to the country, obstruct-

Privilege

ing their ability to record and denounce the constant violation of human rights.

Canadians of Venezuelan heritage are asking that we in this House stand in solidarity with the Venezuelans fighting for democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking, on behalf of these Canadians, that you allow an emergency debate on this matter.

• (1015)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member, again, for bringing this subject to the House's attention, but I am not prepared to grant an emergency debate at this time.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I am seeking unanimous consent that we in this House condemn what is going on in Venezuela, and that we ask the government to send a strong message to President Maduro that he should cease and desist and that all the people who have been doing this be brought to justice.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt has asked if there is unanimous consent for the House to condemn the actions that he brought up. Is there unanimous—

An hon. member: I did not hear a motion.

The Speaker: I did not hear a motion either.

Perhaps the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt would consult with the other House leaders and come up with some wording that could then be put to the House in a more formal manner.

I did see the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley rising. This is on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY MEMBER FOR MISSISSAUGA—STREETSVILLE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do rise on a question of privilege. I rise today pursuant to Standing Order 48(1).

It has been demonstrated that the member for Mississauga—Streetsville has deliberately misled the House. Given the seriousness of the matter, it is my duty as a member of Parliament and House leader for the New Democrats to bring the matter to the attention of the Chair and to the House. Members of the House are well aware of the rights and immunities afforded to parliamentarians, so that they may carry out their duties as members of Parliament. However, for the sake of clarity, let me remind my colleagues that on page 65 in *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, "parliamentary privilege" is defined as:

...the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively...and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions...

Privilege

What I believe we are looking at here is a contempt of Parliament, one that is an offence against the authority and dignity of this House, one that chips away at the foundation of our parliamentary democracy and the requisite for healthy and honest debate. This is a serious charge. We take it seriously. We would insist that the government also do so.

Let me take a moment to provide the House with an account of what has taken place. In hearing my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will ask you to find that the grounds exist that this is a *prima facie* contempt of Parliament, at which point I will be prepared to move a motion to have the matter referred to the appropriate committee for further study.

Yesterday morning, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville rose in the House and said the following:

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to debate that took place on February 6 in this House regarding the fair elections act.

I made a statement in the House during the debate that is not accurate. I just want to reflect the fact that I have not personally witnessed individuals retrieving voter notification cards from the garbage cans or from the mailbox areas of apartment buildings. I have not personally witnessed that activity and want the record to properly show that.

Let us take a look at what it was that the member for Mississauga—Streetsville said in the debate on February 6 while the House was debating the government's unfair elections act at second reading, under time allocation imposed by the current government. It seems clear-cut to me and to others that the member was providing misleading statements in the House, given what he told the House just yesterday. In a question for the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville said:

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a bit about this vouching system again.... On mail delivery day when the voter cards are delivered to community mailboxes in apartment buildings, many of them are discarded in the garbage can or the blue box. I have actually witnessed other people picking up the voter cards, going to the campaign office of whatever candidate they support and handing out these voter cards to other individuals, who then walk into voting stations with friends who vouch for them with no ID.

Does the minister not believe this kind of thing will get cleaned up properly with this bill?

Later in the day, the member rose again to mislead the House during the questions and comments portion of his own speech. He said:

Earlier this afternoon I asked the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification a question. I think my friend from York South—Weston will appreciate this because, just like the riding I represent, there are a lot of apartment buildings in his riding. I will relate to him something I have actually seen. On the mail delivery day when voter cards are put in mailboxes, residents come home, pick them out of their boxes, and throw them in the garbage can. I have seen campaign workers follow, pick up a dozen of them afterward, and walk out. Why are they doing that? They are doing it so they can hand those cards to other people, who will then be vouching for at a voting booth and vote illegally. That is going to stop.

The context of this, and why this is equally important to the fact that the member misled the House, is that he misled the House to justify the reason his government has brought in its unfair elections act. He has brought evidence forward as a member of Parliament, whom we take on faith as telling the truth when he does it, saying this is the reason the government has brought in this bill, to end the vouching system that some tens of thousands of Canadians use properly, by claiming there is evidence of voter fraud that he has seen and witnessed and brought forth as evidence to this House. That

is a serious charge. It is a serious charge and may sway members of this House to, in fact, support the government's legislation, when they ought not to if it were not the truth.

● (1020)

[*Translation*]

Members must know that they have the information needed to do their job well, which is to represent their constituents. The government wasted no time in passing Bill C-23 in the House at second reading by using a time allocation motion. Now, it is fast-tracking it through the committee stage without having heard from interested Canadians and members of civil society from across the country.

[*English*]

To think that it is somehow acceptable for members of the government to come into the House and make up stories as justification for the supposed merits of this terrible bill is totally ludicrous and should not be allowed to simply pass, by having the member rise more than two weeks after the fact, during a private member's business hour, and reveal to the House that this was all, in fact, untrue.

In his ruling on February 1, 2002, on a similar matter, Speaker Milliken stated:

The authorities are consistent about the need for clarity in our proceedings and about the need to ensure the integrity of the information provided by the government to the House.

The authorities to which Speaker Milliken was referring include, but are not limited to, the following: *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, which states, on page 115:

Misleading a Minister or a Member has also been considered a form of obstruction and thus a *prima facie* breach of privilege.

Page 63 of the 22nd edition of *Erskine May* states:

...it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.

Erskine May is even more precise when a member later admits that the statements he or she made were not true. On page 111 of *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, 22nd edition, it states:

The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt. In 1963 the House resolved that in making a personal statement which contained words which he later admitted not to be true, a former Member had been guilty of grave contempt.

Mr. Speaker, on May 7, 2012, and in a handful of rulings since, you have stated the following regarding the conditions that have emerged surrounding misleading statements in the House, which I will cite:

It has become accepted practice in this House that the following elements have to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt for deliberately misleading the House: one, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and three, that in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House.

That is a clear and high bar to prove all of those three conditions in order to find a contempt of Parliament: that the statement has to be untrue, that it has to be established that the member knew it at the time to be untrue, and that when making this untruthful statement to the House, the member was intending to mislead the House. This seems to me a very straightforward case, and I am sure all members of the House would agree.

The first of these conditions has been met, since the proof that the statement was misleading comes directly from the member himself when he admitted that what he said on February 6 was false. The second condition has been met since the statements in question have to do with what the member of Mississauga—Streetsville did or did not personally witness. On February 6, he told the House that he was relating something to the House that he had actually seen and then yesterday told us he had in fact not seen these things at all. What we are talking about is voter fraud, something very serious and not casual.

The third of these conditions has been met since there can be no other explanation as to why the member for Mississauga—Streetsville made the misleading statements that he did over two weeks ago, other than to deliberately and intentionally mislead the House on an important piece of legislation that affects all Canadians. He clearly intended to mislead the House by fabricating a story and then tried to use it to justify why members should be voting in favour of the Conservatives' unfair elections act.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Members of the House will remember a case in 2001-02 in which my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, among others, argued that Senator Eggleton—who was defence minister at the time—had deliberately misled the House. It happened during question period, when he was responding to questions regarding how much he knew about when exactly prisoners captured by Canadian troops in Afghanistan were transferred to the Americans.

Speaker Milliken ruled that there was a prima facie case of privilege and referred the issue to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for further study.

After hearing a former clerk of the House, Bill Corbett, testify about the issue, the committee indicated the following in its 50th report to the House:

[*English*]

...it is not uncommon for inaccurate statements to be made in the course of debate or Question Period in the House. The issue is whether the statements were made deliberately, with the intent of misleading the House or its Members. In the case where a Member later admits to having knowingly provided false information... the issue of intent is clear.

Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that last sentence because it is important in satisfying the conditions you have set out.

In the case where a Member later admits to having knowingly provided false information...the issue of intent is clear.

We are at the point in the life cycle of the current Conservative government where it seems to be out of gas and spinning its wheels. Bill C-23, the unfair elections act, is creating solutions to problems in our voting system that do not exist, when the real problems of our

Privilege

electoral system have often been the ones the Conservatives have perpetrated on the Canadian public.

The member for Mississauga—Streetsville went so far as to make up a story to try to persuade members to vote a certain way on this flawed bill. Time and again, the Conservatives' lack of judgment and these types of dirty tricks are exposed. However, despite all of this, instead of changing their behaviour to fit the rules of the game, they are changing the rules of the game in order to fit their bad behaviour.

In a ruling on October 19, 2000, regarding misleading statements made in the House, Speaker Parent stated:

Only on the strongest and clearest evidence can the House or the Speaker take steps to deal with cases of attempts to mislead members.

Mr. Speaker, with the strongest and clearest evidence at our disposal, I would urge you to find that a prima facie case of contempt of Parliament has occurred, at which point I will be prepared to move the appropriate motion to have this case referred to the standing committee.

This bill is a contempt on the voting public. The member for Mississauga—Streetsville has performed a contempt in this House. It is a sad and perhaps tragic irony, but it is a fact. The conditions that this House has laid out—you yourself included, in your statements and rulings to guide all members in the way we conduct ourselves—are the conditions we have applied to this case. It is clear in all three of those very precise indications and tests that the member has misled the House knowingly, which is a prima facie case of contempt. The fact that he did it in a bill that is meant to disrupt and perhaps further erode the confidence of Canadians about our electoral system is tragic.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North is rising on the same question.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was in the chamber when the original comments were made a few weeks ago and then yesterday when the member stood in his place to provide clarification.

It is important to recognize that members often stand up and make accusations that someone has misrepresented the facts. Over the years of being a parliamentarian, I could safely say that on at least a dozen or so occasions a member has said one thing, with the intent to leave an impression, but then had those comments thrown back at the member and raised in a matter of privilege to say that the member originally misled the house.

I want to go back to the specific statement on February 6 that the member for Mississauga—Streetsville made, and I will quote directly from the document, which states:

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a bit about this vouching system again. I know the minister represents an urban city. I am from a semi-urban area of Mississauga, where there are many high-rise apartment buildings. On mail delivery day when the voter cards are delivered to community mailboxes in apartment buildings, many of them are discarded in the garbage can or the blue box.

However, the following is the important part, which I think we have to take note of, and I am quoting the member directly:

I have actually witnessed other people picking up the voter cards, going to the campaign office of whatever candidate they support and handing out these voter cards to other individuals, who then walk into voting stations with friends who vouch for them with no ID.

Privilege

This is not just an off-the-cuff comment. This is a very serious allegation.

We know that there is a great deal of debate on Bill C-23, the fair elections act. I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that you will likely find that Elections Canada, among others, is following the debate. Therefore, as the NDP House leader has already articulated, and which I will reinforce, one could question why a couple of weeks later, yesterday, the member stood up inside the chamber and stated:

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to debate that took place on February 6 in this House regarding the fair elections act. I made a statement in the House during the debate that is not accurate. I just want to reflect the fact that I have not personally witnessed individuals retrieving voter notification cards from the garbage cans or from the mailbox areas of apartment buildings. I have not personally witnessed that activity and want the record to properly show that.

I would like to highlight two things.

One is that, having commented on many matters of privilege related to misrepresentation, I have heard numerous Speaker rulings, which say that all members are hon. members and one has to be able to clearly demonstrate that the misrepresentation was intentional.

It is very difficult to narrow down what would be a privileged issue on this particular point of misrepresentation. A member of Parliament would have to intentionally mislead or lie and then admit to intentionally misleading and lying, and to say both, inside the chamber, in order to qualify as a violation of our rule of misrepresentation, which is in fact what we have here. It is unique in terms of the privileges that I have seen raised over the many years I have been a parliamentarian.

• (1030)

Let there be no doubt that it was not an offline comment. This was seriously articulated by the member. He stated that he saw individuals with take-out voter ID cards who then used them in an illegal fashion. It is very clear. I understand that he implied that on more than one occasion. We should be looking seriously at that.

Let me add a second aspect to this. Earlier I made reference to Elections Canada. We should get more clarification from the member on why he waited so long to apologize. Is it because Elections Canada approached the member after reviewing what he said? It is a very serious allegation. Did the member share his concerns with Elections Canada prior to raising them here in the House?

It seems to me that the reason the member stood yesterday is he felt that his statement in the House was going to be looked at seriously by Elections Canada and other stakeholders because the accusation that he made during second reading was serious. There was illegal behaviour within that election which the member would have been aware of, if we believe what he said actually took place.

I am very curious, and I am sure many members are curious, about what the member actually saw. He tried to correct the record, but he did not provide very much detail. Did he see some of the voter cards in the blue bins and just left them there? Did he see anyone approach the blue bins? Did he see some people pull out the cards and throw them in the garbage? Did he follow to a campaign office the individuals who pulled out those voter cards? A lot of questions need to be answered.

I would suggest that this issue is a matter of privilege. I would also suggest that the member come forward and articulate more details or appear before PROC to answer a series of questions on whether he violated our rules.

• (1035)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for giving me the time to speak to this question of privilege.

One good thing about this is that the member for Mississauga—Streetsville did stand up in the House and say that he did not tell the truth.

Whatever you do, Mr. Speaker, I hope you make sure you do not create a moral hazard. I hope you encourage people to correct the record when they do not tell the truth in the House. That would be a good thing.

I remember in the last session of this Parliament when I spoke on a related point, some research results were corrected but the ministers did not make it clear that the results had been corrected and kept using the old results. There was no way to go back and correct *Hansard*. There was no way to make it clear that something that had been said in the House was not true. I hope that whatever remedy is found for this would allow for *Hansard* to be corrected so that we would not have to check *Hansard* all the time to make sure that every single statement in it is actually true.

When the member stood up and said his statement was not true, he did not acknowledge that he has hurt the reputation of the House, and that is something that we need to be able to do our work. It is something that Canada needs in order to attract good Canadians to serve in the House. We have to be able to honestly call each other “honourable”, and I do not know if we can do that. It is embarrassing when I talk to friends and they ask me what I am doing this for, what am I doing with these politicians. There is a bit of cynicism out there. Being able to honestly call each other “honourable members” is important to the country and to the functioning of the House, and it gives Canadians confidence in what we do. That is important for good government.

I would call on you, Mr. Speaker, to take these things into account. I do not know how you will rule on this question of privilege, but there is an important idea here, which is that we have to rely on what each of us says in the House. We need to have confidence that we are trying our best to tell each other the truth, to tell each other the facts and the evidence. We should not make up stuff to sound good and to make a good video to send out to our voters.

• (1040)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to this question of privilege.

As everyone is, I am sure, aware, the presumption in this House is that we are all taken at our word, that the statements we make are truthful and correct. That we are given the benefit of that doubt brings with it a strong obligation on us, in the cases where a member misspeaks, to correct the record so that nobody is left with inaccurate perceptions.

Privilege

In this particular instance, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, has done exactly that. Having misspoken in this House and having realized his comments were in error, he has come to this House and corrected the record.

That is the obligation that exists upon members. That is an obligation to ensure that nobody is left under false impressions. That is an obligation he has discharged. That is the obligation upon all members here, and for that reason I think that alone is sufficient to rebut any concern that there has been a contempt.

In fact, I would adopt the sentiments of the member for Kingston and the Islands. The fact that we are even discussing this question of privilege, the fact that it has been raised, is only because the hon. member has taken that duty and obligation seriously, has come to this House and corrected the record. Had he not corrected the record, one would presume that what had been said was correct, and this is the moral hazard that the member for Kingston and the Islands speaks to. We want to, in addition to giving everybody the benefit of the doubt, also provide an environment where we encourage all members to carry out that duty and obligation on an occasion when we misspeak.

It is quite common for us to misspeak in the nature of conversation, and I can understand the error made by the hon. member on the question of voting cards, because I think there are probably very few members in this House who have not, at second- or third-hand, heard anecdotes exactly to that effect.

I personally have heard anecdotes from others, not having witnessed it myself. It is different from having heard an anecdote, but having heard it quite regularly, it becomes part of the normal discourse that “this is what happens out there”. This is what everybody “knows” happens out there. It is a risk and a concern that has to be addressed, and one of the reasons why I think it is being addressed in this legislation.

However, I do not think we want to create an environment where, when members take seriously their obligation to correct the record—take seriously their obligation to be truthful to this House and come to this House and do exactly that—we then make that an occasion to create a finding of contempt against them.

We want to create an environment where, as we do with unparliamentary language when we ask members to apologize and they do, that is an appropriate remedy, and is almost always accepted by the Speaker as appropriate for the circumstances. In this same circumstance, this House should encourage and accept the occasions when a member takes seriously their obligation to come to this House and correct the record, as the member for Mississauga—Streetsville has done in this particular case.

I do not want to leave the argument at that point. I do think it is important that the member for Mississauga—Streetsville also be given an opportunity to speak to this himself, so I would ask that you give him that opportunity.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I too would look forward to that. We had actually assumed, since the member for Mississauga—Streetsville had a speaking spot yesterday afternoon, that he would do that.

Three important things have happened here that leave me more certain in my belief that this is in contempt of Parliament, based on what the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has said.

Allow me first to say that there is some urgency to this matter. I would encourage the member in question to seek a space to speak as soon as possible, because the bill is before us in Parliament right now.

It seems that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is now offering praise to the member for having fabricated a story entirely and is saying that we should give the member great thanks for having returned and having admitted to misleading the House. That is not the environment that we look to create, an environment in which members can take what he called “anecdotes” and things that they have heard and turn them into what the member for Mississauga—Streetsville said.

What he said was, “I have actually witnessed other people picking up the voter cards...”. He did not say that someone had told him a story, that he had heard about it, or that there was some conspiracy theory out there. He later went on to say, after some time and reflection, “I will relate to him something I have actually seen. ... I have seen campaign workers follow, pick up a dozen of them afterward...” and then went on to say that they committed voter fraud in the last election. This is coming from the Conservative Party, which is in court right now defending itself against serious accusations of actual voter fraud.

My point is that this is not misspeaking. To say “I misspoke” means that an event occurred on a Tuesday, when upon reflection it was actually Wednesday. That is an honest mistake. This was no honest mistake. The member fabricated a story to justify voting for a flawed government bill. He totally invented it. When he came in, it was neither to apologize nor to explain why he invented this story from nothing. He did not apologize and he did not explain; he said that he had misspoken and that he wished to correct the record.

If that is what is considered tolerable and acceptable, and if it in fact should be encouraged, as the House leader says, it means that members of the House are allowed to go around completely fabricating and inventing stories to justify their voting for or against a piece of legislation, and then come back during debate on a private member's bill and say in a quiet and hushed way, “Yesterday I may have misspoken, or two weeks ago I may have misspoken. I do not know; the facts are a bit blurry.”

The facts were not blurry. I have read the citations clearly to the House.

The Budget

The member has satisfied all three of your conditions, Mr. Speaker, which the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons did not address at all. These conditions are specific and they are difficult to achieve. A person has to work hard to be found in contempt of Parliament. It is not easy and it does not happen very often, and the reason a person has to work hard is that the three conditions are difficult to achieve. We must prove that the statement was misleading. We must also have it established that the member making the statement knew at the time that it was incorrect. Finally, we must establish that in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House. On all three conditions, the member in question satisfied the conditions for contempt of Parliament.

It is a prima facie case. He did not apologize. He did not explain. He did not rationalize or justify. He just said, "I misspoke."

Of course, we have latitude when people misspeak in the House. They may refer to the wrong bill, misquote a statement, or attribute it to the wrong person unintentionally. We understand that. We are all human and we all make those mistakes. This was not a mistake; well, it may have been a mistake now that it has come to light.

The fact is that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons wants us to somehow offer our praise for somebody knowingly misleading the House, knowing something to be untrue, and then using that untruth, that lie, to justify the government's bill about changing our election laws. Is not allowing Canadians their right to vote freely and fairly something we should be encouraging? What has the government come to when it thinks that this is acceptable behaviour?

The member did not misspeak. The member did not make a casual, glancing error or inaccuracy in his statement. He chose deliberately to take something that he knew not to be true and present it as evidence to justify voting for a government bill that would disenfranchise Canadians from their right to vote in a free and fair democratic country such as Canada.

That is what is before you, Mr. Speaker. Those are the conditions that you and previous Speakers have laid out to guide us. We seek your guidance on this. Again, I am prepared to move the motion if you find a prima facie case of contempt.

•(1045)

The Speaker: I thank all hon. members for their contributions. Perhaps we will hear more from the member in question. Then I will come back to the House with a decision in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from February 12 consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, and of the amendment.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskwasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[*English*]

I want to begin my speech by sharing an excerpt from a piece of correspondence I recently received from a woman on Manitoulin Island.

She wrote:

I am a senior receiving OAS and supplement. My employment income for 2012 was \$5,735.64 which is \$2,235.64 above the allowable \$3,500.

As a result \$50.00 is deducted from my supplement each month.

Yes, I have a problem providing myself with food, rent, especially paying bills for a dentist and new eye glasses.

I wish I could say that hers is an isolated case, but I have a small mountain of messages on that exact issue. Clearly these are people looking for a little relief, and given that they took the time to write their MP, they may also have been paying attention when the finance minister delivered his budget. If so, they would have been disappointed by what many are calling a do-nothing budget.

However, I am not happy just calling it a do-nothing budget. I think we are doing the finance minister a big favour with that description, because this budget does an awful lot when we consider how much in the way of clear, identifiable needs it does nothing to address.

For so many Canadians, the basic message of the budget amounts to "Your concerns are of no importance to your government, which is more interested in focusing on a single, self-serving goal."

Therefore, instead of thinking of it as a do-nothing budget, let us consider what the budget actually does.

It signals the government's acceptance of an ongoing economic recovery that cannot replace the full-time jobs we lost in the recession.

As I mentioned, the budget tells our seniors living in poverty that the government has no plan to either address the problem or to reduce the pinch felt by those who are able to work to supplement their income only to be subjected to a mean-hearted clawback.

The budget tells our disabled community that the smaller agencies who help them so much will not be receiving support, which in turn translates into less support for the disabled across the country.

The budget tells our first nations that they will have to wait, again, for money to improve underfunded schools. It has nothing to improve first nations access to post-secondary education or to ensure adequate resources for the post-secondary student support program.

The budget also tells families waiting for a national dementia strategy that they will have to continue to wait.

The budget tells the communities, individuals, and businesses that rely on tourism in northern Ontario that creating a pre-election surplus is more important than the region's economic prosperity.

The budget goes on to tell small businesses that the government is not interested in continuing with a focused tax credit to assist with the hiring of new employees.

The Budget

The budget also tells the forestry sector that the forestry industry transformation program will remain underfunded.

The budget tells communities with important federal infrastructure that the government is not interested in assisting with their local economy anymore.

The budget does nothing to make post-secondary education more affordable or accessible.

I am sure we could do this all day, but the point is that we should not be slapping the Minister of Finance on the back when all that he really has done is dismiss so much need in the pursuit of a single goal designed to benefit the Conservative Party of Canada alone.

• (1050)

[*Translation*]

Northern Ontario's economy is facing many problems, particularly those related to the boom and bust cycle, which typically affects resource-based jobs. The region has a large number of small businesses, many of which are involved in tourism.

After the budget came down, people in the region wondered whether the Conservatives cared about them at all. They have reason to wonder since the budget made no mention of northern Ontario or its economic development agency, FedNor.

Small businesses in the region work just as hard as anyone, and they would like to know that the government appreciates their efforts and that the billions of dollars they help generate in economic activity are important to the Canadian economy.

Recently, however, the owners of these small businesses have felt as though they are being attacked, and the communities where they run their businesses feel as though they have been abandoned by the government, which continues to deprive the region of its support.

[*English*]

In the few years I have been in this place, we have seen the government walk away from heritage lighthouses that were tourist attractions on the Great Lakes. It is walking away from a modest investment in passenger rail on the Algoma Central Railway, which supports good jobs all along the line from Sault Ste. Marie to Hearst.

In the budget, we see the government will continue to walk away from its responsibilities for federal ports as well. People on Manitoulin Island have just been through the wringer with the government's refusal to accept its clear responsibility to maintain the port in South Baymouth. Now they are bracing themselves as the government prepares to transfer the costs of federal ports onto small communities, communities that have grown local economies to serve tourists who arrive by boat.

However, the problems that flow from this budget are not limited to small tourist-focused businesses. The budget is going to affect all manner of small businesses by eliminating the small business hiring credit. This amounts to the Conservatives turning their backs on job creation opportunities in about 560,000 businesses across the country. The credit was generally used by companies with 20 to 35 employees or less and cost \$225 million annually. However, job creation that bolsters small business is not as important for the government as getting re-elected in 2015.

First nations are getting mixed messages in this budget as well, which is in keeping with the relationship the Conservatives have forged with these communities. Despite changing its tune on first nations education, the government has taken a page from the Liberal playbook, which amounts to strong language and distant commitments, but precious few dollars.

There is no reason to delay increased funds for education in these communities. The chronic underfunding is well documented, and every day the government waits to address this need is another day lost in the struggle to bring better results for the young people in Canada's first nations.

When it comes to first nations, the budget makes blue-sky commitments for 2015 and beyond. What money it does allocate to continue the first nations water and waste water action plan and to continue the aboriginal justice strategy still falls short of what is needed, so we see that the well-being of first nations and our aboriginal population remains a low priority for the government, which is preoccupied with its own needs.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

I mentioned just how important the resource-based economy is to northern Ontario. The forestry sector in particular has been dealing with significant problems on a number of fronts. Since the current government came to power, 30,000 jobs have been lost in this sector in Ontario alone.

We know that the Forest Products Association of Canada asked the government for \$500 million in assistance over six years under the forestry industry transformation program but received only \$90.4 million over four years, which represents a shortfall of \$410 million.

This once again shows that the government is not prepared to stand up for northern Ontario's or Canada's forestry sector.

[*English*]

Many of us have met over the last few years with delegations from the Alzheimer Society of Canada, which has been advocating for a national dementia strategy. As our population ages, Alzheimer's will only become more of a challenge, and from my own experience, I can say that families already living with the difficult reality of this disease are hearing that their struggles are of no concern to the government. I say that because that is the message sent by refusing to commit to the \$3 million requested by the Alzheimer Society of Canada that would let it lay the foundation for the national dementia strategy.

The list of snubs can add up quickly, and while the government sets itself up to hoard cash, household budgets are stretched to the limit. There is little beyond signals of intent in this budget.

The Budget

In northern Ontario, high gas prices are a constant problem, and New Democrats have long advocated for an ombudsman to ensure that consumers are not being gouged at the tank. While there is some recognition of gas price disparity in the budget, the focus is on cross-border disparity, and even that is nothing more than big language with no details or timelines.

Finally, changes to the way the government administers funding for national disability is a point that I will get to later.

I just want to indicate that these are just some of the things that this budget does. I am certain that my colleagues will continue to inform the government of the widespread effects of its budget, which is anything but a do-nothing budget.

I have so much more. I hope to get it done during questions.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to have my colleague elaborate on some of the other aspects of the budget. One point I was glad to hear from her was on the effect this is going to have on seniors, which will affect many of my constituents. I agree with her completely that this was a missed opportunity, particularly for those seniors living in poverty right now. We could have lifted them out of poverty; the government decided not to.

I would like to hear from her some of the other points she had on the budget.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments, because one of the issues I had not touched on enough was the seniors issue. As I mentioned at the outset, there is nothing to address the financial challenges of our seniors, especially those who live in poverty. There is nothing for seniors who are forced to work to top up their meagre OAS so that they can live in dignity. The government could have increased the base amount seniors are allowed to earn before the clawback sets in, which is currently \$3,500, but it chose not to.

It is also really important to talk about the disability organizations, because the impact the budget will have on their ability to provide services is crucial.

• (1100)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have discovered that many of my colleagues on the opposite side live in a deep, dark fantasy world, and they would like to present an image of Canada that is a deep, dark fantasy. It often amazes me to hear them speak.

I was intrigued by my colleague's comments regarding the Alzheimer Society. I am going to quote from a few sources to, as it were, drop a drop of detergent onto the oily pool of deep, dark fantasy the opposition tends to weave and watch the oil recede in the light of the truth.

Perhaps I will confine myself to one quote in particular from the Alzheimer Society of Canada on this budget:

On behalf of the 747,000 Canadians living with dementia, we are grateful to the federal government for providing the resources needed to carry out important research to better understand how to tackle various forms of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

This is a drop of truth in the middle of the oily slick that is laid by the opposition. I would like my colleague who just spoke to tell me if she agrees with the Alzheimer Society, or does she want to take it to task for praising the budget?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, having a sister with Alzheimer's, I certainly want to comment on this. Of course, organizations that did get some meagre dollars in the budget are certainly grateful for what they got, because they know that other organizations did not get as much or did not get anything.

Let us see what the Conservatives are doing with taxpayer dollars. Let us not forget the \$50 million for building things like gazebos and fake lakes. This is where their priorities are.

If we want to look at the disability issue, the Alzheimer Society certainly speaks to the impact of disabilities. Changes to the way the government administers funding for national disability organizations has created real pressures for smaller organizations, and that will have direct impacts on the services and supports available to these persons.

For some organizations, this would mean a loss of up to one-third of their existing network and will translate into the loss of jobs for persons with disabilities, the loss of disability-related services and supports for individuals, and less support for some of the most vulnerable and underserved within the disability community.

How can the government say that it is doing all it can to help people, when in fact all it is doing is creating big barriers?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really liked what the Conservative member had to say about living in a fantasy world. I think the Conservatives are the ones who are completely out of touch with reality. That is unfortunate because, since they took office, our beloved country has been heading downhill.

The Conservatives say that they are champions of jobs and the economy. However, as I mentioned, what we hear from the public is completely different. The people in my riding are telling me that, over the past few years, the economic situation in the Outaouais region has deteriorated. By cutting thousands of public service jobs in the national capital region, the Conservatives have destroyed our economy. It is not just federal public servants who are being affected. All public services and programs are affected by these decisions. Many families affected by these cuts now have less purchasing power and are clearly spending less.

In addition to the public service jobs that have been lost, the entire middle class has seen its income drop under this government. Yesterday, an internal study conducted by the federal Department of Employment and Social Development showed that middle-class families now have to mortgage their future to stay afloat. Government representatives are the ones who released this report. Are they living in a fantasy world? I do not think so.

The Budget

Whether I am out at a restaurant or doing errands, I am hearing the same thing: it is becoming more and more difficult for merchants in the Outaouais region to make ends meet. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for me to have visits in my riding office from parents who have unexpectedly lost their jobs as a result of recent budget cuts. What am I supposed to tell them when they ask me how they are going to meet their family's needs now?

Here are some statistics. In my riding, right now, 9,000 people visit a food bank every month. Most of them—56%—are women. The sad part is that one-third of food bank users are children, and that number is growing daily. An increasing number of these organizations are running out of food because of the growing demand. However, the problem is even bigger than that. In March 2012, just over 882,000 people made use of a food bank in Canada. That represents an increase of 31% as compared to 2008. The Conservatives were in power at that time. They could have done something.

Speaking of children and growing needs, the Minister of Industry said that it was not his job to worry about how these couples were going to feed their children. However, a number of my constituents, my NDP colleagues and I disagree. It is our job to build an economy that provides opportunities for meaningful employment and leaves no one behind. It is first and foremost the government's job to ensure that its budgetary choices guarantee a decent quality of life for all Canadians.

However, the budget that the Minister of Finance presented to us is not the budget of a government that is doing its job. It is the budget of a political party that is laying the groundwork for the next election and is not thinking of Canadians in need. In this budget, the government could have taken real measures to make life more affordable for Canadians. Once again, the government is not listening to what Canadians are asking for.

Last Saturday, I toured my riding with a number of volunteers to talk about the NDP's plan for reducing the financial burden on families. We met with hundreds of people who want this Parliament to do something tangible to reduce the cost of living.

However, I am pleased to see that the government incorporated some of the NDP's proposals in this budget, including putting an end to the infamous "pay to pay" fees. However, one of the major concerns in my riding and across Canada was not addressed: lowering the price of gas. One woman I met told me that it now costs her \$50 a week to get to work and do her shopping, and she does not have to drive very far. Less than 10 years ago, that same \$50 would have allowed her to drive around for a month.

• (1105)

The government needs to do two things here: it needs to put an end to collusion in the setting of gas prices and it needs to invest in a real strategy to free us from our dependence on oil.

The government is also refusing to take responsibility for affordable housing. I cannot believe that in 2014, more than 1.5 million households cannot afford adequate housing, according to the Canadian Housing & Renewal Association. This is completely unacceptable in Canada, a country we are proud to live in.

The problem is very serious in the Outaouais, as it is elsewhere. This is not just rhetoric. François Roy, the coordinator for Logemen'occupe, regularly raises this issue, and I congratulate him for that. As he has so often pointed out, there are 900 families waiting for affordable housing in Gatineau alone.

Even though this is a serious situation, the government has not proposed any new investments in housing this year, all so that it can potentially create a surplus in 2015, an election year.

Does this mean that these 900 families will have to wait for an election year to get a little assistance from the government, as my colleague mentioned earlier? Often, it is just a matter of a little bit of money, but this government has not made this a priority. That is the reality. Will the City of Gatineau and community organizations in Hull—Aylmer have to wait until 2015 to get the financial support they are asking for to meet the public's increasing needs?

In conclusion, I want to talk about this government's attacks on public service retirees. On November 15, 2013, I met with several dozen retirees at a public forum organized by the NDP members in the Outaouais and the Federal Superannuates National Association.

These retirees shared their concerns that their health care plan could potentially be cut. A number of them were also outraged at being treated in such a terrible way after they had dedicated their working lives to serving their country.

Unfortunately, their fears have proven to be founded because this budget will cut \$7.4 billion from the public service health care plan. This will almost double pensioners' annual health insurance premiums. Naturally, the government would like us to believe that it absolutely has to dig into retirees' pockets in order to eliminate the deficit.

We will say it over and over again: the reality is that the average pension for a public servant is \$24,000 a year, or approximately \$21,000 for women and \$25,000 for men. We must accept the reality that these retirees are not rolling in money.

According to Gérald Denis, national director of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, with such low income:

...no matter the amount, whether it is \$10, \$15 or \$20 a month, any automatic deduction from a pension cheque has a clearly direct impact.

I find it deplorable and ridiculous that the government is trying to save money at the expense of retirees while, oddly enough, it can still give \$20 billion in tax breaks to big business.

After studying this economic action plan, I can only conclude that the government is not working for the people. Once again, it is working solely for the Conservative Party.

The Budget

What is scandalous about this budget, is not what is in it, but what is missing. They have failed to seize an extraordinary opportunity to help families, workers, seniors and small business. This is a lost opportunity to prove that politics transcends partisan interests. It is a lost opportunity to build a better future for all Canadians.

• (1110)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question about the what the budget did not do for affordable housing, which is an important issue in my riding, Kingston and the Islands.

Mortgage subsidies and operating agreements will expire in the coming years, yet the budget offers nothing to replace them. Obviously, the City of Kingston does not want to reduce the number of affordable housing units. By doing nothing, the Conservatives are essentially making cuts. In fact, it is the Conservatives who are calling for a property tax hike in the City of Kingston. I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that.

• (1115)

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, we also know that when the Liberal Party was in power, it slashed funding for affordable housing. That is unfortunate.

Getting back to the topic at hand, I appreciate the question because it has been raised many times in my riding. I sat on a board of directors for affordable housing and I heard the complaints and concerns about the housing authority's withdrawal. The housing authority withdrew from the program, which left the boards and co-operatives in a government legal vacuum. That is very unfortunate.

The government had a responsibility, and still does, to speak with the municipalities to ensure continuity. The volunteers who work on these boards of directors are expending all of their energy to try and fix a problem they did not create. It is up to the various levels of government to deal with this situation. These volunteers should be able to do their work of ensuring that housing is properly managed and assigned to those who need it.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question about eliminating the deficit. Canadians obviously want the government to eliminate the deficit—it is one of their top priorities—without raising taxes.

The NDP plan involves raising taxes and spending more.

[*English*]

They want to spend more money, which is exactly contrary to what Canadians want. Canadians want limited government spending and to eliminate the deficit.

So how would my colleague respond to Canadians who want the deficit eliminated without raising taxes?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I must say, I am very pleased to hear this question. When we talk about managing a deficit, this means creating jobs, good jobs that will allow the government to work in an economic environment that generates revenues.

Our projects are about making life more affordable: reducing interest rates on credit cards, for example; and legislating the price of gas and banking fees. This would put a little extra cash in the pockets of average and lower-income families, allowing them to feed their kids, buy clothing and keep the economy going. That is what we are proposing, as opposed to what the Conservatives are proposing—namely, funding cuts across the board, which does not generate revenues.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my hon. colleague from Hull—Aylmer because she really painted a clear picture of the Gatineau region, which she represents so well.

The same picture could be painted almost right across Canada. Indeed, the austerity budgets presented by the Canadian government are stifling our economy rather than boosting it. The government is not considering long-term investments to ensure prosperity.

I wonder if she could elaborate on how the loss of high-quality jobs in her region will have a direct impact on Gatineau's economy.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments and question about the situation in the Gatineau and Hull—Aylmer region, but really, the national capital region as well.

As I mentioned in my speech, I am hearing more and more complaints and concerns about insecurity regarding the economic situation in my region from business people, small businesses living day to day and people who work and spend their money, normally. Since they are living with daily insecurity, they are not doing repairs or buying new cars, for example.

People outside the national capital region may think that we are privileged here, and we are, in a way. However, there is a glaring need for affordable housing, and the situation is only getting worse. Furthermore, food banks are struggling, and demand for their services keeps increasing.

• (1120)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Kitchener Centre.

[*English*]

It is a privilege for me to rise in the House today to focus on two of the many important elements of our budget 2014, those being job creation and strengthening of economies both in Canada generally and in rural areas, such as my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

[*Translation*]

Our government has focused on and will continue to focus on creating jobs for Canadians who live in every region of the country, including the local regions. Thanks to our economic management skills and our management of previous budgets, more than one million net jobs have been created by the Canadian economy since summer 2009. Some 85% of those jobs are full-time, and more than 80% of those jobs are in the private sector.

The Budget

We continue to build on our record, and under the leadership of our government, our job creation rates are the highest of all the G7 countries. We should be very proud of that accomplishment. Compared to the other G7 countries, our country and our economy remained strong and stable during the recession and the economic recovery.

[English]

Our country continues to be a financial and economic leader. Bloomberg ranks Canada as one of the top countries in the world with which to do business. This is a tremendous achievement. It has come as a result of budgets like budget 2014.

In this fragile global economic recovery, our government will continue to focus on jobs and growth in economic action plan 2014. It is our government's goal to help unemployed Canadians get back to work, ensuring that Canadians are given first chance at available jobs. The job-matching service would provide Canadian job-seekers with modern and reliable tools to find jobs that match their skills. Of course, this would also help employers who seek to employ qualified Canadians.

In order to sustain and create more jobs in Canada, we have identified initiatives to attain this goal. To better align training with labour market needs, we have allotted important funding to the Canada job grant program. This grant would encourage greater employer participation in skills training decisions and, most importantly, it would directly link skills training to jobs.

Our government knows that employers are the best judges of determining what exactly they are looking for and what skills they require to make their businesses grow. That is why we have thoroughly consulted with these business leaders, employer associations, educational institutions, and labour organizations to obtain their essential input on the design of the Canada job grant program. The strength of the Canada job grant is that it would encourage employees, businesses, and training institutions to partner and work together to create jobs and to strengthen our economy.

Knowing that both urban and rural businesses help our economy to prosper and grow, budget 2014 focuses on the needs of small businesses. We want to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation. We must ensure that families that move into rural areas have access to both existing jobs and new jobs.

One of my goals, as the MP for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, is to strengthen the local economies within my riding. I want to see local businesses in my riding succeed. When they succeed, they grow, and when they grow, they create new jobs and hire people.

A compelling example of how budget 2014 helps local business is microbreweries. There are two well-known microbreweries in my riding: Beau's All Natural Brewing Company in Vankleek Hill and Cassel Brewery in Casselman. These two microbreweries have contributed significantly to tourism and to an increased interest in craft brewing and the buying of local products.

Creativity and innovation in the development of products are critical to success. That is why microbreweries in my riding have been doing so well. Who would not be intrigued by Beau's brewery No. 11 brew, Smokin' Banana Peels, or Cassel Brewery's Sleeper Car-Double Chocolate Porter?

The current labelling standards for beer need to be updated, as they are an impediment to microbreweries marketing new and innovative beers. The current regulations cause delay and stunt economic growth. For example, a microbrewing company experienced delays in launching its new Blueberry Ale when it was determined that existing labelling standards for beer and ale would not permit both of the names "blueberry" and "ale" on the same label.

• (1125)

Under the beer standard, the addition of a spice, perhaps nutmeg, means there would be a question as to whether the product could still be considered beer. This leads to many frustrating delays and additional costs.

Our government is modernizing the standards to encourage the development of unique products. We have removed red tape for the beer industry and will rewrite the compositional standards for beer to better allow for innovation in the beer industry under the Food and Drug Regulations.

Another important program that I would like to highlight is the creation and launch of the Canada apprentice loan, an initiative identified by employers and various organizations that we consulted with.

The reality is that jobs in the trades are some of the most difficult to fill. For an apprentice to train in his or her respective trade, he or she must undergo years of on-the-job employment and technical training that can last six to eight months at a time, which, of course, is at the cost of the apprentice. The Canada apprentice loan we are introducing would provide apprentices and Red Seal trades with access to over \$100 million in interest-free loans each year. This is important in communities like my riding.

I would like to point out a Red Seal trade that would be especially relevant and essential to rural farming communities.

Agricultural equipment technicians are responsible for the initial set up and maintenance of agricultural equipment, such as tractors, combines, highly technical harvesting machinery, and much more. As the parliamentary secretary to agriculture, I have had the opportunity to meet with farmers from across Canada, including those in my riding, and I can tell members that this particular Red Seal trade has a direct impact on rural farming and our rural economies.

Our government wants to ensure that these positions are filled by qualified men and women receiving the required certification. The Canada apprentice loan would help those seeking apprenticeship and certification to do just that.

It is essential to recognize the importance of training and education, and educating the workforce of tomorrow. As a father of five children, four of them being either students or in the workforce, the reality of this definitely hits home.

The Budget

This is why I am especially encouraged by our government's recent initiative to assist young people during their studies, by eliminating vehicles from Canada student loan assessments. Many young constituents from my riding commute to academic institutions in downtown Ottawa on a daily or weekly basis using their own vehicles. The value of their vehicle, which is essential to their education, will no longer be included in their loan assessment calculations. More than 19,000 students who own vehicles would benefit from higher loan disbursements each year as a result of this initiative, at a projected net cost of almost \$15 million over two years, and then \$8 million per year after that.

[Translation]

Lastly, I would like to say that the federal deficit will be eliminated in 2015, thanks to budget 2014. What is more, all this will be done without any tax increases. That is a remarkable success, especially when we consider that no one other than the Conservative government could achieve that. No one other than the Conservative government managed to eliminate 160 different types of tax. As a result, Canadians families will save on average a total of \$3,400 in federal tax.

Our government has always come up with ways to reduce taxes. Unfortunately, the NDP and the Liberals have always voted against these important initiatives. No one other than the Conservative government could have reduced government spending in order to lower taxes, something the NDP and the Liberals have always resisted.

I can assure the House that budget 2014 will eliminate the deficit, create jobs for Canadians, and strengthen our economy while keeping taxes low.

[English]

I can assure Canadians that no other party could achieve this except the Conservative Party. For those who doubt this, I say take note of how the NDP and the Liberals will vote on budget 2014 in the coming days. They will undoubtedly vote against everything that Canadians wanted in a budget and that we are delivering in a budget.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about job growth, encouraging entrepreneurship, and strengthening local economies in his speech.

How does the member feel about the choices that are being made in the name of creating a surplus when compared to some of the ways the Conservative government has wasted money in the past? A good example is the \$2 million spent on a lavish pavilion that featured a fake lake for the G20 meetings. Ironically, the idea was to promote tourism in Ontario's northern wilderness. However, just a few years later, tourism in the region is of no consequence.

The Conservatives are effectively killing passenger rail service on the Algoma Central Railway, which threatens good jobs, small businesses that are mostly family run, and communities all along the line, so they can hoard away about the same amount of money that they wasted on the pavilion and fake lake. I can tell the member that every dollar invested in a passenger service on the ACR has a \$9.00 multiplier effect that ripples through the local economy.

Can the member tell me the multiplier effect of money spent on a fake lake and an empty commitment to tourism?

• (1130)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleague to see the positive side of all that has been accomplished by our government in Canada's economy. For example, I mentioned the creation of over one million net new jobs since 2009, 85% of which are full time and 80% in the private sector.

There is more. The IMF and the OECD both predict that Canada will have among the strongest growth in the G7 in the years ahead, and for the sixth straight year, the World Economic Forum has rated our banking system as the world's best. It is clear that our budgets are having a positive impact on Canada's economy.

Canada has a strong standing in the world because of our budgets. I would encourage my colleagues on the other side of the House to vote in favour of this budget.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Conservatives always quote job statistics from the bottom of the recession instead of when they took power in 2006. It makes the numbers look better.

I am encouraged by my hon. colleague mentioning one of the Red Seal trades: agricultural equipment technician. It is very important to have people who can fill the jobs that involve needed skills. However, I would remind the member that it was his government, when it closed the prison farms, that said there were no jobs on farms. That was the justification that the Conservatives gave for not having inmates work hard and regularly, work on time, and work up to standards on farms while they were in minimum security institutions.

At that time the Conservatives said there were not any jobs on farms, and now my hon. colleague talks, correctly, I would say, about the importance of agricultural equipment technicians when he talks about the new apprentice loan program. I wonder if he might like to correct the government's statement from previous years.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight this member's support for the Red Seal program and for the trades within our budget.

No government has done more for the development of skills within trades programs than this government, and this budget has even more initiatives.

I would ask this member whether he will therefore vote in favour of the budget. He has identified that the trades and the apprenticeship programs are vital and essential, as I mentioned in my speech. I am asking him, will he therefore vote in favour of the budget? It is essential that he does.

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the budget is great for seniors and also for those people with disabilities. For example, we have already increased accessibility funding by renewing it for another \$15 million annually.

The Budget

I attended two events last week. It was a breakthrough that we put \$16,000 through for a low-income society in Downtown Eastside to help those with disabilities, and another \$41,000 to the University Women's Club of Vancouver to help them with accessibility.

At the same time, we have the lowest poverty rate for seniors, thanks to our GIS, which has seen the largest increase in over a quarter of a century.

There are other good things that are happening. Can I ask the parliamentary secretary to highlight some of the things we will do for seniors?

• (1135)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this government has tremendous respect for our seniors and for the meaningful contributions they have made to Canada.

The minister is absolutely right. This budget contains many very important initiatives to support our seniors. I will list just a few of them. This budget will enhance, by \$5 million a year, the new horizons program for seniors. It will expand the targeted initiatives for older workers by investing \$75 million to help unemployed older workers put their talents and experience to work. The budget also launches the Canadian employers for caregivers action plan. This would work with employers so that caregivers can maximize their participation in the workforce while being able to provide care for their loved ones.

It is clear this budget supports our seniors, and I thank the minister for the question.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support economic action plan 2014, which is a focused and admirable budget. Economic action plan 2014, a road to balance, is focused on Canada's future. With 2015 in our sights, the Minister of Finance has crafted a budget to deliver job creation, economic growth, and low taxes, leading to a balanced budget in 2015.

The last five years have certainly not been easy on Canadians. The global economic recession has drastically affected the Canadian economy. Our government worked hard to fight the worst global economic turmoil in almost 80 years by delivering a stimulus package which created Canadian jobs, built infrastructure, and kept us internationally competitive. This government has succeeded spectacularly.

I am proud to say that Canada is now one of only a handful of countries in the world that continues to receive a triple-A credit rating with a stable outlook, from all rating agencies. Canada has the best job creation record of all G7 countries, with over one million net new jobs created since 2009. The OECD has forecast that Canada will outpace the rest of the G7 in growth over the next 50 years.

Our financial sector is flourishing. The head of the International Monetary Fund noted that Canada is "a country with one of the strongest financial sectors in the world [...] Canada can teach the rest of the world about how to build a stronger, safer financial system".

Our Prime Minister gets it. Our finance minister also gets it and has delivered a strong, stable, and fiscally responsible budget for all Canadians.

I will highlight several aspects of the budget that would affect Ontario, and in particular my constituents in Kitchener Centre. These are strong reasons to support the budget.

The government continues to support innovation in Canada, year after year, and budget 2014 is no exception. Since 2006, the government has delivered almost \$11 billion in new resources to support scientific research. In 2013 alone, the government's support for innovation exceeded \$3 billion for research and post-secondary education.

Economic action plan 2014 would create a Canada first research excellence fund, with \$1.5 billion in funding over the next decade. This would help Canadian post-secondary institutions excel globally in research, which provides long-term economic benefits.

Our post-secondary institutions in Waterloo region will continue to excel as leaders in innovation and research. Canadians have long been leaders in quantum research. The University of Waterloo's quantum research department will receive \$15 million in funding over three years, beginning in 2014.

Most exciting is that the budget seizes the opportunities of the open data world. Over three years, \$3 million will be provided to the Canadian Digital Media Network for the creation of the open data institute, through FedDev Ontario. With advancing technology, it is possible to sort and filter data to identify opportunities for new products and services. This initiative would be spearheaded by the network, but it will be a collaborative effort with partners, which include Waterloo region's own Desire2Learn, OpenText Corporation, Communtech, and the University of Waterloo.

My constituents are concerned about finding jobs. They also want to make sure they find the right jobs for their skills. That is why the budget would create the Canada apprentice loan, which would deliver access to over \$100 million in interest-free loans each year to apprentices in Red Seal trades.

The government will also launch a job matching service, which will automatically match Canadians looking for work with employers who are looking to hire them. This enhanced job matching service will provide job seekers with modern tools to find jobs that match their skills and provide employers with better tools to look for qualified Canadians. The budget starts with \$11 million over two years for this, and adds an ongoing \$3.3 million per year to launch this enhanced service.

The Budget

• (1140)

I am proud of the efforts of women in my community: the entrepreneurs, the executives, and the professionals. Budget 2014 is going to deliver \$150,000 across the country to increase mentoring among women entrepreneurs.

Kitchener has its fair share of dynamic young women entrepreneurs in companies such as Pebble, Thalmic Labs, Charity Republic, and MappedIn, but despite these success stories, women are significantly underrepresented as a proportion of small business owners. This budget meets that challenge.

I meet too many talented young individuals graduating from university who are not able to find good employment quickly, so budget 2014 is going to reallocate \$15 million annually toward up to 1,000 internships for recent post-secondary graduates in small and medium-sized enterprises through the youth employment strategy.

I want to mention The Working Centre in downtown Kitchener, which I am very proud of. It helps many people find work. Earlier this year, I attended an older workers forum there and spoke with people whose skills need to be updated so they can find employment in a changing workplace. The targeted initiative for older workers, which is run out of The Working Centre as well as other Kitchener institutions, such as Lutherwood and Conestoga College, helps older workers update their skills. Budget 2014, I am very pleased to say, renews the TIOW program for another three-year period, representing a federal investment of \$75 million. It is very good news for my community.

As the longest-serving member of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, I am proud of this government's investments in Canada's natural heritage. I am happy to say that economic action plan 2014 allocates another \$391 million over five years to Parks Canada for improvements to bridges and dams in our national parks and along our historic canals.

My constituents enjoy recreational fishing. With the Grand River winding majestically through the city and the wonderful Great Lakes within driving distance, we all benefit from healthy natural waterways. This budget is going to double the annual funding to the recreational fisheries conservation partnership program. It will provide an additional \$15 million over the next two years. This is great news for the Grand River Conservation Authority and great news for those who enjoy fishing.

Finally, we need to talk about families. For an ordinary family of four, the tax burden, since 2006, has been cut by close to \$3,400 each year. This gives individuals and families greater flexibility to make the choices that are right for them.

Further help for families is going to come in this budget through the investment of \$44.9 million over five years to expand the focus of the national anti-drug strategy. Also, the budget is going to deliver an increase in the maximum amount of the adoption expense credit by allowing \$15,000 for further tax relief in recognition of the costs unique to adopting a child. The budget will also permit Canadians leaving a defined benefit registered pension plan to receive a payout equal to the lump sum value of their pension benefits, and there are other beneficial changes.

Canadians need to know that this country is succeeding economically. The OECD thinks so. Fortune 500 companies think so. Our friends in the G7 think so. The world's lenders think so. In fact, the only people who do not want to admit that Canada is doing well are the members opposite, who would prefer to see the government spending more of Canadians' hard-earned money. However, the government is not going to do that today.

I stand proud of the Government of Canada and its plan. I stand proud of economic action plan 2014 and our current path to balancing the budget. I urge all members of the House to put aside their partisan interests and to support the best interests of all Canadians. Support this budget.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his lyrical speech. However, I am going to have to bring him back down to earth. At some point, we have to face reality. It is rather appalling to listen to announcements about correcting mistakes made by this government with its indiscriminate cuts.

Let us talk about real matters. I had the privilege of being a member of the Standing Committee on Finance for one year. The Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that the government's measures in recent years had very little to do with the one million jobs created. We should also not overlook the fact that the massive tax cuts for big business have artificially created the largest debt ever incurred by a Canadian federal government and that this was a real waste of money. Billions of dollars were truly wasted. The finance minister clearly showed that every dollar of tax cuts did not generate even 40¢ in potential spinoffs. That money was not very well spent.

A few years ago, the Minister of Finance supported our proposal to regulate bank fees. Unfortunately, that measure did not materialize. He went with a voluntary code.

I am asking my colleague how he can continue boasting when we have black and white proof that this government has made mistakes for years and is not solving the real problems that are very costly for Canadian taxpayers.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that our colleagues on the opposite side paint a very bleak, kind of walking dead picture of Canada and its economic prospects. It really is a kind of dark fantasy world that is necessary for us to dispel so that Canadians at home know that actually, the government is doing fantastic work, and the country is really quite healthy.

I would like to just add a drop of truth, which, like a drop of detergent, will dispel the oily slick the opposition tries to put out to Canadians. I will provide a couple of interesting comments about the budget for my colleague's consideration.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has said, "The government has acted.... The result will be a stronger economy and more jobs".

The Budget

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said, “Small business owners know that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes, so they are pleased [with] the government's commitment to a balanced budget in 2015”.

Let me close with one more, in particular. Engineers Without Borders said:

EWB welcomes the government's decision to protect vital foreign aid spending in Budget 2014....

...we are proud that Prime Minister Stephen Harper chose to maintain current levels of foreign aid spending.

Canada's recent commitment—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member has been in the House long enough to know that he cannot use the personal name, whether it is of the Prime Minister or any other member of the House.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, as this is a chamber of debate, I would like to respond to a request made by the last two speakers from the Conservative Party, who asked opposition members to vote for the budget. The reason the Liberals are not voting for the budget is that we know that we could produce a much better budget, and we would be betraying what we believe in if we did that.

My question is about the James Clerk Maxwell Telescope. The member from the Kitchener-Waterloo area may know about this telescope. It is a telescope Canadians have worked on for many years. It is a world-class instrument. Canada has put millions of dollars into the telescope. It needs roughly only \$700,000 a year to continue its operation until about 2019, when a new telescope will take over.

Given that the government has announced the Canada first research excellence fund, which, by the way, this telescope is not eligible for, would my hon. colleague from the Kitchener area join me in asking the government to find a way to fund Canadian astronomers using this telescope for the next few years?

• (1150)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, that probably only gives me time to comment on my colleague's remark that the Liberals would present a better budget. As I understand it, the Liberal leader's idea of a better budget is simply to say that it will balance itself. This is a re-emergence of voodoo economics in the 21st century in Canada. I think my friend should be blushing to hear his leader say that.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have an opportunity to add my comments on this pretty dismal budget we see here in the House of Commons. Regardless of who stands and tries to say how wonderful it is, on the opposition side we know that this is not the way it is.

I will be sharing my time with the great member of Parliament for Lac-Saint-Louis who has delved into the budget in depth and will have some additional comments to make.

As I said, I am pleased to be on my feet today to address this year's so-called budget, particularly because it is my hope that

Canada will soon set aside the years of Conservative fiscal mismanagement in favour of something better.

The day before the budget was released, the Liberal caucus released what we hoped the budget would contain. We said things like, “the federal budget must focus on generating the kind of economic growth that will finally help struggling middle class families”. I am sad to report that, clearly, it failed on all counts.

The reality is that our economic growth rate has not been this poor since the days of R. B. Bennett. The government should have used the budget to invest in infrastructure, education, and other areas that would help get Canada on track.

This is history. We can go back in the books. It is not something we are inventing when we say that we have not had such slow economic growth since R. B. Bennett. Members can look at the books and see clearly that what we are saying is 100% accurate.

Instead, this budget provides little more than smoke and mirrors, typical of previous budgets. It provides even less for the average middle-class household in this country.

Budget 2014 speaks directly to the government's priorities. There is nothing for seniors, nothing for students, and nothing to address the fact that the only thing keeping pace with GDP growth over the past years is household debt. There is nothing to help veterans make ends meet and nothing to deal with the fact that the Canadian middle class has not had a decent raise in over 30 years.

Indeed, government priorities come shining through, not the needs of real Canadians. Government priorities are not in touch with the priorities of most Canadian families.

That is enough generalities. Let us take a look at the budget in a more specific way. The government would have us believe that it has set aside money to help veterans, but in reality, veterans have been left out in the cold. The \$6 million for veterans' funerals and \$2 million to improve the Veterans Affairs website will not help veterans who are struggling with PTSD, with physical injuries, or with resettlement issues.

It is not just veterans who have been left out of the Conservative brand of so-called economic prosperity. Rural Canadians have been ignored as well. Budget 2014 allocates what amounts to about \$6.75 per rural individual man, woman, or child for rural broadband. That is right. After slashing the Liberal program to connect every rural and remote community in Canada to the Internet, the Conservatives are hoping that a paltry \$6.75 will now be sufficient.

The Budget

Just to be clear, we are glad to see that the government has finally put some money into connecting rural and remote Canada to the Internet. However, we were disappointed that it slashed these very good Liberal programs, so it stands to reason that we are happy to see the Conservatives reverse their own reckless and shortsighted cuts. They have now seen the error of their ways and after four years are putting the money back into the budget. Imagine how much further ahead rural Canada would be if they had left it in there originally.

This budget is another example of financial planning on the fly, typical of the government. Phony ad campaigns and one-off cash injections did not bring prosperity when the minister was selling Ontario down the river in the 1990s, and it is not going to work here.

In 2012, the government made ill-advised changes to environmental regulations and immigration laws. Then in 2013, it reversed those changes. Am I shocked that the 2014 budget made more reversals? No, that is just how the Conservatives roll. They take one step forward, see the error of their ways, then take two steps backwards to reinstate programs that were already there under the Liberals but will now have the Conservative banner on them.

Worst of all, let us keep in mind that this is all just in time for an election. It is interesting timing.

• (1155)

This begs the question: Is the government minding the best interests of Canadians or the best interests of the Conservative Party? I would ask all Canadians to ask themselves those questions. They can come to a conclusion that I believe would show a significant change after the next election.

That is up to Canadians to decide. It is not up to me or other members. Canadians will have a chance to make that choice.

Of course, seniors are happy that they have been left out of the budget, because recent history tells us that when they are included in a Conservative budget, it usually means pain. There is the example of moving the old age security retirement age up to 67. Again, the seniors who called me said that sometimes it is better to not be noticed than to have more pain passed on to them.

Do members remember the Conservative budget that increased the age of eligibility that I just referred to? Do they remember when the Conservatives began taxing income trusts and increased the income tax rate for low income Canadians? The good thing is that seniors were ignored this time, but they cannot take much more of the Prime Minister's kind of prosperity.

This does not take into account the fact that the government appears to be reversing itself on previous commitments to seniors, rural Canadians, and middle class Canadians.

Do members remember that income splitting promise? Do they remember the promise to cut the excise tax on diesel in half? It was going to save money for everything that moved, because it was going to cut the diesel tax in half. Do they remember when the Prime Minister said taxing income trusts was raiding the retirement nest eggs of our seniors? I remember those things. I suspect many in the House remember them, and I suspect many Canadians will continue to remember them.

Budget 2014 has again verified a full reversal on all of those promises. All of those commitments have been broken.

All of this comes as a leaked government report shows that middle class Canadians, students, seniors, farmers, truckers, and nearly all other people who work for a living are falling behind. Household bills are growing, but incomes are stagnant. Middle class Canadians are putting groceries, rent, and tuition on their credit cards, and they need help. Middle class Canadians are mortgaging their future to fund their basic living today. That is a crisis in the making.

Budget 2014 is an abdication of the trust Canadians place in their government, and the Liberals will be voting against this shortsighted, dangerous, and uninspired plan.

The budget is just another example of a government adrift without a plan. Saying it has a plan is not the same as having a plan. Saying it cares is not the same as caring. We must remember these things.

The Prime Minister has the worst economic record of any prime minister since R.B. Bennett in the 1930s—

• (1200)

Hon. Alice Wong: Oh, come on. That is not true.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Look at the numbers.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, they can get out the history books. I would not say it if it were not true. It is easily proven. In fact, maybe I will go and run it off and deliver it, so they know that everything I am saying is true.

The prosperity that the Conservatives celebrate is not being felt around the kitchen tables of the nation. Economic success must be felt by everyone to be effective, and there is nothing in the budget that would make a serious difference for middle class Canadians.

The Conservative government stumbles from crisis to crisis, and these crises are often of the government's own making. Conservatives have dropped the fiscal management ball, and they are sticking our grandchildren with the bill for their fiscal incompetence.

In 2013, the Conservatives lowered taxes on yachts and summer homes, but hit working class families with new taxes on essentials such as household heaters, baby carriages, and school supplies. Even blankets were hit with an extra 5% tax. Now, just in time for an election, the Conservatives have seen the light. They have reversed their taxes on families and expect us all to stand here and applaud.

I cannot help but wonder if the government is again minding the interests of Canadians and our country, or just its own.

Cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine. It may make us feel like we are flying high at first, but it will not take long before we feel the impact. Middle class Canadians are feeling the impact, and I for one will not be voting for that.

The Budget

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question on middle income families for my colleague.

Statistics Canada just released the figures on middle income families, noting that our government has actually reduced the taxes by \$3,400 for a family of four. Those families of four are what I would call “average families” in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, families like mine. I have three children. We have nine grandchildren and they are the pride of our life.

Statistics Canada has just stated that the net worth of Canadian families has gone up 45% since 2005, and almost 80% since 1999, but with the largest increase between 2005 and 2012 in the middle income bracket.

I wonder if my colleague has a comment about our work with the middle class.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I am sure when we have had a chance to delve into those numbers, we will find they are like the \$3,400 of tax cuts that benefit thousands of Canadians, but 70% of Canadians do not benefit from those \$3,400 in tax cuts. Only 30% of Canadians benefited. We are talking about all Canadians benefiting, not just the wealthy or not just particular pockets.

The issue is that there are challenges out there. The Conservatives continue to break their promises one at a time, and I suspect they will keep doing that in order to beef up their piggy banks so they have more money to throw away next year when trying to buy all the votes of the people who will forget very quickly what the Conservatives did not deliver, and they hope people will be deaf to all the other promises.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments, and obviously those members have come to realize that this is not a good budget.

I rise specifically with respect to the Algoma Central Railway line and the fact that the current government has actually cut \$2.2 million of the subsidy that CN used to get. Now it is leaving the tourism sector in that area, plus the little town of Oba and the outlying municipalities, at a very big disadvantage with the impact this will have on tourism.

This is an email I received from Al and Moe. It goes on to say:

All of the tourist that travel to our cities and towns will no longer have a reason to come. This will create complete loss of revenue to all of the lodge owners and many businesses in these small communities that rely on the ACR Passengers who spend money when they visit. It will impact the city of Sault Ste. Marie and all of the restaurants, hotels and grocery stores who serve these tourists that venture into our precious northern wilderness for weeks at a time. The loss of jobs will be nothing more than staggering and devastating to this economy.

The email goes on to say that people have written to the Minister of Transport but have had no response.

My question for my colleague is with respect to tourism. Does she see anything that really would help the people along the Algoma Central Railway line from Sault Ste. Marie to Hearst and tourism as a whole? The Conservatives say they are creating jobs, but meanwhile they are getting rid of jobs in northern Ontario.

•(1205)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, tourism is or was one of the major things we celebrated in Canada, with people coming. I recently had a meeting with the tourism associations, and tourist numbers are way down. Canada has dropped so far down below the line because of that lack of investment both in promoting Canada and, second to that, in closing off beautiful places in northern Ontario and in other parts of Canada because of the lack of investment in the infrastructure that is needed in our transportation.

What is going to happen to all of those people who will lose their jobs because they do not have tourism and because of the change that will be there? Rather than investing in our infrastructure and things as important as our transportation and opening up other parts of our country, as a result of this budget there are going to be more people unemployed. We need to be investing in infrastructure. We need to be investing in post-secondary education, and we need to provide opportunities for our children to grow and be the best they can be, and invest in our country. That will provide jobs.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know why the budget was introduced during the Olympics. It was so that Canadians might not notice that the Conservatives are not making a real effort on their behalf, on behalf of their future and that of their children. This is certainly not an Olympian budget. It does not strive for excellence. No thought, skill, or creativity went into this budget. There is not much to look at here.

One thing is for sure. The minister is no Alex Bilodeau of finance ministers. The budget does not inspire. It does not give hope to our youth, seniors, those looking at retirement on the horizon, or unemployed middle class Canadians. It is not a budget aimed at shoring up Canada's middle class. It is a furtive budget that seeks to slip by unnoticed, lest Canadians see that the emperor has no clothes, that the government has no ideas.

These past few years, members on the other side of the House have engaged in incessant self-promotion, spinning their economic record with a view to gilding the economic reality over which the current Conservative government has presided. We need only look at the performance of some key economic variables since the Conservatives took power to understand that things are not the way the government describes them.

I would first like to bring attention to something known as the natural economic growth rate, which is that portion of the economic growth rate driven by population growth. As weak as the growth of the Canadian economy has been over the past few years, it can be linked in no small measure to an increase in the population of the country that has driven both aggregate demand and employment.

A Statistics Canada report released in the fall of 2012 showed that Canada had the fastest population growth in the G8, owing to immigration. Canada has sustained the highest immigration levels in the world as a percentage of its population. This is important to note. The Conservative government cannot take credit for Canada's population growth.

The Budget

If we look at key economic variables, we see that the situation is not as rosy as the Conservatives say over and over again. While population growth, and not the Conservative government, has been driving economic growth in Canada, the population has been expanding faster than the rate of job growth. The national unemployment rate in January 2006 was 6.6%. In December 2013, there were 236,200 more unemployed Canadians than in January 2006 and the unemployment rate stood at 7.2%. It is true that there were job gains in January versus December 2013, but these gains included 28,000 people who became self-employed. What is more, these January gains followed job losses in full-time work in December. Moreover, the youth unemployment rate in January 2006 was 12.2%. In December 2013 it was 14%.

All in all, Canada ranked 20th among 34 OECD nations in employment creation for the 2007-2012 period. How the government gets away with saying that it is “first in the OECD” over and over again is beyond me.

Although 7.2% may seem like a hopeful rate in the current context, as the rate was as high as 8.7% in mid-2009, we have to take into account the discouraged job seeker who has given up looking because the labour market is so bleak. This dampens the unemployment rate, which reflects only those actively seeking employment. If one looks at the reduction in the unemployment rate from 2009, the situation looks promising, but that reduction is cold comfort since 80% of it occurred because job prospects were so poor that many Canadians gave up looking for work.

Interestingly, Statistics Canada does quantify the discouraged job seeker effect and publishes a supplementary measure of unemployment that includes discouraged workers and those who are working part time while really wanting full-time work. This unemployment rate, which is referred to as the underutilization rate, sits at over 10%.

Another measure of the labour market situation in Canada is the long-term unemployment rate. Before 2008, 12% of Canadians had been looking for work for six months or more, and 4% for more than a year. Today, about 20% of the unemployed have been without work for more than six months, and 7% for more than one year.

As McGill economics professor Christopher Ragan has said:

A better indication of the economy's job creation performance is the path of the employment-to-population ratio—and by this measure, our economic recovery is only mediocre.

Just before the crisis, total employment was 63.7% of the population. It fell sharply during the recession...and then struggled to recover even to 62%, where it has flat-lined for more than two years

• (1210)

If our performance in terms of unemployment is not very encouraging, the debt situation facing Canadians individually and collectively is no more so. In 2005, for every dollar of disposable income Canadians earned, they owed \$1.30. In 2013, it was \$1.64. On a collective basis, the government has added \$160 billion to the national debt. One-fifth of the federal debt has been accumulated since 2006, the year the Conservatives became the government.

Still other economic indicators show that over the course of almost a decade the Conservative government failed to lay the groundwork for robust future prosperity. There was a 1.9% drop in

productivity in the Canadian economy from 2006 to September 2013. Productivity, of course, is a function of investment in equipment, and also of the rate of innovation. Are we creating and producing the innovative products the world wants?

Another indicator, our chronic merchandise trade deficit, is likely linked at least in part to this poor productivity trend. We have had two years of trade deficits, which have been widening in the past few months, exceeding forecasters' predictions.

Finally, the stock market is often a reflection of generalized optimism or lack thereof about future economic prospects. From 2006 to 2013, the Dow Jones industrial average rose by 55.1%, while the TSX composite index rose by only 16.1%.

What is the government doing to generate growth? In this standstill political budget, it is not much. Moreover, the government's previous strategies and actions have not been enough to produce the growth rates that a country with so many resources, such great human capital, such talent, and such promise should be able to reach.

There are many measures the government could have taken to help middle-class Canadians improve their future standard of living. It could have raised RRSP contribution limits, it could have raised the contribution limits for tax-free savings accounts, and it could have also helped seniors by eliminating the minimum withdrawals required from RRIFs, registered retirement income funds. The markets have not been good, including the TSX composite index I referred to, meaning that the value of these RRIF portfolios has been weak, declining or not rising by very much. Indeed, some seniors have come to me to say that they do not want to withdraw from their RRIFs right now because they want to wait for the value of their RRIF portfolios to rise, but the government is forcing them to withdraw a minimum amount, which is compromising the future value of their assets.

It would have been good if the government had shown some imagination on issues such as this and taken some concrete steps to make the economic situation better for seniors and other Canadians. It did not, however, take the opportunity to do so in the budget, and that is a shame.

• (1215)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of my colleagues asked a question earlier of a colleague of that member about today's Stats Canada report. Stats Canada today reports that the net worth of Canadian families is 44.5% higher today than it was in 2005. Certainly this has largely been due to the low-tax plan our government has implemented.

My colleague's leader has, at different times, commented that the budget will simply balance itself. I am wondering if my colleague would agree with that in the context of these last numbers I just quoted, showing clearly that the low-tax plan our government has had in place for the last eight years is working. It has been working not only for ordinary citizens but also especially for the group the member mentioned, seniors, many of whom have been removed from our tax rolls altogether. I wonder if the member would comment on those positive moves.

The Budget

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, the report that came out, which I read about, did mention that net worth has gone up. In many cases, and I would think in the majority of cases probably, this is because of rising house prices. The report did mention that this was happening very much in British Columbia, where we know that the housing market is very hot.

Now, there is one point I would like to make here. It is one thing to have our net worth go up. However, if we are not cashing out our net worth, we will still have to borrow to buy the groceries and to pay for other current expenditures, and as we do, we are of course accumulating interest, which will eat into our net worth.

Yes, the value of people's homes has been going up, often because of population growth, which as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech is not the result of any government policy. There are many factors at play. I do not think the government can take credit for many of the trends that we are seeing in terms of asset growth.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows full well that this budget is actually being balanced on the backs of the most vulnerable.

I wonder what his view is of the government delaying implementing new ideas until the next election basically. I would also like to hear his view on making life more affordable for seniors, young people, and the most vulnerable. We had asked the government to include items that Canadians would like to see it move on, things that would make life more affordable for them,

Therefore, I wonder what the Liberals' position is with respect to ATM fees and high interest rates on credit cards. Do they agree that those need to be dealt with? These are not big cash items for the government. These are not in fact cash items at all. It would take a bit of legislation, a bit of willingness, to deal with them. Payday lenders is another issue.

Does the member understand that Canadians are being gouged and are victims of this? What is his party's position on the need for the government to act?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the government needs to do more to help seniors. I mentioned in my speech one concrete measure the government could have taken, lowering or eliminating or deferring minimum withdrawals from RRIFs.

In terms of youth, if the government used its power and its jurisdictional right to help post-education in this country, that could delay what many see as inevitable increases in tuition fees, as provincial governments are forced to deal with their deficits. The government could have been more creative in these areas.

In terms of fees, the government seemed to be trumpeting that it would do something about credit card fees, but in my opinion, and I believe this is an opinion shared by many analysts, the government has not been specific about what it will do.

• (1220)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga—Brampton South.

It is my pleasure to highlight some of the key measures in the federal budget, economic action plan 2014, "The Road to Balance:

Creating Jobs and Opportunities", recently tabled by the Minister of Finance.

This is our government's tenth budget since coming to office in 2006. Throughout this period, our country has faced many challenges, including a global recession. Our government, under our Prime Minister's leadership, has always made it a priority to ensure that Canada's economy stays strong and that we take the right measures to limit the impact of the recession here within our borders. When preparing our annual budgets, we have never strayed from our commitment to strengthen our economy for all Canadians without adding additional pressures on our citizens and businesses by raising taxes.

While the opposition likes to criticize how we have handled the economy and what we have chosen to prioritize in our budgets, the reality is that Canada has done much better than our G7 partners.

Here I will highlight some of the aspects of the budget that I am very proud of and that I believe are extremely important to my constituents and all Canadians.

One of the goals of our government is to ensure that we achieve a balanced budget. By staying firm on this commitment, Canada has earned a strong and credible reputation for responsible fiscal management. This, I believe, is the main reason Canada's economy has continued to recover. During the economic storm, we have continued to reduce our deficit, by almost two-thirds, so that our government will return to a balanced budget by 2015.

Another critically important matter that affects our economy is ensuring that we provide the assistance necessary to help Canadians find good jobs. To make sure that Canada's labour force is well positioned to meet future challenges, last year our government announced that the skills training system in Canada would be transformed to better help Canadians acquire the skills that would actually get them hired and provide them with the tools to make career changes.

With economic action plan 2014, we are putting the wheels in motion to develop our country's greatest asset, our people.

I was pleased to see the inclusion of a new interest-free student loan for apprentices, as this would help young Canadians generally, including young Canadians in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville take advantage of the opportunities created in the GTA by the construction boom. I was also very pleased to see additional funding for university and college research projects, which will, of course, benefit the University of Toronto in Mississauga and Sheridan College, which is expanding and building its second campus.

Last year's economic action plan introduced the Canada job grant, aimed at connecting people looking for work with employers by encouraging employers to participate as partners in the skills training system and incurring a portion of the cost. Consultations have confirmed that employers welcome an increased role in training decisions in a way that is simple for businesses to access, and that is what we will do.

The Budget

We continue to work closely with provinces and territories toward the implementation of the Canada job grant and the renewal of the labour market agreements. In jurisdictions where agreements are not secured, the Government of Canada will deliver the Canada job grant directly through Service Canada starting on April 1.

● (1225)

As announced previously, our government will also provide \$222 million per year to better meet the employment needs of Canadian businesses and improve the employment prospects for people with disabilities.

Recently I joined representatives from Family Services of Peel to announce that our government will help people with disabilities in the Peel Region develop the skills, knowledge, and experience they need to find jobs.

Family Services of Peel is receiving over \$209,000 from the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities. This funding will allow the organization to provide 60 participants with the skills and hands-on experience needed to enter and succeed in the job market. Participants will also benefit from job coaching services to help them become more independent and find employment.

To help organizations do a better job reaching out to the potential labour pool, the economic action plan proposes to invest \$15 million over three years to the ready, willing and able initiative to engage employers to hire youth and working-age adults with developmental disabilities, including autism.

Let me share an email that I recently received from Mr. Brett Pavelev of Community Living Mississauga:

Mr. Lizon,

On behalf of Community Living Mississauga, I would like to once again thank you...for taking time to meet with Keith Tansley and I about the Ready, Willing and Able program back on December 20th.

Thanks to your support for this important issue, we are able to celebrate the news that this week's federal budget included an allocation of \$15 million towards the program over the next three years.

Again, we appreciate your ongoing support...

This was from Community Living Mississauga. I am very proud of our government's work with our community partners in the riding I proudly represent.

Our government did not stop there in addressing the labour shortages. We have made significant investments to help apprentices and the employers that hire them.

Apprentices can face significant costs to complete technical training, including educational fees, costs for tools and equipment, living expenses, and forgone wages. That is why we proposed to create the Canada apprentice loan to provide apprentices registered in their first Red Seal trade with access to interest-free loans of up to \$4,000 per period of technical training. This initiative will assist more apprentices in completing their training and encourage more Canadians to consider a career in the skilled trades.

To assist older workers in adapting to a changing job market, we are renewing the targeted initiative for older workers program, representing a federal investment of \$75 million over three years.

To support women entrepreneurs and small business owners, economic action plan 2014 proposes to provide \$150,000 to Status of Women Canada in 2014-15 to increase mentorship among women entrepreneurs.

Balancing the budget, tackling labour shortages, and ensuring that Canadian consumers are protected are extremely important factors to ensuring a prosperous economy.

For many years now, consumers have been unsatisfied with the telecom market in Canada. Our government has paid close attention to this, and our record speaks for itself. Since the auction of wireless spectrum in 2008, prices have fallen by 20% and jobs in the wireless industry have increased by 25%.

I would also like to mention an issue that is very dear to me, and that is our government's action to improve services to our veterans who served our country.

In conclusion, I encourage all members of the House to support the budget. It is a good budget. It is in our interests to support it and support the growth of our great country.

● (1230)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was listening closely to my colleague, and there is not a word in here about the issues of gridlock in the GTA. That is something I think the member should be very exercised about, considering that the people he represents have to sit in traffic for hours in a day. I have not heard a single thing from the member, nor in fact any GTA members from the government side, on this crucial point. I wonder if he ever mentioned to the Minister of Finance that the GTA is losing about \$6 billion annually because of lost productivity caused by gridlock in his home constituency.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, in a 10-minute speech we cannot cover the whole budget. That is why we have many speakers.

I am very much aware of gridlock in the GTA. I also drive, and members of my family drive. Therefore, we are very aware of the fact that there is a problem.

Over the years, our government invested huge amounts of dollars in improving the communications system in the GTA. We invested money in expanding the subway system in the GTA. Of course, we have to do more and we can also do better, and that is our goal. We have a plan. We are implementing it and we can only go forward.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue in the same line of debate regarding the government's announcement for the build Canada fund. It is back-loaded, so for the first few years there is not much money to spend on much-needed infrastructure.

The Budget

However, I have another concern, which is that the government recently announced, with respect to the build Canada fund, that there would be no framework agreement with the provinces. The problem that results is that separate arrangements between provincial and federal governments will now have to be made for each project, because costs for a lot of large infrastructure projects are shared between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

I am thinking in particular of something that causes congestion in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, which is the need for a crossing over the main rail line. I wonder if the member could address that question. I know it is a bit technical, but could he say whether he has heard any assurances about the problems that might be caused by the lack of a framework agreement between the federal and provincial governments?

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, as we know from past years' experiences and the infrastructure projects that were happening in the GTA and in many places in Canada, there was co-operation between all levels of government, and I do not see this not happening in the future. We are open to co-operating and we will be in the great infrastructure projects that we propose for our country.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was some great news today from Statistics Canada. It released its survey of financial security, which confirmed that Canadian families are better off today under our Conservative government than under the previous Liberal government. StatsCan found that the net worth of Canadian families was up 44.5% from 2005 and was almost 80% higher than in 1999. In fact, the largest increase in net worth between 2005 and 2012 occurred for families in the middle-income bracket. Therefore, I wonder if my colleague would like to expound on some of the other things in this budget and previous budgets that are doing great things for families across Canada.

• (1235)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that this is more proof that the plan started in 2006 is working very well.

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak to budget 2014 and outline some of our government's key points from our economic action plan.

Six years ago, Canada and the world faced an economic crisis unlike any seen in generations, perhaps the worst we had seen since the Great Depression. Rather than hope that the crisis would resolve itself, rather than make glib statements about how budgets balance themselves, we chose to act. We chose to assess the problem, develop a concrete action plan, and take strong action.

We chose to invest in much-needed infrastructure as a time-limited stimulus. This action plan put our neighbours to work. It built for our community, certainly in the GTA, roads, bridges, water pipes, and community centres. I was young and determined and led my community, the sixth-largest city in our country, to match the Prime Minister's leadership and undertake an ambitious building plan.

Today the GTA stands as the beneficiary of that much-needed infrastructure. This past weekend, in fact, a neighbour of mine who used a swimming pool that generously carries my name on a bronze plaque at the front entrance shared with me how her family has used that pool each and every week for years. Results speak for

themselves, and Canada has led the world in pulling out of the recession and rebuilding prosperity.

However, back then there were many naysayers. There were quite a few so-called experts, some advocating that we should hoard money and take it out of the money supply. We understood that was not the prudent course. We chose to show leadership and make time-limited investments immediately, investments that would be needed to be built anyway. Those investments would be accelerated by a few years, and we could plow the money back into the Canadian economy and put our neighbours to work. In fact, we could save dollars, because we would not be competing at some future date with the private sector and ramping up the costs for steel and concrete. We could instead choose to invest the money immediately and potentially save taxpayers some money.

Canada's economic action plan invested billions of dollars into local communities to strengthen Canada's infrastructure and promote local business investment. These investments were necessary to position Canada to strengthen and weather the storm. However, even during those challenging economic days of 2008, even as our government stood firm on its commitment to returning Canada's finances back to balance by 2015, even then there were many skeptics who doubted it was possible—yet look at where we are today.

Today I am proud to stand before all members of the House to indicate that we expect to be back to balance on time, as promised by our great Minister of Finance. In fact, under economic action plan 2014, our government's deficit will be eliminated, and a surplus of over \$6 billion is anticipated.

It is important to put this into perspective. Thanks to the stewardship of our Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, our government made some challenging but responsible choices. We have reduced wasteful and redundant government and we have reduced spending by some \$9 billion through prudent fiscal management and administrative efficiencies.

The Budget

Balanced budgets promote stability, business investment, confidence, and lower taxes. Most importantly, they protect families. Unlike what happened under the Liberal government of the 1990s, the fiscal recovery in Canada has not been, and will not be, borne on the backs of hard-working families and future generations. To be clear, we have not cut health transfers to the provinces. In fact, what we have done through these most challenging economic times is honoured our word and increased transfers to the provinces. By the end of the decade, they will reach an historic \$40 billion. My family, my mother, and my children rely on our health care system, as do all Canadians, and Conservatives are firm and committed to the priorities of average middle-class Canadians.

Economic action plan 2014 continues to build upon our government's strong record of supporting everyday Canadians. Budget 2014 will further improve the quality of life for Canadian families by expanding access to vital services, increasing consumer protection, reducing taxes, and, most importantly, promoting job growth.

For example, we will further enhance employment insurance sickness benefits for parental benefit claimants. Beginning this year, people who receive benefits to care for critically ill parents will receive enhanced access to sickness benefits.

• (1240)

Disproportionately, the challenge of taking care of family members seems to fall to women, so I am very proud of our government's initiative on this front.

Similarly, economic action plan 2014 will continue supporting families who seek to grow through adoption. In recognition of the many expenses related to the adoption process, our budget will enhance the adoption expense tax credit up to \$15,000 per child.

These measures outlined in our budget build upon our record of putting families first, and since 2006, our Conservative government has taken many steps to improve the quality of life for Canadians of all ages. For example, in 2006 and since then, we have reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. That saves Canadians money every single day, every time they make a purchase.

Our government also established the tax-free savings account, strengthening Canadians' ability to save for their future.

We have introduced dozens of new tax credits to help stretch the family budget even further, initiatives like the universal child care benefit, the family caregiver tax credit, the textbook tax credit, and the public transit tax credit.

As I indicated earlier today, I am the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, and we are vitally focused on the health and safety of all Canadians. I am pleased to report that this budget will invest more in Canada's world-class health care system while keeping Canadians safe and well.

Canada has one of the finest health care systems in the world. We expect the best from our health care professionals and they expect the best from us. That is why our government is sending more health transfers back to the provinces than any government before. These investments will ensure that the provinces and territories have the

necessary capacity to deliver vital medical services to Canadians when they need it the most.

Another area of prime importance is Canada's food supply system. This budget will invest almost \$400 million in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to further enhance food safety. We all have a shared goal of ensuring that the food we purchase from grocery shelves and place before our families at the kitchen table is safe. We will invest \$153 million to strengthen the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's food safety information programs. We will provide funding to hire 200 new food inspectors, and we will invest almost \$31 million to establish a food safety information network so that we can link provincial bodies together to increase safety and our knowledge of hazardous events.

The health and safety of Canadians is not limited to the food we eat; it includes the communities in which we live. I am proud that this budget has considered the important work of my committee and will invest almost \$45 million to combat prescription drug abuse across Canada.

Sadly, prescription drug abuse is a growing danger in Canadians' lives and sometimes targets the most vulnerable in our society. Prescription drug abuse has effects on all segments, all ages, from seniors to adults to teens and even very young children, and many families are forced to suffer in silence without adequate resources to support them or their loved ones. As a government and as a society, it is our responsibility to ensure that these individuals and their families are protected and have access to programs to help them cope with these very difficult challenges.

By investing in and expanding the national anti-drug strategy, we will ensure that Canadians and their families are properly supported.

It is not only dangers from prescription drug abuse that I am concerned about. A growing number of individuals are becoming addicted and are dependent on illicit drugs such as heroin. Our government has taken concrete, strong action to ensure that we do not continue their addictions, but instead, that we intervene and try to help these people back to a drug-free life.

I am pleased that our Minister of Health and our Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness have taken decisive action to keep our streets safe from dangerous narcotics. Through the introduction of Bill C-2 respect for communities act, which I spoke to earlier this session, we will help protect Canadians from the dangers of illegal drugs, including those who struggle with drug addiction.

• (1245)

In a nutshell, I believe that economic action plan 2014 strikes a much needed balance between balancing our books, paying down the debt, and making the crucial investments that average hard-working Canadians have come to expect from our government.

The Budget

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech.

At the risk of repeating myself, I have to say that I am always surprised to hear the government bragging about its investments, which, in reality, only go halfway at best toward correcting the mistakes it made in the past when it made reckless cuts across the board.

I wonder if my colleague could talk about health transfers. The Conservative government is no different than the Liberals, who 20 years ago made large-scale cuts to all sorts of transfers.

My colleague is confusing absolute and relative numbers. In relative terms, the health transfer deficit is massive, as it relates to activities and particularly the needs of the provinces.

How is it that the hon. member is unable to understand that simple concept and is not addressing it?

[*English*]

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves. In fact, the transfers to the provinces have increased year over year.

We made a commitment to increase spending and transfers to provinces by 6%, and during the most difficult economic times we have delivered on our word.

I think the member is perhaps mistaken. If he is looking at Ontario, which is where I hail from, he may want to speak with the provincial government. While we transferred a 6% increase to that province, it has spent only an additional 3% on health care. I am not quite clear where the province has chosen to invest otherwise.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the hon. member mentioned the Statistics Canada report that came out today.

I would suggest the changes we are seeing are not due to policies of the Conservative government but to demographic factors. For example, people's net worth was seen to change with where they were in their life cycle. People between 55 and 64 had almost three times the median net worth.

Among the provinces, net worth was highest in B.C., which reflects housing prices. If we look at the economy in B.C., the unemployment rate is not that low. The economy is not doing that much better than elsewhere. I would suggest the rising housing prices might have to do with population growth.

Is the member taking credit for policies that really have not impacted on net worth?

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, in fact it was not myself who spoke to that. Another colleague of mine spoke to that earlier on. However, I am happy to address it.

Some people are always going to be negative and doom-and-gloom. I think the facts speak for themselves. Around the world, one country has dominated and has really led in the recovery from the recession, and that country is Canada. As Canadians we ought to be proud of that.

There are other parties with obvious motivated self-interests, and it is to their benefit to deride Canada's economy. However, something is very clear: whether it is the OECD, an independent third party that cites it, or whether it is Canadians as they look at their own books and compare themselves to other countries like the United States, Germany, and Greece, the results speak for themselves.

Canada has shown leadership. We have pulled out of the recession. We are the strongest in pulling out of the recession. I am terribly proud to be a part of the government that has worked to do that for our neighbours.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech and intervention was excellent, as was her response to that ill-informed question from the member opposite about transfers to the provinces, in particular.

Health care transfers to my province of British Columbia were a record high at \$5.3 billion, and \$3.4 billion of that was the Canada health transfer, the highest transfers ever. I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for pointing that out.

I wonder if she would address another important issue, and that is our Canada jobs grant. In fact, we have a surplus of jobs in Canada in certain areas and we have skills shortages. We have a plan to address that.

Would the parliamentary secretary address how important that is to Canada's future?

• (1250)

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, my hard-working colleague from British Columbia is quite right.

Transfers to the provinces are reaching record levels. However, in addition, we are also the largest investor in the nation for research, delivering over \$1 billion of much-needed research money.

My colleague raises a question about matching skills with job shortages, and he is quite right. Our government has shown leadership on this issue, looking to tackle it. It is devastating to see our neighbours searching for jobs in areas of the country while other areas come to us and tell us how they just cannot fill jobs, how they are unable to compete successfully with other countries because jobs are going unfilled.

Our government is showing clear leadership, trying to match up this imbalance. That is why we are investing and focusing, and if the provinces do not join us, which we hope they will, we will take action.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague and friend from LaSalle—Émard.

I am rising today, as the official opposition's housing and infrastructure critic, to speak to budget 2014-15. The budget, which was tabled on February 11, is a rehash of last year and, in some cases, the years before that.

The Budget

The budget summary could easily have been called “The Road to Balance On the Backs of the Less Fortunate, the Middle Class and the Provinces”. That is exactly what is happening with social housing, the fight against homelessness and infrastructure. True to form, the Minister of Finance will likely continue to make cuts to social housing. Despite what those on the other side would have us believe, I did say “cuts”.

Much to my dismay, the budget again made no mention of renewing funding that has run out following the expiry of certain long-term operating agreements on social housing. Since the Conservatives always seem to confuse the issue, I will explain to them once again what the long-term operating agreements are for, before they try to talk to us again about the agreement on affordable housing or access to home ownership. In case they still do not understand, people who benefit from those agreements on social housing are rarely in a position to dream of one day owning their own home.

Long-term operating agreements were signed between 1970 and 1993, which is when Jean Chrétien's federal Liberal government began turning its back on social housing. Through CMHC, the government signs agreements directly with social housing providers—mostly co-operatives and non-profit housing organizations—to allow them to grant rent subsidies to their members and tenants so that they do not spend more than 25% to 30% of their income on rent. These agreements also allow the provinces and municipalities to provide low-income housing to people living there. These agreements, which were signed for periods of 25 to 50 years, have gradually been expiring in the past few years. What happens to a building after all that time? It often needs major renovations.

The government would have us believe that property replacement reserves for social housing projects, combined with the end of the mortgage on a building, will bring financial viability. However, that is not really how it works. When agreements come to an end, most social housing providers are in no position to pay for the necessary renovations on top of granting rent subsidies to their low-income tenants.

When people come and see me about this, they tell me that there are social housing providers that, when their agreements come to an end, are forced to choose the families with the highest incomes for their vacant housing in order to ensure that they will not have to pay rent subsidies to those families. It seems to me that this was not the original purpose of this kind of housing. That is completely unacceptable.

When we add up the Conservative government's disengagement over the past three years alone, we get \$65.2 million that it has saved on the backs of Canadians who need that money the most. In 2011-12, the government saved \$20.2 million; in 2012-13, it saved \$21.7 million; and in 2013-14, it saved \$23.3 million, for a total of \$65.2 million in the past three years alone. The worst years are yet to come.

By 2030, the government will have saved \$1.7 billion a year through attrition. In 2012, in just one year, CMHC posted a \$1.7 billion profit, thanks to its financial products. It seems to me that some of that profit could be reinvested in social housing.

The decision not to renew the agreements could have serious consequences for low-income households. In some cases, people's rent could increase by \$200, \$300, even \$500 a month. It goes without saying that this situation will make many people more vulnerable. Once again, it will be the provinces and the municipalities that will inevitably end up paying the bill. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that roughly one in three social housing units, or 200,000 units across Canada, could disappear when these agreements end.

According to the federal government's own estimates, in 2011, 40% of Canadian tenants spent 30% or more of their income on housing. Over the past few decades, the federal government has invested billions of dollars in the social housing stock. We might expect a responsible government to continue its investments and partner with the provinces when they want to start renovating their low-income housing.

● (1255)

However, again this year, the government is dragging its feet when it comes to making a commitment to the provinces and clearly announcing that it will help fund the renovation of low-income housing. Canada needs to stop considering social housing as an expense. Housing is a right and an investment.

The announcement regarding the fight against homelessness from last year was copied and pasted into the most recent budget. The government once again confirmed its intention to move forward with the Housing First approach, but it will not get very far without any housing.

The Conservatives have been reminding us that they renewed the funding for the homelessness partnering strategy, but they fail to mention that they are making \$15.8 million in cuts per year starting this year. They have cut the already insufficient budget of \$134.8 million to \$119 million per year.

Funding for the fight against homelessness has not been indexed since the SCPI was created in 1999. Now, the government is making budget cuts. That does not make any sense. We are losing social housing units and people are ending up on the streets. What is more, the government is reducing the money for homelessness services and prevention by 60% to 65% and using that money for the Housing First approach, which focuses on episodic or chronic homelessness.

Do people have to be living on the streets for months before they get help? Like social housing, homelessness prevention is also an investment. Once again, the Conservative approach does not make any sense.

The Minister of Finance and the Minister of Infrastructure also failed to deliver when it comes to infrastructure. In last year's budget, the government announced a new \$14 billion building Canada fund but did not tell us how that money could be accessed. I raised this issue in the House a number of times.

On February 13 of this year, the government finally announced the parameters of the new building Canada fund. It is about time. The municipalities and provinces have been waiting for a year for more information and were concerned that the construction season would be jeopardized because of the government's inaction.

The Budget

Unfortunately, we are used to the Conservatives' empty promises, their announcements with no follow-through and their misrepresentations. For example, what the Conservatives have failed to mention is that most of the \$14 billion announced will not be paid out until the end of the 10-year life cycle of the fund. That money will no longer even be there. Only 1.5% or \$210 million of the promised \$14 billion will be available this year.

Municipalities face another problem. Infrastructure projects costing more than \$100 million will now have to undergo a mandatory P3 screen. Naturally, if more than one project undergoes this process in the first year, there will only be two such projects because only \$210 million is available. However, the major problem is that P3 assessments take 6 to 18 months. Once again, the Conservatives are unable to provide predictable, long-term funding for our municipalities, which are left in limbo.

Moreover, the Conservatives have once again broken their promise to make things easier for communities. Small communities are the losers with this new fund because they will no longer be able to use these monies for their roads and cultural, sports or tourism infrastructure.

To fund those projects, they will have to rely on the gas tax fund, which is already insufficient to meet their needs. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that a portion of the money available in the new fund will go to municipalities.

One of the major differences between the new and the old fund is that, previously, municipalities could cover one third of the cost of their infrastructure projects through this fund and also use the gas tax fund for the same project.

Starting now, the maximum federal contribution will be one-third of the total project cost. To fund their projects, municipalities will have to find new revenue streams and, because these are limited, will have to increasingly rely on the gas tax fund.

Quite frankly, when it comes to housing, fighting homelessness and infrastructure, the Conservatives have once again missed the mark with this budget.

• (1300)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Hochelaga for her riveting speech, which showed once again that she knows her stuff.

I have many questions for her, especially about what she just mentioned with respect to the infrastructure projects that are causing headaches for municipalities across Canada.

Could she talk more about the impact that the expiration of housing co-operative agreements will have? They serve as a model for offering affordable housing to residents. They work together to provide good places to live.

What impact does my colleague think this budget will have on housing co-operatives?

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much. She is also familiar with the co-operatives file. By the very definition of co-operative, the people who live there help each other. It is a very healthy environment in which people live

together and work together. I grew up in that environment, in all kinds of workers' co-ops. Housing co-operatives are similar.

I will give an example of what is happening now that the agreements are expiring. There is a big co-operative in the Pierrefonds-Roxboro neighbourhood in Montreal. It has about 700 residents. Nearly half of the residents—about 40%—live in subsidized housing. The agreement is expiring this year or next year. Two months after the co-operative stops receiving money from the subsidies it will go bankrupt. Will 300 or 400 people end up on the street? That is what will happen when these agreements expire.

Two families in Sudbury who were living in a co-operative lost their subsidy on October 31. They were paying less than \$400 for housing. After October 31 they had to pay over \$900. One of the families was a mother with two children. The mother was going to school. These people did not have the means to more than double their rent payments. They could have ended up on the street. If the co-operative had not been able to find them housing elsewhere, these people would have literally been out on the street.

That is what will happen when these agreements expire.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the expiration of the agreements will impact both co-operatives and cities.

[English]

There is an impact on the city of Kingston, which is mandated to operate roughly 2,000 units of affordable housing. Of course it is not going to cut those units as these operating agreements and mortgage subsidies expire. Therefore, what does it have to do? It has to raise property taxes.

The Conservatives' non-action is essentially raising the property taxes of people in Kingston and the Islands. That is what happens when the Conservative government decides to ignore affordable housing.

Does my colleague agree that we should consider the impact on cities and property-tax payers as well as on housing co-operatives?

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, of course I agree. I also spoke about that in relation to infrastructure and low-income housing.

Low-income housing units are in disrepair right now and need federal government funding for renovations. If the federal government does not give the money to the provinces, the provinces will have to take it out of their budget. On and on it goes. The federal government stops investing and offloads it to the provinces. The provinces have the means for a short period, but eventually they will no longer have the means and will offload it to the municipalities. If the municipalities cannot handle it, the public and community groups are the ones that will have to foot the bill.

• (1305)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to express some concerns about the budgetary policy presented by the Conservative government on February 11.

The Budget

I would like to join my colleagues in saying that this budget clearly does nothing to stimulate the Canadian economy and that it could even create obstacles for credit unions, for example. I rise as the member for LaSalle—Émard and the official opposition's critic for co-operatives.

I have two simple suggestions for the Minister of Finance and the government. First, I am asking them to acknowledge the positive contribution of co-operatives to our economy. Second, I am asking them to look at co-operatives through the eyes of their members so that they can gain a better understanding of co-operatives, their structure and the democratic way in which they operate.

Co-operatives make a major contribution to our economy and our society. They are engines of growth and job creation. These businesses benefit communities and meet their needs. That is the case in my riding of LaSalle—Émard, where credit unions are firmly established in the community. Our community is served, to name just a few, by the Caisse populaire de LaSalle, the Caisse populaire canadienne italienne and the Caisse de Saint-Henri et Ville-Émard, of which I am a proud member. We also have the Association coopérative d'économie familiale du Sud-Ouest, which is a consumer advocacy organization that provides tools to help people get out of debt and make informed choices.

Despite the significant growth of the co-operative sector in all provinces and territories and despite demands presented by the main umbrella groups for Canadian co-operatives, the government once again tabled a budget that does not reflect their reality and, above all, that does not recognize the positive impact of these activities on our economy and our communities.

As the NDP has already mentioned, the government has tabled an uninspiring budget. It is full of vague statements and does not set out real measures to strengthen the co-operative sector and to make the federal government an active partner in its development.

However, it does contain clues about changes that could affect the credit union system in the medium term. We will keep a close eye on those to make sure that the government heeds the recommendations put forward by the co-operative sector. In its budget, the government indicated that it would streamline the process for amalgamations of two or more provincial credit unions wishing to move to the federal credit union framework. This proposal complements measures introduced by the government in 2010 and the federal framework introduced in 2012.

The Credit Union Central of Canada stated that credit unions have experienced major challenges in transitioning to the federal framework. We hope that the government will consult them about the amalgamation process and will take their experience and their needs into account.

Again, I would like to remind the minister and the government that I hope they will look at this from a co-operative perspective to ensure they also understand the co-operative principles that govern credit unions, the principles that make these institutions democratic institutions.

The second element that could affect credit unions is the move to review and update the federal regime for credit unions. In addition,

joint supervision of provincial credit union centrals by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions will cease.

I would like to point out to all MPs how important it is to carry out a responsible review of the powers of federal entities with respect to provincial credit unions.

● (1310)

The largest co-operatives, the largest credit union federations are concerned about this measure. The government must take care to ensure that changes to the nature of the relationship with the lender of last resort do not have consequences in terms of how ratings agencies react and in terms of access to the capital of provincially regulated credit unions.

We hope that the government will undertake an open consultation process with the provinces and stakeholders such as the Credit Union Central of Canada and the Mouvement Desjardins.

The third element of the budget plan that I would like to talk about is establishing a property and causality demutualization framework. At the beginning of the month, I met with representatives of mutual companies from across Canada as part of the Canadian Association of Mutual Insurance Companies' lobbying day on Parliament Hill. Their message was clear: do not incentivize demutualization, and if there must be demutualization, there must also be equitable redistribution to the whole sector.

[*English*]

The NDP believes that there should be no external or internal incentives to demutualization. Rather, the upcoming regulations should be strongly oriented toward the elimination of demutualization incentives. Any regulation on this matter should be developed by considering the history of property and casualty mutuals and the collective nature of the assets.

Like the Canadian Association of Mutual Insurance Companies, we feel that demutualization should not benefit a small group of policyholders, directors, or employees; it should provide fair and equitable treatment to all of them. All policyholders must have the right to vote and participate in the decision process. We must avoid unfair enrichment as a result of demutualization. It is for this reason that we support the distribution of proceeds of an eventual demutualization within the co-operative sector.

[*Translation*]

The fourth and last element of the budget plan I want to talk about pertains to the government's proposed measures to ensure that new financial market participants and small banks can be more competitive.

We agree with increasing competition in a financial sector dominated by three or four main players. We also want to remind the government that it is important to consider the differences between a small bank and a credit union.

I remind the government and the Minister of Finance that they need to look at things from a credit union perspective. They need to understand the structure of co-operatives and the democratic manner in which co-operatives operate, and they need take that into account in their approach.

The Budget

Co-operatives, caisses populaires and credit unions can be found in communities where there are no banks. They offer products and services adapted to the needs of their members and they reinvest in their community. It is the same in my riding. However, they have a hard time dealing with some aspects of the regulations and they face significant challenges in terms of human resources and logistics. That is why we need to make sure that the new standards do not increase their administrative burden.

In conclusion, I am concerned that there are no measures in this budget to address some priority needs that the co-operative sector has been calling for for years. The budget does not contain a proposal for tax fairness for credit unions. Similarly, the budget does not say anything about a review of Farm Credit Canada's mandate.

• (1315)

[*English*]

This budget fails to invest in the development of the co-operative sector. The co-operatives demand the creation of a co-operative investment fund, with the joint participation of the co-operative sector and federal government. Access to capital remains a key challenge for co-operatives. That is why the NDP, since 2012, has been seeking the support of the federal government to create conditions facilitating access to financing and capitalization.

I truly expect that the government will reconsider its approach on this fund and that it will introduce measures for this matter in the budget bill. One can only hope.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope that my colleague could share some of her experience in working alongside the co-operative movement, and the kind of rhetoric we have heard from the government's side around supporting rural communities and communities that often depend on co-operative banking and businesses. While we hear that rhetoric, the government turns around and makes that very same work more and more difficult in the communities that they represent.

I would like to hear her experience with this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the question.

In fact, the current government is turning its back on the regions and the co-operative movement. This movement is deeply rooted in the communities. It provides local jobs. It is good for the local economy. These people are not going to get up and relocate when the wind changes. They are deeply rooted and they not only help the communities, but they also meet pressing needs in big cities.

That is why we have seen co-operative health care and arts and culture co-operatives pop up. In remote regions, the co-operative movement is often the only existing service—whether it is a co-operative, a store, a hardware store, a gas station or a credit union—and it maintains the economic life of our communities in our beautiful and great country.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During debate on Bill C-23 on February 6, I stated in the House that I had

witnessed an event that had taken place with respect to voter information cards.

After reviewing the transcript in the blues, I recognized that this was an error on my part. Today, as I did yesterday, I withdraw those comments from the debate portion of my opportunity to speak on Bill C-23 on February 6.

I was referring to information that was relayed to me many years ago when I worked in the rental housing industry, but it was not first-hand knowledge; it came from second and third parties. I raised this at the earliest opportunity yesterday when the House resumed after its week-long break.

I would like to sincerely apologize to all Canadians and to all members of the House for the statement that I made. It was never my intention, in any way, to mislead the House, for which I have the greatest amount of respect.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my former line of work, when we talked about the economy, we talked about a three-legged stool. One leg was for finances, the other the environment and the third for people.

The budget we have here has only one leg. My colleague was talking about co-operatives. When we talk about co-operatives, we are talking about a three-legged economy because it includes people, among other things. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this economic philosophy.

• (1320)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

It is actually more than a philosophy. The co-operative movement is about creating an economy that serves people, the community and society. Co-operatives emerge in response to a need and are part of Canada's DNA. They are part of our heritage. Co-operatives came into being in places like Saskatchewan because there came a time when people had to get together to create the services they needed knowing that there is strength in numbers.

In Quebec, the Mouvement Desjardins arose out of that desire to provide services at a time when banks were turning away people who wanted to start businesses or farm. In Alberta, I met with the association that brought electricity to the province because private companies did not want to bring power to rural areas. It is a rural electrification co-operative in Alberta.

Clearly this is part of Canada's DNA and our history. Why is the government turning its back on co-operatives?

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to talk about public finances in this place.

Before talking about the promising numbers and projects in the works for Canadians and residents of Orléans, I would like to congratulate our athletes who represented us so well in Sochi from February 7 to 23.

*The Budget**[English]*

I would like to extend special congratulations to our athletes from Orleans, Vincent De Haître, Ivanie Blondin, and Cody Sorensen, for being great ambassadors of our region and our country.

I would also like to mention that I am sharing my time with the hon. member, the very dignified member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

[Translation]

With a total medal count of 25, of which 10 were gold, I am happy to say that the \$153 million we have invested in our athletes in the past four economic action plans has yielded results.

[English]

The Government of Canada is the largest investor in sports development in the country. Since 2006, we have increased investment in sports development by more than 50%. The economic action plan 2014 plans to maintain this record level of funding for sports development and training for elite athletes.

[Translation]

This includes \$23 million per year ongoing beginning in 2015-16 for the sport support program.

Special Olympics Canada will receive \$10.8 million over four years, which is in addition to the \$1 million in ongoing funding the organization will receive through the sport support program.

[English]

The government will allow income contributed to an amateur athlete trust to qualify as earned income for the purpose of determining that individual's annual RRSP contribution limit. This will provide amateur athletes with more flexibility to save for retirement on a tax-assisted basis and ease their eventual integration into the workforce by deferring tax on income from their athletic endeavours.

[Translation]

With these measures in place, Canada will continue bringing home medals from various world championships and Olympic games but, more importantly, children will have role models to encourage them to get out there and move, to participate in sports. This is the best way to fight childhood obesity.

[English]

To stimulate our economy, Canada needs to distinguish itself as an innovative country. Thanks to a working group established in 2006 with city councillors from Orleans and the Orléans Chamber of Commerce, we are in the process of rebranding Orleans in terms of economic development. While western Ottawa continues its excellent work developing world-class IT programs, Orleans and eastern Ottawa will become the national epicentre for cybersecurity and telecommunications security.

• (1325)

[Translation]

The new VENUS Cybersecurity Corporation chose to set up shop in Orléans. VENUS will serve as a business incubator for

knowledge-sector jobs in east Ottawa. It will draw new companies to Orléans.

[English]

Venus receives support from this government through the National Research Council and the Communications Security Establishment Canada as well as the Government of Ontario, the City of Ottawa, and various partners in private and para-public sectors.

[Translation]

This is the kind of example the government should be following to stimulate Canada's economy.

[English]

With Venus, the upcoming move of the Communications Security Establishment Canada to Ottawa-Orléans, and the regional importance of the National Research Council, Orléans has everything it needs to excel.

[Translation]

We are pleased to propose investments in research and development.

[English]

The best Minister of Finance in the world has proposed an investment of \$46 million in new annual funding to the granting councils to support cutting-edge research and scientific discovery.

[Translation]

The best minister of finance in the world—I am not the one saying this; it is internationally recognized—is also proposing to invest \$222 million in the TRIUMF lab to support advanced research and to create leading-edge companies.

[English]

To ensure that the next generation of researchers is ready, we are proposing a record \$1.5 billion investment over 10 years by creating the Canada first research excellence fund.

Members will agree with me that Canada is the most dynamic country in the world to do business in, and this statement is based on hard facts.

[Translation]

More than 1 million net new jobs have been created in Canada since the worst days of the economic crisis, in July 2009. Moreover, 85% of these jobs are full-time positions, and 80% of them are in the private sector.

[English]

Furthermore, the economy in the national capital is very strong, despite the unfortunate cuts to the public service in the past few years and the doomsayers' predictions.

Ottawa's unemployment rate in January 2014 was 6.3%, which is below the national average of 7%.

The Budget

[Translation]

Independent and credible organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are predicting that Canada will have the strongest growth among the G7 countries in the years ahead.

[English]

This does not happen by magic, as the leader of the third party would have us believe. The tight spending controls put in place by the best Minister of Finance in the world and the government are behind this job creation.

[Translation]

The government is responsible for creating a favourable business climate.

[English]

Keeping our debt load under control is part of this climate. Economic action plan 2014 shows us that Canadians are almost done using their credit cards to make ends meet every month.

We are on track to balance our budget by 2015-16. Furthermore, Canada's net debt-to-GDP ratio is the lowest of all G7 countries, sitting at 37.5%. That, as far as I am concerned, is still too high, but it is still 20% below the next ranked country, Germany.

[Translation]

To keep our momentum going, we need to focus on our infrastructure, another cornerstone of our economy. Our massive investment in infrastructure during the recession was one of the main reasons Canada was the first country to climb out of the recession.

[English]

State-of-the-art infrastructure is a symbol of a healthy economy. Our previous infrastructure plan allowed Ottawa to begin work on a light rail system, which will be operational by 2018. The federal government has invested \$600 million in this major public transportation project through the building Canada fund and the Canada strategic infrastructure fund in addition to \$161 million from the gas tax fund.

• (1330)

[Translation]

Thanks to the infrastructure improvement fund announced in January 2009 to help stimulate the Canadian economy, citizens in Ottawa–Orléans saw 11 projects in their neighbourhoods receive more than \$11 million in funding.

[English]

It is with pleasure that I see that the minister of infrastructure is proposing \$70 billion over 10 years as part of the ambitious building Canada plan.

I have pages more to deliver. I know that the most important thing of interest to Ottawa under this program will be a further extension of the light rail program and more funding for cleaning up the Ottawa River.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans for his speech, but I must say that his praise for the Minister of Finance bordered on the ridiculous. The member may as well have called him the best finance minister in both the known and unknown universe.

Let us get back to more serious issues. The member for Ottawa—Orléans began his speech by quite rightly thanking our athletes for their performance and for everything they were able to accomplish at the Olympics. However, that gives us the opportunity to point out another problem. The budget was tabled in the middle of the Olympics, as though they were trying to hide or gloss over the government's inaction in the budget.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer clearly stated that tens of thousands of jobs were not created because this government opted for austerity. In large part, that explains the deficit of 300,000 jobs or the additional 300,000 people who are unemployed.

Can the member for Ottawa—Orléans tell us why he supports this lack of job creation, this shortfall?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member opposite for highlighting the importance of job creation. Job creation is a top priority for this government. That is why Canada has created more jobs, per capita, than any other G7 nation since the depths of the recession. In fact, more than a million new jobs were created.

Now he wants us to create more jobs. We need to create more, but we cannot rack up a credit card bill doing it.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's response to do it on a credit card is absolutely true, because that is how the government is doing it. Will he not admit that the additional debt to Canada, as a result of the Minister of Finance's managing of the finances of the nation, is up \$169 billion?

In terms of so-called balancing the books, that is really only on an annual basis.

Let us be brutally honest. How are they going to get to that balance? They deferred military spending by about \$4 billion over time, putting in jeopardy some of the shipbuilding and military expenditures and causing a problem in terms of jobs. Is it not correct, as well, that they are scapegoating, with a lot of their surplus position being on the backs of the unemployed, with the \$5 billion surplus in the EI fund?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the hon. member's question. It is true that we had deficit spending during the depths of our recession, but if we had listened to them at that time, we would have spent even more money. The fact is, we managed the recession better than any other country in the G7. We did it carefully, and we did it in partnership with the provinces and municipalities.

The Budget

In terms of controlling public finances and expenditures, we did not do what the government he belonged to did, which was dump it on the provinces. From 1965 to 1995, health care costs in our country were financed on a 50% basis by the Government of Canada. In one fell swoop, when the member was in government in 1995, they closed it down to 14¢ on the dollar. We are not going to do that.

As far as military spending is concerned, we know that while they were there, it was called the decade of darkness.

• (1335)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the House today to discuss the benefits of economic action plan 2014 for the residents of Bruce and Grey counties, and indeed for all Canadians.

Before I begin, I would like to express my congratulations once again to our Minister of Finance, who has presented a very commendable budget that delivers on promises this government has made and that seeks to advance the lives of all Canadians. It is great work by the minister.

I would like to start by clarifying what exactly we are talking about here. With all the rhetoric presented in this place, it is often difficult to understand what exactly we are discussing. A budget is defined as “an itemized allotment of funds...for a given time period” and a plan of operations based on this allotment. By this definition, we have hit the nail on the head with economic action plan 2014. This budget clearly sets out where various amounts of funding will be going and presents a clear plan forward as to how these funds will be used. This budget makes it very clear that the government has a plan and is executing and carrying out this plan in the most efficient way possible.

It is a basic economic principle that a government must spend in times of trouble to stimulate the economy and must save in times of growth. This government certainly knows this and has done very well in executing these principles. We have been spending when spending is necessary and saving when saving is possible. This budget continues with this proven successful economic agenda.

I would now like to outline various measures within the budget that I feel will be very welcome news in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Perhaps the most welcome piece of information contained within this budget is the fact that we are on a pace to return to balanced budgets by 2015. Remember, the Minister of Finance is balancing this budget; it is not doing it itself. The budget will bring the projected deficit down to \$2.9 billion by 2014-15 and forecasts a surplus of \$6.4 billion in 2015-16.

As I stated earlier, we have spent when spending was necessary, and now that it is possible, we are saving. These savings are coming from controlling departmental spending. However, supports, such as seniors benefits and provincial transfers, will continue to grow at record levels.

Another principle of economics is that when consumers have money to spend, and when they are protected in the marketplace, they will spend money to stimulate the economy. This government

has been committed to consumers, and this budget continues this commitment. Since 2006, we have cut taxes over 160 times, which leaves more money in the pockets of consumers.

Economic action plan 2014 would better protect Canadian consumers through various important measures. One of these measures would increase competition in the telecommunications market. This would be done by amending the Telecommunications Act to cap wholesale domestic wireless roaming rates. Furthermore, the budget would put an end to cross-border price discrimination by cracking down on companies that use market power to charge higher prices.

There are members on both sides of the House who have spent time working in municipal politics. Having been a mayor myself and having sat on councils, I believe I can speak for all in saying that having long-term and steady infrastructure funding is one of the greatest challenges faced by lower-tier levels of government. That is why I was very pleased to see the recent announcement of the details of the \$53 billion building Canada plan. With \$53 billion allocated to infrastructure, the new building Canada plan will be the largest long-term federal infrastructure plan in Canadian history and will provide stable funding for a 10-year period. Furthermore, over \$32 billion will be available specifically for municipalities through a permanent and indexed gas tax fund and the incremental goods and services tax rebate for municipalities. This is very welcome news in my riding, and I look forward to seeing some of that funding used to develop local infrastructure.

Continuing our commitment to improve Canadian infrastructure, this budget contains measures that specifically address the needs of rural areas. I was very pleased to see that \$305 million would be invested to extend and enhance broadband service for up to an additional 280,000 Canadians. In today's high-tech world, with reliance on services provided through the Internet, broadband service is very much needed in rural areas. This is certainly a welcome announcement in my riding.

• (1340)

Furthermore, as a representative of a riding that is surrounded by water on three sides, I am very aware of the importance of stable funding to support small craft harbours. This budget would invest \$40 million to accelerate repair and maintenance work at small craft harbours across the country. These harbours are vital pieces of infrastructure that communities rely on for tourism; recreation, including recreational fishing; and economic growth. Strong and well-maintained harbours provide a stable source of economic input for these communities.

Many Canadians are concerned about the well-being of our environment. There are many environmental groups and organizations with an agenda to support and protect our environment. However, I often find that sportsmen's associations and conservation groups are omitted from this list. Sportsmen are true stewards of the environment and are very committed to seeing healthy ecosystems across the country. This budget would allow sportsmen's associations and other groups to continue the important work they do for our environment.

The Budget

The budget would invest an additional \$15 million in the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program to further support the conservation of recreational fisheries habitat. That is something the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette and a number of my other colleagues worked very hard to get in the last budget. To see this expansion in it is something we are all very happy about.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to welcome the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to my riding to announce funding for a couple of projects under this program. The plans for the projects being funded were very well developed and well researched. This funding would certainly go a long way in supporting our local recreational fisheries.

A stable recreational fishery also creates strong local economies. There are many communities in my riding that promote tourism through their promotion of the excellent fishing we have in Bruce and Grey counties. The Sydenham Sportsmen's Association has been hosting the Owen Sound Salmon Spectacular for 26 years now, which always draws a large crowd of between 4,500 and 5,500 anglers. It is a great event.

Continuing on the theme of recreation and tourism, this budget would invest \$10 million to improve snowmobile and recreational trails across the country. I can say that with all the snow we have in my part of the world this year, many snowmobilers were out on the trails that run through the countryside. The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs and the local snowmobile clubs and communities across the country do tremendous work in ensuring that the trails are well maintained and used properly. With trails that wind through the bush and across fields, snowmobiling is a great way to get out and enjoy the northern environment. This investment would be another welcome measure in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, as it would give further support to recreational trails.

Finally, I would like to touch on the importance of connecting students and the workplace. As we discuss the economy, it is important to note that emphasis needs to be put on training future workers. Without properly qualified and educated workers, economies will collapse.

The budget addresses the need to properly train employers through several measures. It would create the Canada apprenticeship loan. This loan would provide apprentices and Red Seal trades with access to over \$100 million in interest-free loans each year. It is often the reality in my riding that many students move directly from high school to an apprenticeship program. Apprenticeships are a vital link connecting students with the workplace, as oftentimes apprenticeships lead to full-time employment. As an example, one of my sons did an apprenticeship through a local employer and received his training this way.

Furthermore, the budget would create more paid internships for young Canadians. This would be done by investing \$55 million to create paid internships for recent graduates in both small and medium-size businesses in high demand fields. When students graduate, they are often hard-pressed to find jobs in their fields of study. This investment would allow students to get their feet in the doors of businesses and, like the apprenticeship program, could lead to future employment.

In conclusion, action plan 2014 presents a very comprehensive plan for sustained economic growth. The global accolades that Canada has been receiving are staggering.

• (1345)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is funny that the member spoke about rhetoric in this place, because it is his colleague, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, who is trying to lead people in the wrong direction by trying to get them to believe stuff that is not true.

In any event, he has talked about tourism, local recreation, and sportsmen and how important these are to strong local economies. I guess he will be able to sympathize with the people along the Algoma Central Railway line who saw the current government remove \$2.2 million from a subsidy, leaving the tourism sector up in the air.

Let me just read a letter from Michael. It states:

...I have spent my entire life working hard to make a successful business. What is unimaginable to me is that with one last-minute decision by government to save a few dollars, dozens of businesses and private home owners are having their lives and livelihood ruined overnight.

This decision is very short sighted and ignores the larger picture. We personally have hundreds of guests that come visit every year pushing hundreds of thousands of dollars into the local economy. By not helping reverse this decision our business of 38 years will shut its doors overnight, lose everything our family has worked so hard for....

On that note, do the member and his government really recognize the importance of tourism, and will he advocate with us for—

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

The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I am quite familiar with the member's riding. It is not as beautiful as Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, but it certainly has its attributes. My family has a recreational property there, which we use and enjoy very much.

It is good to see the member, I think, point out that some of the money in this budget would go toward recreational snowmobiling, a part of the tourism industry. I have snowmobiled in her part of the world. When snowmobilers travel across the countryside, they spend money on gas, meals, motels, et cetera. This would certainly benefit her riding, and I look forward to her voting in favour of the budget.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in reflecting upon the budget, it is really important that we recognize the this Conservative-Reform government has really missed a wonderful opportunity to talk about something that is really important to all Canadians, our health care system.

This year we will see the health care accord, signed between the provinces and Prime Minister Paul Martin, expire. That accord allowed us to see a record-high dollar value going from Ottawa to the provinces to sustain what Canadians feel so much passion about, the health care system we have in Canada.

The government has done nothing, zero, in making a commitment to something that is so critically important. There is no mention of it in the budget, no mention at all in the speeches,.

The Budget

Why do the Conservatives not recognize what is so very important in Canada when they present their budget, the Canadian budget, and give no consideration whatsoever to the importance of health care to all Canadians?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, my colleague likes to name-call and that kind of thing at the start. I certainly would never recognize him as a member of the socialist Liberal Party.

In any event, he mentioned health care and I am glad that he pointed that out. Our increases with respect to health care have been around 6% a year, and we are committed to that.

I hear the member for Malpeque chirping down there, but in fact his government, in the day, cut health care on the backs of Canadians in order to balance the books. We are not going to do that, and we are not cutting back transfers to the provinces either.

• (1350)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I am happy to speak about nothing, anything—about the budget, in fact. It seems to me, really, that it is nothing and anything. There is not much in this budget to help Canadians who need help, or to help businesses. As I speak, there are 300,000 more people unemployed than before the recession, and there is no significant investment to create high-quality jobs. That is a problem.

With regard to the Canada job grant, the Conservatives would probably talk about that, telling us that there is something, but there is not even an agreement with the provinces. The government wants to proceed unilaterally without consulting the provinces and without cooperating with them. In broad terms, they throw everything into the lap of the provinces and municipalities, and then they wonder why our infrastructure is falling apart, why there are people unemployed and why there is more and more poverty in Canada. This is not saying much.

Household debt is an important issue. Canadian families now owe an average of \$1.60 for every dollar they earn. It is a real problem, because that figure is fairly significant. There is nothing in the Conservatives' budget to help these people. There is nothing to regulate bank charges. The other day, we moved a motion on the subject. There is nothing to limit interest rates on credit cards, which would help the middle class and people who are in debt. There is nothing about gas prices.

Last week, I consulted community organizations in my riding about household debt and the problematic situation in our country. People are at their wits' end, they have problems, they need a hand from the government, and they are not getting it.

This budget does contain a few minor measures that are somewhat positive, it has to be said. We do not always work in a negative way. The NDP motto, after all, is "Working together". High-speed Internet access will be reaching our smaller centres; that is a good thing for my constituency. People will be happy, particularly in the Acton Vale area. There is also the elimination of the "pay to pay" fees. Receiving a bill in the mail and having to

pay an additional two dollars is completely unacceptable. The government has promised to do something about this. Is it really going to? I cannot wait to see that. I should also note that the budget mentions an additional 200 inspectors for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. That is a very good measure. It has to be said that it is about time.

Something that affects my constituency a great deal is infrastructure. For example, money has been included for the Champlain Bridge. Kudos. It has been in ruins for a long time, and we have been waiting for years for the government to do something about the bridge. Perhaps it was waiting for a major problem to occur, and it was even talking about possibly closing the bridge. There would be utter chaos on the south shore and the Island of Montreal if the Champlain Bridge closed. This affects people in my riding, because it is not very far from Montreal and many people from our area work there. The Champlain Bridge raises another issue: tolls. People on low incomes use it daily. Is it really a solution to make people pay for using a bridge? I have my doubts.

• (1355)

The criteria for the building Canada fund have finally been revealed, but these outlays are completely inadequate to meet the current needs of our municipalities. They have been letting things go for years, and now it is time to act.

I could provide some other examples, but I would like to talk about employment insurance. By 2016, \$6.4 billion will have accumulated, and again, the money is to be used as they see fit. However, the money belongs to the workers who have contributed to employment insurance, and they may not be entitled to it.

As far as the environment is concerned, the Canadian government's budget does not address climate change at all. This is 2014. There is a problem. We have to ask ourselves serious questions about where we are headed, what we want to do as a society, and what we want for the future of our children.

I would now like to draw people's attention to housing and homelessness, a cause I frequently take up. I also introduced a bill on the subject, which was debated about a year ago. With respect to housing, the budget contains no measures to address the expiration of the federal agreements. It means that people may find themselves out on the street, or unable to pay for their housing. This is completely unacceptable.

With respect to homelessness, money from the homelessness partnering strategy goes to fund the housing first program. In other words, we are robbing Peter to pay Paul. In plain language, that is what is going on. Yes, there is investment in a housing program for the chronically homeless, but there is no additional housing, so I do not know how that is going to work.

These are the problems I wanted to raise in relation to the budget. The problem is that the government's budget in fact contains no meaningful measures to help middle-class Canadians get out from under their debts. It does nothing to offer adequate help to people grappling with housing issues, it does nothing for the environment—in short, it does nothing at all.

Last week, I held a public consultation on household indebtedness and the “affordability” of life in general. I will use this term because people will understand. Community agencies and organizations working on the problem of debt confirmed that middle-class Canadians and the disadvantaged are being crushed and have had enough. It appears that they need a break, but that is not what the government is now offering them.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

YUKON

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week was very busy in the Yukon.

I want to extend my congratulations to all the mushers of the Yukon Quest; to Liz Foubister for being crowned the Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous Queen; and to the coordinators and volunteers for the successful celebration of 50 years.

I send a big shout-out to Yukon's Olympic skier, Emily Nishikawa, for her performance in Sochi, and I wish the best of luck to her brother Graham in his role as a skiing guide in the upcoming Paralympics.

Finally, I congratulate Karen Barnes of Yukon College for being voted best chili chef at my second annual chili cook-off to benefit the Whitehorse food bank.

Last week I was also privileged to announce the grand opening of 14 independent living housing units for people with FASD, thanks to Sharon Hickey and Options for Independence for their dedicated work.

I was also pleased to announce the opening of the Carcross water treatment facility, part of our government's commitment to essential community infrastructure.

I was there to witness the Government of Canada's historic agreement with the Yukon government to provide \$1.25 million per year for new labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, the first of its kind in the Yukon.

In a territory larger than life, it is closer than we think.

* * *

NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Kinder Morgan has applied to the National Energy Board to build a new 590,000 barrel per day, bitumen-based, export-only, crude oil pipeline from Edmonton to Burnaby.

The Conservative government radically overhauled the NEB pipeline approval process and made a real mess of things with Bill C-38.

Under the old regulations, a company applied to the NEB and then the NEB issued a public hearing order if the application was deemed

Statements by Members

complete. Under the new regulations, the NEB now calls for participation before the application is judged complete.

It turns out that Kinder Morgan's application is incomplete, as it does not include a final pipeline route, but because the NEB has now closed the window for the public to apply to participate, Kinder Morgan may wind up expropriating property with affected land-owners having no opportunity to raise objections.

This is unacceptable to my constituents of Burnaby—Douglas, and I ask the government to support my request for the NEB to restart this pipeline hearing process.

* * *

WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in our lifetime as Canadians, we will have the opportunity to come across a few individuals who we will truly look up to because of their personality, their success, and their ability to inspire us.

Then there are a very few who can capture the attention and respect of people internationally. Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir are such individuals. Their Olympic performance at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games was stellar. They won silver, but their performance was golden. As one commentator said, on the scoring card there should be a box for magic.

Scott and Tessa's humility and commitment make them wonderful role models for young Canadians and examples to all of what it means to be Canadian.

I thank Tessa and Scott, for their incredible performance in Sochi, and all our Olympians who make us so proud to be Canadian.

* * *

CANADA POST

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Canada Post announced that some of my constituents would be the first to lose home mail delivery under the five-point action plan.

I have already heard from seniors and people with disabilities who say they will no longer be able to access their mail.

Mr. Holloway, who lives in Bedford and has a disability, says it will be very difficult to get to a community mail box. He relies on Canada Post to pay his bills and access government services.

Mrs. Blackwell, a senior who lives on a street with no sidewalks, says it will be dangerous for her to walk to get her mail, especially in winter.

Mr. Brown lives on a busy highway and is worried about where Canada Post would put a community mail box that would be safe to access.

Canada Post should suspend its misguided plans, conduct real consultation with Canadians, and ensure everyone continues to have reliable postal service.

*Statements by Members***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, having served 20 years in the Canadian Armed Forces and being a veteran myself, I rise in the House today to highlight what our government is doing to support our veterans.

We have increased funding from \$2.8 billion to \$3.6 billion in under 10 years. We have cut red tape and have ensured that 90% of Veterans Affairs funding goes directly to programs and services for veterans and their families.

[*Translation*]

We have made services easier to access through Service Canada offices.

In my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, in Hawkesbury specifically, veterans will no longer have to travel an hour and a half to Ottawa because they will now have access to a nearby Service Canada office.

[*English*]

Yes, it is clear that our government supports veterans. Canadians have not forgotten what these brave men and women have done to serve our great country, and neither have we.

* * *

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nothing is more important to people's health and well-being than having a place to call home, where they can feel safe. Unfortunately, far too many people in our country know what it is like to live without such a basic need. This is a common situation in my large riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

In Nunavik alone, more than 900 families are in need of adequate housing, despite the fact that the Government of Canada has a constitutional obligation under the treaties to provide housing. The Eeyou Istchee region is short roughly 2,000 housing units. In Val-D'Or, there is a serious shortage of affordable housing, which is driving up the cost of rent. It is getting harder and harder for families to put a roof over their heads. The same is true throughout northern Quebec.

The federal government has a role to play in providing affordable housing. It is high time that the Conservatives honoured their commitments and worked in partnership with the governments in my region to resolve this problem.

* * *

[*English*]

YORK REGIONAL POLICE

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the exemplary efforts of the York Regional Police in combatting human trafficking.

Last week, we heard the details of some remarkable policing work. Through a 2-month-long investigation, the York Regional Police drugs and vice unit was able to identify 31 young women being trafficked and sexually exploited. The unit made 10 arrests, and more than 120 charges were laid.

Some of the rescued women were young teenagers who had been reported missing by their families. Others had children at home. All were able to return to their homes or places of safety.

Human sex trafficking is the fastest growing business of organized crime, and our government is taking strong action to fight it. I commend the York Regional Police, under the leadership of Chief Eric Jolliffe, for its aggressive efforts in combatting this very heinous crime.

They deserve our congratulations on a job very well done.

* * *

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to a special person in my life, my husband Bill. Bill has retired after 40 years of service with the Wyoming Volunteer Fire Department, as a firefighter, deputy chief, and chief.

As has always been the case until recently, Bill was appointed because of his experience, training, knowledge, and leadership. The safety and well-being of all firefighters was his first priority. Under his leadership, the department evolved into one of the best trained, best equipped, and safest departments. Bill worked continuously and tirelessly to improve conditions for firefighters. He was also a strong proponent of critical stress training. Bill was extremely proud of each of the firefighters as they progressed through the various levels of training.

For a wife and mother of a firefighter, there is no greater comfort than knowing that one's loved one, often in a serious, life threatening situation, is in the presence of colleagues who are well trained and well equipped to keep the brigade as safe as possible.

From Will, Tina, Josh, and me, I thank Bill for all he has done. Congratulations on retiring. We are all very proud.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the opportunity to be the honorary chair of *Projet Lit'inérance*, overseen by Contact Richelieu-Yamaska and the Table de concertation *Solidarité itinérance* maskoutaine. The goal is to provide shelter to those who are homeless and not leave anyone sleeping outside, because no human being deserves that—not to mention that homelessness could happen to any of us.

Statements by Members

I would like to thank all the organizers, volunteers and sponsors who made the event such a success. However, we must ask the question: if we had a responsible government that invested appropriately in housing and combating homelessness, would these kinds of events even be necessary? I doubt it.

When will the government make decent, adequate investments in support of the most vulnerable in our society?

* * *

[English]

RECREATIONAL FISHERY

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that our government announced the renewal of the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program for \$15 million over the next two years in economic action plan 2014. That is a 50% increase in funding.

In only the first round of this highly successful program, we were able to form nearly 100 partnerships with hard-working local conservation and angling groups in order to restore, conserve, and rehabilitate fisheries habitats right across Canada.

I am not the only one who is happy about this. Angelo Lombardo, the executive director of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, highlights that:

Recreational fishing in Canada generates over \$8 billion in annual economic activity, and the expansion of this program will allow for dozens of new projects across the country to become a reality.

These conservation groups have established expertise in fisheries and are well positioned to deliver habitat restoration projects through collaborative approaches right across Canada. These projects will benefit recreational fisheries, our natural environment, and many local communities.

* * *

•(1410)

[Translation]

ROSEMONT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to mark the 25th anniversary of the Corporation de développement communautaire de Rosemont, or the CDC. For 25 years, this organization has rallied the people of Rosemont around promising community building projects that improve community life. The CDC brings together various stakeholders in the Rosemont community in order to fight poverty and improve social conditions.

With such projects as “Décider Rosemont ensemble”, the entire community has democratically established neighbourhood priorities such as access to social housing, food security or the environment. The CDC oversees more than 50 active organizations, hundreds of motivated volunteers and innovative projects. The CDC fosters social justice, solidarity and democracy. Indeed, for the past 25 years, CDC has had success in all areas, even those where the Conservatives have failed miserably since 2006.

Once again, kudos and thank you to all those who work together, day after day, to make Rosemont a better place to live.

* * *

[English]

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the leader of the Liberal Party reminds us that he does not have the judgment to be prime minister. It is no wonder that his masters did not want him scrumming at the end of his own convention.

To be clear, our government supports the Ukrainian people, the constitutional process, and their legitimate leaders as they work to re-establish freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Canadians want to know if his comments about Ukraine were a joke or if they were serious. It turns out it was a joke; then it was serious; now it is a joke. Maybe he should add foreign affairs to his short list of priorities, alongside legalizing marijuana and having an unelected Senate appointed by an unaccountable appointed body of friends.

I am sure all members will be on the edge of their seats waiting to see what implications the Liberal leader believes the outcome of the World Cup will have on the geopolitical landscape. He is obviously in way over his head.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians trust Elections Canada to administer fair and impartial elections, yet the Conservatives would have us believe otherwise.

On February 6, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville gave an impassioned account of voter fraud he had personally witnessed, describing the process in careful detail beginning at the community mailbox and ending at the ballot box. He has now admitted that was not true, that he did not personally see voters misusing voter cards.

This is not the first time Conservative resources have been used to mislead Canadians around elections. Members will remember that Judge Mosley found the CIMS database to be the root of the 2011 robocalls that sent voters to the wrong locations.

The fact that the current government would not take advice from the Chief Electoral Officer but would accept the deliberate misleading of the backbencher from Mississauga—Streetsville and leave him on the committee proves the reality that this act is really the unfair elections act.

* * *

LET'S TALK ENERGY WEEK

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week marks the first Let's Talk Energy Week. It is an event for all Canadians to learn and talk about energy systems.

Oral Questions

Energy is central to our everyday lives. The Let's Talk Energy initiative, spearheaded by the Canadian Science and Technology Museums Corporation, is hard at work to raise clean energy literacy and awareness among Canadians.

Since 2006, our government has invested more than \$10 billion to support green infrastructure, energy efficiency, and the production of cleaner energy and fuels. In fact, over 75% of Canada's energy comes from non-emitting sources.

In support of Let's Talk Energy Week and in celebration of Canada's energy success, I encourage my hon. colleagues to attend scheduled events with their constituents to raise awareness of the benefits energy brings to us all.

This government will continue to support clean energy developments to contribute to a sustainable energy future for all Canadians.

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● (1415)

ETHICS

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were shocked to learn today that staff members of the Prime Minister's Office have literally been eating their lunches. Treasury Board guidelines only allow for paid lunches outside of working hours, but in just three years, PMO operatives spent almost \$68,000 on weekly staff lunches, claiming free lunches in violation of Treasury Board guidelines.

Average folks enjoy going to Boston Pizza, but they do not charge up \$7,724 and then ask taxpayers to pick up the tab.

We even have a letter from the office of Nigel Wright, the very model of PMO fiscal integrity, stating "Your dependability, professionalism, and especially the delicious food have been greatly appreciated over the past two and a half years".

Another restaurant encouraged patrons to "order the Prime Minister's favourite dish".

Canadians are also big fans of local restaurants, but regular people do not try to get hard-working Canadian taxpayers to pay for their lunch.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after weeks of empty Liberal lip service about the middle class, today Statistics Canada's Canadian survey of financial security shows that Canadian families are better off under the Conservative government than they were under the previous Liberal government.

Statistics Canada shows that the wealth of Canadian families in the middle quintile was up 45% over what it was in 2005. In fact, it is 80% higher than it was in 1999's median after adjustment for inflation. This is because our government continues to reduce the tax burden on Canadian families. We have done it 160 separate times. This leaves \$3,400 in the pockets of the average Canadian family of four after they pay their taxes.

The Liberal leader has said that he would massively increase the spending of the federal government on the Canadian people's backs. This would increase the tax Canadians pay or increase their debt.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville was forced to apologize to the House for telling tall tales about voters using Elections Canada voter cards to commit electoral fraud. That is a serious accusation. Now the Conservatives want to ban the use of those same voter cards as a piece of ID altogether.

Does the Prime Minister have any actual evidence of voter fraud, or just bogus stories from Conservative backbenchers?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that all ID used in voting is ID that can be authenticated. In this case, the fair elections act would allow for the use of two of any number of 39 different pieces of identification, so obviously people have access to a wide range of possible ID.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will take that to mean no.

[Translation]

Seventy-three percent of seniors use that same voter ID card as identification to vote; that is three out of four seniors. Many of them have no ID card, no passport and no driver's licence.

Why does the Prime Minister want to prevent seniors from voting?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fair elections act gives voters the option of using 39 different types of identification. We will obviously work with voters to ensure that they are able to vote.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the Prime Minister tell us how many cases of electoral fraud have been prosecuted in the last eight years?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Obviously, Mr. Speaker, that is a matter most appropriately directed to investigators.

This particular legislation would make sure that all tools are available to investigators and that the investigative function is independent and is able to ensure the integrity of elections.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will take that as a zero. These are the same investigators, of course, that the Prime Minister now wants to handcuff.

•(1420)

[*Translation*]

The question was very clear. If we exclude the many cases of electoral fraud carried out by the Conservative Party, how many Canadians have been prosecuted for voting illegally since 2006? How many?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is not responsible for investigating. Independent agencies were created to do that.

I should point out for the record that the NDP was forced to reimburse nearly \$350,000 of its election expenses.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only convictions are of the Conservative Party.

Let us look at vouching. If any widespread voter fraud was being committed using vouching as a form of ID, it would be rather easy to prove. We have their names and addresses. We do not exactly have to start a manhunt.

Before making it more difficult for hundreds of thousands of seniors to vote, did the Prime Minister even ask for an investigation to find out if there were any real cases—not ones made up by Conservative backbenchers, but real cases—of voter fraud, other than Conservative voter fraud?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already mentioned the fact that the NDP was forced to pay back \$350,000 in illegal union donations.

Obviously, in terms of vouching we do not have addresses in these cases and that kind of information cannot be verified. The Neufeld report has said that some 25% of these cases lead to possible irregularities, and that is why we are instead providing a wide range of ID that can satisfy the elections process and make sure that voters have the right to vote.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last election the Prime Minister's income splitting commitment was precise. It was not some other type of tax cut. It was not some other time. It was income splitting within the current mandate.

Did the Prime Minister ever intend to keep his 2011 campaign promise?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said, we will look at tax reductions for families when we actually have the budget balanced. This party on this side understands, unlike him, that the budget does not balance itself.

I am glad to see, though, that the Liberal Party is interested. I got confused over the weekend. I am pleased to see that the Liberal Party is interested in tax reductions for families. That would be a big change.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry about the Prime Minister's confusion. It is true, an open convention is something he has never seen.

Oral Questions

During budget week, the Minister of Finance said that income splitting still required “a long, hard analytical look”.

Why did the Prime Minister not ask the finance minister to conduct this analysis before the election promise was made three years ago?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not recall ever having to leave one of my conventions through the back door.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The Right Hon. Prime Minister has only a few seconds left to answer the question. We need to have a little order.

The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I was not the one who raised the subject.

The reality, of course, is this is the party that brought in the universal child care benefit and a series of tax reduction measures for families, for things like fitness and artistic activities. We look forward to further tax reductions for Canadians.

•(1425)

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recommend to the Prime Minister that perhaps he try using the front door of the House of Commons and actually talking to people.

[*Translation*]

In 2011, the Prime Minister made income splitting his—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, order. It is not even Wednesday. The hon. member for Papineau still has the floor. I would like to hear the question. Members need to come to order.

The hon. member for Papineau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the Prime Minister made income splitting his primary election promise, but flip-flopped in the last budget and changed his mind.

Why did the Prime Minister not ask his Minister of Finance to analyze that promise before he made it to Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is clear.

We will look at tax cuts for Canadian families when the budget is balanced. This party understands that a budget does not balance itself.

Income splitting was a good policy for Canadian seniors and it will be a good policy for Canadian families.

Oral Questions

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is small business that creates over 80% of the new jobs here in Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. We are losing a lot of time with these types of interventions. Members will be free to applaud the Leader of the Opposition when he is finished asking the question. I will give him the floor now.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has handed out tens of billions of dollars in giveaways to the largest, most profitable corporations. He even subsidizes the oil companies.

However, in this year's budget, he is cancelling the \$1,000 job creation tax credit for small business. Why is the Prime Minister raising taxes on small businesses across Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course the Leader of the Opposition raises an issue, a particular policy that he has voted against multiple times.

We were very clear that it was a time-limited policy. We have now frozen increases to EI premiums. Those will be falling in the future.

What small businesses said very clearly to the NDP is they do not agree with the NDP's plans for tax hikes of their CPP premiums. We will stand with small business.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a study by the federal employment department proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that "the wages of middle income workers have stagnated" from 1993 to 2007. It goes on to say that "middle-income families are increasingly vulnerable to financial shocks." That is the result of a generation of Liberal and Conservative policies, starting with the decision to dismantle employment insurance and reduce corporate income tax. Nothing to help families, nothing for job creation. When will the government do something to make life in Canada more affordable?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader quoted facts that are not accurate. He is talking about events that took place decades ago.

[English]

The reality is that Statistics Canada said today that the net worth of Canadian families since 2005 is up by 44.5% and indeed the biggest gains have been in the middle class.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was in Fort McMurray again last week, where temporary foreign workers are being exploited. Temporary foreign workers are being exploited and used to undercut wages in every industry from oil sands to fast food. Bringing in more temporary foreign workers,

making people work an extra two years before they retire, attacking collective bargaining rights, forcing workers to take a 30% pay cut or be kicked off EI—every one of these policies is designed to force Canadian workers to accept a lower wage instead of helping them earn a higher one. Why are Conservatives asking struggling Canadian families to accept even less?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are not going to be very many people in Alberta, or elsewhere, who see the irony of the leader of the NDP talking about people who are employed in Fort McMurray, because if the NDP ever had its way, with its policies, those jobs would be gone overnight. He even goes to Washington to lobby against those jobs. It is because of our government that those jobs are protected.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the Conservatives, fairness means evading responsibility and changing the rules after getting caught. A former Elections Canada lawyer says this act would stop Elections Canada from reporting to Parliament about the ongoing robocalls investigation. The person who can report to the public on Conservative wrongdoing during the last election is just the latest to be muzzled by the government. Why is the minister changing the rules and making it harder for Canadians to learn about potential election fraud?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of mistake that happens when the NDP gets its information from reading the newspaper instead of reading the bill.

The fair elections act has similar confidentiality provisions to those that exist already in Elections Canada's policy. That being said, if the commissioner believes that he would benefit from making information public, the proposed paragraph 510.1(2)(b) would allow him to do just that.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now I understand why the minister is afraid to face Canadians, especially when the MP for Mississauga—Streetsville has to make stuff up in order to defend the bill.

Putting a gag order on Elections Canada does nothing to help make our elections more fair, but it does a lot to help Conservatives avoid embarrassment. If the minister truly believes his bill fights electoral fraud, will he stop ramming it through Parliament, agree to leave the "Ottawa bubble," and consult Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, she might consider consulting the facts. The proposed paragraph 510.1(2)(b) states:

The Commissioner may disclose or may authorize any person acting under his or her direction to disclose

Oral Questions

...(b) information that, in the Commissioner's opinion, is necessary to carry out an investigation;

Additionally, court filings, compliance agreements, charges, and annual reports from the commissioner will be public. That is open. That is fair. That is the fair elections act.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for the botched attempt at electoral reform is the same MP who defended the Conservatives tooth and nail on the whole issue of fraudulent calls, regardless of the crimes they committed.

This time, his legislation will prevent Canadians from knowing what is going on with the whole affair, and he would have us believe that happened by chance. Honestly. Can the minister promise that his bill will in no way limit the Commissioner of Elections' ability to publicly disclose all of the information pertaining to an investigation?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just quoted the section of the fair elections act that would enable the commissioner to disclose all details of an investigation when he decides to do so.

[*English*]

However, also in the fair elections act we are requiring that something called a "compliance agreement" be made public. That is when an investigation happens and an agreement is signed thereafter. One compliance agreement dealt with the \$340,000 in illegal union money that the NDP took. All of that was kept secret and the compliance agreement did not become public. It had to be leaked by a courageous whistleblower to the *Toronto Star*.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives committed to tightening the Elections Act after they were caught red-handed making fraudulent calls and deceiving people.

However, instead of tightening the rules, their electoral reform opens the door to other potential fraudulent actions. It makes voting harder for thousands of Canadians and sweeps the electoral fraud from the last election under the rug.

The minister needs to get out of the Ottawa bubble and consult Canadians to find out what they think. What is he afraid of?

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fair elections act would keep everyday Canadians in charge of democracy by putting special interests on the sidelines and rule breakers out of business. It would close loopholes to big money, crack down on fraudulent voting, and bring in jail time for political impostors who make illegal rogue calls. It would make impersonations a crime. The fair elections act would protect the integrity of our electoral system. The NDP should read it first and then support it.

● (1435)

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government can tell its seniors and veterans that the cupboard is bare, but now we find out that the Prime Minister's staffers mooched \$68,000 in free lunches off the taxpayer in clear violation of the Treasury Board guidelines.

When an average Canadian family goes out for pizza, they do not expect their neighbours to pick up the tab. The rules are there to protect the taxpayer. Why does the Prime Minister think that he and his staff are somehow above the rules?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the hon. member's allegation is false. In fact, the rules were not broken. But I can tell the House and I have the opportunity to offer some facts that I believe Canadians will be proud of. Since 2005–06, this government has cut hospitality expenses by 48%. Every year since coming to power, this government has spent less on hospitality than the previous Liberal government. That is something the taxpayers can be proud of.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the members opposite rode into Parliament on their trusty steed, the white horse of reform, promising to defend taxpayers at any price.

Today, they have to defend expensive lunches for PMO staffers, people with more ambition than principles who seem incapable of taking two pieces of bread, spreading them with mayonnaise and adding ham, cheese and lettuce—it is important to eat healthy—especially when taxpayers are footing the bill. Eight thousand dollars at Boston Pizza? Seriously? Where is that spirit of reform now? On lunch, too?

We want to know why the Prime Minister's Office is not following the rules set by the President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, that story is false. No rules were broken. Since I have the chance to speak, I would like to offer some facts that I believe Canadians will be proud of. Since 2006, this government has cut hospitality expenses by 48%. Every year since coming to power, this government has spent less on hospitality than the Liberal government did in 2005.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister once believed, "There is no greater fraud than a promise not kept". In 2008, his single biggest promise was cutting the diesel tax in half. But, like income splitting, once the votes were cast, he simply pretended it never happened. How can Canadians possibly trust the Conservatives when in the last three elections they broke every single one of their biggest promises?

Oral Questions

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing that Canadians expected and got was lower taxes from this government. I do not even think most Canadians expected there would be 160 tax cuts that would put \$3,400 into the pockets of the typical family of four, but they got it.

In fact, the economist from the Bank of Montreal said today that as a whole, Canadian families' overall finances are generally in good shape. The standout is the tremendous growth in net worth. It works out to average annual increases of better than 5%, which is very—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be serious. During the last election, the Prime Minister made a solemn promise to introduce income splitting. Now we know that the Minister of Finance is dragging his feet. He is not convinced.

My question is simple and clear, and it is for the Minister of National Revenue. I would like to know if the minister herself agrees with this measure. Yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, our government has delivered on promises of cutting taxes for Canadian families. For example, all members of this House and all people of Canada know that we have cut the GST from 7% to 5%. We have created a tax-free savings accounting, making it easier for Canadians to save for their retirement.

As I travelled around the country on the budget, nine million Canadians thanked us for the tax-free savings account that helps them in their retirement years. We established a \$5,000 tax credit for first-time home buyers and brought in arts and fitness tax savings. We will continue to deliver tax relief for families.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are starting to get a sense of what a Conservative promise is worth. A promise on income splitting really meant not doing income splitting. A promise to exempt income trusts from taxation really meant not exempting them. A promise to eliminate capital gains tax really meant not eliminating the tax.

Does the Prime Minister still have a problem with Bev Oda inserting all those “nots” into her documents, or was it his idea in the first place?

• (1440)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting what the Liberal Party is not talking about today. The Liberal Party, first, is not talking about Ukraine. The Liberal Party today is not talking about the Stats Canada report that announced that the median net worth of Canadian families has risen by just under 45% since 2005. The Liberal Party today is not talking about the tax rate being the lowest in the last 50 years, as it is right now.

Again, it is interesting that the Liberals do not want to do anything that would look back on their record.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, grain is sitting in silos in western Canada going nowhere fast, farmers are losing money, and our international premium markets are being lost to our competitors, all because grain cannot get to port. What is the minister doing? Well, he sends the grain companies and the railroad companies a letter.

It takes more than a strongly worded letter to get our grain to port. Farmers in western Canada are looking to this minister for action, to move their grain to port before they go bankrupt. When will he act?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been doing far more than strongly worded letters. We have actually been acting, working with all of the players in the supply chain. Of course, it is well documented that the underperformance of the railways is the weak link in that chain. We are moving forward collaboratively with my colleague the Minister of Transport to put in place whatever needs to be done to ensure that grain gets to port in a timely way.

The president of the Grain Growers of Canada stated:

We want to thank [the minister] for bringing all parties together at this meeting as a chance to engage directly with the railways and [we've begun] an ongoing dialogue for the future.

That is what we have been doing: facilitating the future.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems the one thing that minister excels at is making up excuses for the reasons for his inaction.

Saskatchewan and Alberta are demanding immediate action. They are asking the minister to intervene and help ease the grain backlog. Saskatchewan's minister of the economy pointed out that the lack of service agreements means “there's no obligation, there's no accountability...”. When will this minister stop with the excuses and act to get the transport system moving for western Canadian producers?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is well known, through the media accounts, that we have been having meetings directly with the railways with all the members of the supply chain. I welcome the input from my good friend and colleague Minister Bill Boyd, from Saskatchewan, a long-time farmer. He understands the reasons that we are doing what we are doing.

I was able to point out to Bill the other day that under the fair rail freight legislation that we put in last spring, the provision is already there. There is nothing stopping the grain and railways companies from sitting down and working out contractual agreements, with reciprocal penalties, if they should decide to do so.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there was another train derailment this past weekend. This time it happened in Saint-Henri, where 3,500 litres of diesel fuel were spilled. Since Lac-Mégantic, it has been one accident after another, and yet the government does nothing. There was nothing in the most recent budget for rail safety: still no deadline for the phase-out of the old DOT-111 cars and a lack of transparency regarding the transportation of explosive goods through our communities.

Does the minister realize that her inaction is putting lives at risk with each passing day?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the derailment that happened this weekend in Saint-Henri, and I can tell you that the appropriate agencies are investigating. They will come forward with their analysis and recommendations.

With respect to the assertion made by the opposition that we are not doing anything on that, I strongly reject that, completely, and so does somebody like Claude Dauphin, who is the president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. He applauds the federal government's response to the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic and the rail safety recommendations that emerged from it.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people's lives and safety are at stake, and the minister continues to do nothing, just a lot of talking. After the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, we have seen many other derailments, including another one just two days ago. Yet another report has recommended that dangerous goods should not be transported on dangerous DOT-111 tank cars.

Canadians want to know how many more experts, how many more reports, and how many more derailments, before the minister takes concrete action to stop transporting dangerous goods in these dangerous DOT-111 cars.

●(1445)

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has already taken great action with respect to that, consulting with the appropriate people in industry. More importantly, though, we have published regulations that absolutely strengthen the type of car that is able to transport these goods going forward. We are working with our counterparts in the United States to ensure we can do whatever we can to have the transportation of crude oil in our nation and our continent as safe as possible.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Stats Canada released its survey of financial security, which confirmed that Canadian families are better off today under our Conservative government than under the previous Liberal government. We believe in a low tax plan to make life more affordable for Canadian families, which is a stark contrast to the Liberal leader, who would massively increase federal government spending.

Would the Minister of Employment and Social Development please update the House on how our low tax plan is delivering results for Canadian families?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Don Valley East for the good question and his hard work.

I am delighted that Statistics Canada revealed today, as the Prime Minister said, that since 2005 the average Canadian family's net worth has increased by 44.5%. It is no coincidence, because with the more than 160 tax cuts by this government, Canadian families, on average, have seen their after-tax disposable income increase by 10% across all income categories. We are continuing to lead the world on economic growth and opportunity for working families.

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[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in light of the Conservatives' devastating decision to close veterans offices, the Charlottetown municipal council has called a meeting with the minister responsible. Nonetheless, the minister is refusing to meet with the council.

Why is the minister refusing to get out of the Ottawa bubble to go listen to what people in the community have to say? Why is he refusing to listen to those who are affected by these cuts? What is he afraid of?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to meet with Mayor Clifford Lee and city councillor Cecil Villard. I also corresponded with the mayor, during which I commented that our government has and will continue to ensure that veterans and their families have access to the information and support they need. To that end, I am pleased to report that we have recently expanded our service across Canada to include nearly 600 Service Canada locations, six of which are located on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have a right to know why the veterans affairs minister refused to meet with the Charlottetown city council. A letter is not enough. He refused to talk to them about the impact of the decision to close the office. These men and women who serve Canadians bravely in our armed forces deserve a minister who does not run away from accountability.

Does he really think he is safe writing letters here in his office in the Ottawa bubble? Will he now agree to go to Charlottetown and meet with the veterans and the communities affected by these short-sighted cuts, yes or no?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, it is obvious that the member was not listening. I did meet with the mayor and a councillor. I did meet with the mayor, at the Legion, the night before the meeting with the mayor at Veterans Affairs headquarters.

Oral Questions

Will that party support economic action plan 2014 and our proposed investment of \$108 million to improve the funeral and burial program fund for our veterans? That is the real issue, not this rhetoric.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the EI fund is realizing an increasing surplus. Access to EI, though, is at an all-time record low. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has recognized that there are serious problems with the changes that the government has made, and the minister has made changes within her constituency.

What I want to ask the government is, why does it not recognize that the unemployed across the region, Atlantic Canada and Quebec, are hurting as a result of these changes?

Scrap the changes and come to this House with some real reform.

• (1450)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, employment insurance continues to be there for people who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. There has been no change in that regard.

Of course, we are encouraging folks to actively seek available work at their skill level in their local areas. The good news is that employers are finding more people available for work outside of the typical season. That is good for them. It is good for the economy. The recent change we announced for Prince Edward Island, thanks to the leadership of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, is also good. P.E.I. was the only province that did not recognize the difference between the urban and rural economies. Now we will have fairness for Prince Edward Islanders when it comes to EI.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand. The only thing that bothered the minister about the reform was that he thought people were off vacationing in Cuba. Now the Conservatives are prepared to make changes to EI in Prince Edward Island, where the fisheries minister is from.

Is the minister prepared to make changes in all the regions in Canada where workers are having problems, or will he continue to insult the workers by suggesting that the problem is that they are going off on vacation to Cuba?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who just asked that question told his constituents a year ago that the modest changes to the EI program would mark the end of seasonal benefits and the end of communities in his region. That was totally irresponsible fearmongering. The data are clear: not one person in New Brunswick lost his or her EI benefits because of the changes we made.

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the colossal failure in grain handling and transportation is hitting farmers with billions of dollars in higher costs, lower prices, and lost sales. There is not enough capacity; no one is coordinating what capacity there is among grain companies, railways, terminals, and ships; and no one in the system puts farmers first.

The system is five million tonnes behind. Fifty ships are waiting. Japan is buying from the U.S., not Canada.

Will farmers get liquidated damages for the massive losses caused by the way the current government has designed this failing system?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that really is code that the Liberal government would reinstate the Canadian Wheat Board, that mandatory monopoly system that everybody has moved beyond, except for the Liberal government. It is mired in the past. Its idea of agriculture is to continue to make serfs out of western Canadian farmers. We will not do that.

Certainly, everybody recognizes the underperformance of the railways. We are working to mitigate that. They have promised many more cars moving forward toward spring to get that valuable crop to the marketplace. We will continue to work with them and put in place any types of regulations that may be required.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two years after the government promised to restore the confidence of Canadians in the electoral process, it has instead proposed a bill that would attack Elections Canada and gut its ability to enforce the law.

Canadians are now asking if the new election act was deliberately designed to keep Elections Canada from reporting on its investigation into fraudulent Conservative robocalls.

Will the minister guarantee that nothing in the bill would impede the robocall investigation or the publication of its findings?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would refer to the section of the bill in question and proposed paragraph 510.1(2), which reads:

(2) The Commissioner may disclose or may authorize any person acting under his or her direction to disclose

...(b) information that, in the Commissioner's opinion, is necessary to carry out an investigation;

Additionally, court filings, compliance agreements, charges, and annual reports from the commissioner will all be made public.

As I said earlier, that is open, that is fair, and that is the fair elections act.

Oral Questions

●(1455)

CANADA POST

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Toronto's city council passed a motion declaring its opposition to the end of door-to-door mail delivery. It was particularly concerned about the impact on seniors and persons living with disabilities. It recognized the important role that mail plays in helping persons living with disabilities overcome barriers and exclusion.

What is the minister responsible for persons living with disabilities doing to ensure that these Canadians are not hurt by Canada Post's deplorable decision?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member brings up a good point that it was Canada Post's decision to move forward to ensure that it had the ability to be around in the long term. It has a responsibility to be self-sufficient. It understands that its revenues are dropping and it has taken this action.

With respect to the problem of having mail delivery for those who are disabled, I understand that Canada Post is working with national councils with respect to the disabled and disadvantaged to ensure that it can appropriately provide service.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the end of door-to-door mail delivery is another barrier to the integration and independence of people in wheelchairs. Canada Post is not taking the situation seriously. Its solution is to provide an extra key so that these people's friends and neighbours can pick up their mail for them. Quite frankly, that is ridiculous.

When will the minister leave the Ottawa bubble to listen to what people living with functional limitations have to say about her plan?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just indicated, Canada Post has developed a five-point plan. One of the points of the plan is to have delivery to community mailboxes. Indeed, that already happens in two-thirds of this country, and so there are areas where it has expertise. It has been dealing with this issue since the 1980s. In fact, many constituents in my riding have had nothing but delivery to community mailboxes and there are a number of people who have disabilities and are disadvantaged in that area as well.

I think Canada Post will continue to work with the groups it is working with and continue to ensure proper delivery of the mail.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to protect the safety and security of our communities and to stand up for victims of crime.

My constituents are increasingly concerned that Vince Li, the so-called Greyhound bus killer, will soon be granted unescorted passes to the city of Selkirk and possibly Winnipeg.

Our government has accomplished a great deal when it comes to guarding public safety while respecting the rights of victims. Can the Minister of Justice please tell this House what our government is doing to address high-risk accused individuals found not criminally responsible?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for his hard work and his question.

In fact, I cannot comment on the specifics of this case, but I can tell the member that our government has acted. We have introduced the not criminally responsible reform act. This proposed legislation would create a new designation to protect the public from high-risk accused individuals. Such a designation means that those found not criminally responsible and designated high-risk will not be released unless their designation is revoked by a court of law.

Unfortunately, the Liberal Party has been standing in the way of these entirely reasonable and important reforms. We urge the Liberal senators, former Senate Liberals, to get on with it and pass this important bill.

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PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is Wednesday, and it sounds like it will be the same as every Wednesday for the last 10 years. A catering van will pull up to the Langevin Block with several hundred dollars of food to be provided to PMO staffers. Now, other chiefs of staff from other ministerial departments will horde on over. They will make their way to the Langevin Block to be able to get, both figuratively and liberally, a free lunch.

These Conservative staffers are not being held in a budget lockup and there is no emergency session, but like every Wednesday for the last 10 years, they will enjoy a free lunch paid for by taxpayers.

Will the President of the Treasury Board end this practice? Will he comply with the rules and will the kids in the short pants have the—

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

●(1500)

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rules have not been broken. Indeed, this has been referred to officials. Politicians do not get to make these decisions; they are made by officials in the PCO.

I can tell members that when we compare with the time the hon. member was in government, the choice and comparison are very clear. We have spent less every year on hospitality since we were elected into power than the Liberals did in their final year of government.

That is a record we are proud of. We are proud that we have cut hospitality expenses by 48% across government. That is the kind of expectation that taxpayers have of their government, and we are delivering.

*Points of Order***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Nuu-chah-nulth first nations had to resort to the courts to stop the minister from reopening the commercial herring fishery off the west coast of Vancouver Island. She ignored scientific evidence and the advice of her own department to wait until the recovery of the stock was guaranteed.

Now that the Federal Court has overruled her decision, will the minister finally listen to first nations and her department's own scientists and stop putting the herring fishery at risk?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my decision to reopen the herring fishery in the three previously closed areas was based on the department's scientific advice. In fact, the stocks in question were more than 7,000 tonnes higher than what science required for reopening.

We are currently reviewing the court's decision, so I cannot comment further at this time.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian film industry contributes significantly to our country and economy. Canadian films are among the best in the world. Our government supports this industry very generously to help it grow the economy, create jobs, and share our stories with the world.

Arts, culture, and heritage represent close to \$50 billion of our economy and close to 630,000 jobs. Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage inform the House of what she is doing to promote our Canadian film industry?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year, our government allocates more than \$600 million to the audiovisual sector by investing in Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board and the Canada Council for the Arts, and by providing tax credits.

This evening, we will be screening the movie *Gabrielle* at movie night. This movie, which has garnered international acclaim, was directed by Louise Archambault, produced by Kim McCraw and Luc Déry, and stars Gabrielle Marion-Rivard, Alexandre Landry, Mélissa Désormeaux-Poulin and young people from Les Muses school.

I invite all parliamentarians to join us at 7 p.m. this evening at the National Arts Centre.

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HEALTH

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Port of Québec and Quebec Stevedoring are not co-operating with the monitoring committee that was created by the Government of Quebec, the city and citizens who are concerned about the nickel dust contamination.

The lack of co-operation from the port authority, which is under federal jurisdiction, tells me that the government is not taking this situation seriously.

Does the Minister of Transport condone this lack of transparency from the port authority and the offending company because their executives are big Conservative Party donors?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. The Port of Quebec is an arm's-length organization that is responsible for its own decisions. As well, in exercising those decisions, it has to do so with the concerns of the local citizens in mind.

I encourage the Port of Quebec and the Quebec government to work together to ensure that the citizens are protected in the way that they should be, and also to deal with dust emissions in the appropriate manner, as supervised by the environmental people in Quebec.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Government of Quebec and the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale jointly released a report that clearly shows that the federal government's approach is moving further and further away from the values of Quebec regarding international solidarity and practices that are considered effective and ethical by development experts.

After consulting about 60 organizations and experts in the field, the report recommends that Quebec create its own agency with its own policy on international solidarity.

Does the government recognize Quebec's right to do so, and will it transfer to Quebec its rightful share of the international assistance envelope?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians and Quebecers can all be proud of our achievements in the area of international assistance.

I would remind the House that thanks to the Muskoka initiative, under the Prime Minister's leadership, 1.3 million children under the age of five have been saved from premature death. In addition, 64,000 mothers have been saved from certain death. These universal values are shared by all Canadians. We are proud of these achievements, and we will continue on that path.

* * *

● (1505)

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is no surprise to you, Mr. Speaker, that the level of noise and heckling in the last part of question period was a violation of Parliament's rules. I do not want to belabour the point, but I cannot even continue with this point of order because of the noise in this place.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. What the hon. member's point is referring to is some of the noise that rises from time to time in question period. Being at this end of the Chamber, I do my best to encourage members, without interrupting the flow of question period too much, to come to order, so I take her point very well.

I will take this opportunity to ask all hon. members to refrain from applause and outbursts while members are trying to put the question, and likewise, as well, while they are trying to answer it.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is not just the applause. The rules are very clear. Standing Order 16.2 states, “When a Member is speaking, no Member shall...interrupt him or her, except to raise a point of order”.

Standing Order 18 states that no member shall speak disrespectfully of other members in this place.

One would think there were no standing orders. One would think that this was—

The Speaker: Order. The Chair has been informed that the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley wishes to add to the question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY MEMBER FOR MISSISSAUGA—STREETSVILLE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to the question of privilege I raised earlier today.

The member for Mississauga—Streetsville rose in his place shortly before question period to say that he had recently reviewed the blues and realized that he had accidentally misled the House.

He has been in this place long enough to know that the whole point of the blues, the early recording of what happens in House of Commons debates, is to fix any inaccuracies in them before they are published at the end of the day. That is why they are sent to all MPs shortly after they speak.

The House then sat for six more days before it was adjourned for constituency week last week.

This cannot possibly have been the first opportunity to realize that he had been making up false stories and uttering them in the House. What I am saying to the Conservatives across the way is that it is difficult to accept the member's explanation of events. It is difficult to even believe the member after he so brazenly and deliberately misled the House of Commons.

To verify his account, it would be useful to hear from the sources he cited as to the events that took place and therefore to have the procedure and House affairs committee study the matter and call those sources of information to testify. We are faced with a clear-cut case of prima facie contempt of Parliament. All members would benefit from a proper review of the issue at committee.

The Budget

I remain ready to re-move the appropriate motion, should the Speaker be ready to rule. You were not in your chair, Mr. Speaker, at the moment the member for Mississauga—Streetsville decided to rise. Typically, on important issues like this, members notify the Speaker's office so that he or she would be able to hear first-hand their argument.

The intervention by the member for Mississauga—Streetsville this afternoon did nothing to address the three conditions that you, Mr. Speaker, have set out when studying whether a member of the House has misled this place: first, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; second, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and third, in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House.

Earlier today I outlined our argument as to why this has been satisfied in all three cases for the member in question. He claimed to have witnessed voter fraud first-hand. He gave great detail about a crime he had witnessed, yet no explanation as to why he did not report it to police and no explanation as to why he then uttered it a second time in the House of Commons.

This was not a misspoken word or two. These were two separate accounts by the member of things he claims to have witnessed that in fact he did not. How could the intention have been anything other than to make the House think he had witnessed something that is not true? Perhaps he might not have intended to offend the House, but there can be no doubt that he intended to mislead the House of Commons.

● (1510)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. opposition House leader for his further contribution on this point. I will endeavour to get back to the House in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

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

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to budget 2014. The government's budget document was over 400 pages, but I must say that it is very thin on ideas and solutions.

The Minister of Finance speaks of returning to a balanced budget, yet this is the government that has created the largest deficit in Canadian history and has delivered eight deficit budgets in a row.

Under the watch of the Conservatives, more than \$100 billion has been added to our national debt over the past six years. Their corporate tax cuts have resulted in over \$200 billion in foregone revenue over the past six years. At the same time, they are failing to address high unemployment, especially among youth, and record levels of personal debt.

The Budget

When we talk about managing the economy, Conservatives and Liberals like to sling mud at the NDP, but when we look at the actual numbers, New Democrat governments have the best record of delivering balanced budgets.

New Democrats have a progressive vision for our country, one that promotes a strong economy without compromising social or environmental prosperity. We believe in creating good quality jobs, protecting public health care, providing affordable child care, and protecting our environment. We believe that seniors should not have to work an extra two years before they are eligible to retire. Our vision is affordable and inclusive.

Government revenues would increase by reversing the Conservatives' corporate tax cuts, by creating value-added jobs here at home instead of shipping our jobs and resources overseas, and by ending subsidies to highly profitable oil and gas companies. It is about priorities and prosperity for all Canadians, not just the ultra-rich and well-connected.

This year's budget has been criticized as a Conservative re-election strategy: Do nothing this year, then roll out the goodies before next year's election. It contains many re-announcements of previously committed funds, especially on infrastructure.

My riding has one of the highest commuter rates. Traffic congestion is a daily reality, and infrastructure has not kept pace with our transportation needs. I fought hard to ensure that the Evergreen Line would finally be built, but more work remains. Sewers and waterlines need upgrading, bridges need replacing, and we need more sidewalks and walking paths. The government continues to expect cities to do more with less, to pay for transit infrastructure with uncertain and limited gas tax revenues.

Our region is one of the most unaffordable places to live in Canada. I am disappointed that the government is not addressing affordable housing in this budget. Housing is a basic need, and affordability affects us all, from mortgage rates and property values to the limited supply of quality rental suites. I am concerned about those living in co-ops who rely on a federal subsidy to help pay the rent. Many of these subsidies will soon expire, leaving residents with limited options.

Community groups that provide housing for the homeless and other vulnerable members of society are concerned that the new criteria for the homelessness partnering strategy may prevent them from accessing federal funding.

Housing for those who require mental health care is a concern for many in my riding. We cannot continue to let Riverview Hospital deteriorate before eyes. We need a vision for this site that preserves the land for public use and that addresses the lack of mental health housing in the region.

In this year's budget, the Conservatives continue their assault on public servants and labour unions. They are going after employee compensation through bargaining, focusing on disability and sick leave, despite a PBO report confirming that public sector sick leave is actually in line with the private sector.

Just before Christmas, many Canadians were shocked to learn that Canada Post intends to end door-to-door delivery service, increase

the price of stamps, and lay off thousands of employees. These cuts will certainly affect seniors and people with reduced mobility. They also raise mail security issues.

Conservatives seem to think that this is a great idea. Canada Post's CEO even suggested that it would give seniors a chance to exercise more. Only a New Democrat government would defend workers, the middle class, and our most vulnerable.

British Columbia has the unenviable distinction of having one of the worst rates of child poverty in this country. It is not acceptable that one in five children lives in poverty.

● (1515)

This callous response by the government is on the record: "Is it my job to feed my neighbour's child? I don't think so".

Adopting a poverty reduction plan with targets and a coordinated set of policies is the only proven way to eliminate poverty. However, this requires political will. The government could wipe out poverty among seniors with the stroke of a pen by simply increasing the guaranteed income supplement. Instead, seniors face rising costs on everything from prescription medications to electricity bills.

Last weekend, a team of volunteers joined me in a neighbourhood canvass to talk with their neighbours about affordability issues. People told us that they are feeling nickel-and-dimed to death.

The NDP has put forward simple, practical solutions to help make life more affordable. We believe that the government should regulate outrageous credit card processing fees that eat into small business profits. It should cap ATM fees, which are among the highest in the world. It should crack down on predatory payday lenders and prevent companies from charging customers a monthly fee just to receive a paper copy of their bills.

Many Canadians are unaware of the existing benefits available to them. After hosting a seminar on the disability tax credit, my office helped one family claim \$5,500 in a tax refund it was entitled to.

I have also assisted small businesses in accessing government funding for innovation. Small and medium-size enterprises drive our economy and create the majority of new jobs in this country. However, with nearly 300,000 more people unemployed today than before the recession, the government is simply not doing enough. It should be helping SMEs to succeed, not hindering them.

The Budget

Another NDP proposal for this year's budget asks the government to reinstate the popular eco-energy home retrofit program. This program is a win-win. It saves families money, creates good quality jobs, reduces energy consumption, and more than pays for itself in economic spinoffs and tax revenues.

Last weekend I was on the doorsteps. I had several conversations with constituents about Bill C-23, the unfair elections act. They are alarmed by the Conservatives' cynical approach, which they feel will bring American-style politics north.

The Conservatives' scheme to overhaul Canada's Election Act reeks of a government that puts political interests ahead of the national interest. Bill C-23 aims to make it harder, not easier, to vote by scrapping voter information cards and eliminating the vouching system. It restricts Elections Canada from promoting the very act of voting, leaving that responsibility to political parties.

At a time when voters feel alienated from the democratic process, the Conservatives are moving to disenfranchise even more people from their right to vote. Canadians are asking for real electoral reform, not blatant partisan attempts to tip the scales in one party's favour.

I have long held the position that Canada should adopt an electoral system of proportional representation to ensure that voters' expressions are better represented. I was speaking to concerned citizens in my riding last week from Fair Vote Canada, who raised this very issue.

I also continue to hear loud and clear from constituents who are fed up with paying for an unelected, unaccountable, and still under-investigation Senate. New Democrats believe in abolishing this archaic institution and focusing on making Parliament work for all Canadians.

The NDP's vision for our country is one that promotes economic stability without sacrificing social or environmental prosperity. We need a government that understands the realities of today and that is willing to tackle the tough challenges of tomorrow. We need a government that agrees that it is our responsibility to ensure that future generations have clean and safe drinking water, healthy rivers and oceans, abundant wild salmon, and a stable climate.

In conclusion, while there are some positive elements in this budget, I cannot support a budget so thin on ideas and solutions.

• (1520)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the areas of concern I have expressed virtually from day one, since first being elected to the House, is the issue of crime in our country. One of the biggest concerns is that we do not prioritize highly enough the need to prevent crimes in the first place. That is something of critical importance for many communities. I know in Winnipeg North there would have been a greater expectation that we would see something in the budget that would provide opportunities for community groups and others, which have a vested interest in that area, to look at programs that could be developed and promoted to prevent crimes in the first place.

I ask the member if he might provide some comment on what he feels about initiatives that could maybe make a difference if the

government had taken a higher interest in crime prevention in our communities through the budget.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, certainly, putting funding into crime prevention has been shown in study after study to go a long way in increasing public safety in communities. The budget would not do that. In fact, we could look at other areas, like health care. Putting funding and resources into health prevention is also just as important and fundamentally helps increase health in communities.

The member mentioned consultation and the lack of government consultation in not just public safety but many areas. As I pointed out, in my consultations with my constituents I am hearing from people who are very concerned about the lack of consultation on a significant piece of legislation, the unfair elections act. That is what the government really needs to listen to; not just consultation on the budget, but on other proposals like the unfair elections act.

Mr. Dan Albas (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech. I paid very close attention, particularly when he was speaking about the gas tax, as well as municipalities and their needs. Absolutely, municipalities have a lot of needs. My area of West Kelowna is a great example of a community that is trying to build up from a rural standard to a more urban standard.

We have made the gas tax statutory in law, so it happens automatically. We have doubled it. We have indexed it to inflation. I know the member is from a more urban riding. Metro Vancouver receives all of that money and that doubled support, so it can deal with its priority, which I understand is public transit. The gas tax will see further changes to make it more flexible for communities.

Our government's record on gas tax and support for communities is unparalleled. B.C. only received \$1.5 billion under the Liberals. We have over \$4.5 billion under our government. Would the member not agree that \$4.5 billion is a heck of a lot more than the previous Liberal government's \$1.5 billion, specific for British Columbia?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. In my consultations, I consulted with the municipalities in my riding. Certainly, New Westminster has pointed out, in its infrastructure needs for transportation, that it is looking for a predictable, reliable source of funding. Certainly they are looking for more funding and the gas tax is important. It is an important financing tool for local government. However, being a former city councillor, I recognize that cities are being downloaded on more and more. Federal and senior levels of government are turning to local governments to do more and more, but they are not handing over the predictable, stable financing tools needed to carry out the job and get the job done.

So while I appreciate the comment, more needs to be done to satisfy the work that has to happen, not just in urban municipalities but in rural ones right across the country.

The Budget

• (1525)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to rise and discuss economic action plan or budget 2014. At the outset, I will say I am going to be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Calgary Centre.

It may come as no surprise to members who know me that I am going to be discussing veterans' issues as related to this budget specifically, and veterans' issues more broadly.

The new veterans charter was passed in 2005 by the previous Liberal government, and good on it for doing that. It passed with 100% support from the House, from every member of every party. In 2006, our government implemented it, again supported by all veterans' organizations. In 2011, it was updated by our government, not with entire support from across the floor, but that is okay; we got it done. With economic action plan 2014 or budget 2014, the new veterans charter would be updated again.

As many know, we are also doing a comprehensive review of the new veterans charter in the veterans affairs committee, and it will be updated again after that. It is a work in progress, as it should be. Is it a perfect document, a perfect plan? No, that plan has not been invented yet, and that is why it has to be continually updated, as it is being in economic action plan 2014; to the point that even the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, on many occasions, has pointed out that the new veterans charter is in fact superior to the old pension plan, given that we all agree it needs to be continuously updated.

In this economic action plan, there are additional measures to honour the sacrifices made by veterans and their families and to facilitate the transition to civilian life and provide better access to services.

We are expanding the eligibility to funeral and burial programs to ensure that modern-day veterans of modest means have access to a dignified funeral and burial. In economic action plan 2013, we added \$65 million over two years and raised the amount available to such a veteran to \$7,376 from \$3,600 plus the cost of the plot. In economic action plan 2014, we are adding a further \$108.2 million over three years, starting in 2013-2014, to expand eligibility for those veterans of modest means. That includes eliminating some of the items that had inflated the amount of their assets, which would have eliminated their ability to participate in the program. That is changing.

In this budget, we are also committing to commemorating the Afghan mission. I can tell members that the highlight of my time in Parliament will be the time I spent in Afghanistan with the troops on numerous occasions. It has been the longest military engagement in Canada's history, and it certainly deserves to be commemorated properly, mainly for the 158 Canadian soldiers plus 5 civilians who lost their lives, and the families who suffered, not just those who suffered the loss of a member but those who suffered through the injury to family members or just the stress of having family members in a theatre of war. As I said, the highlight of my career in Parliament will be the time spent in Afghanistan, waking up on Christmas morning in an outpost somewhere in the boondocks of the Panjwai with those incredibly remarkable Canadians who went back there time after time, some of them, to help people whom they will never

meet again and had never met before. There was nothing in it for them other than doing what was right.

I mentioned this before in a previous speech, but I will talk about the kind of people they are and the determination they have to do good. In the last Edmonton rotation a couple of years ago, in the combat mission, there were nine soldiers going back to Afghanistan for the fourth time. The commander of Land Force Western Area, who was a friend of mine, talked to me about having a personal interview with each of them just to ensure their heads were on straight, so to speak. He said he was talking to this one young master corporal and he asked him, "What is your biggest concern about going back to Afghanistan for the fourth time?" He said the soldier looked him in the eye and said, "That you will not let me go, sir". Whereupon, the commander said, "You are okay; get out of here". In fact, I wound up talking to that soldier with a bunch of others at the airport a couple of days later when they were leaving and, not knowing it was him, I recounted my conversation with the general. He stepped forward and said, "That was me, sir". I shook his hand and thanked him very much and wished him good luck.

• (1530)

As we have said before, we are introducing priority hiring for veterans. We are going to change the Public Service Employment Act and the public service employment regulations to cater to the fact that there are 7,600 men and women who leave the Canadian Armed Forces every year. In round numbers, 1,000 of those leave for medical reasons beyond their control.

We are creating a statutory hiring priority in the Public Service Employment Act for Canadian Armed Forces members medically released for service-related reasons and extending the duration of their entitlements from two years to five years, giving them more time to adjust and more time to prepare themselves for employment in the public service, if that is what they wish to do.

We are also amending the Public Service Employment Act to give preference to eligible veterans in external public service job competitions and allowing Canadian Armed Forces personnel with more than three years' service to participate in internal public service job competitions.

We want to give our men and women in uniform every opportunity to transition to the public service, if that is what they want, or to other areas in the private sector.

We will be providing better access to online services to the tune of about \$2.1 million in 2014-15 to improve the My VAC Account, to enhance the ability to do routine business with Veterans Affairs Canada. This is intended to mimic in-person services.

The Budget

Online services do not cater to everybody. A lot of the older veterans may not be as tech savvy as some of the younger folks, and there are other ways in which we are trying to cater to them. However, this targets the largest and fastest growing segment of the veteran population. It is just another example of our trying to keep ahead of change, instead of being dragged along by change.

On veterans issues more broadly, they are all budget related because they have related to past budgets and hopefully, in my view, future budgets. One thing we need to understand is that the aim of the veterans affairs programs is not lifelong financial dependence. It is based on giving veterans the opportunity to retrain, rehabilitate, and get on with their own lives under their own terms.

A lot of these men and women are very young. Some are in their 20s and they have a long time ahead of time. The last thing that almost anybody would want to do is to sit there and be financially dependent. We want to honour their spirit to get out and do that. We want to help them in every way we can.

There is an awful lot of misinformation out there. Most of it is based on emotion. The notion that we “give them a lump sum and kick them to the curb” is absolutely false, and frankly it is shameful when people keep bringing that up.

All MPs on all sides of this House care deeply about our veterans and the men and women in uniform, notwithstanding what we might hear in the media or from the opposition or the unions. I do not blame them. The media relies on conflict to make stories, and I get that. The opposition's job is to oppose, and I get that. The union's job is to advocate for union jobs, and I get that.

However, people should understand that and maybe not take everything from anybody, government or anybody else. People should not take everything at face value. They should understand that the media, opposition, union, and government are all operating in their own interest. They should look at all the facts.

I have done a number of veterans events, and all I ask is that we look at all the facts. We can disagree about facts. That is okay, as long as we are doing it respectfully, rationally, and with all the facts on the table, not cherry-picking facts and building a case around that.

The broad range of veterans' benefits is very comprehensive and, yes, it is very complex. It should be simpler. We have had different things added, one on top of the other, for many years. I understand that there is confusion about what is available and how to access it. We do need to make that simpler, and I will talk about that more in a minute.

There is a broad range of benefits available, and I do not have time to go over all of them. There is a broad range of facilities now available.

What I will say is there are challenges, and I firmly acknowledge that. We have challenges of access, which we are working on; challenges of burden of proof; challenges transferring information from one department to another, DND to VAC. The forms are too complex, but we are working on making them simpler. It needs to be faster, with more one-stop service and more online options that cater to the changing demographics. We need improved wait times and stronger partnerships with DND and others.

●(1535)

The bottom line and the question we have to answer is this: are the Veterans Affairs programs a success? Yes, they are. Are they a failure? In some respects, yes, and we are working on those. Are they a work in progress? Absolutely, they are a work in progress, and that is what we have to keep doing. With the co-operation of people on all sides of the House and people outside the House, we will make that happen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague had plenty of nice things to say about the budget.

According to my analysis, things look a little less rosy for my region, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. Forestry is big in the region, but we also have aluminum plants. Those two sectors of the Canadian economy are really struggling right now.

Many people want to work in my region, but they cannot find work in their fields. Tourism is also important to the region, but we know that these days, not many Americans or Europeans are interested in coming. Basically, things are really tough in my part of the country.

Can my Conservative colleague pull a rabbit out of his hat and give some good news to the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, maybe some kind of economic stimulus to help create good jobs?

I think that the reason people were disappointed in the budget is that it did not contain many measures to stimulate employment in my region.

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I have in fact spent a lot of time in the member's riding at CFB Bagotville. I was never posted there, but I flew out of there a lot with 425 Squadron, holding alert with CF-18s. I have spent a fair bit of time downtown. There are some wonderful places downtown in Chicoutimi and other local communities.

The member is right that there are areas of the country that are more advantaged than others with respect to employment and so on, for whatever reason. It is a big country, so the playing field is never going to be level.

There are programs in place. There are EI reforms, which could be taken either way, I guess. There are programs such as the building Canada fund. I am not sure how much infrastructure is available to be built or necessary to be built in his riding. Obviously it is not like Toronto or Montreal or someplace like that.

The main point is to work with the relevant agencies to promote his riding, which we all do, as I am sure he does as well. If there are projects in the riding that would benefit the local economy and benefit work, he should by all means promote those to the Minister of Transport or whoever happens to be involved in that particular area.

The Budget

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member started out with a couple of comments with respect to what has been in the Last Post Fund in this and in the last budget, and then later in his remarks he said that we should not take anything that anyone says at face value.

One of the things he said was that in the last budget there was \$65 million in extra money allocated to the Last Post Fund. That is one thing that should not be taken at face value, and here is why.

Yes, there was mention of \$65 million in the budget, but the Last Post Fund spends about \$10 million a year. It is true that in the last budget the government doubled the amount for which veterans would be eligible for a funeral. Assuming the same number of eligible veterans, that would double the amount of expenditure under the Last Post Fund from \$10 million to \$20 million. The amount the Conservatives put in the budget was \$65 million. They put \$65 million in the budget for one reason: they had no intention of spending it. It is going to be impossible for veterans to be able to avail themselves of that. The \$65 million is going to lapse and become part of the budget balancing exercise. It is what is called balancing the budget by stealth. That is what it is.

Does the member agree that this balancing of the budget by stealth is tantamount to balancing the budget on the backs of veterans, and that the \$65 million in last year's budget is nothing but a ruse?

• (1540)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise to my hon. colleague that I completely reject the premise of his question. All Veterans Affairs programs are in fact demand-driven. They are needs-based. If the demand is there, it will be delivered.

We have made more changes in the budget that respond to the need to lower the threshold of proof, to lower the need to declare income and so on, in order to put someone in the position where they could take advantage of the Last Post Fund. We put everything out there and we see if it works. Then we try to improve it the next time. That is what we did in the last budget, that is what we are doing in this budget, and that is what we will do in the next budget.

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really delighted to speak to this budget. It is a great budget, and it is no coincidence that we in Canada have one of the strongest economies in the world. That is thanks to sound judgment and knowledgeable leadership, and it is budgets like this that show that. Our finance minister and Prime Minister have been doing an amazing job over the last eight years in keeping Canada on track. In fact, that is the reason that I ran for office: to support the stellar leadership of our Conservative government in the economy so that we can continue to enjoy a high standard of living and a good quality of life in Canada.

Economic action plan 2014 is another example of good economics and excellent government policy. Despite what the airy-fairy Liberal leader has been telling his flock, budgets do not balance themselves. Everyone knows that. It takes strong, knowledgeable leadership in order to do this. Just as we promised in the last election, we will return to balanced budgets in 2015. This is not just talking points; this is what matters to Calgarians and what matters to Canadians.

We only have to look at the floundering economies in Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal to see what economic decisions that are not based on these kinds of fundamentals lead to in the face of a very difficult global economy. Thankfully, Canada is not there, because we have had responsible, sound government, with responsible, sound programs for our budgets.

What does fostering strong economic growth do for Canadians? First, it means lower taxes for everyone, which keeps more money in the pockets of Canadians. Second, Canadians and their kids will not end up paying for today's overspending. It is simply irresponsible to be building up debt today by overspending when we know we are leaving the debt for our kids. That is mortgaging our future, and we as Conservatives will not do that.

Balancing the books also cuts our interest payments, and that frees up money so that we can reduce taxes at the same time that we are protecting and growing our important social programs, programs such as education and health care. This seems like common sense to most Canadians, but unfortunately this kind of common sense does not seem to be very common on the other side of the House. The opposition parties want to recklessly tax and spend, and they think that the budget will balance itself. That statement itself tells us what kind of economic leadership we would get from the Liberals: vacuous.

Canadians deserve strong financial leadership, and we have provided it in this budget. Economic action plan 2014 keeps us on a positive upward trajectory. It has new measures that would create even more jobs and opportunities and keep our taxes low. We are not balancing the budget by increasing the GST or by cutting health care, as the Liberals did; instead, we have increased health care spending and have actually cut the GST, not once but twice.

Canadians at all income levels are benefiting from this, with low- and middle-income Canadians receiving the biggest tax breaks. The average Canadian family now pays \$3,400 less in taxes than they did when this government was elected. That is amazing. That is \$3,400 they have in their pockets to spend on anything they want. They can spend it on education and child care, family vacations and mortgage payments, things that will make their lives better.

We are also supporting pipelines and resource development while protecting the environment. It is the energy industry that is paying Canada's bills, and we have a balanced approach to balancing the books by balancing energy and the environment. This is the only party in the House that takes that approach.

This budget is jam-packed with all kinds of benefits for Canadians. I could go on and on, but in the interests of time, I will share just a few more.

The Budget

As we know, my city of Calgary was hit with a devastating flood, the flood of the century, last summer. The flood not only cost \$5 billion in damages but also destroyed people's homes and lives, and they are still rebuilding. It is important to me and the people of Calgary that not only does this budget include \$2.8 billion to pay for the damages from that flood, but there is also, for the first time, another \$200 million for a disaster mitigation fund that was announced in the throne speech and funded in the budget to help to prevent future floods. That provides a tremendous amount of the psychological security that people need after such a disaster.

However, the budget does not stop there. We are also consulting with the insurance industry, along with the provinces and territories, to find a better way of approaching residential flood insurance.

Not only are we providing the support needed to help Canadians recover from disasters, but we are also keeping the economy on track.

●(1545)

In 2008, the world had the worst recession since the dirty thirties. It has been almost six years, and people around the globe are still dealing with those shock waves. However, I am proud that here in Canada, we can say that we have emerged from that crisis with one of the strongest economies in the world. I think we sometimes take for granted, but we should not, because budgets do not balance themselves and economies do not flourish on their own. They need tending. It is no coincidence.

This budget continues our forward-thinking, fiscally responsible approach. It addresses two fundamental issues for the economic health of Canadians.

The first is employment. Jobs matter to all of us. This budget would continue the gold track record of this government in creating jobs. There is not a real lack of potential employment in Canada, but rather a need for access to skills training so that people can get those jobs. As the old proverb goes, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime".

I recently chatted with a dad who sat next to me on the plane on the way back to Ottawa. He asked me how his daughter would be able to get a job once she graduates from school. That is something we are addressing in this budget. For the 26,000 apprentices who are looking for jobs in skilled trades, we have introduced the Canada apprentice loan. The program would provide apprentices in Red Seal trades, which include a lot of women, with over \$100 million in interest-free loans every year. We are encouraging young women to look at the skilled trades. We are also investing \$55 million to create paid internships for recent graduates in small and medium-sized companies in high-demand fields. These measures would help a lot of Canadians and a lot of our kids get a leg up in getting a job.

In my riding, during the pre-budget consultations, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, seniors groups, corporations, and even the volunteer sector said that it is clear that skills training is the number one issue that needs to be addressed to keep our high quality of life. They want the government to help them with that. I am proud to say that this budget does that for Canadians, while keeping us on track to balance the budget and protecting our important programs.

Canada is also one of only a handful of countries in the world with a AAA credit rating. That is amazing. It shows that the Canadian economy is thriving. Canadian families in all income tax brackets have seen real increases of more than 10% to their income since our Conservative government was elected, and the economic action plan would build on this record.

Since our government implemented the action plan, Canada has the best job creation record of any G7 country. Again, these are things not to be taken for granted.

Canadians elected the Conservative government because they knew we understand that sound government policy and fiscally responsible budgets matter. Budgets do not balance themselves.

I learned this when I was growing up in Lloydminster, a city on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The border goes right down through the middle of Lloydminster. The Saskatchewan side of the border, which was under an NDP government, had small houses, often dilapidated, with old cars sitting out in front, and 50 metres across the road there would be new ranch houses with new trucks in front and oil pump jacks going up and down just as they were meant to. I asked myself what the difference was between Alberta and Saskatchewan. The difference was sound economic policy.

Saskatchewan has now started to flourish since it elected the Brad Wall Conservative-thinking government. It is inviting its sons and daughters, who had all left for other provinces as what we call economic refugees, to come home again. Saskatchewan now has the highest growth rate in the country and the kind of opportunity that we want for all Canadians.

It should not be just a few provinces in this country that enjoy that kind of prosperity. All Canadians should reap those kinds of rewards. That is what our Conservative government continues to achieve for all Canadians. This budget is an example of that. Budget 2014 tells the people of my riding and the rest of this country that they made the right choice in 2011, and they will do so again in 2015.

●(1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really like participating in the debate and commenting on my Conservative colleagues' remarks. They keep saying that their government's budget is really great. I get that they are proud of their party, but we have a different perspective on the budget. I am very protective of my riding and, unfortunately, the main thing in this budget that will affect my riding is the cuts to National Defence.

The Budget

I have repeatedly asked the government to confirm that the Bagotville military base's operating budget will be cut by 19.2%. I realize that my Conservative colleague is not the spokesperson for this issue and that she will not give me the answer I want.

Every budget has some good and some bad. Some parts of this budget should be amended to spare ridings that will be severely affected. I would like the Conservatives to consider that.

When the NDP proposes amendments, will the Conservative government rise above partisanship, stop thinking that its budget is perfect, take different situations into account and work with us to improve the budget?

[*English*]

Ms. Joan Crockatt: Mr. Speaker, that is what budgets are about. Budgets are always about choices. We can never say yes to everything. When we want to balance a budget, it is particularly important that we make choices to ensure that we can come within the realm that we want.

I am sure that the member opposite and his party will have an ample opportunity to discuss the budget at committee, but I can say that this budget's priority is making sure that we continue economic growth. Every one of the choices made in this budget has been pored over to do what is best for most Canadians.

I look forward to the continuing debate.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Calgary Centre talk about how the budgets have been good for all Canadians, and it made me wonder when she last went to Prince Edward Island.

The economic policies of the Conservative government have devastated our seasonal economy. That devastation was made worse by an announcement on February 20 to treat some islanders differently from others with respect to employment insurance. The cuts made to the civil service were about 5% across the country, but double that in Prince Edward Island. We have also been particularly hard hit by the decision of the Conservative government to put a \$3-billion gap in infrastructure funding.

My question for the member comes back to her theme that the budgets have benefited all Canadians. Are all Canadians only those who have had the good fortune of finding oil buried underground from hundreds of years ago?

Ms. Joan Crockatt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question even though I completely reject its premise.

I would just remind him that every Canadian benefited from the \$3,400 tax reduction achieved since the Conservatives came to office. That is regardless of whether they live in Prince Edward Island, Iqaluit, or Nanaimo, B.C. It is equal and it is there for all.

The focus of this budget is on helping to create jobs. I am sure those jobs would be created in Prince Edward Island as well as they would in every other province. We want to see our resource industry developed at the same time we do other important things, such as protecting Sable Island. These are all priorities of our government.

The apprenticeship trades program is another very important program. We want to make sure that all Canadians have an

opportunity to participate, but not by giving them a government job, because these are not long-term, permanent jobs that grow the economy. We want to give them jobs in the private sector, where they can earn money and we can keep their taxes low. They would have money in their pockets to take home to their families.

● (1555)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

It is my pleasure to rise today to speak about economic action plan 2014. This budget is focused on what matters to Canadians, keeping taxes low and growing the economy, a concept the opposition simply does not understand or refuses to acknowledge.

Economic action plan 2014 fulfills our commitment to balance the budget by 2015. While the leader of the Liberal Party thinks that budgets just balance themselves, on this side of the House we know that achieving this requires prudent fiscal management.

It is no coincidence that Canada's economy has witnessed the best economic performance among all G7 countries, both in job creation and income growth. Since the end of the recession, over one million high-paying, net new jobs have been created in Canada. Not only that, but we are also the only G7 country to have more than fully recovered businesses lost during the recession.

[*Translation*]

The IMF and the OECD both predict that our economic growth will remain the strongest in the G7 in the years ahead. For the sixth year in a row, the World Economic Forum has ranked Canada's banking system the soundest in the world.

Nevertheless, we know that Canada is not immune to worldwide economic difficulties that arise beyond its borders, which is why we continued to support job creation and economic growth.

[*English*]

To the dismay of the Liberal economic advisers, this budget does not say amen to taxes; rather, the opposite. Our government believes in letting families, not big government, decide how to spend their hard-earned dollars. The facts speak for themselves. Since 2006, we have cut taxes nearly 160 times and reduced the overall tax burden to its lowest level in 50 years.

The Budget

[Translation]

The economic action plan 2014 continues to deliver on our promise not to increase the tax burden. We are introducing a tax credit for volunteers taking part in search and rescue activities to emphasize the valuable contribution they make nationally. We are eliminating the sales tax on more healthcare products and services, and increasing the tax credit for medical expenses.

Our strong performance with respect to tax relief has led to savings of almost \$3,400 for a typical family of four, and more than 1 million low-income Canadians have been taken off the tax rolls.

[English]

Economic action plan 2014 is about creating jobs for Canadians. Through the Canada job grant, Canadians will be able to access the skills training they need to get jobs that are in demand. The Canada apprentice loan program would provide apprentices in Red Seal trades access to over \$100 million in interest-free loans each year. Too many jobs go unfilled because of a lack of people with the right skills. We are taking action to address this problem by providing Canadians the training they need to pursue well-paying jobs that are in high demand.

Canadians deserve to be the first in line for jobs, which is why we have launched an enhanced job-matching service to connect job seekers and employers. We are focused on connecting young people with jobs by investing \$55 million to create paid internships for recent graduates in small and medium-size businesses in high-demand fields. Our budget also invests \$75 million to support senior workers who want to participate in the job market but require skills training.

• (1600)

[Translation]

To continue reducing taxes and improving the quality of life for Canadians, we have to take advantage of the enormous potential offered by our natural resources. That sector accounts for almost a fifth of our economy, over half our exports and some 1.8 million jobs, which means one Canadian worker in 10. The future is promising. Hundreds of major resource projects are anticipated over the next 10 years, for a total investment of \$650 billion.

[English]

For Canadians to continue to benefit from the abundance of natural resources, we must transport our resources to tidewater. However, we will not jeopardize the safety of Canadians or the environment as we look towards this important priority. That is why the economic action plan provides the National Energy Board the tools to continue conducting thorough science-based independent regulatory reviews for proposed pipeline projects. This investment builds on our government's responsible resource development plan to reduce unnecessary duplication and provide timely, predictable reviews for resource projects.

Mining workers in communities can count on our government's support of the mining sector, a vital engine of economic growth that provides over 400,000 jobs for Canadians. That is why we are extending the 15% mineral exploration tax credit to encourage

investment and continue to promote Canadian mining companies abroad.

Our government is also focused on creating jobs and economic growth for forestry communities across Canada.

[Translation]

That is why we continue to offer support to these large communities of workers. Our investments in forest industry transformation program plays an essential role in providing industry with the tools it needs to effect the transition from traditional uses of forest products to the adoption of innovation-based technologies.

[English]

My constituents in Eglinton—Lawrence understand that our Conservative government will stand up for Ontarians. Our province will benefit from significant support, with major federal transfers in the 2014-15 period totalling \$19.2 billion, an increase of 76% compared to the previous Liberal government. While the Liberals drastically slashed transfer payments to provinces, Ontarians can count on our government to ensure that there is funding for health care, education, and other social services that families rely on.

Budget 2014 recognizes the importance of Ontario as an economic driver for the Canadian economy. That is why we are investing to advance the construction of the Windsor Detroit international crossing, an important infrastructure project, to improve the commercial relationship with our largest trading partner and neighbour.

Through the building Canada fund, we have supported over 12,000 infrastructure projects from coast to coast to coast. This is the largest investment in Canada's job-creating infrastructure in our nation's history.

This year we are expanding our government support for important infrastructure by investing to enhance broadband service to up to 280,000 Canadians. We doubled the gas tax fund and indexed it to provide predictable investments directly to Canadian municipalities. This fund has directly benefited Toronto, with significant investments in our transit system.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Before the worldwide recession struck, our Conservative government had reduced Canada's debt to its lowest level in 25 years. This example of our sense of responsibility in financial matters put Canada in the best possible position to weather the recession.

The Budget

[English]

We know what the NDP and Liberals support: reckless spending and higher taxes. That may be what they want, but we know what Canadians want: good jobs, low taxes, and a balanced budget. That is exactly what this budget delivers.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the current government once put in place the eco-energy retrofit program. The program was popular with homeowners and small businesses because the highest rising cost in Canada is a person's energy bill. The government cut that program before it even expended all the dollars that were set aside.

In the last two budgets, there has been nothing for eco-energy retrofit.

An equal driver to investment is regulation. It is fine that the government talks about not spending money, but in its paying down of the deficit, which it created, by the way, it is not regulating.

What Canadians are waiting for, and certainly what the energy efficiency sector in Canada is waiting for, is for the government to put a price on carbon, particularly in the fossil fuel industry. President Obama is waiting for the government to put a price on carbon in the fossil fuel industry, and the Europeans are waiting for the government to take action.

The government once promised clean electricity. It claimed it is addressing climate change. My question for the minister is, what is it going to do in addition to this budget, which does nothing, to reduce the use of fossil fuels? What is it going to do to actually drive a cleaner economy?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am quite amused, a little astounded perhaps, that the member opposite would raise the issue of the eco-energy program for homes, which the NDP has voted against consistently. It keeps voting against it, and then when it completed its mission, the NDP criticized it for not being extended. In fact, almost \$1 billion was invested in this program and many millions of Canadian families have benefited from it. It has been a success.

It was always intended to be a limited program. Unfortunately, the NDP voted against it, and I guess it is sorry that it did.

We have no intention of introducing a \$22 billion carbon tax. The United States government does not intend to do it either, contrary to what the member opposite has said.

Our government is interested in keeping taxes low and generating employment for Canadians. We are not in the business of increasing the deficit.

The deficit resulted from an international financial crisis, and the NDP was right there, asking us to spend much more. Had we done that, the deficit would have been considerably higher right now, and we would have had to take draconian steps to cut social services.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. minister were to bring in a separate bill to reinstate the eco-energy retrofit program for homes, I am sure he would find support for it from all sides of the House.

In fact, it is quite specious of him, and I am disappointed in him as a relatively new member of this place, to take the attitude that so many of his colleagues on that side have taken, saying, "Yes, we had a 400-page budget bill with all sorts of things in it, but because you didn't vote for it with all those nasty things in it, we're going to claim you voted against eco-energy".

That is irresponsible. It is not reasonable. I do not know why he would take that approach.

He talks about reckless spending. People in my riding tell me that they are concerned about the cost of home heating. They see it rising all the time. They are very concerned about the cost of gasoline. There are so many costs they face in their daily lives that they are not getting help with from the government. However, the government is responsible for reckless spending. It increased spending at a rate of three times the rate of inflation in its first three years and put this country in deficit before the recession began. I can show him the records on that.

• (1610)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, again, I am rather surprised that someone who voted against it wants to see the program reinstated. I did not hear from the member opposite or his party that they were in favour of this program.

As far as the deficit is concerned, again, the Liberals very much wanted this government to spend a great deal more than it did. If we had, our deficit would have been considerably higher. We would not be in the situation of being able to declare a surplus next year. We would not have a triple-A credit rating, and interest payments would be higher. There would be less money available for social programs, and we would have to cut those programs right now.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord, Taxation; the hon. member for Drummond, The Environment; the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, Aboriginal Affairs.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour and a pleasure for me to stand in this great place and talk about the budget in economic action plan 2014.

When I joined and became a part of this House, times were good. In those times, we took the good times and the surpluses and we paid down the debt.

I come from a rural municipality called Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. My largest urban area is made up of 14,000 people. The next one, at the other end of the riding, has somewhere around 12,500. This means that Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is made up of small towns and small businesses, dominated by agriculture.

The Budget

One of the things I know about the businesses in the riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is that small businesses go into debt from time to time. I also know from experience, coming from a small business myself, that when we have debt, we work and build a business plan around it so that we can pay the deficit down to get that debt under control. That way, there is money left to spend on our families, to grow our businesses, and to be part of the community.

Today, it is again my pleasure to rise to speak on budget 2014, which takes the same principles that were here when I had the honour of being elected to this place in 2006. Now, we are here in 2014, getting ourselves back to the position that we were in. We will get there in another year.

Having a surplus and our deficit paid down would come with great joy to me, the businesspeople, the communities, and the families in my riding. When the time of a surplus comes, we will take some of that money and pay down our debt once again. Budget 2014 would have many benefits for the people of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex this year.

When we look at how business stands, we look at how a country stands. This year, Canada went from sixth place to second place in the ranking that now says that this is the second-best place in the world to do business. That does not just happen because somebody says that we have a good budget or because we have come out of the recession stronger than anyone else. It comes about because of determination and because we have a government that has the foresight, the focus, and the goal ahead of it to create an environment for businesses in which they continue to grow and sustain themselves.

It is not only important that we attract businesses into our communities and into our country. It is just as important, if not more important, that we keep our businesses, and that the businesses within our communities have the ability and the financial goal and vision ahead of them, along with the business plans and markets so that they will stay and grow. I say that because when they stay and grow in communities like mine, that means that they are the employer, and employers hire people. When we have strong and vibrant businesses within our community, that means jobs.

When we look at budget 2014 and the economic action plans of 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010 and beyond, they were about creating a strong, viable community and a country with strong opportunities for our businesses and for our families.

This would be the third consecutive year where we as a government would spend less of Canadians' money than we did the year before. As a result, this year's deficit would be less than last year's. The direct program spending has fallen for three consecutive years. For the first time in decades, and in 2012–13, it was over \$5 billion lower than it was in 2009–10.

•(1615)

Specifically, action plan 2014 announced that the deficit is expected to decline to \$2.9 billion in 2014–15. Then, in 2015–16, we would have a budget surplus of \$6 billion, as we have continually talked about through our Minister of Finance, who is, by the way, recognized around the world as one of those solid finance ministers. That would take in, as any budget does, certain dollars for risk. As

Canada is large and diverse with areas that have disasters, as we noticed last year, we need to have an adjustment for risk, and we have put in \$3 billion for that.

The key issue is how we have been able to do that, and that sort of runs contrary to the opinion on the other side. We have been able to do this while keeping taxes low. Over the last eight years, not only have we kept taxes low, but we have also reduced them 160 times, which relates to a figure that puts Canada in the lowest tax regime in 50 years. I know the minister is looking at me in astonishment, but that was at the time of Prime Minister Diefenbaker. So we are back to that tradition of having those low taxes.

In fact, as I mentioned, my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is made up of small businesses, agriculture, and middle-income families. The majority of our families are hard-working people. They get up every day, go to work, pay their taxes, and when they come home they become part of their community, which they get involved in. We have been able to leave \$3,400 in their pockets, which we have not collected. We did not collect it and say that we would send them back a cheque. No; we just did not collect it.

I remember when we were talking about removing or lowering the GST. We did not say that we would remove it; the opposition party said they were going to but never did. However, we lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, and I remember one of the debates where the opposition said that all that meant was that we would save a dollar or something on a pair of jeans or a few cents here and there. I will tell members what it meant to my constituents in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

One percent put \$18 million back in the pockets of the people in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. Now, I am not a great mathematician, but 2% left \$36 million. That was accomplished by taking the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%.

Also, we have a particular interest within this budget for local municipalities, such as my riding. I have a bit of a unique riding because I have one single tier. I have two county ridings and 14 lower tier municipalities. I was privileged and honoured for a number of years to have been the mayor of Middlesex Centre and of Lobo Township before that. However, the \$21.8 billion in gas tax refunds has now been indexed, which means it is \$1.8 billion in payments for municipalities. That is secure funding for municipalities for their capital projects.

I had a lot of things I wanted to say, but I will wrap it up.

One of the things I want to talk about is the General Dynamics Land Systems announcement we made a week ago in London, which is just outside of my riding but the impact affects us. This was a multi-billion dollar announcement. It is the largest new program in Canada's history. It is not in my riding, but I can say that the small businesses in my riding now are so excited. Small businesses know that they have the opportunity to compete and be there.

The Budget

•(1620)

Our commitments to Canada's economy and prosperity for the residents of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is no different than across the country, and we will continue to work to balance this budget and to work hard for Canadians in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to my Conservative colleague, particularly as he was the mayor of a municipality before becoming a federal MP.

My riding is fairly rural, apart from one urban centre. There are eight mayors of villages and small municipalities with populations of 2,000 to 5,000. For the mayors of small municipalities, infrastructure represents a major challenge. The new building Canada plan has been announced, but unfortunately there is no new money. That is the problem raised by the mayors in my riding.

For example, they do not have the money to update their waste water treatment systems, so they continue to discharge waste water into the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park, which is managed jointly by the federal and provincial governments. That is not very pleasant.

Since my Conservative colleague was once a mayor, will he be putting pressure on his colleagues to ensure that municipalities across Canada can get new money? That is what would do the most good for our smaller municipalities, and ensure that they can grow, hold on to their young people and diversify their economy.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I really believe that those of us who have had the opportunity to have been involved in municipal governments prior to coming to this great place gives us a foundation and, I would like to think, a bit of an understanding of what is really happening on the ground with our municipalities.

I agree. From the time that I was a councillor, a deputy and then mayor, there was never enough money, but what I always appreciated is that we had the option in money. We now have a build Canada program with \$1.25 billion over five years in P3. That is the public-private partnerships fund. When we talk about water and sewer plants, this is now becoming a great opportunity for municipalities to partner with the private sector in building major infrastructure. As well, there are \$6 billion in federal support that goes not only to provinces and territories but also to municipalities.

I get calls from mayors in my riding and I thank them very much for that. One of the great things is the gas tax rebate. Not only did we double it, but we also made it permanent, and now we have indexed it. When municipalities are given the opportunity to make their decisions, with limited guidelines other than for capital cost, that is the way it should be, and I am pleased that we have been able to do that.

I appreciate the member's comments on municipalities.

•(1625)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue the discussion on the infrastructure deficit. We need to recognize that throughout Canada there is a huge deficit

in terms of our infrastructure. The billions of dollars required in order to meet the demands of our infrastructure are just not possible to raise at the local level. There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the federal government has to play a significant role in building infrastructure and is in a great position to demonstrate leadership, ensuring that there is a national infrastructure program.

The question I have for the member is fairly specific, given his expertise and background working in the municipal levels of government as a politician. I am sure he would have had on his plate five-year capital plans, possibly even ten-year capital plans.

Does he not recognize that there needs to be ongoing annual commitments, not a pile of money right now or three years from now? Why are we not seeing as much money in 2014 as compared to 2015? Coincidentally, of course, the election will be in 2015. A skeptical person might point that out.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that I do not ever consider myself an expert. I am a public figure who works hard to serve my constituents in many areas.

When I became a member, there was an infrastructure deficit that continued to grow. I could take the shot that you guys did not do a very good job of giving money for it, but the reality is that all of the

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Again, I remind the member to address comments to the chair not to individual members. Your time is up, in any event.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

I rise today to speak to budget 2014, which fails to acknowledge the genuine needs of middle class Canadians, like the good and hard-working people of my riding of Etobicoke North, and provides nothing to make the economy grow.

A new internal Conservative report shows that Canada's middle class is in fact mortgaging its future to stay afloat and making the Canadian dream “a myth more than a reality”. This straightforward report reveals the plight of middle income Canadian families and stands in marked contrast to the brighter economic picture presented in this month's budget.

Why did the government prepare and review research over three years and then present a different picture to Canadians? Canadians expect openness and transparency from their government. That is why the Liberal leader rightly opened up the books of Liberal members of Parliament to public scrutiny. Transparency is not a slogan or a tactic for our leader. Rather, it is a way of doing day-to-day business.

This new Conservative government report shows that “Middle-income families are increasingly vulnerable to financial shocks”. It also shows that the market does not reward middle income families well, and as a result they get an increasingly smaller share of the earnings pie.

The Budget

The Conservative government report further shows that, “many in the middle spend more than they earn, mortgaging their future to sustain their current consumption”.

As our leader and now the Conservative government report has said, “middle-income Canadians are unlikely to move to higher income brackets, i.e., the 'Canadian dream' is a myth more than a reality”.

Our Liberal leader is focused on the middle class and on making a real difference to middle class Canadians. Research from the Library of Parliament shows that since January 1, 2013, our leader explicitly acknowledged the middle class 52 times in the House of Commons. The NDP leader and the Prime Minister did so only nine times and twice respectively.

What Canada urgently requires is an action plan for growth to build a solid economic foundation. Instead, the Conservative government failed to fix its so-called jobs grant, which still does not even exist. There is still no consensus among the partners who will be expected to pay for it. The government is still planning to claw back funding that provinces currently devote to the disabled. There is still not a single penny of new federal investment, and it remains a total arbitrary mess.

From my daily work in our constituency office this summer and during constituency weeks, I know that the people of Etobicoke North need jobs. I have worked hard to get them jobs. I obtained funding for a completing the circle program, a \$500,000 jobs program in our community in remembrance of Loyal Gilao, a young Somali Canadian man, a York University student with a bright future who was shot and killed in 2005.

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

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

• (1630)

I repeatedly have bright, ambitious, and qualified university graduates come to get help after being out of school and out of work for two years. What are their pathways into the middle class? What has the government done to help them get there? I have numerous disappointed graduate students, international doctors, and teachers who struggle to find work. I have grandparents who come on behalf of their grandchildren—the first in the family to graduate from university and college—who had fled their country of origin to come to Canada, the land of promise, so that their children could have education. Now the children have education and they still do not have a job and cannot contribute to Canada's economy.

Besides working constructively with provincial partners to get a jobs grant that works and a larger infrastructure plan to drive growth, the Conservative government could also have taken some meaningful action on affordable housing. It could have enhanced a refundable accelerated capital cost allowance to encourage business investments in productivity and competitiveness. It could have torn down some of the barriers blocking access to all forms of post-secondary learning and skills. However, the government did not do any of that.

The economic reality under the Conservative government is the following: Economic growth in Canada has been sliding downward in each of the last three years. It is the worst growth record of any prime minister since R.B. Bennett, and there is stubbornly high unemployment, with 262,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than before the recession. The government should have used last week's budget to implement a real plan for jobs, growth, and prosperity. However, for reasons that escape us, it chose not to.

The Conservative government squandered the opportunity, just as it squandered all the financial strength it inherited from its Liberal predecessors back in 2006. It was handed a decade of balanced budgets and the best fiscal position in the western world, but it blew it in less than three years. The Conservative government turned a record surplus into a record deficit in record time.

What about economic growth? Unfortunately, the government is running a chronic trade deficit, which became \$1 billion worse at the end of last year. Where is the business investment in Canada? Businesses are piling up retained earnings, not having the confidence to invest in new ventures, staff, training, or technology.

Perhaps this is why a new Ipsos Reid poll shows that most Canadians simply shrugged off the federal budget. In fact, a majority of Canadians, or 76%, think the budget does not impact them at all and 20% of Canadians say the budget is “bad and they'd symbolically give it 'two thumbs down'...”.

The people of my riding of Etobicoke North told me that, in addition to a jobs program that actually exists, they would have liked to have seen more support for better access to all forms of post-secondary education and better and new infrastructure. The reality is that some 70% of all future jobs will require post-secondary qualifications and only 50% of Canadian workers have those qualifications today. We must boost our achievement level.

Finally, in closing, the people of Etobicoke North want to know the government's position on income splitting. In the 2011 election, the Prime Minister announced in no uncertain terms that once he could claim a balanced budget, he would implement income splitting for couples with children under age 18. Now he is being contradicted by none other than his own finance minister on the wisdom of that commitment to income splitting.

The Budget

The budget amounts to little to do about nothing, and my community of Etobicoke North and Canadians across this country deserve much better.

• (1635)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has been very passionate about the importance of nutritional programs in our schools. Maybe she could provide some comments in regard to how important it is that our young people go to school with full stomachs, and learn on full stomachs. I know this is an area about which she cares deeply, and maybe she could provide some comment in terms of her thoughts related to the budget.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is unconscionable in a country as rich as Canada that any child goes to school hungry. Forty per cent of elementary school students and 62% of secondary school students in Toronto go to school hungry. Hungry children cannot learn. If they are hungry as children, it can affect their lifelong development. We need a national breakfast program in the country; 169 other countries feed their children every day. We are the only industrialized country without a national breakfast program.

We need to do better for our children. As Buzz Aldrin says, “If we can conquer space, we can conquer childhood hunger”.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member's comments on the need for a national breakfast program. She might be familiar with the fact that the member for Trinity—Spadina has actually had a motion before the House and has done a lot of work. I know it has been a big issue in Toronto, but of course, it is an issue right across the country. It is something that is very important in terms of educational development and making sure kids are healthy and can participate and utilize their full potential.

There is another aspect of the budget I would like to raise, and that was a glaring omission. A lot of Canadians, particularly low income Canadians, and even those in middle income, are feeling the affordability gap. Whether it is high credit card fees, or ATM fees, or being in debt and not having enough money at the end of the month for very basic necessities, people are feeling very stretched. One of the major factors in that is the cost of housing. Being from Vancouver, and particularly Vancouver East, I know this is an enormous issue. Families, even with double incomes, basically cannot find affordable housing. They are paying way more than 30% of their income for housing. Of course, that starts impacting other things like food, educational requirements, and so on. There was nothing in the budget that really put forward a program for a national strategy around housing, something we worked on for so long.

I wonder if the member would comment on that. I know it is a huge issue in my community, and I have a suspicion that it is probably an issue in her community as well.

• (1640)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, child hunger is an issue across Canada. We cannot have 169 other countries feeding their children and Canada not. The U.S. understood this in the 1940s. I also want to point out that I put forward several motions to end child hunger in this country.

Regarding a national housing strategy, one thing that could have been in the budget would have been to make an immediate and transformative investment in local community infrastructure and affordable housing across the country, instead of punching a hole of more than \$3 billion in federal support, as the Conservative government has done. It is going to take until 2019 to get back to even last year's funding levels. Also, how municipalities can access that money remains a mystery,

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to address what is likely one of the most lacklustre budgets ever presented in the House of Commons. I would argue that it is a very boring budget that does not demonstrate any vision for Canada. There is no reason for people to look at this budget document and say it reflects a Prime Minister who actually has a vision for the future of our country. There is a great sense of disappointment as a result. Many Canadians are very concerned about the direction of our nation and want to see more hope and a Prime Minister who is committed to building Canada, looking at things, whether our infrastructure or the many different industries throughout our great nation and how we can support them and feed growth.

I will start by providing comment for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food because I know he is listening very closely. We have had very serious problems in the Prairies. The Liberal Party and I have raised the issue regarding grain. We have piles of grain all over the Prairies, we have empty ships in the Pacific Ocean, and the Minister of Agriculture has done very little or nothing to ensure that grain ends up in the ships in a timely fashion. He has abandoned his responsibility of ensuring that grain farmers get their grain to market and of protecting their interests. It is a crisis. We are not talking about a few million dollars, but tens of millions of dollars, which could easily turn into in excess of hundreds of millions of dollars. This budget does nothing to address that crisis.

Then we have the pork crisis, which really affects several provinces, in particular Manitoba. There is the threat to exports, and again we have not seen any action coming from the federal government, no reference, on this issue.

These issues, in particular the wheat issue, have been there for months and there is nothing in the budget to address them.

We can talk about smaller industries, which are actually fairly significant in size and contribute immensely to our economies. However, I want to focus some attention on the bigger picture and look at where we are going as a country. I have made reference to it in the past and my colleague, in her speech, made reference to the deficit situation.

Why would we believe the Conservatives when they say that the government will, at some time in the future, achieve a balanced budget? We know for a fact that when the Conservatives took office from former Prime Minister Paul Martin, there was indeed a multi-billion-dollar financial surplus.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Taken from the EI fund.

The Budget

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives converted that into a huge multi-billion-dollar deficit, and that was even prior to the recession.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: He has got to be kidding me.

An hon. member: No, he is not thinking.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, Mr. Speaker, it is true.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: They stole from EI.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I know the truth can hurt.

The reality is that if they take a look at the trade deficit, again something that I have raised in the past, the Conservatives will see that they inherited a multi-billion-dollar trade surplus and converted it into a multi-billion-dollar trade deficit. That is all about jobs and the impact it has on our middle class.

• (1645)

There was an interesting report by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and a letter by Perrin Beatty, who is very well-known to the members opposite. I understand that he has served in Progressive Conservative governments in a ministerial capacity. There are a couple of things I want to make reference to.

In his letter, Mr. Beatty states that Canada is struggling to stay competitive and that in fact our country's ability to remain a leader among nations is stagnating. For the second consecutive year, the World Economic Forum ranked Canada 14th in global economic competitiveness, down two places from 2011 and five places from 2009.

The Prime Minister should be concerned when someone like Perrin Beatty indicates this. This is the bigger picture.

I love it when the government members stand up and cite stats and how well Canada is doing. That is why I think we need to look at the bigger picture. The Stats from the Conservative government often twist reality. The reality is that the information being given by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, and other ministers speaking on behalf of the PMO is in fact quite misleading.

This is coming from Mr. Beatty. Tourism is one of the greatest industries that we have. If one were to go province to province to province, one would find that they often talk about the importance of tourism. Tourism is of critical importance to many nations around the world. How is Canada doing on that particular front?

Again, we will go to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. These are the people the Conservatives often quote as endorsing their agenda. The chamber says, "Canada has slid from the seventh largest tourist destination in the world to the 18th." That is the reality.

The tourism industry employs hundreds of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We can see very vividly, very clearly, how the government has dropped the ball. This could apply to different industries. I cite tourism because tourism is one of the industries around the world that is doing so much better in terms of economic development, but here in Canada we are not doing anywhere near as well as we could or should be doing.

I asked questions about infrastructure. The Liberal Party has been on this issue for a long time now. We need to be able to start

investing in infrastructure in a very real and tangible way. We need to sit down with the different stakeholders, our municipalities, industry leaders, and provincial governments, to develop an infrastructure strategy that will allow for greater economic growth.

If we are prepared to invest today, at the end of the day we will end up seeing more economic development because we will have a sounder infrastructure. It is a whole lot easier, for example, to transport goods across our vast land if we have a sound infrastructure.

My time has gone by quickly, but there is so much more that I could talk about. The Kelowna accord, which had a vision for our indigenous people, was thrown out by the government. Child care programs and incentives were thrown out by the government. My colleagues and others have talked about the importance of affordable housing. It is critical. We have more young adults living at home, not because they necessarily want to, as much as parents may want them to stay, but because it is becoming the economic reality. There is no housing strategy.

• (1650)

We need stronger leadership from the government on so many points. If the Conservatives want ideas, they should have gone to the convention that we had, where over 3,000 people were participating

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the remarks by my colleague from Winnipeg North.

He spoke of infrastructure, and I was quite surprised. The member may not be aware of the fact that this government introduced the largest infrastructure program in Canadian history.

The member also spoke about consultation. I was minister of state for transport and I assisted the then minister of transport in creating the building Canada fund. At some \$53 billion, it is the largest infrastructure program ever.

The FCM and municipalities throughout Manitoba and across western Canada all support our infrastructure plan. Why is the member speaking ill of it when everyone else supports it? Why does he vote against it?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, a significant amount of money has been allocated to infrastructure, but we need to put into perspective the time of its allocation. For example, if we say that we are going to invest \$200 billion in infrastructure over a 50-year timeframe, that is not all that impressive.

The Conservative government says it is going to spend x number of dollars on infrastructure over a lengthy period of time, but it is holding off spending a lot of those infrastructure dollars in 2014 so it can maximize those dollars in 2015, which happens to be the year of the federal election. One can understand why people would be somewhat skeptical. Just because the Conservatives say a number, my advice to Canadians is not to believe them because quite often they distort the truth.

The Budget

•(1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the Liberal member's comments, and quite clearly, the Liberal Party does not walk the talk.

The member talked about the Kelowna agreement, a splendid agreement that was negotiated and signed. However, an analysis of the country's financial statements shows that no financial provisions had been made. It was just a scrap of paper. With respect to Kyoto, it was exactly the same problem. We were told that something must be done, that the Liberals wanted to do something, but they did nothing. Under the Liberal government, air pollution increased as never before.

In short, I would like to know when the representatives of the Liberal Party will stop criticizing, stop talking, take real action, actually propose an innovative plan for this country and keep their promise.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect there might be many members of the New Democrat caucus who have a difficult time sleeping at night when they reflect on the issues they killed and voted with the Conservatives on. I am speaking of issues such as the Kyoto accord, which was the largest single expenditure on the environment in Canadian history. The NDP voted with the Conservatives against these accords, whether the Kyoto accord or the Kelowna accord. I can appreciate that.

The leader of the NDP was in Winnipeg the other day fully endorsing Greg Selinger. He said he would do whatever it takes to keep Greg Selinger as Premier of Manitoba. This was just after Greg Selinger lied to the people of Manitoba and did not hold a referendum on increasing the provincial sales tax.

There are all sorts of issues in the province of Manitoba.

Before NDP members start glowing, they should start reflecting on some of their own performances. I can suggest—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today in this House to speak about economic action plan 2014.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

Among the many initiatives and announcements in our budget, I would like to focus specifically on the aspects affecting my riding of Pickering—Scarborough East and the people who live there.

Rouge Park contains unique and highly significant natural and cultural heritage resources. It also offers an extraordinary opportunity to expose a huge number of Canadians to their heritage, as 20% of the country's population resides in close proximity to the park.

Accordingly, the Government of Canada became an early advocate of the park in the Rouge Valley, beginning in 1988 when it pledged \$10 million towards the creation of a heritage park.

A national urban park in the Rouge Valley is a unique concept in Canada. There are currently no comparable places, so this park requires a new and innovative conservation and management approach to respond to its unique urban context.

Aligned with the Parks Canada mandate, it will include conservation of the park's rich natural and cultural heritage resources, opportunities for outreach, and a range of visitor experience opportunities. The specific attributes of this urban context will also require consideration of mixed land uses, including the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

As indicated in budget 2012 and confirmed in budget 2014, the government will take action on the creation of Canada's first national urban park in the Rouge Valley in Ontario. It announced funding on May 25, 2012, of \$143 million over 10 years for park development and interim operations and of \$7.6 million per year thereafter for its continuing operations.

I cannot stress enough the benefits to both our community and the surrounding area that are provided by green spaces such as the Rouge River urban park.

That is why I was particularly excited to see our government's commitment in economic action plan 2014 to protect the health and well-being of Canadians by promoting a safe and clean environment. This is a fantastic government priority that all Canadians can get behind.

Since 2006, our government has taken significant action to protect our natural areas, including taking steps to add more than 160,000 square kilometres to the Canadian federal parks and marine conservation system, a more than 58% increase, and securing almost 4,000 square kilometres of ecologically sensitive private lands.

Economic action plan 2014 invests in measures to protect and preserve Canada's rich natural heritage by investing in Canada's national parks, conserving recreational fisheries, encouraging additional donations under Canada's ecological gifts program, expanding recreation trails, supporting family-oriented conservation, and expanding tax support for clean energy generation.

Our plan proposes investments of over \$400 million in this area, including allocating \$391.5 million over five years on a cash basis to the Parks Canada Agency to make improvements to highways, bridges, and dams located in our national parks and along our historic canals; allocating \$15 million over two years to extend the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program; encouraging additional donations of ecologically sensitive land by doubling for income tax purposes the carry-forward period for donations of such land; providing \$10 million over two years to improve and expand snowmobile and recreational trails across the country; and providing \$3 million over three years to support the Earth Rangers Foundation to expand its existing family-oriented conservation and biodiversity programming.

I am proud to see that our government is investing in protecting Canada's natural beauty and heritage. Hopefully many more Canadians will be able to experience first-hand the benefits that our natural space can provide.

The Budget

While we are on the topic of natural beauty, Canada's north holds a very special place in my heart. During my time in the Canadian Armed Forces, I was fortunate enough to have visited the beautiful territory of Nunavut while on a military exercise. In fact, while there, I helped build the playground in Gjoa Haven, the hometown of the Minister of the Environment.

Building on the government's vision for a new north, economic action plan 2014 is taking action to ensure that the north realizes its full potential by exercising our northern sovereignty, promoting economic prosperity, and supporting the health of northerners.

Economic action plan 2014 proposes to provide \$40 million over two years, starting in 2014-15, to renew strategic investments in the northern economic development program delivered by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

• (1700)

Canada's northern territories have enormous economic development potential. To help unlock this potential, the Government of Canada will work with territorial governments and local municipalities to develop transportation infrastructure in the north.

Economic action plan 2014 proposes to provide \$70 million over three years for a new targeted and time-limited fund to increase health services in the three territories in priority health areas and to reduce the reliance on outside health care systems and medical travel.

As the House may know, I have the Pickering nuclear power plan in my riding. For that reason, issues concerning nuclear power and plants in general are important not only to me but to my constituents. I was particularly pleased to see that our government is committed to investing \$117 million in AECL to maintain safe and reliable operations at the Chalk River Laboratories, ensuring a secure supply of medical isotopes.

In a past life, before I was elected to Parliament, I served as both a professional engineer and a military engineer. I would like to conclude today's speech by talking about what economic action plan 2014 promises for our science and research sectors, as well as for our veterans and persons with disabilities.

Our government has committed to investing \$15 million in the Institute for Quantum Computing at the University of Waterloo to carry out leading-edge research in quantum technologies, such as cryptography and medical diagnostics. This is especially close to my heart, as I am an engineering physics graduate. We are also dedicated to increasing Canada's prestige on the international stage by creating the Canada first research excellence fund through investing \$1.5 billion to position post-secondary institutions across Canada to compete internationally.

Other areas that our government would invest in include providing \$46 million to the granting councils in support of advanced research and scientific discoveries of Canada's leading universities and colleges, providing \$8 million to train more graduates and post-doctoral fellows in becoming the next generation of innovators and researchers, providing \$10 million to support research in colleges and polytechnics focusing on education, and integration of vulnerable Canadians, and community development.

I am proud to be part of a government that would support the youngest and brightest minds across the country through these wonderful investments. I am also extremely proud of what we have done and what we intend to do for our veterans, to whom we owe the greatest gratitude for keeping Canada strong and free.

We would honour our veterans by providing over \$100 million to expand the funeral and burial program to ensure that veterans of modest means have access to a dignified funeral and burial. We would increase access to veterans services by providing \$2 million to enable veterans and their families access to engage the Department of Veterans Affairs 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Finally, my constituents are particularly pleased with the attention our government dedicates to persons with disabilities. Budget 2014 specifically outlines plans to provide \$222 million to create new labour market agreements for persons with disabilities to better help Canadians with disabilities get the skills they need to fill available jobs. It would also provide \$15 million to the ready, willing, and able initiative and \$11.4 million to CommunityWorks to help persons with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders to participate in the workforce.

This is why I very strongly support economic action plan 2014. I invite the opposition to do the same.

• (1705)

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear the member for Pickering—Scarborough East talk about all sorts of things other than what is going on in the Toronto area. As a fellow member of Parliament from the Toronto area, I would have assumed that he would respond and answer the question that I get asked a lot, which is “What is the government doing to give my kids some hope for their future?”

This question arises because we have an employment rate in Toronto of just 43.5% for youth and we have an unemployment rate of over 18% for youth. It is so bad that the youth unemployment rate is driving overall employment and unemployment rates in Toronto.

What is the answer to that question? We have here a budget that does nothing, that inspires no hope, and that offers no hope to young people to find work in the Toronto area, so I am wondering how the member actually answers the question. What are the Conservatives, as a government, doing to give hope to my kid?

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member from Toronto for the question. I want to mention that my riding is half Toronto and half Durham region, so it is a specific riding.

• (1710)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: It's the Toronto area.

The Budget

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, it's the Toronto area, yes, of course, but the most important thing is that the budget is creating jobs and prosperity for our community, especially for youth. Members did not hear me talking about this because I cannot talk about everything in the entire budget in my speech. A lot of things are provided in this big book, which is economic action plan 2014.

To answer a couple of points that the hon. member raised, we are cutting red tape for small businesses and creating opportunities for small businesses to hire more people. That is very important. We are creating opportunities for training. Again, economic action plan 2014 is creating jobs and prosperity for Canadians. There are many issues outlined in this quite big book that can answer his questions.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Pickering—Scarborough East referred to this “big book”. As most members in the House have done, the government is calling it a budget, but it is not a budget.

There is no statement anywhere in this document that gives us a complete statement of revenues against expenses. There is no bottom line. There is no statement of what the total budget will be for any government department. There are random announcements of spending, but no rationalization of whether that spending is new money or old money, or whether, for instance, the \$319 million Parks Canada would get in new money to repair the roads that are crumbling because of previous budget cuts would mean the budget would go up or down.

This has attracted the interest, of all things, of *The Economist* magazine, which has made note that Canada has departed from our time-worn tradition of ensuring that Parliament controls the public purse. I ask my hon. colleague if, in good conscience, he can call this a budget.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, in answer to my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands, I would like to point out that this is a real budget. I understand the budget very well. I am a technical person, not a lawyer. Lawyers put spins on words and so on, but I am a practical person and I know that if we are spending \$7.5 million on something, we are spending it for that purpose.

We have a lot of good things in this budget. If the hon. member would provide some advice on how to do better, I would accept it, but if she is saying that it is not a budget and it does not contain anything, I am sorry, but that is not the case.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to the leader of the Green Party, this is a budget, and as we go through the year, there are supplementary estimates (A), (B), and (C), which also allow us to reconcile some of the differences the member was referring to.

This budget I think is a very positive budget.

There has been a lot of talk today about infrastructure. We have the largest infrastructure program in Canadian history, with tens of billions of dollars. We consulted the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, its sister and brother organizations, and all the provincial associations. What they asked for was a 10-year term, and that is exactly what they got. They asked for a permanent transfer of gas tax money. That is what they got. They asked that it be indexed.

The gas tax is indexed and goes directly to the municipalities. This government listens to what Canadians have to say.

Since taking office, the Canadian tax burden per family has decreased by \$3,400.

In my home province of Manitoba, transfers are at a record high of \$3.4 billion. With a \$9 billion provincial budget, that works out to about 40% of the provincial budget being reliant on federal transfers. I do not think that is great, because I would much rather see Manitoba in a position to contribute to the transfer formula, but right now it is in a situation of needing to accept the transfers. That is why public policy is important.

The infrastructure program included billions of dollars for projects of regional significance, that is, projects that cross provincial boundaries. The infrastructure program, like John A. Macdonald's railway, will help bring our country together.

I have but a moment to finish my remarks, so let me just say that it was reported today that at no time in Canadian history has the Canadian family unit been more wealthy. The value has increased by 44% in the last seven or eight years. For the first time in our history, the average Canadian family is worth more than the average American family in dollar terms.

We live in the best country in the world at the best time in human history. May God keep our land glorious and free.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendment now before the House.

[*English*]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1800)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

*(Division No. 64)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Gameau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Grogulé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Jones	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Ravignat
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turnel	Valeriote— 130

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Amblor
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong

Business of Supply

Ashfield	Aspin
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Falk
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
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)	Norlock
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Spuock
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Weston (Saint John)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Wilks	Wong
Wong	Woodworth
Young (Oakville)	Zimmer— 146

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLYOPPOSITION MOTION—INSTRUCTION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS REGARDING BILL C-23The House resumed from February 24 consideration of the
motion.

Business of Supply

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion.

• (1805)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 65)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brousseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Jones	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	Stewart
Sitsabaiesan	Thibeault
St-Denis	Tremblay
Sullivan	Turnel
Toone	
Trudeau	
Valériote — 131	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Falk
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
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)	Norlock
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seebach
Shea	Shiple
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Patry	Trottier
Truppe	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 145	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

Private Members' Business

It being 6:09 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS ACT

The House resumed from November 7, 2013, consideration of the motion that Bill C-504, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (volunteer firefighters), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour of rising to speak to a vital topic. We need to get to the heart of the issue so that we can help volunteer firefighters, who are so essential to our communities.

We find ourselves in a rather unusual situation where civilian first responders are being kept from performing their duties. We must start with mutual respect and an understanding of what is required if we want society to function and if we want current dynamics to be respected. I was dumbfounded to learn that a bill had to be introduced because the private sector is keeping volunteer firefighters from doing their work.

This is a worthwhile bill that will cost the federal government very little. It can send a clear message to the private sector that all forms of volunteer work and civic engagement—especially in essential sectors—are necessary and should be encouraged. Individuals engaged in such work should not be impeded, intimidated or ignored.

I am my party's philanthropy critic, and this situation does not apply only to volunteer firefighters, but also to everyone involved in the community and volunteer sectors. If we start impeding people from contributing to the well-being of society over the long term, our society will be weaker and poorer as a result. It will be dangerous.

When volunteer firefighters are dealing with a crisis, whether it is a flood or fire, the standards are becoming increasingly restrictive. Services in the municipalities are increasingly professional. Volunteer firefighters are required to be more and more effective and they must all participate, without exception. If 18 firefighters are called to an emergency, they must all participate. How can we accept that one or two people are prevented from being there during an emergency?

That is what is happening now. People who work for private companies and government services are prepared to put their personal lives aside to help others, to support them and save them. They are there for us during a flood or a train explosion, when there are victims and consequences, as we have seen.

If firefighters in every municipality had not come out because of the restrictive standards, what would have happened? Unfortunately, our community does not have the means to hire full-time firefighters.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. There is too much noise in the House. Again, I would ask hon. members who wish to continue their conversations to move to their lobbies and leave the House.

The hon. member for Repentigny.

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, my hon. colleague introduced an extraordinary bill. It is not very costly, and it addresses a problem that can be fixed in the blink of an eye. Yet again, however, the government is trying to avoid the issue and pretend it is not that important. The government often says that it wants to work together and is waiting for suggestions. Here we have a suggestion that could go through very quickly.

The Conservatives say that because only 5% of federal public service employees are volunteer firefighters, it is not up to the government to fix this problem, but there is no cost associated with this bill. Some provinces have already implemented legislation like this, and it is working very well. The government looks pretty lazy in this case.

When it is a Conservative bill and they want to talk about helping volunteer firefighters, their bill is extraordinary. When anyone tries to bully our volunteer firefighters or prevent them from responding, that is a problem. I do not understand. Following that logic, should there not have been volunteer firefighters in Lac-Mégantic? Did some businesses in neighbouring communities prevent firefighters from responding? If there are volunteer firefighters who collect employment insurance benefits and work from home, will the government tell them that Canadian labour standards do not help them and that it needs them to work in an office instead of respond to help the community when there is an emergency? We would end up with fewer firefighters, or maybe none at all who can respond.

Are they trying to privatize firefighting and make it even more costly? We are lucky that some people are prepared to dedicate body and soul to volunteer for the good of a community and its businesses. That is so important when there is a fire. These people take their own time away from their families to train, to be available, to stay connected to people and to help us out of difficult situations.

We cannot yet afford to have full-time, paid firefighters in all of our communities, which is why we have volunteer firefighters. How is it that, although these days the government is saying that essential services are wonderful, the Conservatives do not want to participate in our discussions about the obstruction and blocking of those services? We have introduced a bill. Why not send it to committee? Why not support it so it can be studied? Why not hear from witnesses and prove how problematic this issue is?

Private Members' Business

I will talk about what I know. I wore a uniform for much of my life. I was part of those essential services. I saw friends who volunteered, who took courses, who put their families aside so that they could help their communities, in the broad sense. Not once did I ever see those people hesitate in any way to be there for their communities or to help others. When I had a chance to share a meal with them and ask them what they thought of being a volunteer firefighter, they said it was amazing, but that their employers sometimes prevented them from being present and sometimes made things difficult. Their employers intimidated them and threatened to dismiss them if they were not available to work. That is a real problem.

It is absolutely crucial that we co-operate and come up with standards to ensure that everyone can work together. Actually, I think my colleague's bill is rather sad, because this kind of obstruction is unacceptable. It should not exist. Congratulating our volunteers and thanking them for their commitment is all well and good, but it is absolutely unacceptable that their employers prevent them from volunteering when they are prepared to save children or to save seniors from a fire—which happened recently—simply because the employers need them to sell a product. This is civic engagement in a global sense. I recognize that some businesses and employers who have volunteer firefighters as employees are also making a sacrifice, as this has repercussions on scheduling or on the operation of their business, in terms of ensuring that they have enough staff available at all times. That is to be expected.

If we need such a bill, it means there is a problem. Unfortunately, in our society, we tend to solve problems through legislation. I am completely open to having a dialogue, but unfortunately, that does not happen in the House of Commons.

• (1815)

We find ourselves in a situation where they absolutely do not want to listen. The Conservatives have it in their heads that their idea is the only good idea. They are not prepared to hear that a problem needs to be fixed as quickly as possible. We are even proposing a very inexpensive solution. The problem could be solved very quickly. Unfortunately, once again there is obstruction. They are not interested because it is not their idea. I just cannot understand that.

We have an opportunity to solve a problem, to educate the community, to listen to society and to make it possible for our volunteer firefighters to do their job in any circumstances. The government must set an example. The bill will not necessarily have repercussions for SMEs, but it does set an example.

The provinces have clearly taken a position by pointing out that volunteer firefighters are essential and that their work should not be hindered. Why does the federal government not do the same and set an example?

The Conservatives want to set an example by establishing a volunteer firefighter tax credit, but they are not willing to set an example with a bill. Tax credits for volunteers is a good idea. I tabled a bill in that regard. I completely agree with it. However, first and foremost, I would like to see volunteer firefighters protecting communities in emergency situations—like the one that recently affected our seniors or the train disasters—instead of being told by

their employer that he would rather see them working at the office than saving people's lives by fighting a fire. That is wrong.

• (1820)

[English]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saluting those who have served as volunteer firefighters over the years in my community, the West Island of Montreal. They are sterling individuals. My constituents and I take our hats off to them.

In particular, I would like to mention two individuals, Peter Neville and Wayne Belvedere, who are residents of the town of Baie d'Urfé. Peter and Wayne are pillars of the community. It is hard to imagine what West Island community life would look like without them and the volunteer contributions they have made over the decades, contributions far too numerous to count.

Peter Neville and Wayne Belvedere are well-known and respected for their generosity of spirit. Both have worked side-by-side as volunteer firefighters, and also in support of various community causes and initiatives. I believe that if we looked into the matter we would discover that volunteer firefighters are more than just firefighters; they are the underpinnings of our communities in so many different ways. Their involvement is not limited to responding to fires. Their presence and influence radiate all through the community, through numerous channels and volunteer activities.

Both Peter Neville and Wayne Belvedere are loyal, long-time Rotarians. Their community engagement in the service of others knows no limits. They are models of civic participation and both were well-deserved recipients of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal last year. They made their home town of Baie d'Urfé stronger, as well as the West Island as a whole, through their involvement in charities and grassroots initiatives, including the Baie d'Urfé Volunteer Fire Department.

Sadly, we no longer have volunteer firefighters in the West Island of Montreal. Allow me to take a moment to explain why that is the case. It is not because the volunteer spirit has fled the West Island. Rather, the reason is structural and relates to a reorganization of a municipal government on the Island of Montreal that took place almost 15 years ago, and since then as well.

Around the year 2000, the Government of Quebec thought it would be a good idea to take all of the municipalities on the Island of Montreal, including the City of Montreal and numerous independent municipalities, and merge them into a concept known as "One island, One city". This created quite a wave of protests in my riding of Lac-Saint-Louis in the region of the island of Montreal known as the West Island. All these cities and towns were merged into the City of Montreal and their firefighting services became part of the City of Montreal firefighting service.

A couple of years later there was a movement to de-merge. It was called “de-merging”, a term I know we do not hear often. However, there was a movement to de-merge these formerly independent municipalities from the new City of Montreal, and they regained their independent status. They did get some of their powers back, such as their municipal councils and mayors. Unfortunately, as a result of the negotiations that took place involving the City of Montreal, the Government of Quebec, and these newly independent municipalities, they did not get their firefighting services back. Those remained under the jurisdiction of the City of Montreal, which does not allow volunteer firefighters. All firefighting is now within the purview of professional firefighting services.

Here we are talking about a bill that is problematic for a number of reasons.

• (1825)

Before we get to that, I would like mention that we on the Liberal side of the House do not share the government's anti-labour perspective. We certainly value the role of organized labour. On the other hand, we do not support everything organized labour would do on any given day. For us it is not a matter of faith, as it is for the NDP, to support every demand of organized labour, but we support organized labour, and we understand its role and its importance.

We believe that organized labour should be consulted before changes are made to the Labour Code. In fact, we found that organized labour, or firefighters associations, have not been consulted about the bill. We find this a violation of a principle we hold quite dear, the idea that we should consult widely before making changes to the Labour Code, and second, that the Labour Code should not be changed through private members' bills.

In this regard, we rest our view on the opinions of members of organized labour. I will quote Mr. Hassan Yussuff, who is the secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress. He said when he appeared before the human resources committee during the study of another private member's bill:

Amendments should not be made through private members' bills. They should be made with concerted, pre-legislative consultation that engages employers, unions, and government.

We have a representative of the Canadian Labour Congress, a representative of the union movement in Canada, suggesting that this is not the route to take and that consultation is primordial.

Let me also quote from Mr. John Farrell, the executive director of the main employer group representing federally regulated employers, who also appeared before the human resources committee during the study of another private member's bill, Bill C-525:

This critical consultation process is completely bypassed when changes to the labour relations regime are proposed through the mechanism of one-off private members' bills. It provides no meaningful way for pre-legislative consultation to take place in an open and transparent manner, and it seeks changes without the required engagement of practitioners, recognized third-party neutrals, and the resources of government agencies charged with the responsibility to implement, adjudicate, and monitor the industrial relations system in the federal jurisdiction.

Last I quote a member of the NDP, a member of this House, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, who said, on January 28, 2014:

I believe it is irresponsible on the part of the Conservative government to allow a private member's bill to amend Canada's labour relations legislation. If there were

Private Members' Business

any case at all for changes to our labour relations legislation, then there must be consultations with all the stakeholders, and a full study before proceeding to draft any such bill. It should absolutely be done by a government bill, not a private member's bill.

There was not a lot of support among those who are involved in management-labour relations for taking this route. I firmly believe, as a private member, that consultation is a key principle. Consultation in labour relations and in changing the Labour Code is a kind of sacrosanct principle that should be respected. Unfortunately, the bill does not respect that principle.

I am not aware of any case where a federal government employer, in other words, a department or agency of the government, has said to a volunteer firefighter, “I am sorry. You cannot go and put out that fire. We need you at the office”. I do not know of any cases. Maybe we would have known of some cases if proper consultations had taken place.

• (1830)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on Bill C-504.

The Government of Canada, of course, is committed to ensuring that workplaces are fair, safe, and productive, and that they contribute to a prosperous economy for all Canadians. However, as the previous speaker mentioned, I know of no employer who has prevented an employee under this particular circumstance from doing volunteer firefighting work.

The main objective of Bill C-504 is to provide support to volunteer firefighters who are employed in federally regulated enterprises. The bill proposes to amend the Canada Labour Code to ensure that volunteer firefighters are supported when considered for employment or when called upon to perform their duties during working hours.

We have carefully studied the bill, and we would like to assure Canadians and business owners that the bill attempts to solve a problem that does not really exist.

First and foremost, our government recognizes the sacrifice and hard work carried out by volunteer firefighters across Canada, and there is no question about that. Who can forget the disaster at Lac-Mégantic this past summer? There is no way the small community's fire department could have dealt with this tragedy without the help of its volunteer firefighters.

These volunteers are a beacon of courage for all of us. They are a shining example of the bravery shown in thousands of Canadian communities by men and women who freely give their time to keep us and our communities safe. Our government recognizes their critical role and that is why we created the volunteer firefighters tax credit, which is available to those who provide at least 200 hours of eligible service per calendar year at one or more fire departments.

Private Members' Business

In 2011, more than 37,000 volunteer firefighters took advantage of this tax credit, which is a fairly significant number. In other words, under the leadership of this government, all men and women across Canada who serve as volunteer firefighters get real action with real results.

No one doubts the hon. member's sincerity, and certainly we hear the passion displayed, in wanting to protect the estimated 4,200 volunteer firefighters who work in federally regulated industries. However, we cannot support the bill.

First, there is little evidence that federally regulated employers are unsupportive of their employees who act as volunteer firefighters. I think the previous speaker alluded to that. The truth of the matter is, that is the situation across the country.

The labour program, which is responsible for the Canada Labour Code, has not received a single complaint from a federally regulated employee who has been dismissed, suspended, laid-off, demoted, or disciplined for fulfilling their volunteer firefighting duties; not one single complaint.

Second, Bill C-504 would have a disproportionate impact on small employers, who represent 80% of all federally regulated employers.

The other side of the coin, of course, is that small employers would have to manage unpredictable absences in their organizations while not necessarily having back-up resources to complete the work left behind. The bill would mean an additional burden on employers who would have to manage additional red tape.

Let us not forget that our government has reduced red tape and regulatory burdens on Canadian businesses to provide them with the required flexibility to grow, create jobs, and strengthen the economy. The idea is to reduce red tape for businesses, not increase it. Our economic action plan measures have produced results. The last thing we want to do is to move backwards.

Finally, there is no indication that volunteer firefighter departments, or even volunteer firefighters themselves, see a need for legislation.

A survey was recently conducted by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs in which recruitment and retention was identified as a challenge by volunteer firefighter departments. However, a lack of support from employers was not identified as the main cause for this challenge. Rather, and in many parts of Canada, a lack of local employment poses the greatest challenge for fire departments in small and medium-size communities concerning the recruitment and retention of firefighters.

• (1835)

Although the intent of the bill is to support volunteer firefighters, it would add little to no additional support.

What the bill truly represents is another NDP attempt to create regulation for the sake of regulation, without any forethought to any consequences and when no regulation is required.

The bill is also inconsistent with other provisions provided in the Canada Labour Code. For example, it introduces the concept of good cause, which would leave room to multiple interpretations and could

lead to disagreements between employers and employees, creating a situation that does not need to be created.

It also fails to define under what circumstances a volunteer firefighter would be granted leave from work. An important part of a volunteer firefighter's duties are deemed non-urgent situations, such as training and fire hall maintenance.

I am not so sure anyone here wants their communities unprotected from the ravages of fire. Of course, every one wants to be protected from the ravages of fire. However, there is little evidence that discrimination against employees who act as volunteer firefighters actually exists.

As I mentioned earlier, the bill would have a negative impact upon small and medium-sized employers, while adding no additional protection to those who serve as volunteers.

For all these reasons, the government cannot support the bill and will be voting against it.

Not to be misunderstood, to be sure, our government is committed to ensuring that each and every workplace in Canada remains fair, safe, and productive. That is what is guiding each and every one of our decisions now and going forward.

It seems to me that, so far, the relationship between employers and employees has been excellent and that volunteer firefighters have been able to attend and protect citizens from fire whenever it was required. It does not appear to be a problem. It has not been identified as a problem. Why would we need this legislation at this particular time to legislate a situation or to try to cure a situation that does not exist—a problem that employers and employees have been able to work out on their own terms?

In fact, many employers themselves are volunteer firefighters, and when there is a call and a need by the community or society that needs protection, they are first to go. They see it as a community effort, a duty to the community, and they work that out amongst themselves.

It is our view that this legislation is not necessary, certainly not in a federally regulated sphere.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to speak in the House to support Bill C-504, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (volunteer firefighters), introduced by the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, who is doing excellent work.

In the House, I represent the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, a rural riding that includes 42 municipalities.

As you might guess, not all of these municipalities have a fire department that employs full-time firefighters. It is often volunteer, part-time firefighters who ensure the safety of my constituents.

That is why it is very important for me to support this bill. It is the least I can do for the men and women who are dedicated to our safety. The bill proposes a tangible, realistic no-cost solution to support those who keep our communities safe.

The municipal officials in my riding also officially support the bill. The Argenteuil and Papineau RCMs have both given their support to the bill. Those two RCMs represent a number of municipalities. Most of the municipalities in my riding, roughly 35, are quite small.

I will read the Argenteuil RCM motion for support, to illustrate the importance of such a bill at the local level, in my riding. This is an excerpt from the minutes of the Argenteuil RCM meeting that was held last summer:

WHEREAS the Support for Volunteer Firefighters Act would amend the Canada Labour Code to allow volunteer firefighters to be absent from their work if they are called to a fire;

WHEREAS said Act would also legally protect volunteer firefighters from dismissal or other disciplinary measures imposed by employers, without just cause, in the performance of their duties;

WHEREAS in rural areas, most firefighters do this job in addition to their primary job;

WHEREAS recruiting and retaining firefighters in small and medium-sized communities is difficult;

WHEREAS, according to statistics, it is difficult for fire departments to get their forces together between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. because many employers do not let volunteer firefighters miss work;

WHEREAS this bill enables fire departments to maintain effective response teams at all times and responds to concerns expressed by part-time and volunteer firefighters in rural stations;

WHEREAS similar legislation already exists in Quebec;

They unanimously supported the bill introduced by my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Each reason set out in the motion is better than the last. My colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue is proposing an important measure for volunteer firefighters in our rural communities.

The arguments coming from the other side of the House, from the Conservatives, as to why they are not supporting the bill, are simply mean-spirited. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification said the following:

The bill claims to protect the employment of volunteer firefighters working in a federally regulated business. I think it is important to note that according to the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs an estimated 4.9%, or 4,200, of the 85,000 volunteer firefighters in Canada are hired by federally regulated businesses.

We know that she is opposed to this policy, which would be of help to volunteer firefighters and to the municipalities recruiting them, because the bill does not interfere with provincial jurisdiction.

This is basically about protecting the portion of the volunteer firefighters in Quebec who are not already protected, so that everyone has access to the same type of legislation.

I know that the Conservatives try to manage everything from their offices and that they do not like to hear proposals from the other parties. However, the NDP defends policies that respect the provinces.

● (1840)

If we treat the provinces as allies and work with them, we will be able to protect all volunteer firefighters.

Bill C-504 only affects volunteer firefighters who work for federally regulated companies. This legislation would complement

Private Members' Business

similar legislation that already exists in Quebec. Bill C-504 addresses an inequity towards volunteer firefighters who work for a federally regulated company in Quebec, and we hope that this bill will encourage the other provinces to enact similar legislation.

That is what you would call legislative leadership, and I congratulate my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for taking this step forward.

The Conservatives are complaining that this bill does not do enough. However, as a firefighter would say, you have to take the ladder one rung at a time.

I want to talk about the three measures in the bill that illustrate this first step of the ladder towards real legislative leadership:

246.1 (1) No employer shall, without good cause, prevent a person from acting as a firefighter called on an occasional basis (in this Act referred to as a “volunteer firefighter”) if that person has informed the employer of their obligations and advised the employer when, to act in that capacity, they must be absent from their work place, either by leaving work suddenly or by failing to appear at work.

This is the most powerful measure in the bill and it is very simple. It ensures that the volunteer firefighter is able to serve his community, whether it is to fight a fire, carry out an emergency plan or do anything else.

When we talk about volunteer firefighters in the House, I often think about my time in high school, since my school bus driver, Georges, was a volunteer firefighter. He had a list of the phone numbers of all the people he had to drive to school in the morning. As soon as he got called in for his volunteer firefighter duties, he would call us—because he was the chief volunteer firefighter—to say that he would be late or that someone else would pick us up. He always did his job and made sure that we would still get to school.

However, that required him to manage two tasks at the same time, especially because our day started so early. We had to travel two hours if we wanted to go to French school. Basically, he did everything he could to get us to school on time, and he served his community at the same time. This kind of measure would protect people like Georges, who was punctual and, when necessary, went off to save families in his community.

I would like to move on to the second clause of the bill:

(2) No employer shall, without good cause, dismiss, suspend, lay off, demote or discipline an employee because they are a volunteer firefighter or take into account the fact that an employee is a volunteer firefighter in a decision to promote or train them if the employee has informed the employer of their obligations and advises the employer when, to act in that capacity, they must be absent from their work place, either by leaving work suddenly or by failing to appear at work.

This second measure is important because it states that an employer cannot punish an employee who is a volunteer firefighter and who exercises his or her right under the first clause of the bill. On the job, there are always reasons why people do not have the opportunity to advance. People who serve their community should have opportunities to advance.

The following is the third clause of the bill:

(3) No employer may, without good cause, refuse to employ a person because they are a volunteer firefighter.

Private Members' Business

•(1845)

To conclude, this bill consists of three very clear, tangible steps that are designed to protect the volunteer firefighters who make sacrifices for their community. Once again, I want to thank the volunteer firefighters in my riding for their irreplaceable service to our communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak again today, this time about Bill C-504. I think everyone in the House appreciates that the member has brought forward an interesting bill that has the best of intentions.

All of us have the utmost respect and appreciation for first responders in this country, particularly volunteer firefighters. These are individuals who risk their own safety to save lives, property, and their own communities. We owe them much.

However, what sometimes looks good on paper in reality does not always meet what is needed and what it was meant to fulfill. Unfortunately, this bill fits into that category.

One of the first things we should consider is who we are trying to help. The bill seeks to amend the Canada Labour Code to protect volunteer firefighters from negative repercussions from their employers when they take time off from their work to go and fight a fire or deal with another emergency in their community.

As we all know, the Canada Labour Code applies only to federally regulated industries. Of the 85,000 volunteer firefighters in this country, it is estimated that only around 4,420 work in federally regulated industries. In other words, this legislation would only apply to about 5% of all volunteer firefighters in Canada.

Imagine for a minute that two best friends are both volunteer firefighters. They live across the street from each other. One works in a federally regulated industry, but the other is one of the 95% of volunteer firefighters who do not. They both answer an emergency call. They both leave their work. They both fight the fire. They both risk their safety to help others.

If this law were to be put into place, do members think that they would each be treated differently when they got back to work? Do members think that they might get fired by their manager for leaving work to help put out a fire that might in fact be at his house, his neighbours' house, or one of their businesses? No. In fact, since 1985, the labour program has not received any complaints of a reprisal related to volunteer firefighter duties. There has not been one.

This is one of the severe shortcomings of the hon. member's presentations in support of this bill. She has not provided any examples of a situation in which a volunteer firefighter has been penalized by his or her employer for going out and fighting a fire. That is quite significant.

An notional argument has been made that some of the fire department heads have said that the lack of this legislation inhibits their ability to recruit volunteers. However, a report by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs indicated that a primary reason they have difficulty recruiting local volunteer firefighters is that potential

volunteers do not work close enough to the area they live in to respond to an emergency, not that they fear a reprisal from their employer.

I can speak to that in terms of distance and length. In my municipality of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, there are number of volunteers and small villages, and many of those in rural areas work in larger urban areas. The comment I just made about having access for immediate response becomes a much larger issue.

Furthermore, in a sample of more than 3,000 collective agreements across the country, the issue of voluntary firefighters is only mentioned in two of them. The question then is whether this is really a problem. Is it really an issue that needs legislation? Do we really want to change a process that has been working well for so many years? Do we really want to tell the employers of the 5% of volunteer firefighters and the volunteer firefighters themselves that we are going to give them some more forms to fill out and processes that they will have to follow just to do something that really already works well?

•(1850)

It seems the New Democrats wish to create laws for the sake of creating laws, but we respectfully disagree with this approach. So why do we not do something that will help not only the 5% of the volunteer firefighters under Canadian labour law, but also do something for all of them? Of course the hon. member knows that this has already happened.

In budget 2011, our Conservative Government of Canada brought in the volunteer firefighters tax credit. It is available to volunteer firefighters who provide at least 200 hours of eligible services per calendar year. This is an example of the real, fair application for all volunteer firefighters, with tangible results all the way across Canada. In 2011, more than 37,000 Canadian volunteer firefighters took advantage of this tax provision. It put about \$450 back into the pockets and the hands of volunteer firefighters who helped their communities with fires or deal with other emergencies. This is Canada's way of thanking a group of people who volunteer to carry out dangerous work on our behalf.

We should keep in mind that this is not a job that everybody can or, in fact, wants to do. It requires a level of physical strength as well as courage. These are a special breed of individuals who deserve our deepest appreciation for what they do. Who really appreciates these people the most? It is the folks in our communities, not only their neighbours but also the people who own the pizza parlour or the barber shop, or the business person who owns a factory, or the local farmer. All of them are employers and all of them benefit from the services that these volunteers provide.

Private Members' Business

It is well worth noting that in my business as a farmer, I have had to call on the fire department to come to a situation. I also noticed, when I was mayor of our municipality and involved in municipal work for a number of years, that not only do we have volunteers who are working for businesses, we also have a number of business owners who are volunteer firefighters, and in some cases the owners and the employees all drop their work and come to do their duty as volunteer firefighters. So, whether or not they are employees, all of them benefit from the services these volunteers provide. All of them want to have volunteer firefighters in their communities and they also want to have them as part of their business protection. They quite rightly see it as a good investment.

There are over 3,000 volunteer fire departments in Canada, and the majority of them, as in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, are in small and medium-sized communities. In many cases, the volunteer firefighters provide the only emergency services in the area. They are relied on to act quickly to respond to fires and to other emergencies.

In these communities, business people recognize the valuable contributions of these volunteers, and they continue to accommodate them without the need for additional legislation. Volunteer firefighters are part of every community in this great country of Canada, and their employers know that they provide a unique and an invaluable service that protects property and yes, in some cases, saves lives. The goodwill and co-operative spirit between volunteers and their employers have existed for many years, and we expect that to continue for many years to come.

In short, I do not agree with the NDP that we should try to fix something that is not broken. So we on this side will not be able to support this proposal.

● (1855)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Nickel Belt, I will let him know we do not have quite the full 10 minutes available that he would normally have before allowing some time for the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue for her right of reply. It looks like we have pretty close to seven minutes.

I recognize the hon. member for Nickel Belt.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue for her leadership on Bill C-504. She is a real MP who shows leadership for Abitibi—Témiscamingue and for Canada as a whole.

[*English*]

My riding of Nickel Belt comprises mostly small communities. There are some full-time firefighters in Sturgeon Falls and some in Valley East. They are supplemented by volunteer firefighters.

I cannot believe what I am hearing from members on the government side and members of the third party about this piece of legislation. Bill C-504 is about federal leadership.

Let me talk a bit about Nickel Belt. I have a big riding that starts in the north in Foleyet, which is serviced by volunteer firefighters, and it goes to Mattagami and Gogama. I will stop at Gogama right now.

I received an email today from a firefighter from Gogama. I just wanted to know roughly how many calls those firefighters had per year. Gogama is a very small community of a couple of hundred people. The firefighters get 60 to 70 calls per year involving motor vehicle accidents, extrications, fires, medical calls, and all kinds of calls that volunteer firefighters would respond to.

There are even smaller communities in my riding, like Cartier, Onaping, and Levack. I will stop at Levack for now.

Levack has always been served by volunteer firefighters. Levack-Onaping is a special case because there are several mines in the area that are serviced by volunteer firefighters. They have been called to these mines to put out some fires. Those mines employ hundreds of people. I want members to imagine what would happen if one of those mines was burning and the firefighters could not show up. What if the place was to burn down? What would happen then?

I heard a Conservative member talking about the economic action plan. I am talking about a bill for firefighters, and he was talking about the economic action plan.

I am not going to be like the member for Mississauga—Streetsville and tell members I saw this, because I really did not see it, but I can just imagine how many bonfires were started because of the economic action plan, by people sitting around throwing books about the economic action plan into the fire just to warm up. That is just about all those books are good for, especially the last one because there is nothing in it. It is just an imaginary budget.

I am going to move on to Killarney, which is another town in my community served by volunteer firefighters. I have skipped over several communities to get to Killarney because it had a special cause not too long ago. Killarney is a tourist area. People work in the summer there and are on EI during the winter. As a result of government changes to EI, the volunteer firefighters did not want to volunteer anymore because they felt they were being punished.

As I only have a minute left, I want to read an email I received from another community in Nickel Belt:

The only thing I can add at this time is that many of our members, including myself, have been told under no circumstances can we respond to a fire emergency while on shift at work. This at times is a perilous situation.

Can members imagine that? If they have kids or grandkids—they must have some family—I want them to imagine their house burning down and volunteer firefighters being unable to respond to the call.

● (1900)

I say the same thing to the Conservative and Liberal members. I ask them to imagine having a car accident and needing to be extricated, except volunteer firefighters cannot help because they cannot leave their place of employment. What a real shame it would be to lose lives because employees could not leave their job sites to save lives or extinguish fires. What a real shame that would be.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to first take a moment to respond to my Liberal colleagues.

Unless the Prime Minister appoints me as labour minister while allowing me to remain a member of the NDP, I am currently only allowed to introduce private members' bills. In this case, the only way for me to amend the Canada Labour Code is through my private member's bill. I am not part of the government, so I cannot introduce a government bill. It makes sense that an opposition bill comes in the form of a private member's bill.

I consulted with various fire services. I telephoned people across the country and I even got formal support from Enbridge, for one, who agreed to support my bill because the company's contingency plans depend on volunteer firefighters. Another employer, the Canadian Association of Mutual Insurance Companies, also supports my bill because it believes it could be useful. Consultations were held, but there could be more if this bill gets enough support to be referred to committee.

I used my office budget to undertake those consultations. My budget is far more limited than a minister's, but I consulted all the same.

As for real-life examples, there are some employers who refused to make their employees available. In some communities, when people want to become volunteer firefighters, the fire station asks them for a letter from their employer indicating that it is willing to allow them to leave in the event of a fire, and sometimes employers refuse. What are those people supposed to do? There is no mechanism for filing a complaint.

At present, employers are fully entitled to refuse to allow employees to leave. Will these people risk losing their jobs for a volunteer position? Unfortunately, the answer is usually no, so they say nothing. They would really like to do something, but their hands are tied. This gets overlooked. It is unfortunate, because this can mean that these people are excluded from the fire services because they are not available to respond to fire calls. It would cost too much to train them and keep them on the service if they cannot respond to fire calls.

Someone else said that my bill will impose an administrative burden. Similar legislation exists in Quebec for employees under provincial jurisdiction. Shortly after that legislation came into effect, two cases were brought before the courts, and in both cases, the volunteer firefighters won. After that, there was no longer any need to go to court, because the law was in place. Not one business in Quebec under provincial jurisdiction has complained that the provincial legislation imposed an administrative burden, and my bill does not require any paperwork whatsoever.

This can be resolved in one minute. Employees can simply say to their employers that they are volunteer firefighters and want to be able to respond to fire calls when they come in. Then the employer replies that legislation exists requiring it to comply, and when the employees receive fire calls, they simply have to inform the secretary when they leave and when they return. It takes 23 seconds to solve

the problem. I do not understand how this could impose any administrative burden. It has been tested.

With regard to the specific duties that could be assigned to firefighters, if my colleagues believe that improvements could be made, and if my colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain believes that we should be more specific about certain elements, I urge them to think right away about amendments they could make in committee. I do not believe that I know everything and I recognize that I am not perfect. However, I believe that this is a very good starting point and that, with a few amendments, we could have a very good bill. We need to send it to committee to improve it.

The Conservatives say that only 5% of firefighters will be affected. However, when there is a fire, you have to have an adequate team, a minimum number of firefighters, to respond. If you need 18 firefighters and only 17 arrive, they cannot enter the house. All 18 firefighters have to be there and the 18th might be part of the 5% under federal authority.

• (1905)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 7:10 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

Accordingly the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 26, 2014, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1910)

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, a while back I asked the Minister of Finance a question about the budget. The Conservative government has staked its reputation on claims of creating jobs, fostering economic growth, and keeping taxes low. Indeed, since 2009, the Conservatives have spent \$113 million of our taxpayer money bragging to Canadians about their so-called economic action plan. Unfortunately for all of us, they have failed miserably on all counts.

The government has managed to create a long-term structural deficit, a multi-billion dollar hole that it is trying to dig itself out of with cuts and by shifting taxes, which in turn is holding back growth and will continue to hold back growth. Despite its claims that it has not raised taxes, we know that the government has shifted taxes from large corporations onto the backs of the Canadian middle class in each of the last four budgets.

For the first time in Canadian history, more than half of federal revenue will come from personal income taxes, the hard-earned dollars of our middle-class families. Meanwhile, personal debt for the average Canadian as well as our national debt have both increased by over 25% under the current government.

Since 2011, the government has collected an additional \$3.6 billion in increased employment insurance premiums while placing even more restrictions on EI claimants. It has now instituted a freeze, but it refuses to roll back these job-killing payroll tax hikes to pre-2011 levels. This is not an insurance plan; it is a huge tax grab on small businesses and Canadian workers.

The Conservatives have been increasing the financial burden on Canadian families in other ways. Canada has one of the lowest large corporate tax rates in the world. Our rate on large corporations is less than half that of the United States. The OECD has warned that a tax rate on large corporations substantially below the top personal income tax rate, like we see in Canada today, “can jeopardize the integrity of the tax system as high-income individuals will attempt to shelter their savings within corporations.”

There are unnecessary tax breaks for hugely profitable large corporations, plus an incredible \$1.3 billion tax subsidy provided by the government to oil and gas companies despite the fact that the Conservatives have broken their promise to end this subsidy again and again.

The Conservatives have also refused to crack down on tax evasion. Estimates suggest that upwards of \$5 billion is lost every year to offshore tax havens.

What is more, their claims about Canadian economic growth are pure fiction. Let us look at the facts. Unemployment has increased by 9% and youth unemployment is double the national rate; Canada is 20th in the OECD for job creation; real economic growth per capita is the lowest in, wait for it, 78 years; the number of consecutive Conservative deficits is six; housing costs have increased by 52%; the personal debt of the average Canadian and our national debt have increased more than 25%.

The Conservatives have presided over a dismal lost decade in our Canadian economy. Their failed trickle down economic approach does little to help the average Canadian have a bright future.

•(1915)

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where my hon. colleague has been living the last number of years, but I recommend that he come back to Canada, back to this country, where things are actually pretty darn good.

Let me reassure the hon. member that neither the middle class nor small businesses are paying higher taxes under this government. In fact, the exact opposite is true.

Our Conservative government recognizes the vital role small businesses play in the economy and job creation. That is why we are committed to helping them grow and succeed.

Indeed, one way our government has supported small business is through lower taxes. The member opposite may be interested to know that since 2006, our government has reduced the small business tax rate to 11% while at the same time increasing the small business limit to \$500,000. We have eliminated the corporate surtax for all corporations, which was particularly beneficial to small business corporations, as it represented a larger proportion of their overall tax bill.

We have also increased the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$800,000 and have indexed it going forward, which will increase the rewards for investing in small business by making it easier for owners to transfer their family businesses to the next generation of Canadians.

As can be plainly seen, to suggest that small businesses are paying more in tax under our government is simply fiction. In fact, because of our government's low-tax plan, the typical small business now saves over \$28,000 on its tax bill.

That is not all we are doing to help small businesses across the country thrive. We are also providing them with certainty and flexibility in the years ahead by freezing EI premium rates, a decision that will leave \$660 million in the pockets of job creators and workers this year alone.

We are also continuing to reduce the red tape burden by eliminating over 800,000 payroll deduction remittances to CRA made every year by over 50,000 small businesses. By doing this, business owners can spend more time running their businesses and less time filling out paperwork.

Our government is also standing up for Canadians and their families by leaving more of their hard-earned money where it belongs: in their pockets.

The member opposite might be interested to know that since 2006, our government has cut over 160 different taxes. For example, we have reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, we have cut the lowest personal income tax rate to 15%, we have increased the amount Canadians can earn without paying taxes, and we have introduced the tax free savings account, the most popular savings account in Canadian history. Over nine million accounts currently exist.

Adjournment Proceedings

Because of our government's low-tax plan, the federal tax burden is at its lowest level in 50 years, helping an average family of four save over \$3,400 a year in 2014. That is real action for Canadian families.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, budget 2014 is a failure for the average Canadian. There are no medals here, no silver and no gold.

There is no renewal of the popular eco-energy home retrofit program, which can reduce home energy bills. There is no new funding for desperately needed housing. There is virtually nothing for veterans. There is no pension reform. There is no rollback of the government's past years of job-killing payroll-tax hikes.

There is no investment in health care, including pharmacare, home care, or community health care. Back in my riding, our Regional Health Sciences Centre has people stacked up to the rafters without beds.

There is no investment in rail, including infrastructure, passenger rail, or rail safety. Canada remains the only country in the G20 without any national rail strategy.

There is no mention of climate change at all in the budget.

This budget is a failure. Large corporations remain grossly undertaxed, while small businesses and families are overtaxed.

● (1920)

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the member opposite would ask us to bring back the eco-energy retrofit program, a program that was our program. It was a temporary program, which he voted against, and now he is asking us to bring it back. It is quite ironic.

Despite the significant action our government has taken to keep taxes low for Canadians and their families, we are not finished yet. Unlike other members of this House, our government will not engage in dangerous new spending.

Despite the continued global economic uncertainty, our government will balance the budget in 2015. A balanced budget is important, because it means less taxpayer money is needed to pay interest on debt, it makes Canada an attractive place to invest, and it helps keep taxes low.

Indeed, this is exactly what we intend to do. Once the budget is balanced, our government is committed to greater tax relief for Canadian families.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on January 31, I asked the Minister of Justice about the need to take concrete steps regarding the report of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

Unfortunately, the question was evaded, as usual. It is truly shameful that Conservatives try to hide the fundamental systemic violence and, as a result, are perpetuating it. Therefore, I am taking this opportunity to come back to the subject, as we need to take action in order to avoid having to start over and produce another report that would just be ignored, as those we have produced have been.

Simply put, we need action. There are no lack of ideas and so, here are a few of them.

To begin with, we need to support the sharing of information and culture with agencies, police, lawyers, and social workers, and information and outreach on violence prevention and available resources such as shelters.

We need respectful relationships with police to proactively work with communities and first nation citizens to ensure that they are supported, protected, and feel comfortable reporting crime.

We need to support collaborative approaches to policing and sentencing that recognize the community and family roles of both victims and offenders.

We desperately need funding.

We need adequate funding for services and emergency and second-stage shelters in first nation communities, as well as in rural and urban areas off reserve.

We need funding for organizations and programs that are run or directed by indigenous women themselves.

We need economic security and access to housing for women and children that provides greater safety and autonomy, including the ability to make choices that will take them away from violent situations.

We need resource people in communities, such as family violence workers, counsellors, and social supports, as well as adequate funding and capacity, and we need support mechanisms and interventions for the families of women at high risk of violence.

We need attention and focus on youth, including support to develop self-respect and respect for others and ensure access to traditional teachings and parenting role models, using tools such as sports.

We need to ensure women and girls have political, economic, and social power, and that traditional roles are restored.

We need systems and supports that reflect first nation cultures and teachings and ensure that elders are supported and integrated into the solutions.

We need accountability. We need a royal commission to investigate incidents of violence against indigenous women and girls, including the high rates of missing and murdered women.

We now know what needs to be done. We have known for a long time.

When will the government agree to take concrete steps and agree to an inquiry to end violence against aboriginal women?

Adjournment Proceedings

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for giving me the opportunity to restate the commitment of the Government of Canada to addressing this important matter, as expressed most recently in October's Speech from the Throne opening this current session of Parliament.

The government is deeply concerned about the disproportionate level of violence faced by indigenous women and girls in Canada and about the disturbingly vast number of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. This concern is shared by Canadians from coast to coast to coast and I am sure by members on all sides of this House.

Simply put, it is unacceptable that any women or children in Canada should have to face violence in the course of their daily lives. I stand here now to say that using violence against another person is wrong. As parents, we tell our children to find better ways to express anger and frustration. It is even less acceptable when adults who have not learned to take responsibility for their own needs and emotions seek instead to take them out on someone more vulnerable.

I fully agree with the member opposite that concern and words alone are simply not enough. More needs to be done to build on the important work of awareness and prevention of this problem. Public awareness campaigns like "Don't Be That Guy" and "Be More Than a Bystander" and other demonstrations of leadership on this issue, such as the personal pledge to live violence free taken by the chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations, emphasize that there can be no observers in this struggle. Everyone has to play a role in ending violence.

The Government of Canada is keenly aware that leadership through action is needed before more lives are lost and more families and communities are devastated. The government has answered that call for leadership in four ways.

First, using violence against another person is more than socially unacceptable and morally reprehensible; it is a crime. As part of its responsibility for the criminal law in Canada, this government has made a number of changes to ensure that offenders are held accountable for their crimes against others. For example, amendments made by the Safe Streets and Communities Act promote safety and security to ensure that criminals are held fully accountable for their actions through increased penalties for violent crimes, restrictions on the use of conditional sentences and house arrest for serious and violent crimes, and increased penalties for child sexual offences.

Next, the member opposite asked if the government will support the plan of the opposition to take concrete action to end violence against indigenous women.

I would remind the House that the government already announced a plan to take concrete action in this area in October 2010 with the seven-step strategy, totalling \$25 million over five years, to reduce violence against indigenous women and children and to increase community safety as a criminal justice priority.

The current strategy ends in March of next year, and the government has already announced its intention to make renewed efforts in this area.

The current strategy has produced some significant results. They include, first, a new national centre for missing persons and unidentified remains, responding to a resolution of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police asking for federal leadership. The centre has done an incredible amount of work to help improve police responses, launch a new national website to encourage tips, and much more.

Second is extensive work with aboriginal communities toward the development of community specific safety plans. Third is support for culturally appropriate victim services in seven provinces and territories, including for families of missing and murdered aboriginal women. Fourth is support for awareness activities by community organizations and for novel approaches aimed at reducing the vulnerability of indigenous women and girls.

Last is a new online resource for aboriginal communities looking to address specific challenges, which highlights some of the more innovative measures to reduce violence, designed by aboriginal communities in Canada.

These targeted actions were based on recommendations from many of the more than 45 studies, commissions, inquiries, and other reports that already exist on this issue and that emphasize the need for action. These studies and inquiries also form the basis for other work, including significant investments by the Government of Canada over recent years to address some of the underlying factors identified as the root causes of greater vulnerability to violence, including economic development, education, family violence programming, policing, and other relevant areas.

The concrete actions in the October 2010 announcement also complement other coordinated action taken by federal, provincial, and territorial partners working with aboriginal people and other stakeholders. For example, a dedicated police task force has been established in several jurisdictions to address unsolved murders, such as Project Evenhanded and Project E-PANA in B.C., Project KARE in Alberta, and Project Devote in Manitoba.

• (1925)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, these women simply deserve better. They deserve better than excuses and obfuscation from the Conservatives. They deserve better than a laundry list of things that are supposedly being done. We all know here that there are actually no new things being committed, even though we know that there are plenty of things that still need to be done.

We do not need another ineffective committee report and a list of the government's meagre investments that do nothing but prove the harsh funding inequities that are keeping first nation communities down in a colonial framework.

Adjournment Proceedings

Unfortunately, it does not seem like the report coming from the special committee is going to be any better than the one that came out in 2011 in the report of the Status of Women committee on ending violence against aboriginal women and girls. In 2011, I tabled the NDP's dissenting report, which highlighted the actions that were needed.

The NDP is continuing to demand action. We have put on the table plenty of concrete steps to finally get justice for our sisters. Meanwhile, Conservative budgets are telling a completely different story, with no new investments to really solve the problem.

Could the parliamentary secretary confirm that the Conservatives will actually support Motion No. 444 by my NDP colleague for Churchill, which specifically calls for a public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women?

• (1930)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Mr. Speaker, this government shares the outrage of all Canadians that this situation exists. We have committed to concrete action to resolve this issue and we renewed that commitment in the recent Speech from the Throne.

Thanks to the extensive number of reports and recommendations, along with the testimony from expert witnesses at the special committee tasked with studying this issue exclusively, we have a good idea of what needs to change, but the reality is that the causes of the violence are complex, and lasting change will require coordinated and sustained attention from federal, provincial, and territorial governments working together with aboriginal people and other stakeholders to develop more effective and appropriate solutions on a community-by-community basis.

The government will continue to seek further information and advice on what is and is not working. However, in this era of fiscal restraint when tough choices must be made about priorities, we cannot agree that a major inquiry with yet another report is the responsible or proactive way to move forward to end the violence against indigenous women and girls.

I would close with the words of a B.C. report from 2005 entitled "Researched to Death". The report states that "It is important to note the amount of time and the countless years of advocating...have all led to similar findings, directions, and approaches. These approaches...need to be acted upon, rather than becoming just another report on aboriginal women and violence."

The government chooses to focus on taking concrete action now.
[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on a question I asked in the House quite a while ago. I would like to talk about an important environmental issue: endangered species.

I asked the Minister of the Environment about this several weeks ago, but the minister, who is supposed to make wise decisions about environmental issues, unfortunately did not make good decisions about endangered species. Right now, our ecosystems, our biodiversity and our endangered species are not adequately protected.

According to the minister's answer to my question, the Conservative government is very interested in protecting and preserving our rich biodiversity. She also said that she planned to take urgent measures to protect the sage grouse. This bird has been endangered for a long time. Environmental groups had to pester the government, wearing it down until it agreed to protect this endangered species. That is just a drop in the ocean when it comes to the Conservatives' problems. In Canada, there are 518 endangered species. Fewer than 10 of them are protected. That means there is still a lot of work to do.

Back home, if we get less than 10 correct answers out of 500, that is not good. I have an anecdote. My daughter Ariane is very diligent. She always has to have high marks and sometimes when she gets 56 out of 60, she gets worried because she thinks that mark is not good enough. I tell her not to worry, that it is very good. However, less than 10 out of 518 is not very good. In fact, it is bad.

Unfortunately, this government is not taking a leadership role on the environment. As I was saying earlier, according to the report of Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, the Conservative government is currently protecting only 7 out of the 518 species on the list. That is not good. It is a failure.

I will quote a worrisome statement the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development made. Quite recently, he wrote a report on the matter and came to present it to us at the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. The Commissioner mentioned that, to deal with the challenges and meet the government's obligations under the Species at Risk Act, "it will take Environment Canada approximately 10 years to complete its backlog".

That does not include all the other species that could eventually be put on the list in accordance with the Species at Risk Act, because of everything that is happening, such as climate change. A deputy minister criticized the minister by stating that she is not doing enough. Unfortunately, things seem to go in one ear and out the other.

I will now ask the government my question. I am pleased about the person who will be answering and I hope to have a good answer. In light of the long delays, and the fact that new measures are required in order to meet the obligations of the Species at Risk Act, what new measures will be introduced in the next few days? Why are there no measures in the current budget?

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1935)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague will be happy with the answer because no government in Canadian history has done more on the conservation front than this Conservative government. We have clearly demonstrated our commitment to conservation through enforcing existing laws, delivering new initiatives, undertaking research on and monitoring of wildlife, and continuing to fund and improve the partnerships and programs that have been proven to deliver results.

I would like to take this opportunity to list just a few of our accomplishments.

Since being elected in 2006, our government has created two national marine conservation areas, three marine protected areas, three national wildlife areas, two national parks, and one national historic site.

I know the member opposite will be interested to know that our government has significantly accelerated our progress on species recovery planning. In the last three years we have published recovery strategies and management plans for 141 species. This remarkable figure demonstrates our commitment to the protection of species at risk and that we are achieving real results.

Moreover, our government has improved the enforcement of Canada's wildlife laws and has increased the rate of hiring and is training more enforcement officers. These measures have increased our capacity to take action against ivory smugglers and people who illegally import exotic reptiles, for example.

Since 2006, our government has funded co-operative projects that deliver real results for communities and species at risk. Through the habitat stewardship program the government has supported over 2,100 projects across Canada.

Furthermore, as mentioned in our response to the commissioner's report, we are taking action to support conservation and protection of habitats and ecologically sensitive lands. The total area of new lands that we have protected since 2006 is equal to an area twice the size of Vancouver Island. This provides real conservation benefits for Canadians. It is really historic.

While I am up, I would like to ask the member opposite a question. He sits here every day and asks the government to do more for conservation. The good news for him is that in budget 2014 our government not only announced almost \$400 million in new money for Parks Canada, but also its intention to create a national

conservation plan. It also announced important money for groups such as Earth Rangers.

My question to the him is this. Will he start to walk the talk and stop voting against money for conservation and protecting Canada's environment?

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to say that the only thing historic about what the Conservatives are doing is that environmental groups had to take the Government of Canada to court to say that it was not complying with its own laws. That is historic. Only then did the government finally decide to say that it lost the case and that it should comply with its own laws and protect the sage grouse. That is historic.

Another historic thing is that the government has planned on implementing a national conservation plan for the past two or three years. What are the Conservatives waiting for? The 2015 election? Come on. Let us get going with the national conservation plan. Why wait? They announced it years ago. We did our job at the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. Let us get going on this.

As for the money he mentioned, sure there is a lot, but there is very little for protecting endangered species. That is what we are talking about today. Unfortunately there are still more than 500 endangered species for which there is no protection plan. Only seven species currently have a plan. Unfortunately, other environmentalists and citizens will have to take the government to court to get it to fulfill its commitments. That is what I am realizing today.

• (1940)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I provided concrete examples of how our government has and will continue to work with its partners to advance conservation in the interests of all Canadians and the Canadian environment.

We have done this in the past by funding effective programs and projects and building on what works. We will continue to do so in the future by expanding on recent announcements and making new ones.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:40 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, February 25, 2014

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Act	
Mr. Moore (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development)	3145
Bill C-25. Introduction and first reading	3145
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	3145
Petitions	
Gatineau Park	
Ms. Turmel	3145
Canada Post	
Ms. Charlton	3145
Agriculture	
Mr. Cannan	3145
Poverty	
Mr. Hsu	3145
Proportional Representation	
Mr. Hsu	3145
Gatineau Park	
Mr. Saganash	3145
Impaired Driving	
Mr. Stewart	3146
The Environment	
Ms. May	3146
Lyme Disease	
Ms. May	3146
Canada Post	
Mrs. Hughes	3146
Endangered Species	
Mr. Garrison	3146
Gatineau Park	
Mrs. Sellah	3146
Public Transit	
Ms. Borg	3146
Rail Transportation	
Mr. Chisholm	3146
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	3146
Request for Emergency Debate	
Situation in Venezuela	
Mr. Karygiannis	3147
Speaker's Ruling	
The Speaker	3147
Privilege	
Statements by Member for Mississauga—Streetsville	
Mr. Cullen	3147
Mr. Lamoureux	3149
Mr. Hsu	3150
Mr. Van Loan	3150

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

The Budget	
Financial Statement of Minister of Finance	
Motion	3152
Mrs. Hughes	3152
Mr. Dewar	3154
Mr. Woodworth	3154
Ms. Turmel	3154
Mr. Hsu	3156
Mr. Lemieux	3156
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	3156
Mr. Lemieux	3156
Mrs. Hughes	3158
Mr. Hsu	3158
Mrs. Wong	3158
Mr. Woodworth	3159
Mr. Côté	3160
Mr. Hsu	3161
Ms. Sgro	3161
Mr. Shipley	3163
Mrs. Hughes	3163
Mr. Scarpaleggia	3163
Mr. Albrecht	3164
Mrs. Hughes	3165
Mr. Lizon	3165
Mr. Cash	3166
Mr. Hsu	3166
Mr. Calkins	3167
Ms. Adams	3167
Mr. Côté	3169
Mr. Scarpaleggia	3169
Mr. Lunney	3169
Ms. Boutin-Sweet	3169
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	3171
Mr. Hsu	3171
Ms. LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	3171
Ms. Ashton	3173
Ms. Boutin-Sweet	3173
Mr. Galipeau	3173
Mr. Côté	3175
Mr. Easter	3175
Mr. Miller	3176
Mrs. Hughes	3177
Mr. Lamoureux	3177
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	3178

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Yukon	
Mr. Leef	3179
National Energy Board	
Mr. Stewart	3179

Winter Olympic Games	
Mr. Shipley	3179
Canada Post	
Mr. Regan	3179
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Lemieux	3180
Housing	
Mr. Saganash	3180
York Regional Police	
Mr. Menegakis	3180
Retirement Congratulations	
Mrs. Davidson	3180
Homelessness	
Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	3180
Recreational Fishery	
Mr. Sopuck	3181
Rosemont Community Development Corporation	
Mr. Boulerville	3181
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada	
Mr. Anderson	3181
Democratic Reform	
Mr. Easter	3181
Let's Talk Energy Week	
Mr. Trost	3181
Ethics	
Mr. Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	3182
The Economy	
Mr. Armstrong	3182

ORAL QUESTIONS

Democratic Reform	
Mr. Mulcair	3182
Mr. Harper	3182
Mr. Mulcair	3182
Mr. Harper	3182
Mr. Mulcair	3182
Mr. Harper	3182
Mr. Harper	3183
Mr. Mulcair	3183
Mr. Harper	3183
Taxation	
Mr. Trudeau	3183
Mr. Harper	3183
Mr. Trudeau	3183
Mr. Harper	3183
Mr. Trudeau	3183
Mr. Harper	3183
Small Business	
Mr. Mulcair	3184
Mr. Harper	3184

The Economy	
Mr. Mulcair	3184
Mr. Harper	3184
Employment	
Mr. Mulcair	3184
Mr. Harper	3184
Democratic Reform	
Ms. Charlton	3184
Mr. Poilievre	3184
Ms. Charlton	3184
Mr. Poilievre	3184
Ms. Latendresse	3185
Mr. Poilievre	3185
Ms. Latendresse	3185
Mr. Poilievre	3185
Prime Minister's Office	
Mr. Angus	3185
Mr. Clement	3185
Mr. Boulerville	3185
Mr. Clement	3185
Taxation	
Ms. Sgro	3185
Mr. Sorenson	3186
Mr. Dubourg	3186
Mr. Sorenson	3186
Mr. McCallum	3186
Mr. Sorenson	3186
Agriculture and Agri-Food	
Mr. Allen (Welland)	3186
Mr. Ritz	3186
Ms. Ashton	3186
Mr. Ritz	3186
Rail Transportation	
Mr. Mai	3187
Ms. Raitt	3187
Ms. Chow	3187
Ms. Raitt	3187
The Economy	
Mr. Daniel	3187
Mr. Kenney	3187
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Chicoine	3187
Mr. Fantino	3187
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	3187
Mr. Fantino	3187
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Chisholm	3188
Mr. Kenney	3188
Mr. Godin	3188
Mr. Kenney	3188
Agriculture and Agri-Food	
Mr. Goodale	3188
Mr. Ritz	3188

Democratic Reform	
Ms. Bennett	3188
Mr. Poilievre	3188
Canada Post	
Mr. Sullivan	3189
Ms. Raitt	3189
Ms. Perreault	3189
Ms. Raitt	3189
Justice	
Mr. Toet	3189
Mr. MacKay	3189
Prime Minister's Office	
Mr. Byrne	3189
Mr. Clement	3189
Fisheries and Oceans	
Ms. Crowder	3190
Mrs. Shea	3190
Canadian Heritage	
Mr. Falk	3190
Mrs. Glover	3190
Health	
Mr. Côté	3190
Ms. Raitt	3190
International Development	
Mr. Fortin	3190
Mr. Paradis	3190
Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Ms. May	3190
Privilege	
Statements by Member for Mississauga—Streetsville	
Mr. Cullen	3191

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

The Budget	
Financial Statement of Minister of Finance	
Motion	3191
Mr. Donnelly	3191
Mr. Lamoureux	3193
Mr. Albas	3193
Mr. Hawn	3194
Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	3195
Mr. Casey	3196
Ms. Crockatt	3196
Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	3197

Mr. Casey	3198
Mr. Oliver	3198
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	3200
Mr. Regan	3200
Mr. Shipley	3200
Mr. Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	3202
Mr. Lamoureux	3202
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	3202
Mr. Lamoureux	3204
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	3204
Mr. Lamoureux	3204
Mr. Fletcher	3205
Mr. Giguère	3206
Mr. Chisu	3206
Mr. Kellway	3207
Ms. May	3208
Mr. Fletcher	3208
Amendment negated	3209

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Instruction to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs Regarding Bill C-23	
Motion	3209
Motion negated	3210

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Support for Volunteer Firefighters Act

Bill C-504. Second reading	3211
Mr. Larose	3211
Mr. Scarpaleggia	3212
Mr. Komarnicki	3213
Ms. Freeman	3214
Mr. Shipley	3216
Mr. Gravelle	3217
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	3218
Division on motion deferred	3218

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Taxation	
Mr. Hyer	3219
Mr. Saxton	3219
Aboriginal Affairs	
Ms. Freeman	3220
Mrs. Truppe	3221
The Environment	
Mr. Choquette	3222
Mr. Carrie	3223

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