



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, June 2, 2005**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 2, 2005

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*English*]

### WAYS AND MEANS

#### NOTICE OF MOTION

**Hon. Andy Scott (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1) I have the honour to table a notice of a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the Labrador Inuit land claims agreement, which is part of this notice, and I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of this motion.

\* \* \*

•(1005)

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the great honour today to table the government's response to 70 petitions.

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### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, in both official languages, concerning chapter 4, Accountability of Foundations, of the February 2005 report of the Auditor General of Canada. In accordance with Standing Order 109, your committee requests a government response within 120 days.

[*Translation*]

### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

### SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, Employment Insurance benefits paid to Canadians in areas of high unemployment (10% or greater unemployment rate) should be based on either: 1) the best 12 weeks of income in the last 52 weeks preceding the claim; or 2) the best 12 weeks of income since the beginning of the last claim, whichever is shorter.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe you would find consent for the following order:

That at the conclusion of the present debate on today's opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until the end of government orders on Tuesday, June 7, 2005.

**The Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak today. I want to thank the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth, who seconded the NDP motion on employment insurance, for giving such prominence to the employment insurance issue. The problem faced by seasonal workers across the country is so serious as to warrant putting before the House a motion that will be debated all day today.

Let us examine this motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, employment insurance benefits paid to Canadians in areas of high unemployment (10% or greater unemployment rate) should be based on either: 1) the best 12 weeks of income in the last 52 weeks preceding the claim; or 2) the best 12 weeks of income since the beginning of the last claim, whichever is shorter.

### Supply

I believe this is a step in the right direction, but I have to add that it is not what is really needed. Many Canadian workers are aware that I toured Canada in 1998. I have talked about it time and time again in the House of Commons. The purpose of this tour was to see how other parts of the country, besides the riding of Acadie—Bathurst, were affected by this problem.

At the time, the minister responsible for employment insurance said the problem existed in Atlantic Canada and nowhere else in the country. I travelled through 10 provinces and one territory, the Yukon. Everywhere I went, this problem existed.

The problem, as everyone knows by now, was so serious that during the various elections the Liberals would always tell voters that if they voted Liberal, then changes would be made to EI. They did that every time.

I remember one of our colleagues who used to be in the House of Commons, Georges Farrah, the representative for the riding of Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok. His first day at the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, a session the Minister of Human Resources Development attended, he made an appeal to the minister on behalf of the people of Gaspé and Îles-de-la-Madeleine. He said people were unable to qualify for benefits and that the divisor of 14 was the hindering factor for workers.

The current member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac clearly said—and I have the newspaper clippings to prove it—that officials in Ottawa did not understand seasonal workers and that the government needed to make changes to the system.

The former member for Shediac—Cap-Pelé, Bernard Richard, who is now the New Brunswick ombudsman, is someone who is quite respected in that province. One newspaper reported that Bernard Richard demanded that the federal government find solutions to the employment insurance program.

I introduced a bill in the House of Commons after tabling my report on my tour across Canada. The report included 15 recommendations. The Liberals and the Conservatives chose to vote against the bill. I want to thank the Bloc Québécois for voting in favour of it. We fought hard to improve the employment insurance system for seasonal workers.

That said, the following question might be asked today: why take the best 12 weeks in an area with an unemployment rate of 10% or greater? I predict someone will ask that question.

● (1010)

The reason is as follows. Bill C-2 was introduced prior to the 2000 election—I remember it quite clearly and, obviously, so do other members of the House of Commons. Subsequent to that election, we realized that not many amendments had been made. The parliamentary committee had written a report that went beyond Bill C-2. Then it made a number of recommendations that the government completely ignored.

During the 2004 election, a few more minor amendments were made, such as extending the number of weeks by five. We called for additional changes, but we were told that they would be made after the election.

The problems with EI are extremely important. The former Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, struck a parliamentary committee comprising Liberals to travel around the country and identify these problems. After the report was tabled, the current Prime Minister even decided to follow up on this work. This committee still exists, as a matter of fact.

When the committee started to draft its report, the senator from Madawaska, Ms. Ringuette-Maltais, made a dissenting comment to the effect that it did not go far enough. However, the Liberal Party did not share that opinion.

It is our responsibility as members of this House to have parliamentary committees. The report of the Subcommittee on Employment Insurance Funds presented another 28 recommendations in February 2005. The Liberal Party had agreed to use the best 12 weeks. The Liberal members of the committee had even voted in favour of the report, which refers to the best 12 weeks, so that it could be tabled in the House of Commons. However, after the budget was tabled, the minister announced in a press release that she was in favour of the best 14 weeks in regions where the unemployment rate is 10% or higher.

Today is an opposition day, and we are proposing that the House adopt the best 12 weeks instead of the best 14, and we are using the government's own motion to do it. So we hope it will be adopted.

Consider the seasonal regions. We do not choose where we are born. We do not choose our parents. One fine day, bingo, we are here. We are born, and we learn whatever language we are taught. Nature, not us, determines who we are. However, I do think that Acadia, along Chaleur Bay, where I come from, is the most beautiful region in Canada.

My colleague over the way says he might like to move to Quebec in order to have a view of the beautiful St. Lawrence as it flows into the Atlantic. That is not far from where we live, but our cousins in Gaspé have the same problem we do. In fact, when the people of Gaspé and the North Shore invited me to Forestville, there were 2,500 people out in the streets. Workers from the local businesses, business owners and clergy were out to show us that this is no longer a political matter. It is a human matter. It is time the EI problem were addressed.

For Canadians in the regions who have to accumulate 14 weeks to qualify, the divisor is 14. If there are regions where 17 weeks are needed, then the divisor is 17. Yet there are regions where there is high unemployment and 12 weeks are required. Twelve weeks is 420 hours with an average work week of 35 hours.

● (1015)

So why punish these people and tell them the figure will be 14? They are already getting only 55% of their income, so they are being punished twice.

A problem has developed in the southeast of the province, where people work 17 or 18 weeks out of the year. Some 1,500 people there broke the law by stockpiling time. The Liberals understood the problem and settled it by proposing the 14 best weeks, since there are 17 or 18 weeks worked.

But the problem is not limited to this one place. People must be treated the same everywhere. Since the minimum required to qualify for EI is 12 weeks, it is completely normal for those to be the best 12.

People who work in the fishery or forest industry—whether in northern Ontario, Kapuskasing, Hearst, Hornepayne, Manitowadge or White River, or in northern Alberta, or in Prince George, British Columbia—everywhere I went, have the same problems with EI.

This week in parliamentary committee, when we were debating Bill C-280 proposed by the Bloc Québécois, the parliamentary secretary was worried. If money were taken from the employment insurance fund and put into an independent fund, our country could be driven to the verge of bankruptcy. We balanced our budget and paid our debts with it when we had a deficit.

Is it really up to working people who have lost their jobs to pay for the country's deficit and balance the government's budget? They are attacking families, children. They are taking money from these families that could be used to help them buy food and clothing and send their kids to school. They are creating poverty in Canada, and that is totally unacceptable.

•(1020)

[English]

When we speak about employment insurance, it is not only in Acadie—Bathurst. Newfoundland has similar problems. We could talk to the Minister of Natural Resources who said that he has the same problems in Newfoundland because it is a fishing region. It is not the fault of the working people if the fishery stocks have gone down in the Atlantic Ocean. It is not the fault of the fish plant workers if the fishery stocks have gone down around the Gaspé coast. It is not the fault of the working people, with all the high technology now even in the forestry sector, that the woodcutters have been removed. Even there they only have short weeks which are not enough.

Some are under the impression that if we bring it down to the best 12 week of earnings, it will encourage people to quit their jobs and go home. Who is encouraged to quit their job and take 55% of their wages? As a matter of fact, the law is very clear in employment insurance. If people quit their job, they will not have employment insurance because they will not qualify. This is an excuse the government is using to not give employment insurance. It is only an excuse to take that money and use it to balance the budget and have a zero deficit.

I recall in 1986 when the Conservatives moved the account from employment insurance to general revenues. People were on the street because they did not want the change to employment insurance.

The minister responsible for employment insurance in 1996 was Doug Young. When he was in the opposition in 1989, he asked all New Brunswickers to fight back against the changes in employment

### Supply

insurance because they would be a disaster for New Brunswick. In February 1993 Jean Chrétien himself, when he was in opposition and leader of the Liberal Party, said the Conservatives were wrong to make changes to employment insurance because the problem was not the people. He said we should not punish people. He added that the problem was economic development, and we had to create jobs and put people to work.

Sadly, in the fall, when the Liberals were elected, they continued to make the changes that the Conservatives had been doing which was to cut employment insurance. When the Liberals took the money from EI and put it in general revenues, it gave them a way to get money. Then they became greedy. It is not the workers who depend on EI any more. It is the government that depends on EI for all those surpluses. Some \$46 billion of surplus on the backs of workers who lost their jobs is totally unacceptable in this country.

•(1025)

[Translation]

The employment insurance surplus is about \$46 billion. It is no longer working people who depend on employment insurance but the government itself, which needs it to balance the budget and have a zero deficit.

In the case we are talking about, the best 12 weeks, people made arguments such as it would cost too much, be too expensive, cost \$150 million.

For the information of the House and all the hon. members, I asked our researchers to look into this. When we were in parliamentary committee, some people from Human Resources Canada came and gave us some figures because we were pushing for the 12 best weeks out of 52. The best 12 weeks would cost \$320 million.

In the minister's remarks after the budget was tabled, he announced some changes, saying that the 14 best weeks would be used, the number of hours would be reduced from 910 to 840, and one could also have earnings of \$75 a day. The cost would be \$300 million.

If the costs of the 12 best and 14 best weeks are compared, which would be \$320 million compared with \$300 million, the difference is \$20 million and not \$150 million. That is not very much—\$20 million—to help families, children and industry, when they have a surplus of \$46 billion. Just last year, in one year, the government generated a \$3 billion surplus.

I ask my Conservative colleagues, who opposed the recommendations on employment insurance—apart from an independent fund—to take a look at their colleagues from Newfoundland and Labrador and support them too. I ask all my colleagues in the House of Commons and in the Bloc Québécois to support the changes requested in the motion. I ask my Liberal colleagues to do a very honourable thing next week and support the motion before the House of Commons.

I am sure that working people will thank everyone in Parliament, all the political parties, because finally they will have put their political partisanship aside and done something for people in need, for working people.

*Supply*

**Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the NDP member on his motion. What I find unfortunate is that, in the negotiations to sell NDP support to the Liberals, he did not think of this aspect of Canadians' needs he is so valiantly defending at the moment. When he asks for Liberal support I am not sure whether he really thinks he will get it. Indeed, with the Liberals' record for honouring their commitments, I am not sure it is worth the effort to make deals with such a party.

My question is in this vein. Does he really think the Liberals will agree to these changes, when they even reject the changes proposed by the committee?

•(1030)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Bloc colleague for his question.

I can only say, and am very proud to do so, that the NDP managed to get \$4.6 billion from a minority government to help Canadians, through an amendment to the budget. In addition, if Parliament votes in favour of bills C-43 and C-48, we will have an opportunity to pay out this money in order to help people.

Today, we are asking a majority in Parliament, including the Liberals forming the government, to vote on the best 12 weeks rule. My colleague asked me whether I thought the Liberals would accept the changes. I hope so for the sake of the workers. However, it rests on a decision by the members of the House. If they wish to vote against the motion, it will be because they have chosen to, and they will be judged on that. They have before them an opportunity to vote in favour of the best 12 weeks, and by so doing of helping women, children, parents and families.

As I have learned from my past responsibilities as a negotiator, we must proceed one step at a time. Now we are at the step of employment insurance and the best 12 weeks. I call on all parties to support the motion. Canadians will judge Parliament and the political parties on they way they vote.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Acadie—Bathurst for his tireless defence of workers in this country. As we know, the Employment Insurance Act has been a critical factor coast to coast in supporting workers, their families and employers in the community.

The member alluded to the fact that this was a very important measure for workers who are hardest hit in regions with very high unemployment. That takes place coast to coast and is very important for workers. The member also alluded to the fact that there are other necessary changes that need to happen to the Employment Insurance Act to ensure that our workers can rise above poverty in Canada.

I would like to ask the member, what other measures does he think are really important to be addressed in the long run for workers in Canada?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Madam Speaker, that is why the committee made 28 recommendations, one being the number of hours needed to qualify. It totally does not make sense that a person needs 910 hours to qualify for employment insurance. We have people all across the

country who are working in the restaurant industry which is seasonal work. The tourists arrive in the summer and after August, when school starts, many people lose their jobs. It is not easy to find 910 hours of work. The committee recommended to the government 360 hours in order to be fair to the people.

I have said this so many times. It is not the fault of the workers. We do not have any seasonal workers; we have seasonal jobs. There is a difference between seasonal workers and seasonal jobs. I am proud of Canadians. People are not lazy. They do want to work, they do want good decent jobs and they do want to earn a living. However when an employee is told on Friday that he is not needed the following week or in two weeks time, the employee has no control over that. We have a an employment insurance system to help those people.

If we look at the study that was done we see that people are upset with the employment insurance because they do not understand why people who lose their jobs cannot qualify for EI while there is a \$46 billion surplus in the fund, a fund that has a \$3 billion surplus every year. This is totally unacceptable, which why our recommendations go further than the best 12 weeks that we are asking for. At this time we are asking Parliament to support the best 12 week plan because the other one does not make sense.

One would not believe how much people are hurt by the small earnings they take home. Most of the people working in seasonal jobs are working for minimal wages and when they get EI it is less than if they were on welfare. We should be ashamed for treating our workers like that, especially since they and the employers are the ones paying into it. It is not the government. It has been out of it for years and years. The money belongs to two groups, the employers and the employees and they should have some say in it. They are telling us that it should be the best 12 weeks and that the qualifying hours should go down.

We are hoping to go further than that and to bring forward changes for the employment insurance plan at a level that will be acceptable to the labour market in the country

•(1035)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the points raised by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. Seasonal workers are faced with situations that are out of their control, situations having to do with the working conditions in their area. I find it very appropriate that we address this issue today.

But at the same time, I am wondering why this proposal should apply only to those areas where the unemployment rate is greater than 10%. I think this is creating unnecessary inequity. The member estimated the cost of this measure at \$320 million for all affected workers. Incidentally, this was one of the 28 recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

I would like him to tell me: How can he justify creating unfairness, from one area to the other? In areas where the unemployment rate happens to be slightly lower than 10%, the workers would not benefit from this proposal which will mean so much to others.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for this very important question concerning the percentage. I want to put it all together so that we have the best chance of eventually getting the 12 best weeks, as announced. That is why I say that the committee has to continue its work on this.

Nothing, however, can stop the government from changing its mind, listening to the arguments raised in the House of Commons, deciding that the 10% cutoff is unnecessary and eliminating it. But, after the budget was tabled, the minister announced that calculations will be based on the best 14 weeks of 52 in areas where the unemployment rate is 10% or greater. So, I figured, why not 12 weeks, since there had already been a recommendation made about a 12% rate?

So, I did it this way to make sure the odds were in our favour for getting this motion passed. We shall see what Parliament decides and what we can do in committee to restore justice in every area where there are problems with employment insurance.

[English]

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all parties concerning the debate that is scheduled for later this day on the motion to concur in the third report of Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and I believe you would find consent for the following:

That the debate on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, moved by the member for Kitchener—Waterloo, be deemed to have taken place, the question deemed to have been put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to the end of government orders on Wednesday, June 8, 2005.

• (1040)

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** Does the hon. government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Hon. Belinda Stronach (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, as the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, I am proud to be responsible for a department that touches the lives of so many Canadians. Programs that support employment, workplace skills and learning, such as employment insurance, the Canada student loans program and the Canada education savings grant, are all part of this mandate.

These programs all aim to help improve the standard of living and the quality of life for all Canadians by providing workers the support they need to find and to keep work. As such, any motion that deals with helping unemployed Canadians make the transition into employment is of great interest to me and the department that I represent.

### Supply

Before going into this debate on today's motion, let me underline the overall labour market picture and the tremendous gains Canada has made over the last few years.

Canada's 6.8% unemployment rate is well below its peak of 12.1% in 1992. The good news is that all regions of this country have seen a falling unemployment rate. The rate in the Atlantic provinces fell from 15.7% to 10.4%. Quebec's rate fell from 14.3% to 7.9%. Ontario's rate fell from 11.5% to 6.8%. The rate in the western provinces is down from 10.2% to 5.1%.

We now have less long term unemployment than any other G-7 country. Canada has enjoyed significant job growth, faster than any other G-7 country. In 2004, and so far in 2005, the level of employment has risen by close to 280,000 jobs. The Atlantic provinces created 13,000 jobs, Quebec created 51,000 jobs, Ontario created 107,000 jobs and the western provinces created 108,000 jobs.

The labour market is inclusive. Canada's 67.2% labour market participation rate is at a near record level and above the U.S. rate of 66%. The foregoing statistics, in my opinion, are a tribute to all Canadians. As the Government of Canada, we are only one player in the whole labour market equation.

At the same time, we must not forget those areas of the country and those Canadians who are not benefiting to the same extent from the expansion in our economy. As Canadians, we are a much stronger country when we are all pulling together. That is why employment insurance is a valuable program and the reason today's debate is important.

Employment insurance matters to Canadians. It plays an important role in our labour market for millions of Canadian workers, employers and communities across Canada. The EI program provides workers with temporary income support while they look for another job. It also helps clients who cannot work for reasons of sickness, childbirth or parenting, or need to take time off work to provide care and support for a gravely ill family member.

The employment insurance program also provides for active re-employment measures to help clients acquire the skills needed to return to work quickly and to stay employed.

In 2004 and 2005, approximately 635,000 Canadians participated in employment program interventions and a further 50,000 young Canadians participated in the summer career placement program. Over 220,000 Canadians found employment or became self-employed through these measures.

The government is committed to ensuring that EI remains relevant to the needs of Canadians. Let me give some context.

Today's debate is timely as it follows the tabling of the government's response to recommendations by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities dealing with this important national program which have provided us with considerable food for thought. It comes on the heels of the release of the most recent EI monitoring and assessment report that provides us an annual snapshot of how the program is performing.

*Supply*

•(1045)

Given the size and the complexity of the program and its impact on individual workers, communities and our economy, care must be exercised in implementing any changes to employment insurance. A balanced approach is called for so Canadians can have adequate benefits and reasonable entrance requirements while avoiding any changes that could jeopardize our labour market, economy and sustainability of the program.

An excellent way of getting feedback on specific issues is for annual EI monitoring and assessment reports. We need to ensure that EI can continue to serve Canadians in our dynamic labour market as well in the future as it does now.

As we know, the Employment Insurance Act allows the government to implement pilot projects to test new approaches before deciding whether to implement them nationally or permanently.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has proposed that we calculate EI benefits based on the best 12 weeks of earnings over the past 52 weeks. In fact, on February 23, the Government of Canada announced enhancements to the EI program that take into account many recommendations that were brought forward concerning EI. Indeed, one of the pilot projects that we announced in February aims to address the same issue as the best 12 weeks proposal. However, we do not support the motion because we feel the government's approach of a best 14 weeks benefit rate calculation balances the need to ensure income adequacy while maintaining work incentives.

The best 14 weeks pilot project aims to ensure that EI benefit levels are more reflective of full time work patterns for workers who experience weekly changes in their hours of employment and earnings. It is designed to test whether this benefit rate calculation will encourage workers to accept work that could lower their weekly benefit rate and they may otherwise refuse.

The new enhancements also include two additional pilot projects in areas of high unemployment that will test the labour market impacts of reducing the hours new and returning workers need to qualify for EI from 910 hours to 840 hours when linked with employment measures and increasing the while-on-claim threshold to encourage more people to accept work while collecting EI benefits.

At the same time, we also announced extensions to a pilot project that provides five additional weeks of EI benefits which is designed to help address the annual income gap faced by workers with limited work alternatives and transitional boundary measures in EI economic regions at Madawaska-Charlotte, New Brunswick, and Bas-Saint-Laurent-Côte-Nord, Quebec, until October 2006, pending a boundary review.

These enhancements demonstrate the government's ongoing commitment to meet the needs of Canadian workers and regions while maintaining sound management of the program.

These latest enhancements build on past adjustments based on ongoing monitoring of the program to identify areas where some fine tuning may be required. A good example was the elimination of the

intensity rule in 2000, which was not working as had been originally intended.

Another example involved the modification of the clawback provision to make it fairer to low and middle income claimants.

We also adjust to the changing trends in the labour market.

In December 2000 we enhanced EI's ability to help parents balance family and workplace demands by doubling the duration of maternity and parental benefits from six months to one full year, a move that resulted in a significant increase in the number of parents accessing parental benefits.

Alongside our efforts to make adjustments to EI that meet the needs of Canadian workers, premium rates have been reduced for 11 consecutive years.

In 2005 the EI premium rate was reduced to \$1.95 for \$100 of insurable earnings, compared to a rate of \$3.07 in 1994. As a result, employers and employees now pay \$10 billion less in premiums than would have been the case using the 1994 rate.

Our goal is to maintain the sound management of the EI program while ensuring that it remains responsive to Canada's labour market.

We also have to be proactive in meeting the challenges of today's economy. Just the past week, I helped open the Newmarket Human Resource Centre of Canada for Students. I was impressed by the enthusiasm of our young people and our partners in the community, including employers, to help open the doors for young Canadians to help them get over that incredible challenge to finding work, with no experience.

I only point this out because in each community each Canadian is faced with the challenge of accessing and creating opportunities for employment.

•(1050)

Human Resources and Skills Development has been active on many fronts. We know that today's labour market requires Canadians to hone and sharpen their skills so they can remain engaged in the workforce. We know that lifelong learning is a key for each and every one of us.

What about those Canadians who are in seasonal economies, whose jobs are essential for our economy and their skills crucial? The same learning principles apply to all Canadians. The fact is, people change and industries change. Nobody can afford to pretend a situation will remain static.

However, there is another challenge that faces us. What about those Canadians who feel they have been left behind and who perhaps do not have the strong foundations that will allow them to absorb new training? Indeed, the Government of Canada is working with the provinces, the territories, employer groups, labour and the non-profit sector to develop a comprehensive strategy to support learning, literacy and essential skills development.

*Supply*

My colleague, the hon. Minister of State for Human Resources Development, will be a major force in this endeavour, along with the National Literacy Secretariat which is investing \$30 million in collaborative efforts to enhance literacy and essential skills in communities across Canada.

HRSDC has also put in place the aboriginal human resources development and the aboriginal skills and employment partnership to enhance the skills of Canada's aboriginal workforce.

If we accept the need for lifelong learning, it follows that skills development must continue on the job to meet that need. That is why the Government of Canada is also developing a workplace skills strategy aimed at ensuring the Canadian workforce is highly skilled, adaptable and resilient.

By shaping a labour market that is flexible and efficient, the strategy also responds to the needs of employers for productive, innovative and competitive workplaces.

With those objectives in mind, Budget 2005 invested another \$125 million over three years to strengthen apprenticeship programs in Canada, to test new workplace skills development initiatives and to spur discussions on skills issues among business, labour and training leaders.

As a government, we are committed to maintaining and raising the skills level of Canadians. We see this as critical for two reasons: to help individual Canadians find stable and well paying work, good quality, high paying jobs to improve their standard of living and to take part in society; and to secure Canada's economic competitiveness, productivity and prosperity, especially at a time when other leading industrialized nations are investing heavily in the literacy and essential skills of their citizens.

Clearly, we cannot do this alone. We have worked and will continue to work with the provinces and territories as well as stakeholders in the public, private, non-profit and voluntary sector to further boost the literacy and essential skills of Canadians. Literacy and essential skills are nurtured in families, in schools, in the workplace and in communities, with special recognition for the voluntary sector.

As we can see, a great deal has been done across the board to ensure that we are responding to the needs of unemployed Canadians while at the same time looking ahead to the future to ensure that Canadians have the opportunity to develop their skills for this new economy.

While much has been accomplished, still a great deal more needs to be done. Therefore, I call on the members of the House to work with the government as it seeks to ensure that EI can serve future generations of clients as well as it does the current ones. It is only by working together that we can ensure the responsiveness and relevance of this important national program will continue to help Canadians build their skills for a better future and for a better quality of life.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pretty discouraged with the position of the government. I thought it understood the problem, after it made the decision to send the committee across the country to look at the problem affecting our

workforce and seasonal workers. When the committee came back, it recommended paying benefits for the best 12 weeks of income.

I am waiting to see the result of the vote on Tuesday. I am waiting to see if Liberal members will vote for the motion to save their seats in the Atlantic provinces while the rest of them vote against it as they have always done.

The member of Parliament for Beauséjour said in a newspaper article on January 29, 2003:

Rich people hire lawyers and accountants to manipulate the Income Tax Act and poor people manipulate the Employment Insurance Act...These people are at the bottom end of the economic ladder.

Let us be honest here. In the riding of Beauséjour, 1,500 people violated the Employment Insurance Act. Now have to pay the government back. To pay benefits for the best 14 weeks helped the member of Parliament from Beauséjour, but it did not help workers across the country. Everybody knows that.

Will the minister do what she has to do now? She is responsible for the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. Will she apply the laws of our country? Will she go into the riding of Beauséjour and charge the 1,500 people who violated the law?

I had no intention of bringing this up in the House today, but this is not fair. What the Liberal Party did with the best 14 weeks only protected their ridings. It is wrong. I hope the government thinks about this from now until Tuesday. I hope those members change their minds and help working people instead of only helping their own people. Their reputation is on a thin line right now. Why do they not try to save it a bit?

•(1055)

**Hon. Belinda Stronach:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the sincere passion and concern the hon. member has shown for people in his community. I take his comments very seriously.

There has been a lot of consultation over the past while and extensive work has been done by the committee. A report was tabled recently in the House, which the department looked at seriously. A number of improvements have been made.

It is important to look at this in a broader context.

We understand that this is a sensitive issue and that there are areas of the country which have different issues that need to be addressed and we need to be more sensitive to them. It is for that reason that a number of measures have been put in place over the years, but most recently in 2005. We have come up with a strategy which tries to deal with the issue of the best weeks. We have decided that 14 weeks makes the most sense. It is a balanced and fair approach given the fact that this is a new pilot program. We will be testing it over the next three years with a view to looking at how it works and to making improvements.

EI used to be calculated by using the most recent 26 weeks. By going to the best 14 weeks, we feel that it is a balanced approach and that it will address the needs of seasonal workers who face more sporadic working conditions. It is a fair approach.

*Routine Proceedings*

That is not the only thing we are doing. We have looked at other enhancements. In fact, we announced enhancements to look at this in a more comprehensive way. We have made it easier for new workers to reduce the number of hours they must work before qualifying for benefits. We also have taken a look at allowing people to work while on a claim. Therefore, they are encouraged to take up new work. This will allow them to work while receiving benefits.

There are a number of things that we have done. It is important to take a look at the overall package.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for her speech and particularly for the sensible approach she has taken since her appointment as minister to studying this entire file, which she has said is a complex one.

My colleagues have spoken with the minister on several occasions, and we are very pleased at her understanding of seasonal work and seasonal business. I would like to congratulate her and thank her for that.

• (1100)

[*English*]

In my constituency, as the member for Acadie—Bathurst noted, we celebrated the pilot projects that the government announced in February. The seasonal workers and local officials had a party to celebrate this great victory for seasonal employees and employers. The one concern we have is with the implementation date.

There is a great concern that these important measures, all three of them which were included in the budget in February, will not be available in time to benefit workers this season. We were hoping they would all be in place and available to benefit workers in October of this year and not later, as some people had suggested. Could the minister update us on when we can expect to see these three pilot projects fully implemented?

**Hon. Belinda Stronach:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for giving me the opportunity to address this question and again to demonstrate how sensitive we are to the issue. We want to ensure that we look at it in a comprehensive way and focus in on the best 14 weeks program. We are strongly committed to an October implementation date. We are doing everything possible to meet that date. That is how committed we are.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I find it unbelievable that the new minister comes strutting into this House to tell us how pleased she is with the new EI reforms. These new reforms represent \$300 million, whereas \$46 billion has been snatched from the EI fund. I do not see where this is any improvement. I do not understand how anyone can be boasting about reforms that will begin in October. I do not find it pertinent.

There were 28 recommendations. Why are we only discussing a single one today? Why the reduction in numbers?

I cannot understand, either, the attempt by my colleague for Acadie—Bathurst to get the minimum, in keeping with what the

Liberals want. We do not want to give them what they want; we want to see the people get what they want, because this is all about their own money. It is not the Liberals' money, but the money of the workers and their employers. The Liberals are helping themselves to the fund in order to reduce the deficit they themselves created. I am not in favour of that.

On the other hand, it must not be a matter of scattering money left and right and trying to improve the system, while boasting of making improvements when these are made with other people's money. That is perfectly obvious.

Can the hon. member opposite tell me who contributes to the EI fund? Is it the government, or is it the workers and their employers? When someone gives me money, I handle it how I please. But when it is other people's money, I handle it with care and think things through before I use it.

The measures the Liberals plan to put in place are not specific, so I will ask the new minister the following question. Are they going to address all 28 recommendations and not just three? Will the minister settle for scattering a bit of money around in order to show Canadians how nice, how bright, how lovely she is, in hopes that they will behave if they get a little money given to them? A total of \$46 billion has disappeared. Will it be used to create an independent fund?

[*English*]

**Hon. Belinda Stronach:** Madam Speaker, the member expressed that I was satisfied. This is a process of continuous improvement. We have been consulting, looking at ways to improve, and we will continue to do so in the future. A number of very good improvements have been made to strengthen the program. I would be happy to receive any good ideas the member may have and I look forward to working with him.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, further discussions have taken place between all parties concerning the debate that is scheduled for later this day on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the debate on the motion to concur in the Third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, moved by the Member for Kitchener—Waterloo, be deemed to have taken place, the question deemed to have been put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to the end of government orders on Wednesday, June 8, 2005.

• (1105)

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. member:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak today on the important subject of employment insurance. The motion that has been put forward by the New Democratic Party deals with some of the challenges facing people in areas where seasonal unemployment is a major issue in areas of high unemployment. It is worth noting that the motion put forward does represent a dramatic change in the position of the New Democratic Party. Its previous position was one of best 12 weeks everywhere in Canada, whether the unemployment rate was high or low. We had great concerns with that kind of approach.

I should advise you that I will be splitting my time with the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

The problem of course is that a best 12 weeks approach does invite some abuse. In areas of low unemployment, for example, in the construction sector in Alberta or Ontario and places where we do not have the same kind of challenges, one can easily see people using the system and working the system to rack up their hours and use other weeks where there were very few hours, in order to maximize benefits when there was not a real and legitimate change.

There is no doubt that the existing system does not work. That is why this issue is being raised. The existing system does not work for seasonal workers. In fact, it invites people to work the system. It invites people to engage in abuses. It invites people, unbelievably, to say no to work, and to say no to taking on hours. We do not want to have a system that does that. Clearly, the approach that has been put in place by the government is flawed to that extent.

However, does the suggestion on the table solve that problem? That is not entirely clear. Certainly, by focusing it on areas of higher unemployment is a positive development and that is something which addresses some of the problems. However, is there a basis by which we say 10% is the right number? Should 9% be the right number, or 8% or perhaps 11% or 12%? We do not see the basis why that is the number that has been chosen.

There is some arbitrariness there and there are also very real inequities that may result where, for example, houses next door to one another by virtue of being in a different postal code have entirely different rules by which they operate. Some of those issues need to be examined to see if this is the fairest and best way to resolve the problems that exist in the proposal that is in front of us.

In addition, we have to look at the bigger question. Why do people not have jobs and why is there no work? That is where the Liberal government has more dramatically failed Canadians. By far and away the best social policy, the best form of employment

### Supply

insurance, is an ongoing job, a job people can count on, rely on and go to every day. That is certainly the kind of policy we wish to see in place, one that encourages people to work, that encourages people to have jobs, and that creates an environment where those jobs get created.

One reason why there are no jobs is because the Liberal government has for the past decade consistently put a tax on jobs. Liberals have taken \$46 billion from workers and employers over the past 10 years, more of it from employers because the ratio is 1.4 to 1. They have taken this from employers and workers and taken it out of the money that was paid into the employment insurance system. Those individuals and businesses thought that they were paying those premiums, so that people could rely on the safety net. If they ran into trouble, they would rely on the support and the training that would come from employment insurance.

In fact, the Liberal government over 10 years took \$46 billion of that insurance money, and diverted it to other purposes and spent it on other things. It became nothing more than a tax. It was a theft of those dollars from hardworking Canadians, and hardworking entrepreneurs and workers who had in good faith put forward that money, not to be taken by the government for its priorities. We have seen with the sponsorship program and other things what those priorities really were. Liberals have spent it there instead of focusing it on helping those workers and helping to create jobs.

The Liberals have suppressed job creation. They have reduced the number of opportunities. They have increased the need for people to have to turn to employment insurance as their safety net and their reliance.

• (1110)

We have to put an end to this kind of job tax. We have to look at whatever opportunities we have to reduce the premiums on employers and employees. One of the things we in the Conservative Party have recommended very strongly is that there be fairness between the businesses creating the jobs and the workers.

For example, if workers have paid in excessive employment insurance premiums on an individual basis they would get a rebate, yet the matching funds that businesses paid in would not be rebated. We put forward a very reasonable suggestion across the board, which was supported by the major stakeholders on the business side and which would allow those overpayments to be returned in as fair a way as possible and was efficient by averaging out.

That was better than nothing. Employers were willing to live with that. They did not want to look at a big bureaucracy. They just wanted some fairness. This government has turned its back on the people who create those jobs. This government is not interested in job creation. This government is really interested in simply taxing small businesses, the entrepreneurs, the people who, through their sweat, toil and effort, create jobs. It is taxing those jobs out of existence. It will not respond on that front. That is simply unfair.

We have seen the government consistently use the employment insurance system for things that it was not designed for. For example, the government uses it for compassionate care. We all think that it is a positive thing to provide for compassionate care leave. It is something that is important.

### Supply

It is a positive social program advancement, but there is a very real problem in that many Canadians, even those who pay into employment insurance, are not eligible, and of course those who are self-employed by definition are not eligible for that kind of compassionate care leave. Yet that is the way the program is delivered. The result is an inequity and an unfairness between different Canadians. Effectively, the Government of Canada has created a two tier compassionate care system.

When we realize that compassionate care is really a way of encouraging and inviting individual Canadians to contribute to the health care of their families, to supporting their health care and providing them with quality health care, this is in fact a form of two tier health care that the Liberal Party has introduced.

Beyond that, we find that the way compassionate care leave has been operated by the government is very unfair. It produces all kinds of inequities. I know the House will hear from some other members of the Conservative Party later today about those flaws.

When we look to solve some of the problems in the employment insurance system, these are some of the things that we think we should see solved. We think there are all kinds of problems that need to be resolved.

Employment insurance is not working for people. It is not working for workers in regional areas that are facing high rates of unemployment, but it is not working even for people in areas where business is strong, where jobs are strong and where the economy is strong, because of the unfairnesses within. The biggest unfairness of all is the fact that the Liberal government continues to overtax workers and businesses through high premiums and to take away their opportunity to create jobs and contribute to their own well-being. That includes seasonal workers. They, too, are being overtaxed by a system that makes it tougher for them to get ahead and stand on their own two feet.

In summary, we think that while there is a need for changes to the program and some constructive suggestions have been made here, there are still many questions that remain unanswered.

For example, we want to know how much a change like this would cost. How much would it cost the system? How much it would cost employers and workers? Unbelievably, we do not know the answer to that question. When we put that question forward at committee the Bloc, the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party all voted against a resolution to indicate what the cost of changes like this would be.

Thus, members of the House, the decision makers in this country, are compelled through the collusion of the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc to make these decisions with our eyes closed, with no awareness of cost, with no awareness of what this will cost workers and businesses in Canada. That is asking us to do a lot. It is asking us to buy a pig in a poke, to make a change when we have no idea what the cost will be. For me, that seems to be a risky jump to ask us to make.

We want to see real help. We want to see real improvements to a system that does not work. We have on the table a suggestion for some changes that may do that. There are some real problems with these changes. Would it be better than the system we have now or

not? It is very difficult for us to make that decision right now without the information from the government because of the NDP's refusal to allow that information to come forward.

• (1115)

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Madam Speaker, as we talk about this question before the House today, I am sure my colleague would agree that when the department of human resources representatives came to the parliamentary committee on human resources when we were doing the report and we spoke about the best 12 out of 52 weeks, the number we received was that it would cost \$320 million. He will receive a letter from me this week and all members will get a letter from research telling us that it will be a \$320 million cost for the best 12 weeks.

Now, with the change that the government has proposed, the best 14 weeks, plus the 910 hours to qualify going down to 840 hours, plus the \$75, it is a cost of \$300 million. We do not even have to use a calculator. If the other plan of the best 12 weeks would cost \$320 million and the best 14 weeks would be \$300 million, that means a difference of \$20 million, and even less because we are not talking about the number of hours. It is even less. That information comes from the research department and the department that reported to our committee when we were speaking about this particular clause itself.

The numbers are there. At the same time, the member is saying that people quit their jobs just to abuse the system. I disagree with that. I have more respect for the people. After that member, I would like to hear from his Conservative colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador on whether he accepts that the people just abuse the system. The problem is that the government does not understand seasonal work. We have to help those people.

Is the member going to support the motion? Is the Conservative Party going to support the motion or say no to the Atlantic region?

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** Madam Speaker, I am amused at the comment made by the member for Acadie—Bathurst that he respects the workers. It is the member for Acadie—Bathurst who told me that people turn down work because it does not allow them to maximize their claims and that is why this needs to be changed. I am very puzzled by the fact that he told me it is why we should support this. I repeated that here in the House and now he says it is a disrespectful thing to do. I will be more cautious in the future about repeating what the member for Acadie—Bathurst says.

As for the cost, while the member for Acadie—Bathurst may have his opinion, we asked for the Department of Finance to provide those numbers and a detailed analysis of what every change would cost. At committee, the member for Acadie—Bathurst, together with the Liberals and members of the New Democratic Party, voted to keep that from happening. To now rely on hearsay and news releases elsewhere and doing one's own math based on that to me is not the analysis from the Department of Finance which we asked for and which was turned down.

We have to make decisions in an informed fashion. Sadly, we do not have that information.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to respond to the comments made by my Conservative colleague. Naturally, we do not oppose the NDP motion, although we find it falls short compared with the 28 recommendations recently proposed by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

It falls short because, as we know, the Liberals have taken a little over \$45 billion from the EI fund in recent years, partially destroying it. In our regions, unemployment has been rampant for over a decade now, and the program has created numerous exclusions.

I come from a rural region. There are many seasonal workers in Berthier—Maskinongé; they work on wildlife preserves, in the hotel industry, forestry and other sectors. By destroying the EI program, the Liberals have prevented many of them from accumulating enough weeks to qualify for EI benefits on an annual basis, thereby forcing them to apply for social assistance.

Since the federal EI program is inadequate, Quebec has to meet the needs of these workers with a social assistance program intended for income security recipients. This reduces people to poverty. So, clearly, this motion is inadequate.

To respond in part to the comments of our Conservative colleague, I believe that the program needs to be improved. Our constituents want to work. It is not true that they are not looking for work, but, at present, there are not enough jobs in our communities. There are many seasonal jobs, and we need a EI program. As the House knows, the EI fund has money in it; it just needs to become an independent EI fund.

I want to ask my Conservative colleague a question. How can he say that people do not want to work? In our regions, in Quebec, people want to work and they are entitled to an improved EI program.

• (1120)

[English]

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** Madam Speaker, the concerns raised by my friend from the Bloc and Mr. Godin are concerns raised by their colleagues at committee, where they said—

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** Order, please. I am sure you meant to say the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** Yes, Madam Speaker, it is the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

The concerns they raised at the committee were that the structure is such that people are discouraged from taking those short weeks and short days of work because it minimizes their return on the averaging basis. That is why they wanted a change to the 12 best weeks. Those are the concerns they explained to justify this change. That is where that comes from, so if there is a concern it is a concern they must raise with their colleagues.

*Supply*

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, discussions have taken place and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

[Translation]

That, notwithstanding the Order made March 11, 2005, in relation to its study on Canadian feature film industry, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be authorized to travel (a) to Vancouver from June 8 to 10, 2005; and (b) to Halifax from June 5 to 6, 2005, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion

**Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in the debate this morning, not because it is a motion put forth by the NDP or by any party, but because it is an issue that should be debated here in the House, but not necessarily by this narrowly focused motion. I do not say that to demean the motion, which is a very important one, but perhaps a good wide debate on the whole issue of employment insurance would lead to more understanding.

One of the things I have learned since I came here is that in order to get anything done, we have to build supports. We have a huge country. There are areas that are extremely rich where people do very well and where unemployment is unknown. There are other areas where because of history, because of geography, because of the resources that have been destroyed over the years, people are eking out a living, as did the people who came here five centuries ago.

We cannot make blanket rules for people across the country. People who are used to living in a certain area have tunnel vision to a certain extent because that is all they see. It is difficult sometimes for people to understand what it is like in areas where conditions are different. By having these discussions, by talking within our own groups, within our caucuses and here in the House, we get a better understanding of the concerns and needs of people across the country.

### *Supply*

One of the most misunderstood issues in this whole country is employment insurance. On one side there are people who, without some form of insurance payments, would not be able to exist. In other areas there are people who work all the time and contribute to a program from which they have never drawn.

The first year I worked, I was 16 years of age. I am slightly older than that now, as members know. I have been fortunate in that I have never had to draw employment insurance, but that is not true of many people around me, friends, family, people in my province and people across the country. We live in this diverse country where people's needs change dramatically from area to area.

Over the years I have had discussions with the member who moved the motion. We share many common concerns. He represents an area where people are hurting. I did, although most of it has been taken away now. We should not generalize. Just because we represent an urban area, and the unemployment rate in our region as given out by Statistics Canada is 2% or 5%, it does not mean that within that geographic area people are not having trouble finding employment. People in the areas of highest employment in this country cannot find jobs for a number of reasons, lack of training, lack of skills, lack of opportunity in their field of training, or whatever. It is a problem everyone experiences, but more so in areas where there is seasonal employment at best.

There is one thing that concerns me about the issue. The member makes it sound as if it is so important, and I agree it is, but I have not heard him explain why, when his leader did a deal with the Prime Minister to support the government and keep it in power, this issue was not one of the ones listed. They talked about money for the environment, training programs, affordable housing and foreign aid, but there was no mention at all of the employment insurance program. I think the member has a little bit of explaining to do. If this issue is so important to the member and his party, why was it not a priority in the discussions? Having said that, it is a very important issue.

• (1125)

I am going to concentrate on the fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador. I see the member for Random—Burin—St. George's. He knows full well from where I am coming as he is in the same type of situation. Our areas depended on the fishery. In many small fishing communities some people fished and others worked in fish plants.

We had the richest resource in the world. It has been practically wiped out. In many parts of the member's riding there were plants that worked 52 weeks of the year. People had problems getting Christmas and New Year's off because of the amount of product that was being landed and needed to be processed.

Today many of these areas have no processing facilities. They have been closed. Some people have gone to Alberta or Ontario but there are always those who have been left behind, who cannot leave for all kinds of reasons, because of their age, their lack of training, or they have invested everything at home. They have to stay and depend upon a few weeks of work each year.

Right now if we took the crab out of Newfoundland there would be very little work in the fishing industry. That resource is caught in a few short weeks. This means that the thousands and thousands of

people who work in the fishing industry year round are now limited to a very few weeks of work.

Other species are caught intermittently and there are five or six, or eight to ten weeks of peak employment. Then there are a couple of days here, a day there and a few hours somewhere else. The way the old system worked is that the last 12 or 14 weeks were averaged out to determine how much employment insurance a person received. The partial weeks, days and hours cut into the amount. A few years ago the system was changed to put on a limit of \$225 or something like that, and anything below that was not counted.

Many of these people work for very low wages, \$8 to \$10 an hour, especially at the non-unionized plants. Some work for even less. Some work for minimum wage.

We have to realize that the unemployment rate generally has not changed in years. The minimum wage keeps going up but the unemployment rate has not changed. People are earning the same as they earned years ago and they only get 55% of their income. If people make \$400 a week and unemployment insurance is averaged out at their top wage, that means they get a little over \$200 a week. If partial weeks and days are thrown into that, they are down to less than \$200, probably \$100 a week. Can someone tell me, in this day and age how can anybody feed a family and keep a household going on \$150 to \$200 a week?

That is why the member has brought forward this motion. I notice the government just responded to a report and is basically saying it is going to do a pilot project for three years in areas of high unemployment, 10% or above, which is exactly what the member is saying. It is going to pick the best 14 weeks and see how it works. I think that is laudable. The government came out recently with this three year pilot project for the best 14 weeks. I am not sure why the member is pushing for a change immediately to drop it to 12.

I know that going from 14 weeks to 12 weeks is going to make some difference. However, one of the things we also have to be very careful about is that a lot of people who pay into the program and never take out benefits look upon those who draw in areas such as mine as always taking. We fought that battle here in relation to our resources. We do not want people to get turned off completely about supporting programs for those in need. We have to walk before we run.

The whole issue of unemployment insurance has to be revisited certainly in areas where our resources are diminished, mainly because government has given them away, destroyed them, or has not looked after them. We are sitting on \$40 billion. Why are people not able to find work anyway when we have that kind of money to invest in training and infrastructure? Why is Harbour Breton closed and people are looking for help and there is \$40 billion floating around?

*Supply*

•(1130)

There are a lot of unanswered questions. Can this motion solve them all? In light of what government is doing ties in. Is government willing to drop it another couple of weeks to make it a little better for people? I guess we will find out as we hear the speeches.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Madam Speaker, since being here I have enjoyed debating with the hon. member, learning about his region. It has been very important to get an understanding not only about the complex array of issues he deals with but also the social environment that the hon. member represents.

He was a little critical of our party in terms of Bill C-48 and getting changes to the budget and not including this measure. I remind the hon. member that the Conservative Party did not even vote on the first budget. Had the Conservatives voted against the budget, there would have been an election. They chose not to vote at all. A couple of members may have broken from the party ranks. They did not vote at all. Their leader went outside this chamber and praised the budget as being a Conservative budget. However, it had no improvements of significance for workers. They are supporting that budget bill right now but not our amendments.

We admit that our amendments are not complete, but there are only 19 of us. We did our best to at least get a few issues resolved to make a better budget.

I would like to ask the hon. member right now if he is going to be supporting this very important motion. It is a modest motion that actually creates an opportunity. We do not have to go back in time and debate things. We could make a difference right here today by passing this motion. Could he convince his leader and other members of his party who are speaking against it here today to support it? Would he be able to convince them that we could effect the changes right now and not bicker about what happened in the past?

•(1135)

**Mr. Loyola Hearn:** Madam Speaker, there were certainly a number of issues there.

One of the things I will assure the member that I have done and continue to do is to make sure that my party fully understands where I am coming from and the condition in which my region is, whether it be good or bad, the resources we have, the potential we have, et cetera. That is quite evident in the support we have on major issues, such as the overfishing issue, the offshore accord and other issues like that.

He mentioned our party did not vote during the budget process. He is probably thanking us quietly for not doing that because if we had, we would have been into an election and I am not sure whether the member and some of his colleagues would be here right now. We did not vote because our vote would have killed the government. Nobody wanted an election at the time. Of course Gomery had not peaked, and there was not the pressure then that there is now.

The member went on to say that his party's amendments gave workers certain rights. He did not even talk about the employment insurance issue and the workers as such. Most of it was on international issues.

The main concern here, and the member knows this because two of his colleagues in answers to questions I asked admitted to it, is that the money will probably never see the light of day. It will only be delivered if the surplus reaches \$2 billion and I understand that will not be determined until August 2006. Then there would be negotiations, et cetera.

His own colleagues said in the House that they do not trust the government. I do not trust the government. He does not trust the government. They made the point. I congratulated the speakers originally on that and I will congratulate the party for making the point that there are needs in this country, absolutely. But all they did was fall for a ploy from government. They were bought off, their support, to keep a corrupt party in power so that they could continue to throw money around the country, but their input into it was minuscule.

We have said in the House that this issue is of extreme importance right across the country, but specifically to certain regions. Whatever has to be done to make sure that this overall issue is corrected, that the money that is paid into that fund is used for the benefit of the people who should be deserving of this should be done. However, we are not going to see it in the present government.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Madam Speaker, we have before us a motion presented by an hon. member of the NDP. We will support the motion even though it really does not go far enough. The purpose of the motion is give back to the unemployed a small part of what has, there is no denying it, been stolen from them over the past few years.

I am supporting this motion, but it is as if those watching us had had all their furniture stolen from their house in their absence—all their belongings, electronic equipment, the entire contents of their home—and someone said, “I know who did it and I will make sure he returns the cutlery.” I am not against the fact that your stolen cutlery will be returned. I just think it is a shame that the person who knows who the thief is has no other recourse than to ask “Could you please return the cutlery?” This seems quite wrong to me.

Despite good intentions, the NDP has put the House in an odd situation. The unemployed have had \$47 billion stolen from them—these are the real figures, which everyone recognizes—by the government since 1994, since it cut benefits. The unemployed have been denied access to the plan with the comments “You are not entitled, because you have not accumulated enough hours. You are young, you need 900 hours and you have accumulated only 600, so you are not entitled. You cannot do this; you cannot do that. In one region, you can have this, in another, you cannot have that”.

The government has repaid part of Canada's debt on the backs of the poorest families and society's neediest people. That is unacceptable. Every single member in this House should be scandalized at the government's attack on the most disadvantaged, people who lose their jobs, saying “Here is a good group from whom I can get billions of dollars to pay off the debt”.

### Supply

A normal government might be expected to go after the richest and the biggest businesses, which often succeed in evading taxes in various ways and to get those who earn a little more and enjoy a standard of living well above the average to contribute. However, that is not the case, because, since 1994, the Liberal government has preyed on the poor who lose their jobs. That is the fact of the matter.

Today, the big gift from the NDP is one of the 28 recommendations in the report from the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. In that committee, the members said, "That makes no sense. Here are 28 things that have to be carried out if justice is to be done to those who lose their job". The NDP picked one and only one. What's more, it abridged it.

I have to say to them—and maybe hurt their feelings—that if we no longer recognize them, if we no longer recognize their principles, the unemployed—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Michel Gauthier:** The member is right to cry. He will cry much harder still in the next election when the unemployed realize that they were shamelessly abandoned. The NDP has turned its back on the unemployed. Today, to ease its conscience, it is presenting a minor motion to restore a small advantage to a limited group of people, something which, however, the government has almost agreed to already. It has been improved and today the NDP is easing its conscience.

Madam Speaker, do you know why it has done this? Because in the halls of this Parliament, people are saying that the NDP abandoned the unemployed in the deal it struck with the government. Now, we have the Liberal government and its left, NDP, wing. That is who we are dealing with.

● (1140)

The NDP abandoned the workers for its own political benefit. This is unacceptable.

I thought I had seen everything, that the government was the only one capable of such injustice toward the unemployed. We see today that the NDP is joining forces with the government not only in order to keep it in power, but also in terms of how it treats those who lose their jobs.

During the throne speech debate, we, the leaders of the political parties, had a discussion, and we came to an agreement. Everyone agreed to have the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities redo the work in order to improve the EI program. As a result, it issued the 28 recommendations. Even the NDP voted in favour of them, as did a number of Liberal and Conservative members. Everyone agreed to help the unemployed. Everyone said that it made no sense and that something had to be done. Now that the report has been released, I get the feeling that the Bloc Québécois is the only one still in favour of these 28 recommendations.

The NDP member who is proposing the motion bases the benefits on the best 12 weeks. If the committee's resolution were taken in full, that is to say, if benefits were calculated on the basis of the best 12 weeks of income, 470,000 unemployed people in Canada would be

helped. That is a lot of people. It would cost \$320 million, or about one-quarter of the surpluses not of 2002, 2003 and 2004, but just 2005. In other words, one-quarter of the money that the government will save once again on the backs of poor people, of the money stolen from the unemployed, would be paid back to help 470,000 unemployed people.

Well, the NDP proposes more than that. It has decided that this will be in areas where the unemployment rate is more than 10%. Can anyone tell me what is the matter with the NDP? How can they advocate for people who have no work and no voice, vote in favour of motions and amendments to help the unemployed, always talk the same talk, and then introduce a motion in the House which is one of the committee's 28 recommendations that the NDP has been careful to water down by applying it only to areas where the unemployment rate is 10% or more? In doing this, the NDP proves that it has chosen to abandon the unemployed not only at the time of its historic agreement to keep the government in power but also by cutting back the demands of unemployed groups, of the Sans-chemise movement, of people fighting to recover their rights and their money. It is unworthy of a party that calls itself social democratic to take the same path as this government.

I knew that the NDP did not want an election and was absolutely intent on keeping this government in power—a government literally crushed by scandal—but not to the point of turning its back on many of its supporters, on people who count on us, who need our support, who need spokespersons here in Parliament. I never thought the NDP would sink so low.

I do not know whether it is the euphoria of power that has turned the heads of the NDP members. Maybe they are not accustomed to moving in the corridors of power or numbering among those people who have decided to keep this government in office.

● (1145)

Maybe it went to their heads. In any case, it has made them forget their principles and it is quite sad.

The committee of MPs asked for a salary calculation over a 12-week period everywhere. A Liberal senator made a report and she asked for the same thing, a calculation based on the best 12 weeks. The Liberals say they will use the best 14 weeks in areas where the unemployment rate is 10% or greater. The NDP say they are fighting for the unemployed and asking for the best 12 weeks in areas where the unemployment rate is 10% or greater.

We are not going to play this game. We cannot sacrifice the rights of one group of people, like the unemployed, to play politics and try to show that no, we have not completely forgotten them. When the NDP made its deal with the government and the Prime Minister bought that party's vote for \$4.5 billion, can anyone listening tell me why the NDP did not put on the table, as a condition for keeping this scandal-ridden government in power, an overhaul of the employment insurance system? As long as it was for sale, it could have at least gotten fair market value, in other words, the price of justice for those who lose their employment.

*Supply*

No, the NDP thinks it conducted a great negotiation, made major gains, and did extraordinary things. It is part of the development of this country, but it has abandoned the unemployed. You have abandoned the unemployed and that is unacceptable.

The unemployed and the jobless coalitions will remember. All those who believed you, and believed the Prime Minister and the ministers, during the last election campaigns when promises and commitments were made, those who were told that, yes, something was going to be done to correct the injustice done to them, all those people who believed the government, have been deceived. All those who believed the NDP have also. They have obvious confirmation of it.

I will indicate in closing that we will be supporting the motion. We cannot help but be in agreement with any improvement, no matter how small. I will return to the example I gave at the beginning, since it seems not to have been understood. The government has cleared out everything in the house and now the NDP is offering to return the cutlery. Are we going to say no to that? No, we are not, but we would like to see the unemployed get back everything that belongs to them, everything that has been stolen from them.

There was no possibility of the Bloc Québécois voting in favour of this government's budget without the express condition we set before, during and after the budget. We are going to vote against this budget right up to the end, because it does not contain any EI reform. The unemployed and the Sans-chemise have a voice here in the person of the Bloc members, and we will not sell out our support for any political advantage, no matter what it is.

We believe in the unemployed, we believe in justice, and we will stand firm. Either one believes in justice, or one claims to believe in it and then does what the NDP did, prostrates oneself before the government in order to be up close and personal with power. But the honeymoon will soon be over.

• (1150)

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend from Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean for his fine speech and the compliments he sent my way.

This member has the gall—the guts even—to rise in the House of Commons to lay such a burden on 19 MPs who managed to squeeze \$4.5 billion out of the federal government to help students who are in debt and homeless people in need of a place to live. We will get blamed for that.

But were was the Bloc Québécois when we were negotiating with the government to improve the employment insurance plan? Who travelled the country to meet with workers? Who went to Rivière-au-Renard and even met with workers in a cathedral in the Gaspé? Who went to Forestville and joined the workers and employers who were demonstrating in the street to be eligible for employment insurance?

When we had the chance, we negotiated with the minority government. The Bloc Québécois wanted elections to be called and chose to team up with the Conservatives, who are against employment insurance. They should be ashamed of themselves. The member did not even stand up and address the people of Canada

and Quebec with a straight face. The Bloc members have not done justice to their people.

We at least put forward a motion today to base calculations on the best 12 weeks. Bill C-280, introduced by the Bloc Québécois, deals with only one thing: an independent EI fund. Why did the Bloc not introduce a bill covering all the recommendations, as the hon. member said? This is a tiny bill dealing with only one thing. Where was the Bloc Québécois?

I introduced a bill dealing with all the recommendations, but it was defeated by this Parliament. Now, I am moving a motion to try and get a little something for the workers. I am sure that those listening to us today know that we have their well-being at heart. If the Bloc Québécois is ashamed of the work done by the NDP, it should vote against the motion. Pardon my French, but they should stop sucking up wherever and whenever it pleases them.

• (1155)

**Mr. Michel Gauthier:** Madame Speaker, people have witnessed an outburst of sincerity in the past few minutes. However, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst should have had this outburst in his party, when his leader announced that the 19 votes of the NDP were being sold to keep a government in office that is rotting in corruption. The NDP sold its 19 votes for \$4.5 billion. Of that money, not a cent goes to the unemployed in Quebec or Canada.

Today we are treated to an outburst in the House to the effect that the Bloc Québécois has not done its work and that the NDP, on the other hand, defends the unemployed. The member for Acadie—Bathurst should have had his outburst in his caucus, when his leader announced that he had sold his own vote and that of the 18 other party members, to be bought by the government. The Liberals, more than any other party, have stolen from the unemployed.

Reference was made earlier to the Conservatives. No government in this country has robbed the unemployed more than the Liberals.

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Michel Gauthier:** Have they forgotten? The figure of \$47 billion is involved. The NDP members are blindly defending the Liberal Party. The unemployed realize the NDP is overcome by the smell of power.

The NDP members should listen to the Quebec president of the Liberal Party of Canada. He advised holding one's nose and voting for the Liberal Party. So, we should hold our noses and do like the NDP and betray the unemployed.

*Supply**[English]*

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Madam Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc seems to have picked up the Conservative rhetoric rather nicely in the sense of saying that somehow the New Democratic Party votes were bought because we negotiated a deal for a better budget for Canadians that saw more dollars for affordable housing and more dollars to go into a pension fund to assist workers. It is not the ultimate and best budget but it is better than what was there. More dollars will go into foreign aid, which the Bloc's critic greatly supported, but I guess it is a different tune now. More dollars will go into improving the environment and the sustainability of the environment. Somehow the Bloc has been caught up in the Conservative rhetoric that that is buying votes.

I say to the Bloc members that they should go to Quebecers and tell them that the NDP got more money for affordable housing, more money for a pension fund, more money for foreign aid and more money for Kyoto, instead of the garbage in here of trying to get rid of the government and to go back into an election for their own purely self-serving purpose.

● (1200)

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Michel Gauthier:** Madam Speaker, I need to explain something very important to the hon. member once again.

I, too, did a tour of all the regions in Quebec before the budget. The Bloc Québécois said, "We will vote against this budget if the Liberal government does not give the unemployed their due". During the budget debate, the Bloc Québécois said, "We will vote against this budget if the Government of Canada does not give the unemployed their due". During the negotiations when the NDP sold its soul to the Liberal Party, we told the Prime Minister, "We will not support your budget if you do not give the unemployed their due". The Bloc Québécois is saying today, "We cannot agree to support a government, a budget or any motion whatsoever that does not give the unemployed their due".

We believe in the cause of the unemployed. We talk about it all the time and take advantage of every opportunity to help these people. The NDP says it got a good budget, but out of the \$4.5 billion not one cent was allocated to the unemployed. In all fairness, can you explain to the unemployed why not a single penny of your \$4.5 billion was allocated to them? That is what the Bloc wanted, that is what the Bloc wants, that is what the public wants and that is what we will get.

*[English]*

**Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it disheartens me tremendously to hear the comments from the Bloc Québécois member of Parliament from Quebec.

What he probably does not tell his constituents and the people of Quebec is that right now in Canada we stand astride and on top of all the OECD countries in terms of economic performance. Right now we have the second lowest unemployment rate that we have had by point one-tenth of a per cent in 30 years. Our economy is humming and it is working very well. As a result of that, we were able to produce a tax base that, in conjunction with the NDP, has allowed us to invest money into many different things that Canadians care

about, such as children, defence, housing, health care and other social programs that are critically important.

It is also very sad that the member probably does not mention to his constituents and to Quebecers that the best hope for the French language in Canada is for Quebec to remain in Canada, not as a separate country or a separate entity, but as part of the family of provinces that make up our beautiful country.

I find the member's rhetoric very rich because we know what they say about the Bloc Québécois members. They say, "Québec est ma passion, Canada est ma pension".

*[Translation]*

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** The hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean has less than 30 seconds to respond.

**Mr. Michel Gauthier:** Madam Speaker, I know that you will afford me as much leeway as the members who questioned me.

What puzzles us in Quebec, whether in the riding of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean or in other ridings, is that the government boasts about promoting economic development by cutting benefits to the unemployed. What a fine response to give the victims of the softwood lumber crisis, the trade disputes with the U.S. or the mad cow crisis, in the riding of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean among others, who lose their jobs.

I would like someone to come and explain to the unemployed in my region, who have lost their jobs and are denied benefits, that this government is good to them because it is creating jobs and the economy is doing well. The fact is the economy never fed anyone. One does not buy economy to feed his family; bread and butter is what they need to put on the table. They need money for that. It is not by cutting the benefits of unemployed people with no money, in challenged areas like mine, that the government will convince us of how good it is.

That is what I had to say about sovereignty. Once Quebec has achieved sovereignty, we will stop bothering the others. We will develop our own employment insurance plan. And in this plan there will be a place for those who need help from the government.

● (1205)

*[English]*

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I cannot tell the House how proud I am to stand to speak to the opposition day motion put forward by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. This is an issue of vital importance, not only to the residents of his riding of Acadie—Bathurst, but across the country. The issue is unemployment insurance, now called employment insurance, and the historic cash grab of this Liberal government from that social program.

Believe me, I have some strongly held views on the subject of EI. I can say without any hesitation that this is one thing I hear about more than anything else in my riding.

I have some statistics. Let me begin my presentation with some figures. When the Liberal Government of Canada chose to use EI as a cash cow, rather than an insurance fund for the unemployed, it had a profound effect on ridings in the country, such as my own riding. I have examples from across the country. I will start with my own riding of Winnipeg Centre.

When the government changed the rules so that no one qualified any more, obviously the fund would go into a surplus position. That surplus the Liberals used for everything they chose such as paying down the deficit, giving tax breaks to Bay Street.

Members will be surprised to hear that the impact in my riding alone was that \$20.8 million a year, every year since the government made those changes. My riding already is a low income riding, the third poorest riding in Canada by any statistical measurement used.

Imagine the effect of sucking \$20.8 million worth of revenue out of my riding every year. The impact was felt immediately. To get our minds around the effect of that, try to consider what could be done to attract a company to a riding that has a payroll of \$20.8 million per year. We would pave the streets with gold to attract new businesses. I know the riding the Speaker represents would welcome the influx of jobs like that.

We were powerless to stop the flight of capital, the exodus of that money from our riding. It was a policy decision made by the Government of Canada.

I cannot imagine anyone from Quebec voting against the simple resolution my colleague has put forward today to try to reverse this trend. I have the figures here for Quebec. I will quote a couple of them.

In the riding of Champlain the effect of the cuts to EI was \$59.5 million per year, every year. In the riding of Charlevoix the cuts to EI were \$50.1 million per year. In the riding of Bourassa it was \$42.9 million per year. That is the effect of the cuts to EI when the Liberal government changed EI so that nobody qualified any more and started to use it as a cash cow. It makes me angry just thinking about it.

This was a deliberate policy when the Liberals found themselves in a deficit situation when they took over. They realized they had a deficit of which they had to take care. Where did the government look for revenue? It was not to some kind of a growth scheme that might increase the GDP in order to increase government revenue. They took at least one-third off the backs of the unemployed.

The total cumulative surplus, from what we call this wholesale theft of our EI money, was over \$50 billion. The government took in \$50 billion more than it paid out.

Keep in mind that we should begin from the fact that this is not their money. Back in the 1980s, under the Brian Mulroney government, the federal government stopped paying into EI all together. All that money is contributions of the employer and the employee. Its designated use was to provide income maintenance for unemployed people should they happen to lose their jobs. That was the whole purpose of the unemployment insurance scheme.

Two changes took place. First, under Mulroney the government chose to put that money into general revenue, under the guise that if

### *Supply*

the fund ever fell into deficit, it would be the government's responsibility to make up that deficit, and that is true.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** And Lucien Bouchard.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** And Lucien Bouchard was the architect of that particular scheme, something we are still paying the price for today.

• (1210)

However, in actual fact the fund has only been in deficit a few times. The total accumulated deficit, if we add up all the periods that it has dipped into deficit, is \$11 billion to \$13 billion. The total accumulated surplus right now is \$50 billion. When is an insurance fund not an insurance fund? That is the question we need to ask ourselves.

Imagine if we had to buy house insurance and it was mandatory that we participate in a house insurance scheme. Our premiums are deducted from our paycheque every week, above and beyond our control. That is a mandatory contribution. However, if our house burns down, we have less than a 40% chance of ever collecting anything, not one penny. We are told by the government that it has used that money for tax cuts for its friends on Bay Street, or to build roads or to offset our other cutbacks in social spending and that it does not have a penny for us to provide income maintenance in our so-called insurance fund.

That is not an insurance fund any more. That is another payroll tax. It ceased to be an insurance fund years ago.

I know from personal experience because I am a carpenter by trade. I am not ashamed to say that I have collected EI probably 10 to 15 times in my career. It was designed exactly for that, to provide bridge income to people like me who work either seasonally or sectorally, like in the building trades. Every day we worked, we worked toward getting laid off because we were completing the job. That is the nature of a carpenter. We start a job and every day we work, we work toward a layoff. EI was there for me in the old days. It is not there any more for those who need it under the current hour bank system. It certainly is not there for the seasonal workers to whom our motion today is dedicated.

### *Supply*

I am particularly proud of my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst because of the passionate representation he has brought to this issue and for the people affected by this policy over the years, with specific reference to people who have fallen between the cracks. Even when the Liberals have been forced to try to fix EI a bit, even when EI was exposed for the fraud that it was, the changes they made failed to thoroughly look after many of the people it should have covered. No group of people has been negatively impacted by the bill more than the fish plant workers in eastern Canada, who by design are excluded from participation in the EI fund as it stands.

The change that my colleague and the NDP are asking for today is paltry compared to the total size of the fund. It is almost insignificant when we look at the annual operating surplus of the fund. I am told that \$20 million to \$30 million per year could satisfy the change for which we are asking, which is to reduce the qualifying weeks from 14 to 12 for areas where unemployment is higher than 10%.

My colleague tells me the impact is under \$20 million a year. In its current operational mode, the fund is showing a surplus of more than \$200 million a month. At its peak it was showing a surplus of \$750 million per month. Talk about a licence to print money for the government. Even with the amendments and the changes it has made, it is roughly half of that. Doing the math, it is roughly \$375 million per month in surplus. We are talking about \$20 million per year to include this group of workers in eastern Canada who are shut out of the program.

This group of workers in New Brunswick have a champion in the member for Acadie—Bathurst. I would point out that there is not another party here that has lifted a finger to represent its interests. The NDP is using its opposition status in this minority Parliament more effectively than any other party because we are actually extracting some measure of benefit out of this Parliament.

I hear the Bloc Québécois making noises, asking how the NDP could align itself with the crooked Liberal Party. The NDP is doing its job as an opposition party in a minority government to move our agenda forward. That is what we are supposed to do. That is what we were sent here to do.

●(1215)

I see other parties, with more members, that are getting exactly nothing, a big goose egg out, of this Parliament. We are getting social spending on the areas that we care about and they will be auxiliary beneficiaries of the work we are doing. I hope they enjoy the benefits that they will reap by our efforts.

Instead of using our opposition day to tear the government down, or to move a motion of non-confidence or to force an election, we are using our opposition day to help some unemployed workers in a corner of the country that has been forgotten by the Liberal Party. That is a good thing. Is there anyone here who does not think that is an appropriate thing for members of Parliament to do? This is called the House of Commons. This is where ordinary people are supposed to have a voice, where they can appeal for some relief if they suffer an injustice.

Here is a classic example of injustice. The fish plant workers in eastern Canada, who slipped between the cracks of the EI program, are a forgotten people. The government has turned its back on them.

No other opposition party is advocating on their behalf. It falls to the NDP to be the spokesperson for this group of disadvantaged employees, and I am proud of that.

I heard the rant of my colleague from the Bloc a moment ago, that the NDP was in bed with a corrupt Liberal government. Our point is that before the last Liberal is led away in handcuffs, we are going to extract some level of benefit from this Parliament before it collapses.

That is our job. It is what we were sent here to do and we are doing it more effectively than even the official opposition which has 99 members. Conservatives do not seem to bring home the bacon to their constituencies. They have not managed to negotiate a single benefit. As we speak, they are putting the Atlantic accord in jeopardy at the finance committee. The benefits that we managed to get into these budget bills is standing at jeopardy because of the collaboration between the Bloc and the Conservatives whose only interest is to tear down Parliament and go to the polls.

They should reconsider for a number of reasons. First, if they went to the polls tomorrow, they would lose seats, both parties, because they have lost credibility. No one believes they can deliver any more. All they have is the empirical evidence and that evidence is a big fat goose egg. They do nothing. They just occupy space and disrupt those of us who are trying to accomplish something with the opportunity we have been given by the people of Canada.

When an opposition day does come along, we meet as a caucus and we put forward ideas of what we might do and how we might use our political leverage to our best advantage. In this case I am proud to say we chose on the side of ordinary working people whose voices are rarely heard.

How often do we hear of people who are willing to dedicate a whole day to the interests of the fish plant workers who are disadvantaged and left out of the employment insurance program? It is a rare thing. We would think that members of Parliament from Atlantic Canada would vote in favour of this opposition day motion which would benefit them. What I cannot understand is why is this not coming from them? They have more opportunities than we do.

We have 19 members of Parliament and we have an opposition day once in a blue moon. We use ours for something constructive. All we hear from them is destroy, tear it down, burn baby burn. That seems to be the motto of the Bloc of the Tories, burn baby burn. Why do they not build something for a change? Maybe the reason no one wants to vote for the Conservatives is they have never seen any evidence that they can do anything constructive. All they can do is destructive measures.

We expect that from members of the Bloc. With all due respect, it is their *raison d'être* to tear the government down and prove that Parliament does not work so that something, in their mind, can be built out of the ashes. I can deal with that. What I cannot understand is the party which tries to sell itself as the government in waiting using its political leverage and political capital, which is five times ours, for nothing but destructive measures. That is what is frustrating to me.

We find ourselves in a unique situation with an opportunity in the twilight dying days of this parliamentary session to do something positive for a significant group of Canadians. I am proud it is our party that is advancing it. I am proud to be here with my colleagues, the member for Churchill, the member for Windsor West and the member for Acadie—Bathurst, the sponsor of the motion and perhaps the leading champion on EI reform in the country.

● (1220)

The member for Acadie—Bathurst took it on himself, at his own expense, out of his own parliamentary budget, to travel the country to try to determine what was wrong with EI. We knew something had to be done and we wanted to make sure that our recommendations were grounded in fact and not in some kind of emotion, even though the frustration is palpable.

He came back with a report. What he learned is that this is not exclusive to Atlantic Canada. This is epidemic in northern Canada and in the Churchill riding. Unemployment dips below 10% in pockets throughout northern Canada. One of the most cynical things in Canadian public policy is the fact that we do not count first nations in our unemployment statistics. The unemployment rate in some of the 35 first nations communities that my colleague from Churchill represents is 95%. Those numbers are not factored into the national unemployment rate.

The measure my colleague is putting forward today is that, in areas of 10% unemployment or greater, the weeks for qualifying for unemployment benefits should be calculated on a person's best 12 weeks instead of 14. That would apply in Churchill. That would apply in Windsor West. There are pockets in all our ridings that have unemployment rates of higher than 10% and where people are disadvantaged.

I do not even have time to go into the gender inequities of the EI act as it currently stands. I hope that becomes a subject of debate. Perhaps one of the other opposition parties that has more opposition days will see fit to bring forward the gender imbalance of our current EI act, because it disproportionately discriminates against women. That is a fact. That is not some mode of spiel members are hearing from me. A gender analysis has been done. In fact, women are disproportionately impacted by the changes that the government made when it went to the hourly system instead of the weeks system. It is a proven fact.

Let us talk about an unemployed, middle-aged male. If I were still on the tools as a carpenter, I would have a less than 40% chance of collecting any EI benefits at all under the current rules. An unemployed woman would have a less than 25% chance of collecting any EI benefits. An unemployed youth would have a less than 15% chance of collecting any benefits. This is nothing but a cash cow. It is a mandatory contribution fund and an optional benefit-paying fund. That is completely contrary to the spirit and intent of the concept of unemployment insurance. As I have said, it ceased to become an insurance fund long ago.

As a tradesman and as the former head of the carpenters' union, I had over 1,100 apprentices signatory to my local when I was in charge of it. Even apprentices are discriminated against in that they have a two week waiting period now when they leave their job to go to their school component.

### *Supply*

I am running out of time, but I wish I had more time to share with the House some of the shortcomings of the EI act. I wish there were more time to share with my colleagues the benefits and the merits of the motion put forward by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. We are going to be watching very carefully who votes against this motion, because it will speak volumes about the government's priorities.

I am astounded that we do not hear more practical opposition day motions put forward by the parties that have opposition days coming out of their ears. They are always engaged with self-interest or negative things that do not make any contribution to the elevation of the living standards of Canadians.

We have chosen something that is real, tangible and has a material benefit to those on whose behalf we are advocating today. I have never been more proud to be a New Democrat. It has never been more fun to be a New Democrat than it is today. I welcome the opportunity to vote in favour of my colleague's opposition day motion.

● (1225)

**Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the NDP bringing up the issues of EI and indeed unemployment. As I mentioned in previous comments, our country now has the lowest unemployment rate that it has had in some 30 years and the highest economic performance of all the OECD countries.

The member brings up a vexing problem. All of us want to ensure that unemployed people get jobs, for a job is the best social program of all. We also want to make sure the program is sufficiently attractive, so that when people lose their jobs through no fault of their own they will be taken care of but can also go back to work as soon as they are able. Next, we also want to make sure they have the skills and training to do that.

On the other side of this equation, as the member knows very well if he looks at the performance and experience of a lot of the socialist countries in northern Europe, if we make social programs such as EI too attractive, what we can unfortunately do is encourage unemployment and inefficiencies within economies.

There is a balance that we are trying to strike. On the one hand, we are trying to make sure that people are treated fairly and are taken care of when they lose their jobs through no fault of their own. On the other hand, we do not want to engender a systemic problem within employment insurance that actually causes the exact problem we want to avoid, that is, unemployment.

Indeed, when the Liberal Party came into government in 1993 there was a \$5.884 billion deficit in the EI account. Over the last few years there have been surpluses and there has been some criticism about that. There are events taking place right now in the world, particularly south of the border with U.S. deficit spending, that are going to have dramatic impacts upon our country. We have to deal with that.

### Supply

Does my colleague not think the changes the government has put in place, including a reduction in the minimum hours and in the amount of moneys that have been paid by employees and employers, are a fair balance? Does he not think they ensure that we have a viable EI system, that it is there for the public and the investments we have made in skills training are useful, but on the other hand we are not making a system that is going to encourage or engender inefficiencies within our economy and encourage unemployment?

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca might be interested to know that the changes to EI, when the government cut, hacked and slashed the provisions of EI to the point where virtually nobody qualifies anymore, cost his riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca \$28.3 million per year. Every year the poorest people in his riding are denied unemployment insurance to the tune of \$28.3 million a year. Let us imagine the effect that has. That has the effect of pushing the working poor into the ranks of poverty.

That was the impact in my riding. This takes people who do work, although be it intermittently or when they can, and denies them the money that used to bridge periods of employment, thus pushing them onto the welfare rolls. It has a double negative effect in my riding. Not only does it cut off the flow of federal dollars to provide income maintenance in the riding, but people then have to go on the rolls of provincial social assistance. It pushes them onto welfare, so it has a double whammy negative effect.

My colleague is parroting the old yarn about how the best social program is a job. There are two designated uses for the EI fund. One is income maintenance and the other is training. The best bridge to re-entering the workforce is training. Those guys over there used the surplus to give their corporate buddies tax breaks instead of providing training to unemployed workers.

• (1230)

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech made by the Conservative member, who said he was once a trade union leader.

**An hon. member:** The NDP member.

**Mr. Robert Vincent:** I am sorry. I am referring to the speech made by the NDP member.

I would like to ask him a few questions. Being a union representative is interesting. If we applied the union process to the House, the demands of the union would relate to the 28 recommendations made by union members. We already know that the employer had \$47 billion. Therefore, we were in a position to negotiate.

Why did the NDP choose to negotiate one recommendation out of 28? I do not understand that. The NDP should know what this process is about, when it comes down to negotiating and begging the employer. When a union negotiator knows the employer has money, he does not go down on his knees at the first meeting and say he will lower his expectations and settle for a single demand. Personally, I would feel uncomfortable telling union members that, after negotiating, I kept only one recommendation out of the 28, and, moreover, that I diluted it. I would have a problem with that. In my

opinion, these union leaders would be fired at the first meeting with their members.

We are also told that the Bloc Québécois is only interested in going into an election, and does not want to protect anyone's interests. I cannot understand how these people think. They already know that the government is struggling with the sponsorship scandal. But they want to keep it in office, even though there is corruption everywhere.

We have had at least 20 majority votes in the House. For example, 187 members voted in favour of the motion on the RCMP, while 103 opposed it. Did the government respect the decision made by the members of this House? Not at all. How can we trust a minority government that does not respect the will of the members of this House, a government that is corrupted by the sponsorship scandal? Will we support it? No way. The Bloc Québécois will not support people who do not respect the word and the will of the members of this House.

Why did the NDP choose that recommendation for its motion, instead of a recommendation relating to POWA? Yet, that is one of the 28 recommendations. Does the NDP not care about seniors? Did it think about them? Perhaps it has already negotiated this. Perhaps the NDP will be seen as a saviour—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The member for Winnipeg Centre.

[English]

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that I am a trade unionist. I was a trade union leader in my former life. I know negotiations. I know enough to say that it is far better to be effective on one point than ineffective on all of one's positions, as we are seeing in the opposition parties.

I have a challenge for my colleague. There were 28 recommendations to improve EI. We are taking care of one today. My colleague's party has an opposition day tomorrow. Perhaps he would like to do something effective for a change and make a contribution around here. Perhaps he would like to bring forward an EI amendment for his party's opposition day tomorrow. We will support that one. That would leave only 26 improvements yet to make.

**Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.):** First of all, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca told me to say that unemployment in his riding is now at an historic low, to the point where they had to close the EI office and he hopes that they never open it again.

I also noticed that my colleague from Winnipeg Centre mentioned the carpenters' union. In my capacity as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, I had the opportunity to visit the carpenters' union apprentice training facility, which is close to highway 407, north of Toronto.

I congratulate my colleague and the union for the work they are doing in training apprentices there, apprentice carpenters and apprentice welders and a variety of others. I am really pleased that the federal government is able to work so closely with them and to support the work of the carpenters' union in developing really effective tradespeople and, in particular in the case of Toronto, in re-qualifying tradespeople from overseas.

*Supply*

My colleague knows there have been great improvements to EI. What does he think of the extension of maternity and parental benefits to one full year?

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for recognizing the contribution that the carpenters' union makes to the well-being of the construction industry. I do not think there is a union in the country that is more engaged in apprenticeship training. They have a wonderful location in Toronto of which we are all proud. I send some of my own apprentices there for their training.

Having said that, I will note that the EI changes the government put in place began to penalize apprentices. We had apprentices dropping out because they could not afford to go through the two week penalty period when they left their jobs to go to their annual six weeks of schooling. When I was an apprentice, it was seamless. We finished on Friday, the last day of work, and on Monday the six week trade school component began. We began collecting EI right away, because we were not unemployed but in the trade school component.

These changes by the Liberal government were thoughtless in that they drove people out of apprenticeships by penalizing them as if they were unemployed and had to serve a waiting period.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have been afforded the opportunity to respond to the motion by the hon. member for Acadie-Bathurst, who would like to see those workers who find themselves in areas of high unemployment—10% or more—receive EI benefits based on the best 12 weeks of their income from the previous year, instead of the best 14 weeks, as announced in February.

I salute the member. I know that he works very hard and is very passionate about this issue.

As my colleagues have said, over the next three years, we want to test whether this redesigned method of benefit rate calculation will encourage workers to accept available work that could otherwise lower their weekly EI benefit and they may otherwise refuse.

The concept of EI is simple. It is an insurance program that Canadians can rely on in times of temporary unemployment that provides benefits to eligible workers who, through no fault of their own, are without work but who are available for work. The underlying objective is to help unemployed Canadians prepare for, find and keep employment.

But while the basic concept is simple, the means of implementing it through the EI program are a little more complicated. The government must take into consideration many diverse interests and needs—sometimes conflicting—and find a balanced way to meet them. At the heart of the program is the need to make sure EI provides the support that unemployed Canadians need, while at the same time ensuring that the program's integrity and long-term viability are maintained.

Fortunately, the government has been consistently able to do that. Most objective observers would agree that EI is a Canadian success story.

Over the years, hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers have been able to access the program in times of need and today the program remains stable.

A prudent approach to managing the EI program means the government has been able to consistently balance the program's objectives—that is, to provide temporary income support as well as assist people to find and keep work.

As outlined in the government response, the responsible course is to continue to pursue the balanced approach to the EI program, so it will continue to be there for Canadians when they need it. That does not mean the government should not make any changes to the program. On the contrary, it means the government must be able to adapt to changing circumstances and make adjustments to the program from time to time.

As a matter of fact, a look at the record will show that the government has clearly been willing to do just that. For example, in February of this year, in conjunction with budget 2005, the government announced approximately \$300 million in new measures to enhance the EI program. These changes are expected to benefit more than 220,000 Canadian workers annually.

These new measures include three new pilot projects that take into account issues raised in the standing committee's report. These pilots will test the labour market impact of enhanced support in regions of "high" unemployment.

More specifically, the pilot projects will test the impact of the following three adjustments.

First, we want to enable individuals new to the labour market or returning after an extended absence to access EI benefits after 840 hours of work (rather than 910) when linked with EI employment programs.

Second, we suggest calculating EI benefits based on the best 14 weeks of earnings over the 52 weeks preceding a claim for benefits to better reflect the full-time weeks of work for individuals with sporadic work patterns.

In addition, we want to increase the working-while-on-claim threshold to allow individuals to earn the greater of \$75 or 40% of benefits. This is designed to encourage people to take work without a reduction in their benefits.

These are important changes. They are in line with the recommendations of the standing committee. Now we have to study and evaluate their impact to see how they are working, before making any further changes.

Over the years, the government has demonstrated its willingness to make changes to the EI program to deal with specific issues that arise in the Canadian labour market.

### Supply

Last year, for example, the government introduced a pilot project to test the impact of five additional weeks of benefits in regions of high unemployment. The government also modified, for EI purposes, the transitional boundaries in the economic regions of Madawaska—Charlotte, New Brunswick, and Lower St. Lawrence—North Shore, Quebec.

• (1240)

These measures had been introduced to meet special needs, and the government has decided they will be extended for another year.

In 1996, the government began monitoring and assessing the program on a continuing basis to make sure it would continue to meet the needs of Canadian workers.

As a result, each year the EI Commission produces its monitoring and assessment report on the program. Successive reports show that the program is working well for the majority of Canadians. They also show that the Canadian labour market is strong.

From time to time, however, a case is made for a change—either to respond to an unanticipated outcome of a particular measure or to strengthen the program in one way or another.

The elimination of the intensity rule is a good example. In 1996, the intensity rule was introduced to reduce reliance on EI and encourage work effort. When evidence indicated that the measure was not achieving its intended objective, the government intervened and eliminated it.

Similarly, when analysis showed that the clawback measure was having a disproportionate effect on lower to middle income claimants, the government moved to adjust it.

When the Government of Canada doubled the overall duration of maternity and parental benefits from six months to one full year beginning December 31, 2000, it carefully monitored the results. We were gratified to learn that, indeed, there had been a sharp increase in the following year of parents accessing parental benefits—up to 24.3%.

The government has a solid track record of adjusting and enhancing the EI program by following a prudent, balanced approach to change.

In making changes to EI, the government bases its decisions on a number of considerations: an ever-changing labour market; the program's annual monitoring and assessment report; and the recommendations initiated by stakeholders and bodies like the standing committee.

In the case of the standing committee's recommendations, as outlined earlier, the government has already acted in a number of positive ways. The government recognizes that certain EI clients continue to face challenges and it continues to work on examining the substance of issues raised by the standing committee.

I am confident that, if we continue to follow the kind of prudent, balanced approach to change that has served us so well in the past, the EI program will continue to be there for Canadians when they need it.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to express my thoughts on the matter and provide supporting arguments.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech, but I wonder if she really believes in what she is saying. I will tell you why.

I am anxious to see how the Liberal members from the Atlantic provinces vote on Tuesday. Will they be in favour of the 12 best weeks in order to help the people in the Atlantic area, the people of Gaspé, of the Magdalen Islands, of Newfoundland and Labrador, of Cape Breton? What will the eastern MPs' position be?

I have seen a lot of this sort of thing before. The Liberals are good at it. A motion is presented in order to solve a problem, then they tell their members to vote in favour of it because otherwise they might pay for it at the next election. However, they are going to vote against it as a government. I can hardly wait to see what the eastern MPs will do on Tuesday. Will they support them again, even after having been taken in like that?

The member for Acadie—Bathurst is not the only one saying the best 12 weeks are needed. The Liberal MPs from the Atlantic ridings are saying so too.

What will the position of the Conservative members be on Tuesday, when the Atlantic members vote in favour of the best 12 weeks? If the system was working that well, why would the government have accepted 14 weeks when they knew that there are 1,500 people in Beauséjour and Petitcodiac who work 17 or 18 weeks out of the year and who broke the law by stockpiling time. I feel this is just one more scandal, if the problem of all workers is not settled.

With all due respect to my colleague, what explanation can she give me for playing along with the Liberals? When there are problems, they let their caucus members vote in favour of the solution. Then the others, as a government, are going to vote against it. Yet we are not asking for such a lot, just that the people with seasonal jobs get help.

I would like to know whether my colleague is going to support the best 12 weeks. The fish plant workers are the ones being punished here. The people who get minimum wage and then get only 55% of their earnings as EI. I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on this.

• (1245)

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, I said it at the beginning of my speech and I say it again directly to my friend from Acadie—Bathurst. I admire his passion in this matter. He never stops talking about his cause to anyone who will listen and anyone who will support him in this.

Of course, I understand the position of my colleagues from the Atlantic region. Everyone votes his or her own conscience. As a Liberal MP, I am very happy to say that I have been able to vote my conscience on several issues on which I had very firm views. I am thinking, among other things, of the anti-scab legislation. I had already said, even during the election campaign, that I would be in favour of such legislation. I was not afraid to say so and I was not afraid to emphasize it in regard to the motion on gasoline, and so forth.

Insofar as employment insurance is concerned—my friend is very aware of this—it is certainly a very touchy matter in Quebec. During my election campaign, under my beautiful signs—I thought they were very beautiful—there was always another little sign asking, “Who stole the employment insurance fund?” It came from a certain labour confederation that was—how might I phrase this—very “pro-friends-across-the-way”, the Bloc Québécois.

That being said, I am very aware that this is an extremely sensitive issue. However, in the context of this motion and the entire employment insurance issue, beyond the cheap rhetoric that you sometimes hear from certain quarters—I do not mean the member for Acadie—Bathurst at all—we must remember that the employment insurance fund has not always run surpluses. There are some important choices to make. People sometimes forget to mention that employers and employees have contributed to the employment insurance fund. The cost of contributions has gone down considerably. That is very good for the economy.

That being said, how can the right balance be found between 12 weeks and 14 weeks? It is not always easy. What I like about the measure proposed by a previous minister, as I mentioned in my speech, is the fact that things can be monitored and adjusted. What we should do in this connection is try to find answers to the irritants. That is certainly what we all try to do. I can never say enough how much I admire the passion that my friend brings to this. But are 12 weeks the solution—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Peterborough.

[*English*]

**Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows and we know that improvements have been made in recent years to EI. For example, the extension of maternity and parental benefits to a full year, the elimination of the intensity rule, the elimination of the multiple waiting period for apprenticeship training programs to help apprentices, and the introduction of the new compassionate care benefit which allows workers to take time off to look after loved ones who are terminally ill.

In particular, in the current budget the three new pilot projects which affect 220,000 people a year will run for three years in regions of 10% or more of unemployment. This would allow the calculation of the best 14 weeks which would come in this fall thereby increasing the working while on claim benefits. This would also continue for a second year the pilot project providing an additional five weeks of EI benefits in these regions of high unemployment. And by the way, it would extend the transitional boundary measures in Quebec and New Brunswick. I wonder what the member thought of those.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** There is certainly all that, Mr. Speaker. I thank my colleague for his question.

I listened to the new minister's speech on all the adjustments made in the new program. I think that these adjustments address many of the irritants in the employment insurance system.

### *Supply*

I want to reiterate that it is not easy to come up with a definitive answer and say, “There is the solution”. That is the beauty of the system. As I explained, we are trying to make adjustments. Sometimes we make mistakes, which we catch the next time we conduct an evaluation. I think that we have to look at the big picture, because this is a program that benefits the vast majority of Canadians.

Full employment would be the best, not taking EI benefits away. That is what everyone dreams of, I am sure. Every Canadian dreams of having a good paying job. This may not be very realistic, but we must nonetheless hope for that dream to one day become a reality. Efforts must also be made to help the most disadvantaged through this program. We are solving a great many of the problems. Are we solving all of them? The future will tell. With a balanced government, we will endeavour to make the necessary adjustments, when appropriate.

I cannot repeat it enough. According to the Auditor General, the employment insurance account should be part of the consolidated revenue fund. When I hear people say that we on this side have pillaged it, that irks me. After all, as I said earlier, there has not always been a surplus in the employment insurance account. Not so long ago, it was seriously in the red. That does not do those who lose their jobs any good. In my opinion, this surplus has been very well spent, that is, on the needs of Canadians, on health care, at various levels of the economy, and even by reinvesting into the economy. That does help employment.

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps you will find that I am rising a little too often, but I really care about this issue.

The member for Gatineau is obviously very pleased when she says that \$320 million will be given to the unemployed. However, this is just a drop in the ocean, compared to \$47 billion. Also, considering that premiums total in excess of \$1 billion annually, this \$320 million is just money that will be redistributed.

Will that money still go into the consolidated fund, or should it be given back to workers who need it to make ends meet and pay their rent?

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, we would never think that the hon. member is rising too often. This is an extremely important issue, particularly in Quebec. It is an issue that was at the forefront during a good part of last year's election campaign, if not throughout that campaign.

I do not agree with the member when he talks about \$320 million being a drop in the ocean. He said that while \$1 billion is invested in the fund, only \$300 million is given back. As I mentioned, the money is there, but a fair balance must be struck in the employment insurance fund, in order to meet needs.

The hon. member is also suggesting that the money put in the consolidated revenue fund just evaporates. That is not necessarily the case. Many investments are made in the Canadian economy. This is helpful and, as the minister mentioned earlier, it allows us to drastically lower unemployment rates. This may be the most important point in the minister's speech, namely that we can reduce the unemployment rate all across Canada, including in Quebec.

*Supply*

•(1255)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this has been an extremely important issue for communities throughout Canada for 30 years now. I will be sharing my time with the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. Both of us, like the majority of the NDP caucus, wanted to take part in today's debate, because it is an extremely important one. Our presence in the House attests to the importance of this issue for communities throughout Canada. Too bad we cannot say the same thing about the Liberal caucus.

The truth is that the many cuts to the EI program have hurt communities across Canada, from British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador and the territories to the north. I want to take a moment to pay tribute to the hard work of the member for Acadie—Bathurst on this issue. He has worked tirelessly, night and day, in order to advance this issue affecting not only his region but all workers in Canada.

Thanks to his continued commitment and hard work, we see the opportunity, with today's motion, for all members in the House to be able to renew and improve the situation facing the unemployed in this country or those in seasonal employment.

I have a great deal of admiration for the work done by the member for Acadie—Bathurst. I think he deserves the thanks and respect of all members of the House.

[*English*]

The reality is that when we are talking about employment insurance we are not talking about some abstract concept. The motion before us today is to take the best 12 weeks of income in the last 52 weeks preceding the claim, or the best 12 weeks of income since the beginning of the last claim, whichever is shorter, for Canadians in areas of high unemployment.

What we have seen over the past 10 years is a collapse of the job market in this country. We know that over the 15 years since the signing of free trade agreements and NAFTA, we have actually produced half the number of full time jobs that were created in the 15 years previous. Most jobs created in the economy today are jobs that are part time or temporary in nature.

In January, Statistics Canada reported that the wages for many of the new jobs were at a much lower level than the jobs that used to exist in our economy. We also see that whereas in the past a majority of jobs actually provided pension benefits, now a minority of jobs in our economy actually provide pension benefits. We know as well that the number of jobs with benefits is falling.

The Liberal government has done absolutely nothing to stop the decline in quality jobs. In fact, it has done exactly the opposite. What we have seen is contracting out and outsourcing. The Minister of International Trade has been actually encouraging companies to outsource and take their jobs offshore.

We have seen our Canadian flag lapel pins being produced in China rather than in Canada. We have seen what disrespect this Liberal government holds workers in communities across the country. We have seen its complete abrogation of planning of an industrial strategy or even providing a trade policy that comes with jobs. Instead of that, we have a jobless trade policy.

In the midst of this uncertainty, the fact that the quality and number of full time jobs has been declining steadily over the past decade, families are now having to work harder and work more hours. We are seeing the average number of hours worked in a week for those workers who have jobs increasing at the same time as the real income per hour of the average Canadian worker has fallen 60¢ in real terms. This means that as the cost of living increases, the actual salary and benefits provided by that job are decreasing.

In the midst of all this, we saw the Liberal government, not only failing to act on the job front, but penalizing those workers who are without employment because of the Liberal government's own policies. The Liberal government has basically taken the \$48 billion out of the employment insurance fund. The Liberals have very grudgingly provided some restoration of the benefits that have been taken away from those workers who are unemployed.

It is not because of a lack of work. As I mentioned, the member of Parliament for Acadie—Bathurst, who has been fighting without rest to address these concerns, is a very passionate advocate for seasonal workers. His motion today seeks, in a small way, to move forward the agenda to start addressing those concerns in rural communities where seasonal workers are the mainstay of the local economy.

It would be surprising to me if this motion, which is incremental and begins to provide some support that those communities have been missing, would be refused by any member of this House. We understand the problems in the job market. We understand what is happening to the average Canadian family. We understand that the Liberal government has done nothing.

However the Liberal government now has a chance to actually start moving forward. We can do it because this is a minority Parliament. We can have support from the opposition parties. I am certain that the members of the Bloc Québécois will be supportive of this and I certainly would hope that members of the Conservative Party would be supportive.

•(1300)

By adopting this motion today, we can move forward on the agenda to address those very real concerns of rural communities and seasonal workers across this country. It also affects urban regions. We are talking about a modest but significant contribution to start to address the Liberal cutbacks and the Liberal misuse of the employment insurance fund.

The Subcommittee on the Employment Insurance Funds has called for a whole series of improvements to employment insurance. The government has been very tentative. However, on the corporate sector scheme for tax gifts, the government was very quick to respond in the budget. It provided almost \$5 billion in corporate tax gifts. It was very quick to do that.

The subcommittee has called for improvements to employment insurance. There has been a strong push for improvements by the NDP caucus, by the member for Acadie—Bathurst and other members of the House. Despite that, what has come back are very small pilot projects which only address in a very small and almost insignificant way the significant, devastating action of the government when it comes to employment insurance.

Our role in the House has been a productive one. We 19 members of the NDP believe we are here to get the job done, to remove that disconnect between what happens on Parliament Hill and what happens in communities across the country. There is one key way to address the disconnect between Parliament and the communities across the country. We saw Bay Street policies in the recent budget until the NDP pushed for major changes to finally start to address the post-secondary education crisis, to address the increase in homelessness and poverty and to address the environmental deterioration. That NDP move to push forward a new agenda, eliminating the corporate tax gifts and putting forward things that matter for people and the environment is replicated in the motion today. We are here to work.

We are advancing the motion because we want to make significant changes that will help communities and the vast majority of Canadians across this country. We want to deal with the significant deterioration in the quality of work in every corner of Canada. I hope all members today will support the motion.

**Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments. He was critical of the government's performance on the economy. He was factually incorrect in what he has said, quite dramatically. If he does not believe it, he should look at the recent statistics in *The Economist*. It compared Canada to the other nations of the world in economic performance, and as I said before, we lead the OECD countries.

It is interesting that comments were made previously by one of the hon. member's colleagues who was critical of my riding in that there is less use of EI. Yes, there is less use of EI because more people are employed. They are not using EI because they are getting jobs and that is the key.

As a government, we made a number of changes, as the member knows full well, including reducing the minimum hours of work needed. We also made sure that the benefits were paid on the best 14 weeks of 52, not on the average of 26 weeks.

We have also put in place measures to train people to get the skills required to get the jobs that we are trying to attract here. We want to make sure we have an EI system that is sustainable in the future for the people who need it.

We need an economy that balances good microeconomic capabilities with good macroeconomic decisions. That is the balance we need to have. When we have that, we have an economy that provides jobs so people do not need EI.

Let us address the question at hand. In the member's area, a number of people work in the fisheries industry and are seasonal employees. On the west coast, we have the same challenges too. Would it not make more sense for us to put a greater investment into skills development? We have done that. That would enable those fisheries workers to gain larger employment in such areas as the inshore fisheries, on-land fish farming and fish farming in certain areas that are not environmentally destructive. This has been done very effectively in places like Norway, Iceland and certain parts of Chile. I am not talking about the Far East, where things have been done very badly.

### Supply

I ask the hon. member to go back to his constituents and come up with a plan for the government to redirect some of the moneys that are being allocated for skills training to enable his seasonal workers to gain long term stable employment in the areas I mentioned.

• (1305)

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I will be pleased to provide the parliamentary secretary with additional input. I hope that means there is an opening on the part of the government to finally start dealing with the communities in crisis across this country.

He mentioned balance. What was balanced about bringing in \$4.6 billion in corporate tax gifts when the corporate tax rate in Canada is already lower than it is in the United States and not dealing with housing? There has been no housing funding from the federal government over the last 10 years.

As the parliamentary secretary well knows, in British Columbia we have seen a tripling of homelessness in areas on Vancouver Island and in the lower mainland. The lineups at food banks are getting longer and longer. The government and its provincial Liberal counterparts in British Columbia are responsible for that shameful record.

Fortunately the NDP forced changes and for the first time there will actually be funding going into housing. Post-secondary education is in a crisis as well. Thanks to the NDP we now have a budget that actually starts to deal with that crisis and starts to deal with the issue of access to training.

There was nothing balanced about the Liberal budget until the NDP brought in components to make it a better balanced budget. We have 19 seats now and after the next election if we have more, and the polls certainly indicate that we will, we will be pushing for even better changes.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for sharing his time with me.

I hear a great deal of talk in the House about how wonderful the employment insurance program has been for Canadians, but I need to focus people's attention on what some of the changes have meant over the last several years.

I applaud the member for Acadie—Bathurst for bringing forward this very important motion to deal with one aspect of the employment insurance program.

In 1990, 74% of unemployed Canadians were receiving what was then called UI. By 2001, only 39% of unemployed Canadians were entitled. That is a huge shift in public policy leaving some of our most vulnerable people at risk.

### Supply

Because I am the women's critic for the NDP, it would be remiss of me not to point out that in 1990, 69% of unemployed women were covered, but by 2001 only 33% of unemployed women were covered by EI. That is a shameful record. It has actually driven more Canadians into poverty. These numbers are from the Canadian Labour Congress and they talk about the fact that EI cuts are the single most important reason for the rise in child poverty. Sixty per cent of the million workers cut from EI eligibility had incomes below \$15,000. This loss in benefits averaged \$4,832.

I have a couple more numbers to present before I put the face of a person on this reality. We have seen that in many places women have been disproportionately hurt. What we found is that only 33% of unemployed women receive benefits compared to 44% for men. In five provinces, insurance coverage for women is below 30%. In Ontario only 23% of unemployed women get EI. In some cities only 20% of unemployed women get EI. That is outrageous in an age where we talk about gender equity.

The member for Acadie—Bathurst did some investigation and there was a report called "The Human Face: Employment Insurance". Someone from my riding, Jack McLellan from Nanaimo, British Columbia was quoted as saying that he had attended the funeral of a co-worker, Brian Gellhoed, a victim of our eroded social safety net. Brian had taken his own life after his EI payments stopped. Too proud to sell his home and the personal belongings he had acquired during his lifetime in order to qualify for welfare, Brian preferred to end it all.

It is absolutely shameful that we talk only about numbers and not about the human face of what happens to people in our communities who no longer have this very important social safety net. Not only do Canadian reports talk about the fact that this is a shameful state in Canada, but we have been cited under international conventions. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has specifically called for a gender based analysis of the employment insurance program because it so seriously disadvantages women.

In addition, FAFIA has conducted a gender based analysis of the last budget, but specifically talks about the fact that the employment insurance legislation has disadvantaged women who are often part time, seasonal workers and are in and out of the workforce due to factors well beyond their control. This very good motion by the member for Acadie—Bathurst would help redress some of these issues.

In addition, women often have to take on other responsibilities. They are often primary caregivers in their home. They are often involved in senior caregiving. Women are often in and out of the workforce through absolutely no fault of their own. If we are truly committed to equity and gender equality, for women's equality in this country, we must look at the employment insurance legislation in this light.

Many studies talk about the impact. Even Statistics Canada talks about it in a report which notes that not collecting EI has important implications for an individual's probability of being poor while unemployed. Regardless of the policy environment, poverty is significantly higher among those who experience unemployment but do not receive EI benefits.

• (1310)

About 60% of the million workers kept from EI eligibility had incomes below \$15,000. We keep talking about strategies to address child poverty. We do not have child poverty unless we have family poverty. This translates to the fact that we have so many women who cannot access this important social safety net.

The tightened eligibility rules for employment insurance have done one thing. We talked earlier about the fact that fewer and fewer women were actually able to receive employment insurance. To put this into context, benefits were reduced to 55% of income and this is the lowest percentage in the history of employment insurance in Canada. The replacement rate of income was 67% in 1971, 60% in 1980, 57% in 1993 and 55% after 1997.

Given the fact that many women and men are earning less than \$15,000 a year, we ask them to go on employment insurance earning only 55% of that. How do we expect Canadian women and men to feed, clothe and house their families? I challenge any member in the House to live on that kind of family income. None of us would be willing to do that. In fact, we are asking people to live in third world conditions.

When we talk about commitment to families and the importance of healthy families to nurture our communities, our economy and our social well-being, we must commit to employment insurance programs that support those values.

The steelworkers provided a report called "It's a Balancing Act: A Steelworker Guide to Negotiating the Balance of Work-Life Responsibilities". That report talks about some real challenges and asks parliamentarians to take a stand as they move forward to improve the lives of Canadian women and men.

We often hear about the fact that these wonderful changes to maternity and paternity leave have made a huge difference in the lives of Canadian men and women. The problem is that many Canadian women and men no longer qualify. The steelworkers specifically say that although the length of maternity, paternity and parental leave has increased to a year, the benefit rate and eligibility requirements leave many families without protection. I applaud the fact that we have seen some improvements in those areas, but many Canadian women just cannot access it.

We are talking about workers who are disadvantaged by the current regulations. Currently women and men who are self-employed cannot access the employment insurance program. When we are talking about maternity and paternity benefits, we are talking about a great gap in wage supports for men and women who are actually a vital part of our Canadian economy.

We keep talking about entrepreneurial spirit. We keep talking about small business being the driver of our economy. Yet, the very people who are engaged in those kinds of activities and are self-employed do not qualify for benefits that would help them keep their businesses vital, active and contributing in the longer run.

In conclusion, the motion before the House is a small step toward ensuring that the Employment Insurance Act more readily meets the needs of workers in Canada. If we value our workers and communities and say that our families are important, we must ensure the social safety nets are there, so that Canadian men and women have some certainty after their employment ends that they have some income to feed their children and keep themselves stable.

• (1315)

**Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has focused on one thing, basically EI, but I would challenge her to focus on two aspects of this issue. One is certainly employment insurance. However, let us also talk about employment. How can we get people who can work off the unemployments lines and off EI, so they can use their talents and skills or acquire skills to be long term employees and contribute to their families and communities, which they want to do? That is where the proposals that we put forward come into play and the investments we have made in skills development.

The other issue she brings forward that is not often spoken about, and I think needs to be and I am glad she did, is how do people actually survive on very low amounts of money. It is profoundly sad to see people struggling, making minimum wage or thereabouts, and trying to provide for themselves and their families. That is extremely difficult.

We must do a better job in reducing or eliminating the tax burden, certainly on those who are making less than \$20,000 a year, but also those in the poor or low middle class, keeping more money in their pockets which would enable them to take care of themselves and their families. That is what our goal should be.

The problem with the member's party's proposals with respect to EI is that where this has been used and where a shift over that curve to where EI or its equivalent becomes too attractive to acquire, then it actually acts as a disincentive to work. That is not what we want to do.

Would she not agree that the changes we have made to the EI program are very good, and would she not also support us making further investments into reducing the tax burden on people who are the poor or the low middle class, and furthermore, making the strategic investments in skills training which we have already done?

• (1320)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of issues here. When we are talking about investing in skills development, I came from a university/college background, so I absolutely support investing in skills development. However, one of the challenges with the existing programs is that they are often narrow in scope. They are often fairly complicated procedural mechanisms for people to access. They are not often seated in the reality of many people's communities.

They tend to be a one-size-fits-all cookie-cutter approach that do not recognize the needs of the fishery workers in New Brunswick, the forestry workers, and the fishery workers on the west coast. So, yes, we should invest, and yes, we want to have investments and contribute to a healthy economy, but we need to be more flexible in our approaches around this.

### *Supply*

On the issue around reducing taxes, although I would applaud reducing taxes on people who earn less than \$20,000, we often look at tax reduction as a simplistic approach to fixing a complex problem. Unless we seek those kinds of measures within the context of a broader social strategy, they will fail.

People pay minimum taxes on \$20,000 as it is. However, we must look at initiatives like affordable housing and education. We need that comprehensive strategy in order to ensure that people have a way of getting themselves out of poverty.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member did a good job of touching on women and the collection of employment insurance. I remind everybody in this House this is something that workers pay into as well as employers. This is not a handout. This is something that is actually deferred to have an insurance program. For example, under the current system, similar to women, less than 30% can actually collect. Imagine having an insurance policy for one's home where one basically spins the wheel and only has a third of a chance of actually recovering despite paying into a system.

I know as well persons with disabilities who, for example, cannot work a certain amount of hours per week and choose, because of their limitations, to work a shorter amount of hours week and then lose that job. They cannot collect any benefits. How fair is that when they are doing the responsible thing by working to the fullest extent of their abilities?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, that exactly fits in with the description that I had around the challenges that many women face. Men and women with disabilities who are, by a variety of circumstances, only able to work part time or seasonal or non-standard employment pay into the EI system and are just as disadvantaged as women.

If we want to encourage people's participation to whatever extent that they are able, we must look at a system that recognizes their differences.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your very successful marathon race and we are very proud of your efforts.

This is a very interesting motion that we have before us today brought to us by the NDP to provide EI benefits to Canadians in regions that have unemployment rates at 10% or more.

I acknowledge that there are problems with the EI benefit program and I would like to focus on some of those problems rather than creating a new issue.

### Supply

For regions that have unemployment in excess of 10%, it is suggested to give them money to keep people on employment benefits and to keep them unemployed. That is not the solution that Canadians want. They want to see those areas that are struggling to be vibrant areas where their unemployment is lower and not to maintain people in that type of situation.

I am thinking of the Atlantic accord. Why is the House delaying the passage of that? It is the Conservative Party that wants to break that off, deal with it right now, and let the Atlantic people have their money. However, it is the NDP-Liberal alliance that is keeping that money from the Atlantic provinces.

I also have some difficulty with the EI fund. It is the \$46 billion. I used to be an employer and I was also an employee. The EI program is an excessive tax. Canadians are being overtaxed. It is a prime example where the government tries to get more taxes out of Canadians by overtaxing them through the EI program. It is a \$46 billion surplus. We have heard from the government that there did not used to be a surplus. There is now. The government is overtaxing Canadians. It is overtaxing employees and employers. It has to stop.

We heard from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development that there is a new compassionate care program that is part of EI. I am disappointed that the NDP is not dealing with some of the problems with the EI program that are causing problems for Canadians.

The compassionate care program touches me passionately because I have a constituent who is dying. Her name is Sue. She is 43 years old. She has been taking care of her mother. I have spoken with the NDP about this. I have been bringing this matter before the House to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development since January. Time and time again I have been asking for support from the NDP on this and there is nothing.

This is part of the EI program and the NDP is not supporting compassionate care for Canadians. We have heard nothing but excuses from the Liberals on compassionate care. We heard today that it is a new program. In fact, this is the third fiscal year that it has been in and the government is still calling it a new program that is still under review.

The government, with the backing of the NDP, is not calling a sibling part of the family. It is not calling a sister part of the family. It is absurd. Why is it not dealing with this in the deal that the NDP got over a weekend in Toronto? Why was it not in budget Bill C-48?

All of a sudden the NDP comes up with something that sounds good, but it does not meet the needs of Canadians. It is not practical. There are all kinds of opportunities to help Canadians and compassionate care is one of them.

My constituent who is 43 years old had been taking care of her 73 year old mother and then she contracted cancer. She is not able to take care of herself or her mother. She is not married and has no children. It is a very sad story. Her sister came from the Okanagan to take care of Sue and she applied for the compassionate care program. It is a program that is already in existence to keep families together in the last days of their lives.

• (1325)

They can apply for six weeks of EI benefits, providing they qualify. The government, with the support of the NDP, says that a sister is not called a family member. Genetically they are the closest, sister and a sister, or a brother and a sister or a brother and a brother. Siblings are the closest genetically and the government is saying that it will not allow a sister to take care of a sister. It is a tragedy.

What happened in Langley is they appealed this. They went to the board of referees, which is the appeal board. I want to read the decision of the appeal board was. The appeal board was very critical of the government and gave some strong recommendations of what should be happen. The board of referees hears a great number of appeals on the issue of compassionate care benefits which is an EI program. It said:

The Board finds that there is no compassion in a piece of legislation that would not specifically prescribe a sibling to be a family member and consequently, deny that sibling the basic human decency to receive benefits while comforting a dying sibling.

Why have we not heard about this from the NDP? Why is it not fighting for this?

The board went on to say:

The Board is of the understanding that the Commission can enact new Regulations to the Employment Insurance Act that would serve to broaden the definition of family member to include sibling and other persons who are members of a class of persons prescribed.

Why are we not hearing about this from the NDP? It further said:

This Board believes that the failure of the Commission and the Minister to act swiftly in these matters of Compassionate Care amendments has only served to exacerbate the suffering endured by families as they care for a dying family member.

Why are we not hearing that from the NDP?

The board went on:

The Board believes the Minister and the Commission, in their failure to act urgently to rectify the inadequacies of the Compassionate Care legislation, can be viewed as being neglectful of the trust reposed in them.

Why are we not hearing from the NDP?

The board of referees goes on and recommends that the commission and the minister review this matter as an urgent, critical matter of business.

It is unbelievable that we are hearing rhetoric and not dealing with the real issues that Canadians are facing.

Being involved with this, I have heard now from Olga Petrik from Ontario. She went to take care of her dying sister in Richmond. She also applied for the compassionate care benefits and the appeal board said that absolutely, a sister did qualify, that a sister was a family member. She was approved for the compassionate care program. The minister has now put a stop on that and is appealing that decision of the board. It is disgraceful.

Why are we not hearing anything from the NDP about that? It has been totally silent about this. Canadians are suffering and are dying. The NDP is not speaking about it. It wants to keep Canadians who are unemployed on unemployment.

We need to take care of Canadians. I encourage the NDP to bring up motions that are not rhetoric, but that deal with the real issues with which Canadians deal. It is too important. Dying Canadians cannot wait. The NDP is not dealing with the motions and the issues with which Canadians want to be dealing.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this kind of talk makes me want to weep, almost as much as the Conservatives' position.

The hon. member for Langley is making accusations about us with respect to the Atlantic accord. Knowing how the Conservative Party feels about the Atlantic provinces, they need not give us any lectures.

I wonder sometimes if the hon. member for Langley knows that when the Liberals came into power in 1993, the EI fund was in a deficit. In fact, it had a \$5.884 billion deficit. By 1994, the governing Liberal Party had already managed to reduce the EI deficit to \$3.601 billion. The hon. member makes a point of saying that it is just a hidden tax. I would point out to the hon. member, who gave us this speech, that the contribution rate has decreased considerably. That might make him happy.

How does he reconcile the Conservative Party's so-called new provisions in favour of the Atlantic provinces with the comments made by its leader on the inability of Atlantic Canadians to take charge of their own lives? He said these people do nothing but chase after their EI cheques. How does he explain this pseudo interest in the Atlantic provinces? This party does not give the impression that it has a very good opinion of them.

• (1335)

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Mr. Speaker, I looked through the motions with which the House dealt. There was a Conservative motion that there be no clawbacks, that the Atlantic provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador, receive those. It was the government that voted against it. I do not believe the government really wants Newfoundland and Labrador to get those funds.

There have been all kinds of tactics that it has been pulling. Now the latest one is that it wants to have this as part of another bill, an omnibus bill. It does not want to break it up because it knows it will pass and it wants it stalled.

We want to help Atlantic Canada and I believe Liberal government does not.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but respond to my Conservative Party colleague from Langley who is being critical of the NDP for not putting everything into the motion today. We all know that only so much can be put into an opposition day motion.

### *Supply*

As was mentioned by my colleague from Winnipeg earlier, the Conservatives had numerous opportunities to bring up motions to benefit Canadians, but they never did.

In response to his comments about compassionate care, I personally have written the minister on compassionate care, recognizing that the program is not perfect. It needs improvements and needs to encourage payments to other family members as well. I would question whether he might have done any of that. I want to emphasize that my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore also brought in the private member's bill on that before anyone else did.

That is an example of doing positive things for Canadians.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question but we are talking about a previous Parliament. In this Parliament—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Say you're sorry.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** All I receive, even now, is heckling on compassionate care. Not once in the House have NDP members supported our call for the government to permit family members to take care of a dying loved one. Not once.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Wrong, wrong.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Maybe there is going to be a start, but I would appreciate it if they would stop the heckling. Let us do something to keep Canadians together.

**Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about the employment insurance fund.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I have had the opportunity to participate in many discussions and debates about the EI fund, how it has ended up in the situation it is in today and how we might fix it.

It is important for Canadians to realize that the largest problem in EI today is the fact that the Liberal government for almost 10 years has deliberately overcharged employers and workers in Canada. The premiums have been too high. I have had some debate with some of my colleagues from the NDP on whether we should cut rates to bring it back into balance or whether we should increase premiums. That has been an honest discussion. There has been no discussion between us that the Liberals have been deliberately overcharging Canadians, running up a large surplus in the EI account year after year and using that money to pay for other general government expenses.

Here we are today with a \$46 billion surplus in the EI account. As many Canadians may have heard, in Ottawa this is what is euphemistically called a notional surplus. For those who are not familiar with the concept of a notional surplus, it is a whole series of IOUs totalling \$46 billion.

### Supply

Last year, in reply to the government's Speech from the Throne, amendments were brought forward by my leader and were agreed to by the leader of the NDP and subsequently agreed to by the government. A commitment was made that we would revisit the EI process, that it would be put back in the place where it should have been all along, and that is with balanced finances; money coming in is equivalent to money going out. A commitment was made to stop the Liberal practice of deliberately overcharging and running surpluses year after year and throwing IOUs into the EI notional account and taking that money for other purposes.

We are faced with the issue of a \$46 billion surplus. Earlier today I sat at committee and heard Liberal members suggest that we could not possibly repay that \$46 billion into the EI account without it causing some sort of fiscal catastrophe. It sounded to me that the government was suggesting that if it were to move on with EI, that \$46 billion would be written off and it would start with a fresh sheet of paper.

The \$46 billion that ought to be in that account is the property of workers and employers in the country. It is not the property of the government. Nor is it up to the government to decide how to spend it. That money rightfully belongs to workers and employers. One way or another, sooner or later that money needs to be put back into the account, and workers and employers should benefit from those dollars.

One of the ways to address the imbalance is to look at premium rates. We in the Conservative Party have said all along that EI is essentially a payroll tax. Everyone, including the current Prime Minister when he was finance minister, acknowledges that payroll taxes kill jobs. If payroll taxes were reduced, employment opportunities would be increased. More Canadians would be given the opportunity and the honour to hold a job. Surely the best employment insurance scheme for all Canadians is an actual job. For those who are unable to find a job or who cannot keep a full time job throughout the year, programs like EI are meant to help them.

It is also important for us to remember that changes to the EI formula are complicated and will result in changes in terms of the amount of surplus or deficit in the future. I have had this discussion with the member for Acadie—Bathurst in committee a few times and with the member for Sault Ste. Marie. We have agreed to agree that the Liberals are stealing money from employers and workers. We have agreed, in some cases, to disagree in terms of how that balance should be re-struck

•(1340)

I think the first and most important point for all of us in this House and all Canadians to remember is that this government, when pushed if not forced by the three opposition parties, has agreed to fix EI. There is a discussion going on about setting up a separate bank account so that all the money does not go into one place in the consolidated revenue fund.

I know the government loves the consolidated revenue fund because it maximizes flexibility. It maximizes the Liberals' ability to shuffle things around where nobody can see them, to spend dollars here or there where they want to but not actually make sure that people get those dollars.

In my personal life I have a bank account into which I deposit my paycheque and out of which I pay several things, but I also have a retirement savings account that is segregated. It is set aside and I know that the dollars I put in there will stay there until I need them later in life. I also have registered education savings plans for my children and those dollars are set aside in such a place that they are and will be there.

That is what the idea of setting up a separate account for EI is all about. It is to take these dollars that employers and employees contribute to this fund and set them in a place where the sticky fingers of this government cannot get at them. That is what we have had for too many years: the sticky fingers of this government pulling those dollars over into the general account and spending it on a whole host of things. We have spent much of the last month learning where billions and billions of dollars have gone.

I agree with my colleague from the NDP that we need to fix the EI fund. We agree that the money needs to be set aside. We agree that it needs to be in balance, that the payments going out actually must match the revenues coming in.

In our most recent report, we have agreed on a whole variety of changes that need to be made. The ball is now really in the government's court. The government is going to have to decide whether in fact it will respect the wishes of our committee and whether it is going to respect the wishes of this entire Parliament when it voted last year on the Speech from the Throne to actually put EI on the right footing.

That is the job before us. We have a variety of remedies. The resolution before us today may be one part of it. I agree with one other NDP member who said that we cannot do everything at once, but I think it is important that we move forward and balance EI. We have to put it at arm's length from this government, which so obviously cannot be trusted with it. This stack of IOUs worth \$46 billion is ample proof of that.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this today. I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

•(1345)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask my colleague a question. I am pleased to see him actually move to an area of debate that I think is much more thoughtful than that his previous colleague who was giving misinformation about previous work that a member of this House had done and tabled here, specifically, and was well known.

I congratulate the member for moving the debate back to an area of debate that is very important. We are talking about a program that has a significant impact on the lives of people across this country.

I have a simple question in terms of his speech. I know that this is a simple step forward for this particular issue. It is something we would like to see happen because we know there is a lot of controversy in this House with regard to how the program should be completed at the end of the day in terms of there being a renewal or it having some type of structural change that can be agreed upon.

*Supply*

We selected an item that we were hoping would have some degree of consensus and fairness about it, which all members could support. Could the hon. member tell us what would be his next suggestion for reformation and fairness past this point in the order?

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that EI is set up in a separate account. It appears we may be moving in that direction, notwithstanding some of the efforts by government members on our human resources committee to punch some holes in Bill C-280.

Bill C-280 actually states that the government should repay the \$46 billion. We have heard all kinds of excuses as to why that cannot happen immediately and we have heard about all the problems that would ensue. They almost make it sound as though the government actually has no intention of ever repaying that \$46 billion.

I would be glad to work with opposition members from all parties to hold the feet of this government to the fire and make sure this money does not disappear. That is probably the biggest piece of this puzzle. As I said earlier, we can debate how we should bring this fund back into balance in terms of the amount that comes in and the amount that goes out, but I think the first and absolutely the most important point is to get this government to recognize that the \$46 billion belongs to workers and employers.

Let us get that resolved. At that point, we can then have an honest discussion about how it would be divided.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague demonstrates a good working knowledge of the whole EI program and a genuine interest. There is a report here with 28 amendments. With 99 members of Parliament, his party as the official opposition gets a great number of opposition days on which it could in fact move any one of these recommendations and substantially improve the EI program.

Can he tell me why his party does not use its political advantage and political leverage for something useful and put forward a motion to amend EI at its very next opportunity on the next opposition day?

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** Mr. Speaker, I agree that this is an important issue and that using opposition days to move one's agenda forward is one tool, but there are others. In that report my colleague references, there were certain recommendations that all opposition members in the committee agreed to and others that we did not agree to.

I can tell him what my concern was at that time. We were provided with what was essentially a laundry list of different changes that could be made to the EI payout schedule: that people would work fewer weeks, or that the percentage of income would be increased by 5% or 10%, or that the eligibility criteria would change.

Of course each of these changes would carry some cost. While we want to see the fund brought back into balance, I was personally concerned that we could go the other way. I actually moved a motion in committee to get the Ministry of Finance to cost each of these different ideas, including the one on the order paper today, so that at least we would have the information and know how much each of these changes would add up to. Then we could make reasonable and responsible decisions.

I said that if there is a \$6 billion surplus, it is not just having 10 options that cost \$1 billion each and picking the six we like most,

because there are interactivities between these different functions. We would have to look at a package and have someone with an econometric model actually price it out.

I put forward that motion in committee. The NDP member of the committee voted against that motion. At that point, it raised the question in my mind as to whether there was genuine concern in terms of bringing this into balance or whether this was maybe more a political exercise in terms of driving the agenda. My interest is to bring it back into balance. I hope the NDP will work with us to get the right information so we can do that.

• (1350)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Hamilton Centre.

I want to start by referencing the terms of what we are talking about in the motion. What we are looking at is a very modest change to the Employment Insurance Act, so that those workers who are at their most vulnerable in key strategic areas receive some type of assistance and stability.

That is important to acknowledge, because we are not talking about doing this across the country. We are talking about doing it in areas that geographically or systemically have greater than 10% unemployment. It is very important to recognize that point, because it limits the scope of where we are going to be addressing the issue to start with.

We are going to acknowledge those areas that have a significant bump of unemployment, where there seems to be something happening in those regions that is causing a greater impact in those communities. Those regions would be able to access a fund that is a little more flexible for the families of the workers who are in trouble because there is something happening in those regions.

Those significant unemployment bumps could be caused by anything. In Atlantic Canada and British Columbia, they could be in the fishing industry. Or in my area of Windsor, Ontario, for example, we are concerned about an automotive downturn, which could peak things up at certain periods of time.

We know that certain sectors and certain parts of our country have some very unique challenges. That is what we are talking about: a very focused first step to address this. It is very important to acknowledge that the member for Acadie—Bathurst who has brought this forward has done it so he can be inclusive of the House. That is the intent here. It is not to try to take such a position on a very divided issue. We have taken some criticism that I think is very unfair, because we have taken a position whereby we can at least reach out to all members of the House to provide a simple change in our system that will cost only approximately \$20 million.

That cost is going to go back to workers and their families. It is going to go back to them to make sure their mortgages and car payments get paid. It will make sure that they can put food on the table. It will make sure that they are able to get retraining and get back on their feet much more quickly.

*S. O. 31*

We are not talking about \$20 million in terms of a corporate tax cut or something which might have the money squirreled away somewhere outside this country. By the way, we still have not fixed that.

We are talking about \$20 million that gets injected back into the hands of people who have already paid this out. They have paid for it through their benefit contributions on a daily basis, matched by their employer. That is what the whole insurance issue is about: we will have that coming back and we are looking at moving it from 14 weeks to 12 weeks.

Quite frankly, I am disappointed about the attacks saying that we have not included all these other things. We know that there is no consensus on this issue, so what can we do as a logical first step to make a difference, especially with the twilight of Parliament and this session and the threat of a looming election at any time? What can we do to allow those people and those geographic regions to have better benefits, for their own stability? At the end of the day, it will help those communities. It will change things. That is why the member for Acadie—Bathurst brought this forward.

There are a number of different issues on employment insurance that we can really relate to what is happening here. I want to touch on a couple of issues and one in particular that I have seen. It relates to going from 14 to 12 weeks. Some people in different occupations cannot deal with the way this is now. The member for Winnipeg Centre talked about carpenters and skilled trades. They work so much to get a job done and often are under a lot of pressure to get that job done quickly. Sometimes they actually have to work overtime and pay higher premiums and greater taxation, but at the same time, they are closing their working weeks down.

I can relate to that in regard to the persons with disabilities I used to support prior to coming to the House. Many of them, for their long term health and well-being, could not work at a job for 35 or 40 hours a week. That became problematic. Generally speaking, in Windsor West, even if someone had a good stable job the threshold to collect any type of employment insurance was often far too high.

• (1355)

When some of my clients, who were in occupations for years, diligently paying their taxes and watching it come off their paycheques, found themselves unemployed due to circumstances beyond their control, for example the employer had to lay them off or the company closed, they found nothing there for them. People were immediately removed from that system and put into the welfare system.

In Ontario, under the Harris regime, it was brutal. I remember supporting clients at that time who had to sell their cars or their life insurance policies. It was unbelievable. One client in particular had to sell the policy and dispose of it before going on social assistance. However if a person passes away, the state has to pick up that cost anyway, so there is actually a double cost on it. Those are the types of things people are made to do before they can actually receive some type of assistance. What happened was people would go into turmoil and it undermined their being able to get back on their feet and be successful again.

What is important about the motion is that we are asking that the qualifying weeks go from 14 weeks down to 12 weeks in areas with 10% unemployment or higher and that we have a specific strategy to address this so people can get back on their feet a lot quicker.

I think due diligence is required from the government. We have areas that for economic reasons have higher unemployment or have sectorial problems. We had a good debate the other day on the textile industries, where we know that beyond the control of the workers in this country, and their quality and ethics in terms of producing good products and services, there are other factors, which are beyond anything they can do individually, that are causing their unemployment. We had lots of different horror stories of what happened in that sector either because of things that the government has done in terms of the trade policy or has not done in terms of some of the massive overseas subsidization of other industries that have allowed unfair competitive practices and have thrown those workers out of work. The government has a duty to come up with a strategy to deal with that. We will be voting on that and I would encourage all members to support that effort.

We need to have specific government strategies for areas that are going to be influenced beyond their control in their area of expertise until we can make sure that there is going to be some stability.

I do want to address, in my final two minutes here, the notion that going from 14 weeks to 12 weeks to collect benefits would create an influx of people who cheat the system. Why do we not go after the people in the corporate world, white collar crime, those this country never goes after, those who cheat people out of their pensions, their savings and their earnings, with the same type of vigour? Why is it always on the backs of the workers as being victims first?

It is unacceptable. Nobody wants those cheaters and we should go after them if they are going to do that, but the government cannot get away with not doing anything about white collar crime and the looting of pensions and at the same time not do a little bit for workers and have an excuse—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry to interrupt the member but we are moving to statements by members.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

### MÉLANIE BÉRUBÉ

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Mélanie Bérubé, a clinical nurse specialist, who won the Florence 2005-Relève award. This is the highest award of the Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec.

Ms. Bérubé, who lives in Sainte-Dorothée, in the riding of Laval—Les Îles, has made an outstanding contribution to the development and implementation of continuous quality improvement initiatives. She has worked in the intensive care unit at the Jewish General Hospital in Montreal for the past five years and also teaches at the Université de Montréal, specializing in intensive care.

Ms. Bérubé is devoted to people and advocates greater recognition for nurses.

Without a doubt, Ms. Bérubé sets an example and is a role model for the next generation.

Once again, congratulations to Mélanie Bérubé.

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[English]

#### CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

**Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party works for Canadian unity. Conservatives believe our nation's strength is in our diversity.

Conservatives celebrate and work side by side with atheists, agnostics, Muslims, Buddhists, Protestant and Catholic Christians, Mormons, Hindus and those who practise native religions. Canada's might is found in new Canadians and established families who centre their lives on eternal values.

We recognize that government involves moral and ethical challenges. Canadians do not expect MPs to check their religious beliefs at the caucus door because governing is not done in a vacuum of values. We welcome MPs who bring their world view to the table when we discuss economics, a city agenda or world trade.

Liberals consistently conjure fear of Canadians who hold religious values but Canadians are becoming tired of the Liberals' fearmongering and are looking to a party that celebrates strength. I am proud to be a Conservative because the Conservative Party works for Canadian unity.

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#### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, May 31 was a historic day for relations between the Government of Canada and Canada's first nations, Inuit and Métis.

Cabinet ministers and the leaders of five national organizations participated in a policy retreat which marked a new way of doing business, a new partnership based on respect and coexistence.

The signing of a joint accord with each of these organizations underlines the commitment of all parties to move forward together on policy priorities that have been jointly set from the ground up.

I believe this partnership is an achievement that is in the interest of all Canadians. It helps ensure an inclusive approach where real progress can be made in closing the socio-economic gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians.

The policy retreat has resulted in strengthened relations and has put us well on our way to achieving concrete results.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### SOCIÉTÉ ALZHEIMER DE LANAUDIÈRE

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, June 5, I will have the privilege of being the honorary chair of the Société Alzheimer de Lanaudière's memory walk.

*S. O. 31*

A memory walk is held each year in various communities to raise money to help people suffering from this terrible disease and support programs, services and research.

I invite everyone to come out and walk with us on Sunday, June 5, in Joliette. I also want to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers of this organization, and I thank them on behalf of everyone suffering from this disease and their families.

Congratulations to Ms. Claudine Goulet, chair of the Société Alzheimer de Lanaudière board, and the organization's coordinator, Ms. Andrée Brousseau. Happy walking to all.

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[English]

#### UJA FEDERATION

**Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last Sunday marked the 35th anniversary of the UJA Federation walk with Israel. This year more than 15,000 people from across the greater Toronto area came out to celebrate Israel.

The event was highly successful. As we walked through downtown Toronto, we were greeted with Israeli food, songs and dancing. Fun was had by all. The walk raised approximately \$350,000 which will go toward the annual UJA Federation campaign which last year raised over \$55 million worldwide.

The UJA Federation is a very important organization that strives to ensure the survival and growth of the Jewish community through fundraising, planning and providing programs and services. The Federation's credo is compassion, commitment and generosity. Its tremendous work exemplifies the concept of *tzedakah* or charity.

The UJA Federation is committed to the community. In partnership with other groups, it supports our most vulnerable, welcomes newcomers and strengthens a sense of cultural pride through its numerous projects.

I want to commend all those who participated and put in countless hours of work for the UJA Federation and everyone who came out to have a wonderful walk for Israel.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

#### LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

**Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, do you remember the 1993 election? The Liberals won because they promised to eliminate GST and do away with free trade, but they reneged.

*S. O. 31*

Instead, they raised taxes and increased spending. In the process, their misplaced priorities damaged our health care, defence and agriculture. They bought votes with taxpayer money.

Then came the scandals: Somalia, tainted blood, the HRDC \$1 billion boondoggle, the gun registry fiasco, the list goes on, and damaging Auditor General's reports, one after another. Meanwhile, western alienation has gone from bad to worse.

The Gomery inquiry brought the corruption in the Liberal government to light. The Liberals put tax dollars into the party's coffers.

They made deals with the NDP on the budget to prop themselves up.

Then came the new low: the Prime Minister's office buying MPs' votes to save non-confidence votes.

It is little wonder Canadians are losing confidence in the Liberals.

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**ARTS AND CULTURE**

**Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to commend photographer, Michael Semak, a native of Welland, Ontario, for his contributions to Canadian photography and culture.

Mr. Semak is a self-taught photographer whose world renowned photographs have been exhibited in over 300 solo and group exhibitions. Michael Semak's work has been recognized by numerous grants and awards and presented in publications like *National Geographic* and *Time* magazines. His photographs can be found in many private and public collections, among them the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Public Archives of Canada.

Michael Semak's work is currently being exhibited until November 13, 2005 here in Ottawa at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Mr. Semak has travelled the world capturing intense images. His work presents a tension between beauty and social commitment but does not suggest any type of social change. His photographs simply capture the raw moments of life.

Many anticipate Michael Semak's next project, which will portray the wine-making industry in Niagara. I congratulate Mr. Semak for his many accomplishments. Welland is justly proud of its native son.

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[*Translation*]

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois supports the recommendations in the third report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which was tabled in the House of Commons on May 20.

The committee recommends that the federal government increase funding to the women's program at Status of Women Canada by at least 25% for investments in women's groups and equality seeking

organizations. The present amount is far from sufficient, as it represents less than 60¢ per woman per year.

The committee recommends that the government heed the unanimous call from equality seeking organizations for core funding to allow them some financial stability. In addition, there will have to be some project funding to meet new challenges.

The organizations in Quebec are in desperate need. This is why the Liberal government must act promptly and transfer this funding to Quebec to enable it to continue promoting equality for women.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**BRANT WATERWAYS FOUNDATION**

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge the Brant Waterways Foundation. This non-profit, charitable foundation was established in 1988 to provide funding assistance to projects that preserve, protect, restore and improve the Grand River and its related bodies of water and adjacent lands.

The foundation has contributed \$3 million in assistance toward projects that have been of tremendous benefit to the citizens of Brant.

I would like to congratulate, in particular, Mary Welsh, a citizen of Brant who has been the driving force behind the foundation. She has been tireless in her devotion to this and other causes in the riding of Brant and the result of her efforts has been outstanding. The walking and biking trails which are maintained by the foundation have been enjoyed by thousands, both by residents of Brant and visitors alike.

To Mary Welsh and to all who support the Brant Waterways Foundation, I send my sincere congratulations.

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**BORDER SECURITY**

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians have relied too long on luck to avoid a terrorist attack. Canada's security net is full of holes.

Most of Canada's 160 border crossings are staffed by one person and there are 225 unguarded cross-border roads. Airport security is so lax that missing security badges and uniforms turn up on eBay. Computer checks on incoming travellers at the border are flawed or non-existent. Sixteen hundred cars were reported speeding past the border without stopping in 2004. Unarmed guards must rely on police officers to respond to border incidents. An airport accepts international passengers without on-site immigration checks. Finally, a marine border unit does not even have a boat.

Securing our border is vital. If the government cares about the safety of Canadians and customs officers and in stopping smuggling, it would staff ports properly and provide the proper tools for law enforcement.

*S. O. 31*

•(1410)

### JUSTICE

**Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to speak out against a hate crime that took place in my province last week.

A 17-year-old Canadian Sikh boy was walking through an elementary school field when he was cowardly and callously attacked by five young men. They approached the boy and made several racial slurs before they assaulted him several times. One of the suspects apparently even went so far as to remove the victim's turban and proceeded to cut his hair off with an exacto knife. Cutting his hair with a knife was not only a serious physical assault, but also a very serious insult to and attack on the cultural and religious beliefs of the victim.

This attack has all the ingredients of a hate crime. This type of action does not represent the type of Canada we are trying to build. Canada is an open and tolerant society that celebrates differences and does not accept hatred.

I hope that community representatives everywhere will speak out against such acts.

\* \* \*

### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals once again announced a new day for the victims of abuse in residential schools. Sixty years of abuse, several royal commissions to study the problem, a dispute resolution system that paid billions to lawyers and almost nothing to victims, and what now? Another delay, another adviser who will report back by next March.

The Liberals refuse to acknowledge that the residential school system was a government attempt over three generations to extinguish native culture. It allowed the physical, sexual and mental abuse of aboriginal children.

The Liberals have made a tradition of delaying compensation for residential school survivors. Lawyers and public officials have made millions while the survivors grow old and die fighting to prove their case. Survivors in my riding do not accept another promise. They have heard Liberal promises for years and they have seen them broken.

The Prime Minister should show true leadership now. He should authorize immediate lump sum payments to sick and elderly survivors so they receive compensation now. There is no reason to delay unless the Prime Minister is playing more games. He needs to show some integrity and—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

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### MARRIAGE

**Mr. Jim Gouk (British Columbia Southern Interior, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the question on redefining marriage is extremely divisive, but Canadians are fair minded and reasonable. Most do not oppose a recognized union between same sex couples. They simply object to

those couples using the same name for their union that traditional families around the world have used throughout history.

Recognition of the union of same sex couples is a new consideration and as such should have a new name to better describe this newly recognized relationship.

If the Prime Minister is not sure whether Canadians support his proposal to expand the traditional definition of marriage, I suggest he put his trust in the good judgment of the Canadian people and hold a referendum on the issue of definition of marriage. I have done this on a number of issues in my riding and, on occasion, I have voted contrary to the position of my party and even my own personally held beliefs when directed by those I represent.

Collectively, we are sent here to represent all Canadians and they should all have a say when considering such a major change to a defining aspect of Canadian life.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### CHILDREN

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, June 4 will be the International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression. This day was created by the United Nations in 1982.

There is nothing more precious in our societies than our children. Their well-being is of primary concern to all humanity. They are the leaders of tomorrow. Every effort must be made to protect them from potential aggression and to help them when they fall victim to it.

These innocent victims include not only the child victims of war. They also include the victims of sex crimes, of extortion by bullies, of physical violence, of marginalization.

Let us hope that by sharing her story with the public Nathalie Simard will have helped the rest of us to break the silence and made us more watchful over defenceless children.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### JUSTICE

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians travel overseas for many different reasons, some for business, some for vacation, but alarmingly some travel for the sole purpose of engaging in sexual activity with children.

Yesterday the first Canadian to be charged with sex tourism crimes pleaded guilty to sadistic sex acts involving Cambodian girls as young as the age of seven.

Sex tourism exploits children worldwide and it is something that absolutely no child should ever have to endure.

*Oral Questions*

Experts estimate that more than a million children are lured or sold into the sex trade each year. Federal law now allows for the prosecution of sex offences committed by a Canadian in a foreign country. It is expected that pedophile Don Bakker will likely serve a mere 10 years in prison. Innocent children will live a life sentence that is unimaginable.

I hope our justice system continues to prosecute these sex tourists and at the same time ensures that pedophiles and violent offenders are never given access to the pornographic material known to be circulated throughout our federal prisons and counterproductive to successful rehabilitation.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

**SENIORS**

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is committed to giving families a helping hand at all stages of life. I stand today in the House to urge all members to support budget 2005 which contains important initiatives for Canada's seniors.

*[Translation]*

Whether it is health care, income security, retirement savings or help for caregivers, the 2005 budget includes financial provisions for seniors. Our goal is to improve the quality of life of all our seniors, particularly those who are the least well-off.

Tax cuts are planned, which will take 240,000 seniors off the tax rolls.

*[English]*

Budget 2005 also increases support for low income seniors and provides additional resources for the highly successful new horizons program to keep seniors active. In addition, the budget will provide \$13 million over five years to establish a new national seniors' secretariat.

Please support Canadian seniors by supporting budget 2005.

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**GLOBAL WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today in a British Columbia court a historic judgment will take place. For the first time a Canadian citizen will be sentenced under the provisions of the Criminal Code for predatory sexual behaviour with children outside of Canada.

Yesterday, before a committee of the House, we heard three credible witnesses refer to the fact that a number of Canadian mining companies had been involved in the violation of human rights and health provisions of workers in Africa, Asia and South America.

The NDP believes that just as we should protect children in foreign lands from sexual predators, so too should we protect their parents from predatory companies.

As a first step, we call upon the government to amend to so-called Westray law and extend its protective provisions to apply to workers of Canadian companies anywhere in the world.

**ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]***MEMBER FOR NEWTON—NORTH DELTA**

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in response to allegations of vote buying, the Prime Minister initially said, "I made it very clear that no offers were to be made, and no offers were made". Yet yesterday he admitted knowledge of the negotiations.

The attempts to distance himself from this deal are failing. The tapes show the health minister saying, "Cabinet can be arranged right away". The health minister and the Prime Minister's chief of staff set up the deal and the Prime Minister, the big boss, seals it or formally okays it.

Does the Prime Minister still deny that his health minister and chief of staff were making a deal on his behalf?

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister has been very clear about this, but let me clarify it again. When the Prime Minister was informed that the member for Newton—North Delta was interested in joining our caucus, the Prime Minister was absolutely clear in relation to what he told Mr. Murphy. He told Mr. Murphy, "do not make an offer" and no offer was made.

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC):** Clear as mud, dirt actually, Mr. Speaker. The RCMP have the tape so we will see.

The Prime Minister said that he would never meet with the member for Newton—North Delta, yet the tapes say otherwise. His chief of staff said that the Prime Minister would only meet once a deal was in place. He said that he would formally okay it. That was the way previous defections were handled.

We only have to take a look around the benches to see how that works. A deal was offered. The chief of staff said that the Prime Minister would be "prepared to talk to you directly both by phone and subsequently in person as we see fit".

There is a blatant contradiction between the Minister of Health, the chief of staff and the Prime Minister's version of events. Which Liberal is telling the truth?

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is no contradiction. The Prime Minister was clear. The Prime Minister told Mr. Murphy that there was no offer to be made. There was no offer made.

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC):** What we know, Mr. Speaker, is that the Prime Minister has made a career out of playing a clever game of plausible deniability and attempts to hide some of his sordid vote buying activities.

*Oral Questions*

This well orchestrated plan goes like this. A third party, usually a Liberal confidant, makes the initial offer. The chief of staff claims that this allows the government to say, “The independent party played the role, like we didn’t approach, you didn’t approach”. Then the chief of staff works out the details and the Prime Minister closes the deal at 24 Sussex.

Why does the Prime Minister not just stand up and admit what Canadians have come to know, that in his desperation to cling to power, the Prime Minister will do anything?

• (1420)

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** I think, Mr. Speaker, it would be more appropriate to cast our eye on the benches of the official opposition over there. It seems to me that some, including the member for Newton—North Delta, would do almost anything to leave that side of the House.

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC):** The fact, Mr. Speaker, is some did.

Last night CTV television reported that the RCMP had launched an investigation into the corrupt deal making efforts of the Prime Minister. Then the station received a call from the Prime Minister’s Office saying that the RCMP was only reviewing the complaints and further questions would be directed to the RCMP.

How did they know in the PMO, and could the Prime Minister tell us when his communications department became the official spokesperson for the RCMP?

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me make it absolutely plain. No one from the Prime Minister’s Office contacted anyone in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will just have to take their word for that. Time will tell. This is very reminiscent of the efforts to interfere with the Ethics Commissioner.

The *Globe and Mail* reports today that the RCMP said that it was only reviewing the complaint, only after the RCMP spokesperson, Nathalie Deschenes, told the *Globe and Mail* that an investigation had been launched.

Why was the police investigation suddenly downgraded to a review, and was the Prime Minister once again exercising political interference in an RCMP matter?

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me clarify for everyone. The RCMP is an independent law enforcement body. As I have said in the House before, if anyone is in possession of any information that he or she believes points to an alleged criminal offence, it is that person’s obligation to turn that information over to the RCMP. It is then up to the RCMP, and the RCMP alone, to review that information and determine whether an investigation is to proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in the matter of the tapes, the line of defence that the Prime Minister’s chief of staff and health minister have been sticking to for the past few days is the following: the member for Newton—North

Delta asked for future consideration in exchange for his vote, something they claim to have refused. That is what we have been told.

I have a very simple question for the Prime Minister. Was he informed by his chief of staff and his health minister that a Conservative member had tried to get compensation for his vote, yes or no?

[*English*]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said before, he was aware that the hon. member had approached our side of the House, his office, about joining our caucus.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. I did not ask if the Prime Minister knew about someone wanting to join the Liberal Party. My question is this: Did the PM’s health minister and chief of staff tell him that the member was asking for compensation to switch sides? That is their current line of defence. Did they advise the Prime Minister that doing so would be a criminal offence? That is my question. I would like an answer. Was the Prime Minister informed, yes or no?

[*English*]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me clarify and I hope that I answer the hon. member’s question. The Prime Minister knew that the member for Newton—North Delta had approached our side of the House about joining our caucus. The Prime Minister then made it absolutely plain that no offer was to be made to anyone in any way.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it would be interesting to hear the Deputy Prime Minister answer the question put to her. Was the Prime Minister informed of the fact that the Conservative member was asking for some compensation or reward to join the Liberal caucus? Did the Prime Minister know that such a request had been made?

[*English*]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister made it plain that no offer was to be made in this situation. I am sorry, I do not know what else one can say. The Prime Minister said there were to be no offers made and no offers were made.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. If the Prime Minister was aware that the member had set conditions for supporting the government and no offer was made, could the minister explain two things to us? First, why did the chief of staff and the Minister of Health spend four hours talking with the member? Four hours to tell him they had nothing to offer sounds like a long time.

*Oral Questions*

Second, why did the Prime Minister not inform the RCMP, knowing that a criminal act might be committed? That is clear.

[English]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me be plain about this. The Prime Minister was aware of the fact that the member for Newton—North Delta had approached our side of the House. The Prime Minister was clear that no offers were to be made to the member for Newton—North Delta and no offers were made.

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**HEALTH**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is amazing what can be heard on tape from the Minister of Health. Just as an example, after 10 years of medicine being increasingly privatized in this country under the Liberal watch, here is what the Minister of Health had to say on tape on May 1: “We stand for public pay and public delivery”.

This week in Vancouver a private health clinic is opening. It costs \$2,300 just to become a member. This is exactly the kind of two tier medicine we should not have. What is the minister going to do about it?

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we do stand for public health care and public delivery of health care. That means that the delivery in this country has to be within the context and the four corners of the Canada Health Act. We will monitor this particular clinic and ensure that the Canada Health Act is enforced.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is becoming a true Liberal after all, offering jobs on the one hand, breaking promises on the other.

People in Canada want their public health care system kept public. That is fundamental. A private clinic is opening in Vancouver. A person has to pay \$2,300 just to walk in the door to get service. What does it take to get some action from this minister?

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister provided an additional \$42 billion to all the provinces to ensure public health care remains strong in this country for the next 10 years. I want to ensure that we enforce the Canada Health Act evenly across the country. We shall enforce the Canada Health Act to ensure that any delivery of health care in this country conforms with the Canada Health Act.

\* \* \*

**MEMBER FOR NEWTON—NORTH DELTA**

**Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a shame to see a fight in the family. That sounds like the Prime Minister's kind of clinic.

It is amazing how the Prime Minister's version of the truth shifts from day to day as his chief of staff and his health minister are caught on tape trying to buy off the member for Newton—North Delta. Here is what the tape said. The health minister said:

I talked to the prime minister moments ago. He will be happy to talk to you over the phone tonight or in person if you want to move.

Why did the Prime Minister tell us yesterday that he had never offered to meet the member for Newton—North Delta when that clearly is not true?

• (1430)

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I said yesterday that not much stock should be placed in those tapes. My suspicions have come true. Independent experts from CFRA have said the tapes had been doctored. So we not only have a serial tapper in the House, we have a doctor in the House who is an expert in altering the tapes.

**Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the health minister is going to start promoting conspiracy theories, he really should get himself a tinfoil hat.

Canadians believe that small lies often hide big lies. They have to wonder what is going on with the Prime Minister and his shifting stories. His chief of staff is on tape saying:

—first, Prime Minister was quite happy to do this but literally he is going to get a plane to see the Queen but he is prepared to...talk to you directly both by phone and subsequently in person as we see it fit.

Why does the Prime Minister continue to deny his knowledge of the Liberal MP purchase plan?

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I said before that the member for Newton—North Delta, the expert in doctoring tapes, came to us and made demands. The demands were rejected. He has now actually misplaced some of the tapes. He has misplaced the tape of a two hour conversation with me in my home, which those members said on May 22 that they had.

What is the involvement of the Leader of the Opposition in erasing or misplacing those tapes?

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect members of Parliament to act with integrity and to uphold parliamentary tradition.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre has the floor. We will have a little order please.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, tradition suggests that when a minister of the Crown is under suspicion for potential criminal activity, that minister should step down. The tapes clearly indicate that the conversation between the Minister of Health and the member for Newton—North Delta was done for one purpose and that was to try to buy votes.

Will the Prime Minister simply do what is right, uphold the tradition of this House, and call upon the resignation of the Minister of Health?

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said before in the House, it was quite clear that the member for Newton—North Delta was the one who was interested in leaving the official opposition and was apparently looking around for a new home.

*Oral Questions*

What I find interesting are some of the quotes from some of the members of the official opposition. The member for Edmonton—St. Albert said:

I don't think that one-sided taping of conversations is something that we should brag about or be doing on an ongoing—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the minister knows, every member of the House knows, and every Canadian who has been paying attention to the story knows that the intent of the meeting between the Prime Minister's chief of staff, the Minister of Health and the member for Newton—North Delta was to try to buy votes.

The refusal by the Prime Minister to ask for their resignations is at best unconscionable and at worst condoning potential criminal activity. Will the Prime Minister simply do what is right and call for the resignations of his chief of staff and the Minister of health?

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are seeing an unfortunate example of the kind of tactic undertaken by official opposition members. They assert legal conclusions. They destroy people's reputations.

The hon. member has just made some assertion around vote buying as factual. The hon. member and everybody on that side of the House should be very careful that they do not damage innocent people's reputations.

However, let me quote the member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam—

• (1435)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member's time has expired.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said again today that whoever learns of a potential criminal offence must immediately notify the RCMP. The Minister of Health and the Prime Minister's chief of staff tell us that, for two days, a Conservative member tried to obtain compensation in exchange for his vote, which is a criminal offence. They did not inform the RCMP.

My question, and it is very clear, is this: Did they advise the Prime Minister that the MP was trying to get compensation? That is the question. I do not want to know whether or not there was an offer. Did they tell the Prime Minister? Perhaps she would answer my question.

[*English*]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me be clear again. The Prime Minister was absolutely clear that no offers were to be made to anyone, and as I have said before, if the hon. member has any information that leads him to believe that a criminal offence has been committed, he should turn that information over to the RCMP.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, let us be clear, as the minister says. Was it not more like this: the Prime Minister was advised that the MP had sought compensation and, rather than inform the RCMP, he did as his chief of staff and health minister had done, he said to continue negotiating and if things were resolved and he agreed to wait, they would have done nothing. That is what the Prime Minister wanted to do. It is the usual nobody knew story. This is why the minister is not answering my question. Exactly why. She is trying to clear the Prime Minister—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

[*English*]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that the only thing the Prime Minister knew was that in fact the member for Newton—North Delta had approached our side of the House, interested in leaving the official opposition. That is what the Prime Minister knew. The Prime Minister went further and said, "I don't want any offers made". Full stop. It could not be clearer.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is saying that the Prime Minister had not been told that the Conservative member was looking for a reward. In the meantime, his chief of staff and the Minister of Health are defending themselves by saying that they did not make an offer, even though the hon. member spent two days looking for a reward.

I have the following question for the Deputy Prime Minister. How can the Prime Minister still have any faith in his Minister of Health and his chief of staff, when they hid the fact that a Conservative member was trying to get something in return for his vote? How can he accept that today, since both men are saying—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

[*English*]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was clear. There were to be no offers made and no offer was made.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of tapes, this one is starting to sound the same. Maybe we need to ask the question three times to get an answer. We are starting to get to the bottom of what happened.

According to them, the Prime Minister did not want to know that someone was looking for a reward. That is their line of defence. That is the version given by the Minister of Health and the chief of staff.

How can a prime minister tolerate as a senior adviser a chief of staff who kept him in the dark about what went on, a criminal offence, and a member of his cabinet who is fine with the fact that a criminal offence may have been committed? How can he tolerate that?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Again, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was clear that no offer was to be made. No offer was made. I will say again that if the hon. member has information that leads him to believe a criminal offence has been committed, he should turn that evidence over to the RCMP. The RCMP will review that information and decide whether an investigation should be initiated.

● (1440)

**Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians have heard the Prime Minister's chief of staff suggest he could influence the actions of the Ethics Commissioner. This is outrageous. The Ethics Commissioner should be able to operate free of any political interference, but the words of the Prime Minister's chief of staff would suggest that the government believes otherwise.

How can the Prime Minister continue to condone this behaviour? Why will the Prime Minister not admit that he is responsible for his government's sordid vote-buying practices?

**Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, serious questions have been raised with regard to the tapes and the transcripts. That has been echoed earlier on today. The Ethics Commissioner himself is an independent officer of Parliament. Frankly, I understand that this matter has already been referred to the Ethics Commissioner. If any members have any information to provide the Ethics Commissioner, I suggest that they do so.

**Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, however evasive their choice of words may be, once again the Liberals have been caught acting solely in their own best interests. The conflict of interest and post-employment code for public office holders imposes upon cabinet ministers and their ministerial staff an obligation. Let me quote it:

—to uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of government are conserved and enhanced.

Canadians want to know. When is the government going to live up to this code?

**Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, frankly, I think what Canadians want to know is if the hon. member has any additional information to assist the Ethics Commissioner in reviewing this issue why the hon. member would not be providing that information to the Ethics Commissioner rather than playing the smear game here in the House.

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of the Ethics Commissioner, he is not very pleased with the government. One can understand why, because after all, the Prime Minister's chief of staff suggested to the member for Newton—North Delta that he would intervene with the Ethics Commissioner to have a report and a particular result produced by the Ethics Commissioner. That is why today the Ethics Commissioner says he does not appreciate having his office “bandied about in negotiations”.

Why is it that the Prime Minister's ethics are so low that he would drag the Ethics Commissioner himself into this sordid vote buying—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Calgary Southeast knows suggesting that the ethics of hon. members are low is improper, to

say the least, and I would caution him about using that kind of language in the House.

The hon. member for Calgary Southeast on a supplementary.

\* \* \*

**SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, they still have an opportunity to answer that.

*[Translation]*

On another matter, last week at the Gomery inquiry, Giuseppe Morselli said that once when he was at Chez Frank, the famous restaurant, having a meal with Benoît Corbeil, he saw the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was there and congratulated Mr. Morselli on his successful fundraising in Quebec for the Liberal Party.

I want to know exactly how many times the Prime Minister dined at Chez Frank with the people involved in the sponsorship scandal.

*[English]*

**Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I guess those members have gone beyond birthday letters now and are going into restaurants.

Today's *National Post* editorial had this to say:

If the Conservatives had their way, [Justice Gomery would] effectively be asked to consciously prejudice the courts.

Mercifully, the Conservatives' motion was defeated, allowing Judge Gomery to fulfill his original mandate after testimony concludes...But the fact that [the Conservative Party] ever thought it was a good idea demonstrates no one in Ottawa has a monopoly on bad judgment.

Further, it said that:

—in advocating a fundamental change in the inquiry's mandate...the Conservatives displayed dubious judgment.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***BROADCASTING INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

During the last election campaign, the Liberal government promised to resolve the situation with respect to making the RAI International television station available in Canada. Once again, the Liberal Party has kept its promise. On May 13, the CRTC gave permission for RAI International to be broadcast in Canada.

My question is very simple. When will Canadians be able to tune in to RAI International from home?

● (1445)

**Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce that, as of today, RAI International is available from Rogers, and it will soon be available from Vidéotron as well.

As we all know, this decision made by the CRTC last month will increase the diversity of content in our broadcasting system, which is already regarded as one of the best in the world.

I might add for the hon. members' benefit that, on Sunday, RAI International will have a special broadcast, which will air simultaneously worldwide—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

\* \* \*

[English]

### ETHICS

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have heard today both from the Deputy Prime Minister and the government House leader that if we have information we should be turning it over to the RCMP.

We have asked this before and I am repeating the request now. There are logs, there are memos and there are exchanges that have gone on within the PMO with regard to the taping and the whole incident. I am asking the Deputy Prime Minister today: your former prime minister was investigated very quickly and are you prepared to turn that information—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member will want to address his remarks to the Chair, not to the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Deputy Prime Minister may wish to respond to the question.

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure what the hon. member is referring to. In fact, I think this Prime Minister and this government have a history of openness and transparency that is unparalleled.

All we have to do is look at the extraordinary steps this Prime Minister took in releasing all sorts of documents and cabinet confidences never before released so that Mr. Justice Gomery could do his work. I think this is a government that is committed not only to transparency but to accountability.

\* \* \*

### AIR TRANSPORTATION

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I hope the Prime Minister will protect the privacy of Canadians as much as he protects the privacy of his minister.

Any time the Liberal government goes into discussions with the U.S., Canadians get worried. After all, the Liberal government has been discussing the softwood lumber dispute and the BSE dispute for years with no resolution. Now the transport minister says he is discussing the U.S. requirements to release private information on airline passengers flying over the U.S., not landing in the U.S. but flying over the U.S.

The government needs to make it perfectly clear that Canada will protect the privacy of Canadians and this is not up for discussion. Will the minister do that? Will he say—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transport.

**Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. I was talking with Secretary of

### Oral Questions

Transportation Mr. Mineta this morning. I made it quite clear that Canadian routes and Canadian destinations are Canadian information and we want it to remain Canadian information.

\* \* \*

### CHILD CARE

**Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we learned this morning that the Minister of Social Development is negotiating with the opposition Liberal leader of New Brunswick. The families of New Brunswick and the Premier of New Brunswick have spoken loud and clear. They want choice in child care. The minister should be listening to the families of New Brunswick instead of giving political direction to his provincial Liberal counterpart.

When will the minister admit that no political rhetoric will change the reality that families do not want a two tier child care system and instead want choice in child care?

**Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I met earlier today with the leader of the opposition in New Brunswick. All that was discussed is where things are in terms of the negotiations and how in fact our negotiations with New Brunswick have proceeded to a point where the officials agreed. We expected to have an announcement. That announcement did not happen. This is an announcement and an agreement very similar to five others that have been signed across the country and to others that are being negotiated at the moment.

**Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let us hope the agreement involves choice.

The *Moncton Times and Transcript* said in its editorial today, "It is inane and short-sighted of the federal government to impose a one-size-fits-all solution on New Brunswick", and we could not agree more.

A gender based analysis of the Liberal child care plan shows that it discriminates against women who work shift work. It discriminates against women who live or work outside of urban centres and women who choose to work part time or full time in the home.

Can the minister please explain why the Liberal child care plan does not support the choices of all women?

● (1450)

**Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in the House, about a year ago in terms of early learning and child care in this country there was very little push going on for anything big and ambitious. It all came from the commitment that was made by this government in last year's election campaign. That is where it all came from. There was nothing foreseeable that was about to happen without that kind of commitment.

If anybody wants to talk about discrimination, \$320 for low income children as part of a tax cut is true discrimination.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday I asked the social development minister how much it would cost to fully implement his day care bureaucracy. He said no one can know, yet the NDP, which wrote this year's federal budget, seems to know. It estimates \$10 billion per year. Major unions, day care industry groups and other supporters of the minister's day care bureaucracy say it could be more than \$10 billion.

The minister should quit dodging. How much will it cost in the immediate future to fully implement your day care bureaucracy?

**The Speaker:** I urge the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton to address his remarks to the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Social Development.

**Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said to the hon. member the other evening, with our early learning and child care system we are in our early stages. We want to develop a true system, as education has been developed over the last 100 years and as health care has been developed over the last 100 years.

At those particular times no one knew at that moment how important or how costly those systems would be, but as we look back in time we see how important that health care system has been and how important that education system has been to us.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the minister has effectively just admitted it will take 100 years to finally implement his program. We know it will take 100 years to pay for it.

This bureaucracy will cost \$10 billion a year or more. The Liberals have only budgeted \$1 billion. That leaves a \$9 billion black hole. Is it not true that the only way to pay for this \$10 billion bureaucracy is through higher taxes on working families and on parents?

**Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the creation of this kind of system is in the same way as the health care system costs parents and families, as education costs parents and families. We just need to ask any member of the public whether he or she wants the kind of health care system and education system that we have been able to build in this country in the last 100 years.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**MEMBER FOR NEWTON—NORTH DELTA**

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it appears the Prime Minister's chief of staff may not only have alluded to a future reward for the Conservative member, but may also have contemplated getting involved in the member's dispute with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, because he said, and I quote: "I go to—the Minister of Immigration—and say 'don't ask me why, but 10:30 am tomorrow you're issuing a statement'. But, I do that and force him to, based on an agreement".

Is the fact that the Prime Minister's chief of staff made his demand conditional on an agreement with the Minister of Citizenship and

Immigration not an attempt to buy the vote of a member of Parliament?

[English]

**Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the Ethics Commissioner is an independent officer of Parliament. He was actually voted on in the House.

I understand that the matter has already been referred to the Ethics Commissioner. If the hon. member does have information that would assist the Ethics Commissioner, then I suggest that he bring that information forward for the Ethics Commissioner to review.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, he did not answer the right question. I will give him another opportunity to answer.

The chief of staff allegedly went even further by suggesting he could approach the Ethics Commissioner, precisely to ask him to speed up the production of a report dealing with the member.

In light of these revelations, can the government deny that it was prepared to do anything to save its own skin, even going so far as to contemplate putting pressure on the Ethics Commissioner? Is this not just despicable?

• (1455)

[English]

**Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as was said earlier in the House, there was no offer made to the hon. member. The Prime Minister provided that instruction to his chief of staff.

The Ethics Commissioner is an independent officer of Parliament. Rather than making allegations in the House, if the hon. member does have information to provide the Ethics Commissioner, then he should actually provide that directly to the Ethics Commissioner.

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**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, under the government, management of west coast fisheries has been concentrated in downtown Ottawa, thousands of miles from the nearest fish or fish boat.

After years of agitation, a cooperative agreement resulted in the establishment of a representative group from local communities, regional governments, first nations and various fishing sectors. The West Coast Vancouver Island Aquatic Management Board has been building consensus among those most affected by the resource and providing that input to DFO.

Why has the government failed to renew the funding to maintain this community driven and widely supported initiative?

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the work of this board and I have directed that the funding be continued for the board.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, promises have been good. We heard rumours that maybe the money was coming. I want to say that our local first nations prefer to work with their neighbours—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. I am sure the hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni appreciates all the help with his question, but I cannot hear it. Hon. members, especially the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, has to be able to hear the question so he can give an answer. Perhaps the hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni could continue with his question.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Mr. Speaker, promises, promises. I have been after the minister for some time to actually deliver the money on this. We have not actually seen it delivered. We would like to see the cheque on the west coast. The government is undermining an initiative that communities close to the resource have fought for and continue to support and one that could become a resource management model that works.

Will the minister renew that funding today? Will he deliver the cheque today?

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of the lawyer who, upon having his client acquitted, was asked by the judge if he had anything to add. He said, “No, Your Honour. I can take yes for an answer”.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**HOUSING**

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, housing cooperatives are extremely important to the housing sector in Canada. Thousands of Canadians depend on access to low-cost housing designed for low income families.

Can the minister tell the House what commitments the government has made to ensure the sustainability of housing cooperatives?

[*English*]

**Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member and all in her caucus for their hard work on cooperative housing. As everyone knows, we have signed a historic agreement with the Co-operative Housing Programs Administration Agency to better administer and work with us as we continue to build more and more cooperative housing.

It is incredible that the Bloc Québécois, which purports to support cooperative housing, has never asked the question of how we could do it. Let me say this.

[*Translation*]

It is my firm conviction that this kind of collaboration will ensure the sustainability and prosperity of an extremely important sector of the population—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

[*English*]

**AGRICULTURE**

**Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, farmers across Canada are burdened by increasing government interference in their lives. They are concerned about the way the Canadian Food Inspection Agency goes about its business.

Bill C-27 should be focused on reorganizing the CFIA to make it more accountable and responsive to producers. Bill C-27 does not include any significant appeals process for producers. Can the minister tell us why?

**Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I need to point out to the hon. member that Bill C-27 was referred to committee before second reading. That provided members of the House, government members and indeed opposition members as well, the opportunity to shape the legislation in the way they felt was best. If there are specific recommendations that he would like to see in that legislation, I suggest that the hon. member come to committee and lay on the table amendments to achieve that.

● (1500)

**Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear the minister does not have any problem with improving the appeals process as it is currently included in the flawed bill.

Is the minister prepared to stand in the House today and make his commitment to the farmers of Canada that he will urge government members on that committee to make sure there is a real and meaningful appeals process for the farmers so they do not have to be dragged through the courts when they disagree with a CFIA decision?

**Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the hon. member fundamentally misunderstands how the process works. When a bill is referred to committee before second reading, a process which the opposition has encouraged the government to do on an ongoing basis and which the government did in this case, it gives the committee the opportunity to shape the legislation.

The committee is in the process of doing that work. I look forward to the committee completing that work in the near future.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, over \$500 million was spent to speed the movement of truck traffic across borders, so that security measures are not excessively detrimental to our economy. In the meantime, the RCMP is dragging its feet when it comes to checking the criminal records of candidates for federal public service jobs. People are waiting at least four months and sometimes even over a year before their fingerprints are analyzed. As a result, a number of applicants lose employment for which they were deemed qualified, and many students are not able to take the summer job in their field of study.

*Privilege*

Is it too much to ask that people be treated with the same care and speed as trucks?

[English]

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a very important question. The hon. member raised it with me in committee, and I think one other member of his party raised it on the floor of the House during question period.

Obviously security checks need to be done. If people are going to work for the Government of Canada, as for most private sector employers today, provincial governments and so on, security checks are done. There is no question that we need to develop a system where especially those who are summer students applying for summer work have their security checks done in an expeditious and timely way so they are able to take up their work.

The commissioner of the RCMP was at committee when the hon. member raised that question—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

\* \* \*

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, recently the government issued citations to a Russian trawler known as the *Odoevsk*. Could the minister please update the House on that situation and the violations made on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and Labrador?

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we take issues like this very seriously. Russia has acted responsibly by calling the vessel home and revoking its fishing licence. This is welcome news in the wake of the St. John's conference where all international participants agreed that more must be done to combat overfishing on the high seas.

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**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** Order. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Phil Goff, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Minister of Justice of New Zealand.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

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**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it being Thursday, could the government House leader enlighten not only the House but by extension the general public who I am sure are curious to know what the government business will be for the remainder of this week and next week?

I wonder if he is now prepared to admit that by cancelling opposition days in April to prevent non-confidence motions, he now must schedule all of the remaining opposition days in June, exactly as I said he originally intended to do.

**Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before I get to the weekly business statement, I said at that time that I would begin to schedule opposition days before the end of May and that is exactly what I have done. There are a number more to schedule.

Today and tomorrow, of course, are allotted days. I also wish to designate next Tuesday and next Thursday as allotted days.

When the budget bills, Bill C-43 and Bill C-48 are reported from committee, they will certainly become our highest priority.

In the meantime, we will proceed with third reading of Bill C-22, the social development bill; report stage and third reading of Bill C-26, the border services legislation; second reading of Bill S-18, respecting the census; and Bill C-52, the Fisheries Act amendment.

We will then turn to report stage and third reading of bills that have been or are soon to be reported from committee. These include Bill C-25 respecting RADARSAT; Bill C-37, the do not call bill; Bill C-28, the food and drug legislation; and Bill C-38, the civil marriage bill. If there is time during the next three weeks, we will also start to debate the legislation that has been introduced during the last few weeks.

\* \* \*

● (1505)

**PRIVILEGE****USE BY OTHERS OF WEBSITE NAMES OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**

**Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, two days ago I rose in the House on a question of privilege to talk about the fact that there had been tampering with electronic equipment in the offices of members of Parliament, namely the telephone systems hooked up to fax lines. Six or seven MPs at least have been affected by this situation. I want to add to this today by bringing the following to the attention of your honour. We now have a situation where people are engaged in what is commonly referred to as cybersquatting. People have now taken over the websites of members of Parliament in much the same way.

We cannot refer to names of MPs in the House, not even one's own, but I bring to the attention of the House that "my name".ca, which for years has been my website, now appears under the name of an organization calling itself the Defend Marriage Coalition. It instructs people on how to object to my voting in favour of Bill C-38 regarding the definition of civil marriage. It makes disparaging remarks against me as a member of the House and so on.

I also want to draw to the attention of the House that I am not the only member affected. There are some 40 or 50 members of Parliament whose names have been similarly taken over by this organization. I have the list and I am willing to provide it to the Speaker, table it, or both.

*Privilege*

Finally, in about 15 such cases of the 50 that I have just enumerated, the members of Parliament are now subject to this actual cybersquatting. In other words, it is not only that the sites have been taken over, and many of them were previously held by the members and were paid for personally and otherwise, but now some of them have already been converted to these right-wing religious organizations.

For instance, the site names of the following members have been taken over by someone else: the hon. member for Durham; the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre on the Liberal side; the hon. member for North Vancouver, a Liberal member; and an hon. member of the Conservative Party from South Shore, Nova Scotia.

The point I am making is that our fax lines which we use to communicate with our constituents have been overtaken and plugged up by people. Now our websites have been taken over by cybersquatters. A number of them not only have captured the domain names, but they have published information about members of Parliament, using the member of Parliament's name as access, when in some cases, such as mine, I had personally held that site for years.

The threshold has now increased. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is a bona fide case of privilege. I ask that this matter be referred forthwith to the procedure and House affairs committee.

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the only additional element that the hon. member has brought to the Chair's attention relates to a matter which is in no way, shape or form within the purview of this House or your honour and it never has been, and hopefully never will be, that is to say, the registration of domain names on the World Wide Web.

I understand my hon. friend opposite is learned with respect to parliamentary procedure but I must infer from his remarks that he is stupefiedly ignorant about the commercial practices on the Internet.

• (1510)

**The Speaker:** Honestly, the hon. member for Calgary Southeast need not suggest that any hon. member of this House is ignorant.

**Mr. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, of the Internet.

**The Speaker:** That does not make it better. He could say that he has perhaps missed the point or something. We do not need to use this kind of language.

I would urge the hon. member to show some restraint.

**Mr. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. I did not mean ignorant in the pejorative sense but in an objective sense that the member apparently does not understand the process by which domain names are registered on the Internet.

Quite frankly, I would suggest that should not be entertained by the Chair as a prospective item for consideration as a point of privilege.

The House of Commons, the Parliament of Canada and the Government of Canada do not own, regulate or manage in any way, shape or form the registration of domain names on the Internet.

There are independent agencies, .com, .ca, .org, .net, et cetera, that manage this on a commercial basis. Any sequence of letters that

constitute a name can be registered for a fee. It is incumbent upon a member or any citizen, should they wish to protect and own those domain names, to take the initiative to do so, as many of us have.

What the member said was that our websites have been taken over. This is patently not the case. If members operate parliamentary websites, it is possible for them to have the House reimburse them for the cost of registering the domain name and for the maintenance of that site.

I do not believe the member has suggested that his or any other member's official parliamentary websites have in any way been affected by third parties. What he is suggesting is that third parties have quite legally made payments to acquire domain names on the Internet.

He or I or all of us may disagree with the tactics of individuals choosing to do so but the operation of domain names on the Internet is a matter of free enterprise and is not in the purview of this House. The member knows better and should not be inviting the Speaker of the House of Commons to intervene in the operation of private businesses.

**Mr. Gary Carr (Halton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my name was one that was taken as well.

I think the problem is that what happens with this is that it looks like a real site. If people were to go to that site they would see that my picture from the House of Commons was stolen to make it look like a real site. What they have written down in the very corner is, "This is not the official site of Gary Carr".

As the House knows, I was one of those who voted against the bill. Most of the people who are on those websites are people who voted in favour of the bill. They have also taken the names of people who were opposed to the bill.

The trouble is that when people look at this site they think it is an official site. I am .ca. All a person has to do is make one mistake, and people do that very readily, they hit .com instead of .ca, with my name. What happened I guess is that a lot of us did not think we needed to protect our names against those people out there.

Quite frankly, when they stole my House of Commons picture, which actually is a very good picture of me, and put it up on that site it has my phone number and my constituency address. If someone were to go to that site they would be led to believe that it was an official website. This is the problem I have. Down at the very bottom they then have their association. I find it very troubling that they are doing this.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to your ruling and would be guided by your ruling.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to belabour the point but there a couple of things that should be brought to your attention. First, it is not correct to say that this is merely a matter of a commercial nature and so on. Intellectual property judgments rendered over the last little while in the case of Julia Roberts and a number of others are quite clear that it is not that way where name recognitions are such that this is not a matter purely of the kind that the hon. member suggests.

*Privilege*

The hon. member is referring to what he called civil remedy. The House will know that we are in the public domain. All of us are members of the House. As the hon. member for Halton has suggested, these sites are designed to look like official websites. They may have fine print on the corner that says that they are not, but they are still in appearance very similar to what members of Parliament use.

Furthermore, in the case of a number of us, and I am one of them, they took the site that I had for a long time and as a matter of fact it is linked to my House of Commons website and has been for years and years. The same had occurred to “my name”.com until earlier today. When the organization was phoned a number of times by the media, they released “my name”.com but still hung on to “my name”.ca. Clearly this is not someone else whose name happens to be the same as mine.

A number of us have what I would call unusual names. I can say that because mine is one of them. I do not know of anyone else who bears the same name and even if I did, that person likely would not be an MP and have my picture. That is not the same thing. The threshold is far different. It has been established in international courts of justice as being different. It is a different threshold under which we operate. There are links between those sites and our official sites. If people were to go onto my official site right now they would see the link to “my name”.ca. If they were to transfer to that site they would see that a religious organization is making disparaging remarks about a member of the House, namely myself. No one can say that is a legitimate use of the domain name in question. It cannot be.

● (1515)

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have two thoughts on this. What has been outlined to the House sounds a little like impersonation or identity theft. Those two actions may or may not be covered under the Criminal Code.

The second and more significant issue I would urge upon you, Mr. Speaker, is that these actions of impersonation, identity theft or using members' names and may interfere with the work of members of the House and it may interfere with the functions of the House collectively as positions, false or accurate, in relation to the members and their work are placed on the World Wide Web. I think that is the bigger issue. This is not just a domain name issue. It has to do with the functions of the House and the proper functioning of the House and its members collectively.

**Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think I can be of some assistance to you by telling you that in my opinion there is not a thing that you can do about this and you should reject the complaint.

It is a matter of the way the Internet is being used. While these things have been going on, I actually logged onto the site on my computer and, frankly, it is a process that is being used by people who care intensely about the issue of marriage.

In looking for these sites I found the one for the riding of Halton. In that particular case it says “You can trust”, and then it names the member and says that he is in favour of the traditional definition of marriage.

In the case of the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, at the top of the website it states, “This is not the official website of”, and it names the member's name. So there is a total disclaimer there. Indeed, they have his picture and they have used .ca, as the member has indicated, but there is nothing he can do short of making sure he has registered and preserved all of the variations of his name if he wants to avoid this.

There is not a thing that the Speaker can do. I do not think there is anything that any court of the land can do. That is just the way the Internet works and all of us are subject to this type of thing. I would urge the member to listen to what the constituents are saying.

● (1520)

**Mr. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I have a brief addendum. I think your honour needs to understand that, for instance, in the United States it is common practice for Internet entrepreneurs to register domain names of candidates and those candidates then at some point have to purchase those domain names through a commercial transaction. This is an established precedent. No one has a prior right to a series of letters on the Internet.

I would further point out that I find it quite interesting that my colleague opposite should only raise this now when it affects him. Five years ago the hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, when he was leader of the opposition, had his name .ca, .org, .net and various other versions registered, presumably by members of my hon. friend's party, with scurrilous content put on websites with those addresses.

I, myself, have had iterations of my name on the Internet as domain addresses taken by extremist organizations and I never raised this matter, nor did my colleague from Okanagan—Coquihalla, nor, I suspect, have other members who have had their names previously registered because we respect the freedom of people to do so and we also recognize our own responsibility to protect our own names. If we fail to do so that is not a responsibility of the House of Commons or the Government of Canada.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this now for two days and I find it very interesting that when I went through the same problem as the member is experiencing and took it to the people opposite, they regarded it very lightly. They laughed and joked about the fact that this was being done to me on a completely different issue. Now we see the hypocrisy being displayed about how serious this is but when it was a different issue I received no support from that side of the House and there was nothing I could do about it.

I went to Internet companies. I went to all the people who were using my name to spread all kinds of things about me that were totally false and those people laughed and joked about it. They said, “oh, ha, ha, ha”. Now it is happening to them and it is a very serious thing on another issue.

Mr. Speaker, this has been going on for some time and it is a bit hypocritical for them to now raise this as a very serious issue.

*Supply*

**Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I sympathize with members on the opposite side of the House that sometimes things that should be taken seriously are not by the government when it does not affect its members. I also appreciate the viewpoint of the member for Elk Island that this may be, like many other things on the Internet, impossible ultimately to enforce or to do anything about.

However, I do not think that two wrongs make a right and because somebody ignored or did not treat seriously a serious concern of the hon. members in the past does not mean that I would want the Speaker to let that be the deciding factor in judging whether or not there was something here that should be the appropriate concern of Parliament.

I am not sure whether that which impinges on our personal name is ultimately a matter for Parliament or not but I think it is worth thinking about. I would just urge members who in the past were not taken seriously when they raised this matter, to not throw out the baby with the bath water. Maybe it is time they should welcome the fact that people who otherwise or earlier did not take this seriously now do and maybe it is worth having a look at in some fashion. That is my only point.

**The Speaker:** I thank all hon. members who made a contribution today for the additional clarification they have offered on this point which I have under consideration and will continue to have under consideration and return to the House in due course with a ruling that I hope will satisfy everyone.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1525)

[*English*]

### SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Before the House broke for question period, the hon. member for Windsor West had the floor. There remain two minutes for him in the time allotted for his remarks.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to wrap up. I know I am splitting my time with the member for Hamilton Centre and I am looking forward to his comments on the subject.

I will once again appeal to members of the House that what the member for Acadie—Bathurst is doing is presenting a modest attempt to change the system. There seems to be a lot of divisiveness on what we should do about employment insurance in this country, how it should affect workers, and how we can make it a better program.

This is a modest approach and a practical way for us to do something, before this Parliament recesses or falls, for the people who are paying into the employment insurance program and who are in areas where there is over 10% unemployment.

We know those regions are having problems. It may be something related to their environment, or maybe it is related to historical employment issues that they have not been able to address. Perhaps there has been a downturn with a significant employer in their area that has caused them to percolate up beyond the 10% mark. We would be lowering the number of weeks from 14 to 12 of the best weeks.

We are talking about \$20 million which is the estimated cost of this expenditure. It would be going to help families and individuals pay for their mortgages, to assist them to find other employment, and to ensure that they do not fall behind in other payments or debts.

It is not money that would be lost. It would actually be spent in the community. It would create stability in those areas where we know we have specific strategic problems. That is important to remember because once again it is a modest step in a House that is divided on an issue. We know it is important not only to employers but to employees, and that is why the member for Acadie—Bathurst should be congratulated for doing this.

All Canadians know that this House is divided. There is a lot of controversy relating to everything from tapes, scandals, opinions of spending resources to decisions about the country. Here we have an attempt, which has been unfairly criticized, to bring people together so that we can actually accomplish something.

If we look to this motion, we can see how it can affect Canadians and more importantly how it helps individual workers and their families. It is a good first step for a House that is often divided, and more importantly, it might restore some confidence that we in this House are looking at issues that affect Canadians.

I will be supporting this NDP motion. It is a motion that all members can support. It is something that is not going to be expensive. It is not going to be irresponsible. It is going to be limited and focused, and more importantly, any resources go back to taxpayers who are paying into the system. They are making regular contributions to employment insurance on a day to day basis. For that reason it is going to be an improvement in a very divided atmosphere.

**Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it strikes me that in the last few weeks in this House, or perhaps even the last month or so, we have seen an awful lot of rage, some of it simulated, some of it genuine, but all of it directed toward the alleged and sometimes obvious flowing of great sums of money in inappropriate ways. Yet, here we are talking about something that should be the appropriate object of moral outrage. There are many families in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst and in ridings all across this country who are struggling to make ends meet.

It must be, for them, a source of legitimate outrage that the sums of money that we talk about here every day as having gone to this bagman or that ad firm or this Liberal Party hack or whatever the case may be, are beyond their wildest dreams. All they are asking for is for a change in the regulations having to do with employment insurance that would enable them to collect a meagre sum of money on a monthly basis, a sum of money that would not even register on most people's fiscal graphs around here.

*Supply*

Yet, this is scoffed at by the government and by the official opposition. We cannot tell where the Bloc Québécois members are because they are so blinded by their own rage that when they finally have an opportunity to cooperate with the NDP to do something about EI, they cannot see the forest for the trees, or the trees for the forest, whichever metaphor is appropriate. I wonder if the hon. member would want to comment on that.

• (1530)

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Mr. Speaker, it is important to note the frustration we seem to be sensing from Canadians. The member is quite right because we are talking about a few hundred dollars. We are talking about a few hundred dollars for people to ensure that they do not fall behind on their mortgage payments and that they can make their payments on their cars so that they can find new employment. It is to ensure that their kids are going to be able to go to school and that they are not going to fall behind on any other payments that they might already have in terms of debt. This is a transition point.

These workers have paid into this fund. It is not a gift back to them. They have paid into this fund and their employers have paid into this fund. For heaven's sake, why in a House divided can we not do a modest thing?

It is a responsible thing the member for Acadie—Bathurst has done. He did not come here with a shopping list that nobody could support. He did not come here and say that we were going to position ourselves in a way that we were going to make a lot of hits on people, on the government and on the opposition parties, and ensure that we embarrass them. He found something that is a reasonable approach that all members can support.

For the Conservatives, here is immediate tax relief for those families. They can control this, they can stand up and deliver on this with us, with the Bloc and with the Liberals that support this, and get effective change for people.

What good is it going to do, in all of this employment insurance debate, if we deny this motion and we withhold from those families in economic areas that have over 10% unemployment a small, modest change so they can hang on? What would we accomplish by denying a small change to a system that affects people on a daily basis and could provide some stability in a time when their communities are affected quite significantly by unemployment rates over 10%? What benefit are we going to derive from that?

I think that other Canadians out there would recognize that we have to have a modest change for those regions that are most vulnerable. We are talking about from the best 14 weeks to the best 12 weeks, a very modest change. I think Canadians would support this and they would welcome this to ensure that their brothers and sisters in other parts of this nation would be able to hang on.

I know for a fact that my community contributes a lot in taxes on a regular basis. We do not mind the fact that we have to help other people at times, but we want to know that this country is going to be there for us when we need it. I think that is why we should support this motion.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment my colleague from Windsor West

and certainly my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst who is sponsoring the motion. Both have put forward powerful, effective arguments. If people are watching at home who are either unemployed or have an unemployed family member and are lacking any hope in finding employment, I am sure they take those arguments very seriously and are probably wondering why they did not have the same kind of effect on the rest of the House. I want to compliment those members for making that kind of powerful argument. They have also laid the groundwork as to why this is so reasonable.

Let me visit a couple of the issues that I think warrant the consideration of members of the House and why they should ultimately support this motion.

There is nothing new here. This is not some wild eyed, pie in the sky, perfect utopian aspect of how the world ought to be in its perfection. It is nothing like that. This is about an issue that was recommended by one of our committees in February of this year.

There were 28 recommendations from the committee dealing with improvements to EI. The NDP, the Bloc and the Liberals supported the report in its entirety. The Conservatives supported some of the recommendations. That is the starting point and I am not going to put too much emphasis on talking to them, although I think that some of those members who actually give a damn about the unemployed ought to be concerned about this. Maybe something will happen and lightning will strike, and they will see the light and be there for their constituents.

My main focus is on the Liberals and the Bloc because together we can make this happen. We can do this; we have the votes. This is a minority government. When we join together on this or any other issue that we think important, we can make it law.

I do not understand why the Liberals are offside. If they have suddenly taken a trip down the road to Damascus, then they should please send a note over. I would love to start praising the fact that they have joined us on this. I have been advised by our whip that the minister indicated earlier that the government is not going to support this motion. Why? Why would they not support this when just a couple of months ago all of the Liberals on the committee voted for these 28 recommendations?

Is it because it was just at committee, so the Liberals could play their posturing games where they say one thing, talk like New Democrats, get passionate like New Democrats, but govern like right wingers? Is that what was going on? If it was, then it was disgusting.

This is not just some theoretical debate about some esoteric issue. As my good friend from Windsor West pointed out, we are talking about the ability of fellow Canadians to maintain their life while they go through the crisis of unemployment. We are not talking big dollars. I believe the difference between what is already in front of us and what is proposed here today is \$20 million. Someone correct me if I am wrong.

The sum of \$20 million is a lot of money, make no mistake about that. However, in a system where the surplus alone has generated over \$50 billion, it is not a lot of money. It is certainly not enough money to justify saying to the unemployed in this country that they are not good enough to get the attention and support of the House. These are good, decent, hardworking people who just want to provide for their families like every one of us here in the House and like everybody else in this country,

We just went through the experience of seeing the Liberal government put \$4.6 billion, a surprise gift, into corporate tax cuts in the last budget. It is funny how the Liberals found \$4.6 billion that nobody was really asking for. They had no mandate for it. It was not part of the election campaign. All that we in the NDP have ever asked for is for the Liberals to take a good look at the difference between what they say and what they do, and this is a prime example.

• (1535)

Take a \$4.6 billion that no one campaigned for, no one had a mandate for and no one asked for—

**Mr. Peter Adams:** Can you make it a bit louder?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I will scream as loud as I have to get some justice for people who are looking for some kind of recognition that they are important. Damn right I will yell. If the unemployed had a chance to be here it would be deafening. Someone has to stand up and speak for them. It is a good thing that they have friends in the members from Acadie—Bathurst and Windsor West who are prepared to stand up and give voice because you are not prepared to do it.

Prior to that \$4.6 billion, the government had \$100 billion to give away—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I can hear the member clearly, but of course the member would know that he is not allowed to address people in the first person. If he could address them by riding names or by their titles that would be fine.

• (1540)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I think I am getting better, but I do not have it down just yet. However, I accept that and I will do my best to continue to stop presenting things in a way that is unacceptable to you. However, the anger I suppose is part of it and I appreciate the tenor that you took in slapping me on the wrist.

My point was we just went through an exercise of \$100 billion, the biggest tax cut in the history of Canada. The Liberals had enough care about corporations that it found \$100 billion. All we are asking for is \$20 million to give some scared, frightened, decent Canadians a bit of a hand. Do we not owe them that? Is that not the least we can do?

I grant that this will not change the world and it is not a huge thing, but that is the whole point. We are trying to make Parliament work. We have brought in a motion that is very small and narrow. I know there are a lot of activists in the EI community and in the labour movement who are somewhat concerned that it does not contain more. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I would say to them very

### *Supply*

directly to take a look at how much trouble we are having getting support for this little piece. It will give them an idea of how tough that battle is.

In trying to make the minority Parliament work, we decided we would take one chunk of these recommendations. Keep in mind that we tried to make it part of the deal, the new better balanced budget we negotiated with the Liberals, but we did not get it. That is why we are bringing it in this way.

For the life of me, I truly cannot understand how members of the Liberal Party can stand behind their colleagues who voted in committee for this very recommendation. Yet when it is time to put their money where their mouth is, they are nowhere to be seen. It is totally unacceptable.

I urge the members of the Liberal caucus, enough of them at least, to reconsider their position on this. It is not that much to ask.

What more do the unemployed have to do to get a decent shake around here? The government stands by and lets Wal-Mart use economic terrorism in Quebec to stop unionization. It seems the Liberals do not want unions to do well in Canada. Again, the Liberals talk a good story, but look at what they did or in this case did not do. They have stood by and done nothing as Wal-Mart marches across not just North America but the world now, putting hundreds of thousands of people who have small businesses out of work.

I am approaching the one minute mark and that is a shame because there is so much to be said.

Why are the smallest things always the biggest fight? We are talking about \$20 million that could make the difference between someone being able to put food on the table or not, or to buy a nice dress for their daughter's prom or to ensure that their son has the fees to be involved in local sports.

We are talking about that. It is not billions and billions of dollars. We are certainly not talking about envelopes stuffed with cash, like we have seen in the sponsorship scandal. All we are asking for is a measure of decency for people who have worked hard their whole lives and who through no fault of their own find themselves unemployed.

The least we can do in one of the richest, most generous, nations on the planet is provide some modicum of support while they go through this crisis. That is not asking too much as a Canadian citizen.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not want to interrupt the debate, but there have been discussions among all parties and I think you would find unanimous consent to deem the ways and means Motion No. 9 tabled earlier today concurred in on division.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the consent of the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

*Supply*

**Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's discussion about EI and the suggestion that in some way the EI program was lacking in generosity, that we only needed another \$20 million and that this would have some effect. I feel obliged to put some things on the record.

The first one is that in the budget, Bill C-43, which is before us and which I know he and his party are supporting, there are \$300 million in new investments in the EI program which shows that the government is putting in money. They include the three new pilot projects which will benefit 220,000 people each year and will run for three years in regions where there is 10% per cent or more unemployment.

These programs will enable individuals new to the labour market or returning after an extended absence to access benefits up to 840 hours of work when linked with the employment program. They also will allow the calculation of benefits based on the best 14 weeks over the 52 weeks preceding the claim. I know we are discussing a change in the 14 weeks.

Also included in the \$300 million is increasing the working while on claim threshold to allow individuals to earn the greater of \$75 or 40% of benefits in an effort to encourage people to take work without a reduction in their benefits.

This is a figure we also should put against the \$20 million which the member mentions. We have lowered premiums every year for the last many years. The result of these rate reductions for employers and employees means that in 2005 they will pay \$10.5 billion less in premiums than they would have under the 1994 rates, which are at the beginning of the period that we are discussing.

Could my colleague comment on the fact that it is a generous program, attempts are being made to improve it and that although he is talking about \$20 million, there is a lot more than \$20 million in play here?

● (1545)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, the primary difficulty we have is that we do not agree with the premise that it is generous.

Take a look at what has happened since 1990 under Conservative and Liberal governments. In the 1990s we started with 75% of the unemployed receiving EI coverage. That means 75% of people who were unemployed qualified for some kind of EI. Even that was not ideal but it is certainly was getting a lot closer than where we are today. Thanks to the Conservatives and Liberals, they put it in reverse and put the pedal to the metal. Now only 38% of the unemployed in the country receive benefits. Put another way, two in five of Canada's unemployed receive EI benefits at any given time. It was double that in the 1990s.

When the member speaks about how generous it is and how wonderful things are, I beg to differ. I suggest with great respect that the facts put the lie to the argument that somehow the Liberals and the Conservatives care at all about the unemployed.

I will wait for my opportunity. When the member gives a speech and I will want to ask him a question. That question will be this. How can Liberals stand in this place and say that they care about the

unemployed when under their regime, benefits and eligibility to the unemployed have been cut, cut, cut? Yet on the corporate side, there are millions and billions in tax gifts, gifts, gifts. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out who is important to them and who is not.

\* \* \*

**WAYS AND MEANS**

LABRADOR INUIT LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENTS

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us try this again. There may have been some confusion earlier.

[*Translation*]

Discussions have taken place between all parties. I believe you would find unanimous consent for Ways and Means Proceedings No. 9, for which notice was given earlier this morning, to be deemed carried on division.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

● (1550)

**SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga—Brampton South.

I am pleased to join this vigorous debate on EI. It is extremely important that the House, from time to time, devote attention to this very important matter.

In the period that tends to be discussed, 10 or 15 years, there has been an extraordinary change in the nature of work in Canada and the nature of the labour force. The labour force is far more inclusive than it ever was. The percentage of the population which is involved in work, men and women, abled and disabled, increased extraordinarily in that period of time, and this is all for the good. I think it has been reflected in the way the EI program has evolved over those years.

I believe now that in the developed countries, we have the largest percentage of our population involved in the work force, which says something. One of the things it means is that when we say the unemployment rate in Canada is 6.8%, it is 6.8% of a much larger number than what we were talking about 10 or 15 years ago.

For more than six decades, employment insurance has been a mainstay of Canada's social safety net. From its inception down through the years to the present day, governments have adjusted the program in response to changing times. This government has been no exception.

The government recognizes the importance of keeping EI in tune with the needs of Canadians, and my preamble dealt with some of that. Through the budget proposals in budget 2005, which is still unfortunately before the House, on EI rate setting and the subsequent announcement of the enhancements to EI benefits, we have addressed many of the most pressing concerns.

This is the approach that we believe Canadians want us to take: careful study and deliberation in conjunction with sound policy decisions supported by thoroughly tested evidence to support this remarkable program. This is precisely the process the Government of Canada followed in proposing a new EI premium rate setting mechanism.

We recognized that the mechanism set out in the EI Act needed improvement. Therefore, in budget 2003 we committed to undertaking a review of the premium rate setting process and launched public consultations.

We promised the new process would be based on five principles: premium rates should be set transparently, in public; premium rates should be set on the basis of independent advice, not just on the basis of whims of government; the expected premium revenues should correspond to the expected program costs, so there would be a balance each year between the income and the out-pay of the program; premium rate setting should mitigate the impact on business cycles; and premium rates should be relatively stable over time so that employers and employees know what to expect from year to year.

Consultations were held with a wide variety of stakeholders. We heard from business and labour, economists and technical experts, EI commissioners for workers and employers, and individual members of the public.

In budget 2005, which is still before us, the Government of Canada proposes a new permanent rate setting mechanism that meets all five of the principles developed in 2003 and takes into consideration the views of the stakeholders and those of the standing committee, and is consistent with the views of the Auditor General of Canada, which is important.

Starting with the rate for 2006, the EI Commission will have the legislative authority to set the rate. In setting the rate, the EI Commission will take into account the principle of expected premium revenues matching expected program costs, which I mentioned. I also would take into account the report from the chief actuary, whose independence has been increased through a functional reporting relationship to the commission.

• (1555)

What this means is that for the first time the chief actuary who does the calculations of these things will be mentioned in the legislation. This is a step forward.

### *Supply*

The commission will take into account input from the public and, as needed, the services of those with specialized knowledge in rate setting matters. Gone completely will be the requirement for the Government of Canada to improve this rate. We are talking about an independent, logical, transparent rate setting mechanism.

These new measures address issues raised by stakeholders and in the standing committee's reports by increasing the independence of the EI commission in EI rate setting and strengthening the transparency of the process.

With respect to EI benefit enhancements, the Government of Canada has taken a similar approach by considering the recommendations of a variety of stakeholders, coupled with the results of ongoing monitoring and assessment. The recent announcement of about \$300 million, which I mentioned, in new targeted EI benefit enhancements reflects this process and addresses some of the standing committee's recommendations.

In conjunction with budget 2005, the government has announced three pilot projects to respond to the most pressing challenges facing Canadians who turn to EI for assistance. When fully implemented, these projects will be in effect across the country in regions of high unemployment.

The pilot projects are designed to test the effects on the labour market of the following: first, enabling individuals new to the market or returning after an extended absence to be eligible for EI benefits after 840 hours of work, rather than 910, when linked to EI employment programs; second, calculating EI benefits based on the highest 14 weeks of income over the 52 weeks preceding a claim, thus better reflecting individuals' full time work patterns; and, third, increasing the working while on claim threshold to allow claimants to earn the greater, as I mentioned, of \$75 or 40% of benefits in an effort to encourage people to take work without reducing benefits.

These things are being tested so that we can see what their effects are and what the benefits truly are to the people involved with the program.

In addition to these new pilot projects, the government also announced in the budget the continuation for a second year of the pilot project to provide workers in high unemployment regions with five additional weeks of EI regular benefits. This particular pilot helps to address the annual income gap faced by workers with limited work alternatives.

As well, the government has extended until October 2006 the EI transitional boundary provisions in two regions in Quebec and New Brunswick, pending a review of the EI economic boundaries.

These measures demonstrate the government's commitment to ensuring that EI remains responsive to the needs of Canada's workforce.

This approach has worked well. Successive monitoring and assessment reports indicate that overall the labour market is strong and the EI program is working well for the majority of Canadians. The government will continue to monitor and assess the program to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of Canadians.

### Supply

Our response represents a balanced, grounded approach, one which includes the feedback of stakeholders, is supported by evidence and enhances the independence and transparency of the mechanisms that govern the EI program.

It is an approach that we will continue to follow because this government is committed to ensuring that the EI program remains responsive to the needs of the labour market and all Canadians.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague from Peterborough. How can he make such a speech in the House of Commons when he sat with me on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and recommended the best 12 weeks option?

Before the 2004 election, the Liberals went across Canada. After the election, they kept going. They came to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and recommended this best 12 weeks option.

[English]

Today we have a motion in the House of Commons on the best 12 weeks. I want to know how my colleague from Peterborough can get up in front of Canadians and say what he is saying when he was in the committee on EI and he recommended the best 12 weeks. He has a report in the House of Commons in which he recommends the best 12 weeks. He did it on Bill C-2 in 2001. He did it twice. How can he get up today and say the government is doing the right thing? He is saying two different things. I want him to get up in the House of Commons and tell me that. How could he do it?

• (1600)

**Hon. Peter Adams:** Mr. Speaker, it is true that I am a very proud member of that committee and I appreciate the work that the committee has done.

I was talking about a balanced approach here. It is a balanced approach to a program which affects millions of people and which involves billions of dollars. The balanced approach includes appreciating that fact and appreciating that the millions of people involved, the people who are working and the people who are not working, because it includes both, deserve management decisions on the commission and for rate setting which take into account all the variables.

My colleague is perfectly right that the standing committee recommended a whole variety of things. There was something in this part of the EI program, something in that part of the EI program and so on. By the way, each one taken by itself has a benefit, but in the end if one is in government one makes decisions based on the whole thing. For example, over the years there has been an extension of maternity and parental benefits to a year in Canada. This is something that was not necessary 10 or 12 years ago, but we need to have it now. There is the new compassionate care benefit and so on.

My short answer to my colleague is that given the balance of all the changes and all the variables in the EI program, I believe the 14 weeks should be given a chance to run. Let us see what the effect is.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I heard the comments from the member for Peterborough. The last part of his comments was something to the effect that he

took into account all the variables. I must tell members that the only variable here is that the whip came along and said that the position of the hon. member was going to change when this got to the House.

That is a totally inadequate answer to a very straightforward question. I am from Hamilton. We like to do things straight up. At committee, the hon. member felt this was a good idea. He cast his precious vote in favour. Now it is in the House a few months later and the member is voting against it. An explanation is in order.

**Hon. Peter Adams:** Mr. Speaker, I believe, and I am sure one of my colleagues will remind me, that this was one of 29 or more recommendations that we were dealing with, so in one sense it is a small item and in another sense it is not.

We have put in place the experiment with 14 weeks and we are now being urged, on the spur of the moment, to change it to 12 weeks.

I do not like the implications about my whip. Our whip is a wonderful person. She is our best friend. She is a person who is fair and compassionate and someone who I respect deeply. I do regret my colleagues suggesting that a person such as that, such a wonderful member of Parliament, would treat me in some overly severe way.

**Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have an opportunity to share my remarks today. I do have a question for my hon. colleague, but I will defer it.

The debate today is on EI. I am going to make sure that in this debate the context in which I make my remarks emphasizes transparency and a balanced approach. I am pleased today to share my thoughts on the motion presented by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

In February, the government announced a pilot project, which, over three years, will test whether a new method of benefit rate calculation will encourage workers to accept available work that could otherwise lower their weekly EI benefit.

This approach to benefit rate calculation involves using the best 14 weeks of income from the previous year in order to determine the employment insurance benefits paid to workers in areas of high unemployment. The hon. member's motion, as we have heard, would instead involve using the best 12 weeks of income.

As this House is well aware, EI is a key element of Canada's social safety net and economy. Last year, the EI program provided over \$13 billion in income benefits to over 2 million Canadians.

The government is committed to ensuring that the EI program stays responsive so that Canadians can count on it when they need it. This is why we monitor and assess the program each and every single year. This ongoing analysis, published annually in the monitoring and assessment reports, confirms that the labour market is strong. It also confirms that the EI program, including the active measures to help people to develop their skills, is working well for the majority of Canadians.

The government also recognizes that labour market conditions vary across the country and within some sectors of the economy. Since 1996 we have been making improvements in our EI program to reflect the ever-changing labour market. These investments now total over \$2.5 billion, the same number mentioned by my colleague. I think that is a substantial improvement.

These improvements have been based on the findings of the annual monitoring and assessment of the program and on the recommendations of various stakeholders.

The Government of Canada has pledged to address the most pressing challenges facing Canadians who turn to the EI program. That is why we have done what we are doing in our recently announced enhancements. These enhancements are significant measures that will invest an additional \$300 million annually and benefit more than 220,000 Canadians each year from coast to coast.

Our new EI benefit enhancements include three pilot projects in areas of high unemployment.

The first pilot project will test the labour market impact of reducing the eligibility threshold for newcomers to the labour market. It will enable individuals new to the workforce or who are returning after an extended period of absence to access EI benefits after 840 hours of insurable employment, rather than the current 910 hours, when linked to the EI employment programs. This pilot project is expected to benefit more than 16,000 individuals each year.

In the second pilot project, we will test the labour market impact of calculating individuals' EI benefits based upon the highest 14 weeks of income during the 52 weeks preceding a claim for benefits, or since the beginning of their last claim, whichever is shorter. I should add that this is similar to the standing committee's recommendation for a "best 12 weeks" approach to calculating benefits, but the government approach balances the need to ensure income adequacy while maintaining incentives to work.

For Canadians with sporadic work patterns, this enhancement means that EI benefit levels will better reflect their weeks of full time work. This initiative will test the labour market effects of improving incentives for individuals to accept all available work, including weeks of work that are shorter than their normal weeks. It is expected that more than 200,000 Canadians will benefit from this measure each year.

Our third pilot project will increase the "working while on claim" threshold. As this House is aware, the working while on claim provision allows Canadians receiving EI benefits to earn a certain amount from their employment without a deduction from their benefits.

### *Supply*

To encourage people to take available work, our three year pilot project will increase this amount, allowing claimants to earn the greater of \$75 or 40% of their weekly benefits before their benefits are reduced. More than 220,000 Canadians in regions of high unemployment are expected to benefit from this initiative each year.

● (1605)

In addition, we are continuing for a second year the pilot project introduced in 2004 that provides five additional weeks of EI benefits in areas of high unemployment. The aim of the project is to help address the annual income gap faced by workers with limited work alternatives.

We are also extending for an additional year until October 2006, the EI transitional boundaries provisions in the EI economic regions of New Brunswick and Lower St. Lawrence-North Shore, Quebec. Under these provisions, claimants in the two regions require fewer hours to qualify for EI and receive benefits for extended or longer periods.

The government recognizes that EI can only ever be part of the solution for responding to specific employment related issues that Canadians face. We know there is a need to build communities' capacity and to stimulate local economies to provide sustainable employment opportunities.

To this end, we work closely with regional development agencies, employers, community groups and labour representatives to explore new ways and new ideas to address these issues over the long term.

For all those reasons, I believe the government's approach to benefit rate calculation is a well-balanced approach that responds to the needs of Canadian workers. I can assure the House that the Government of Canada recognizes the challenges certain EI clients face on a daily basis.

We are committed to ensuring that this important program remains responsive to the needs of Canadians.

● (1610)

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague seems to indicate that there are a number of different projects being tried. He said that we have to find a balanced approach so that EI is not seen as the employment funding so to speak for an area or a region.

*Supply*

I am curious to know if he thinks this way because there is not enough money in the EI fund or if he somehow falls into the view that people who are doing seasonal jobs really do not want to work part of the time.

I have to admit that I am getting the impression from some members that they somehow feel that people who are doing seasonal jobs really do not want to work all the time and therefore do not deserve to have their employment insurance come into place when they are not employed for part of the year because the type of jobs they do are seasonal. I am wondering if maybe that is just part of not recognizing that different regions of the country have different jobs available and one cannot necessarily work year round in a specific job.

Is the member's reasoning because there is not enough money in the EI fund or does he fall into that trap of believing that people who are on EI really do not want to work?

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** Mr. Speaker, the one thing I have to note in addressing the member's question is that I in no shape or form made any remarks about people not wanting to work.

I think the reflection is clear that the EI program is a reflection of a strong economy. Unemployment rates across the country are at their lowest rates in a very long time. The economy is doing very well. I think the government's job and the job of individual parliamentarians who are the gatekeepers of our great country is to create jobs as well.

When we talk about certain EI programs with respect to parental leave or compassionate leave, those are not only used by individuals but also by employers.

I think the question is a bit misleading. It is my belief that the issue should revolve around a strong economy and the notion that the EI program should be there to benefit people but we also have an obligation to make sure that we create jobs and create wealth.

**Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to what my colleague from Mississauga—Brampton South had to say. It is one of these difficult things because we all have compassion for people who are out of work, and particularly people who are out of work either frequently or for long periods of time.

In the modern economy it is not unusual for people to change jobs and to have a number of careers in a lifetime. It is different than it was 10 or 15 years ago. I mention also that the nature and size of our labour force has increased extraordinarily to where the unemployment level is now at 6.8% nationwide. It was 12.2% in the early 1990s, the sort of period that we are looking at. The ideal rate of unemployment is zero but that is impossible given that people are in transition.

In the Atlantic provinces the rate fell in that time from 15.7% to 10.4%. Quebec's rate fell from 14.3% to 7.9%. Ontario's rate fell from 11.5% to 6.8%. The rate in the western provinces fell from 10.2% to 5.1%. We now have less long term unemployment in Canada than any other G-7 nation and that is because of the job growth that my colleague was talking about. Job creation is very important.

I have great concerns about the unemployed but the unemployment program is for employed people and unemployed people. I would like my colleague's comments on that.

● (1615)

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** Mr. Speaker, I think the EI program, as he has indicated very clearly, is for two particular reasons: one, for those who are unemployed; and two, for those individuals who are employed but who are going through transitional work arrangements. The EI program, if we were to take a step back, speaks to the social fabric that we have developed in this country. It is a very important social program that many Canadians benefit from.

I indicated in my remarks that thousands if not millions of Canadians from coast to coast benefit from the EI program. It is a program that is administered very well and has been done so over the past few years by the government.

I agree with the remarks made by my colleague. The EI program has two components. Our job is to ensure we have a strong economy and we create jobs.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to my party's motion to close a gap in Canada's employment insurance program. I will be splitting my time, and am pleased to do so, with the member for Churchill.

[*Translation*]

This motion addresses one aspect of the problems faced by Canadian workers, who the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has defended tirelessly since he first came to this House eight years ago and for whom I have the utmost respect.

[*English*]

Members of the House know that in regions all across the country from coast to coast to coast there are communities that suffer from endemic unemployment. Seasonal economies simply make it difficult for men and particularly women of those regions to find long term and stable income that will sustain their families. As the seasonal work cycles ebb and flow, many workers will simply not qualify for EI benefits because of the limitations of their seasonal jobs.

[*Translation*]

A number of affected workers are women and aboriginals. Many of them are among the most vulnerable in our workforce and often have minimum wage jobs. After all deductions are made, their net pay is only 55% of their salary. Try to imagine how it is possible for a family to live with only 55% of the minimum wage.

It is high time for the Government of Canada to take measures to resolve these systematic injustices.

By calculating benefits based on the best 12 weeks of work instead of 14, we would, in effect, be reducing the period without employment that currently reduces the amount of benefits received. This is a much fairer and more equitable approach.

[English]

In recent years, the EI system has moved further away from actually helping the people who it was meant to protect. When only 35% to 40% of workers qualified for the benefits that they paid for, there is clearly a problem with the program. These are the individuals who are paying for the program and yet they do not qualify when they need its help. Something is wrong.

For 12 years, Canadians have listened to Liberal rhetoric on EI reform. During each election, the Liberals pledge to correct the failings of the EI system, but after each election the Liberal governments quickly forget the very commitments that they made to workers and their families. We have seen it time and again.

The Liberals know that their policies are causing great harm to workers in many parts of the country but they simply will not act to bring about real change even when the evidence and the recommendations are right before their eyes and even when some of their own members have participated in the creation of those recommendations.

The Liberals like to argue that calculating the benefits based on 14 weeks is an incentive for workers to keep working as though these hard-working men and women have some kind of a choice. The government would have Canadians believe that it is the workers in seasonal jobs who are hooked on employment insurance. It is a destructive, patronizing, negative attitude toward the working people who do the work that we all need done in our society.

It is not the workers it turns out who are hooked on EI. Far from it, it is the federal government. It has discovered a source of revenue so it can give away its large corporate tax cuts and carry on with that sort of program. Forty-six billion dollars in the EI slush fund, whose money is that? It is the money that belongs to the workers. It was put in the fund for the benefit of the workers when they most need it, when their families have been forced out of work, because of no decision by the worker but because, in this case that we are talking about today, of the seasons of work coming and going and they simply do not have a paycheque. This is the system that they paid into to help ensure they would have a little bit of income so that when their children came home from school they would put a meal on the table. That is what we are talking about.

• (1620)

[Translation]

The government continues to inject hundreds of millions more into the system as a result of contributions by workers. The NDP is not alone in calling for changes. The Auditor General has continued to demand that the government reform EI.

[English]

The fact is that there are many jobs that must be done in this country, jobs that we all expect will be done, but those jobs can only be done during particular times of the year. Let us take the fishery and farms in Nova Scotia, the crab industry in Newfoundland or the fishery on the north coast of British Columbia as examples. Workers there must work as the seasons permit and then they have to find other employment in the interim months. It is a really tough process.

### *Supply*

Where that is not possible, our motion proposes a more equitable access to those workers to receive sufficient benefits to help them get by until the next season. We cannot harvest the crops or the snow crabs in January and we can do nothing to change that. Unless we are saying that we do not want such industries to exist at all, then we need a system that allows families to get by if they are unable to find other work.

We are not the only ones to recommend this. It was recommended by a standing committee consisting of all parties that travelled the country and heard witnesses from across the country.

[Translation]

The forestry industry is facing the same situation. Be it in The Pas, Manitoba, Charlevoix, Quebec, or Prince George, British Columbia, forestry workers are finding themselves out of work during the off season.

We are simply proposing to do right by them.

Tourism is an expanding industry in a number of regions in Canada and draws hundreds of thousands of tourists. This is good, but not many sites are able to attract visitors 12 months a year. From Summerside to Sault Ste. Marie to Whitehorse, when the information kiosks, tourism attractions, historic sites and festivals close for the season, we should provide these workers with EI benefits so they can make ends meet until the next tourism season.

[English]

The motion is not sweeping in scope. It does not, by any means, correct all the various problems with the employment insurance program. It simply takes one important initiative that had been brought forward in a recommendation from a standing committee in an effort to see it adopted by the House, to get something done.

However it is a very important change because it is a change that can happen now and it is a change that would affect workers and they could see the results immediately, not years from now. It would address the needs of some of those most in need in our society. It is a modest step forward but it is an essential step in a long battle to expand the access to employment insurance, to make it fair and to improve the benefits that these workers have earned.

• (1625)

[Translation]

There are always some people who do not qualify under every major federal programs such as EI. Today's motion seeks to fix these flaws and assist the thousands of Canadians living in regions hard hit by unemployment and working, of necessity, in industries that do not provide year-round employment.

[English]

It is going to help people out. It is not going to replace full reform but it is a positive step for Canadians.

*Supply*

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth, our leader, for participating in today's debate. It is important to recognize his effort to do so. This is a very important issue and, as we have already said today, it is a modest step forward on an issue that is very divided in terms of how the House feels about it.

I would like to ask him about the things he has witnessed as he has travelled the country among family members and what they have said about the instability of work and how it is affecting their lives and their future. We have looked at areas with over 10% unemployment where people are having a difficult time planning for their families because of the instability of work. This motion would be a modest improvement.

I would like to hear what the member has heard from Canadians about what they want government to do in the way of assisting and facilitating them. They do not want a hand-out. They want a hand up. This is their money that they paid into the fund to ensure their dreams were fulfilled.

**Hon. Jack Layton:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments. There is no question that he is a member of Parliament who is standing up for the workers in his community as well, and on a whole series of fronts.

I was very struck by my visit to the riding of the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, who has been a champion of this issue. The hon. member, as we all know, has been a champion of reform for employment insurance. He speaks with great passion about the situations of the families.

When I had a chance to actually visit with some of those workers, quite a large number of them met with us. Most of them were women. These people were earning a very low income, but they had a lot of pride in the work they did. It is hard work to go into one of those fish plants. It is cold in a fish plant so that the fish we love to eat, and I love to eat fresh fish, remain fresh. I am thankful that someone is doing the hard work of filleting the fish in that cold environment to make sure that this wonderful product is available when we sit down with our families to have a meal.

The fact of the matter is that in these plants the fish come in at certain times and there is work to do. It is not very well paid work, I have to say. The wages are quite low and the work is hard, but nonetheless there they are, the people preparing that food for us and our families.

Yet when the fish stop arriving and there is nothing more to be processed in the plant, naturally the plant has to close down. Suddenly, those individuals who have been paying into the employment insurance program, with money taken right off their paycheques and put right into the very fund we are talking about right now, are simply unable to go to that fund, even though it has billions of dollars of surplus in it, to get a little bit of help to buy food for their families.

I will bet that a lot of them simply cannot afford the fresh fish we eat, the fish that we are buying in the stores and that they have worked to pack for us. They cannot even afford it for themselves. Or they have to turn to a food bank. This hard work can affect their health. I know there are injuries associated with it. It is not an easy

job. These individuals are struggling to get by between the times when the fish come in for packing and when they do not.

As for anyone who stands up and tries to suggest that these workers are not interested in working or that we need to see if the "labour market" effects are positive or negative, let us just analyze what those people are really saying. They are really trying to suggest that if we give these workers some fair access to their own money in the employment insurance fund they are not going to do the work.

That is an insult. It is a complete insult. It is not fair. It really does not represent a respectful attitude toward the working people of this country in our key communities and industries, and it is time that it changed. Our motion would be a small step toward recognizing that those workers deserve some respect from us.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order please. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes, Deportation of the Acadians.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in the debate on our opposition day motion.

The motion itself does not encompass all of the wrongs within the unemployment system. That has been acknowledged today. We have been criticized by the other opposition parties, whose members have said that somehow we should have fixed everything in this one opposition day motion. Either of the other two opposition parties could have on numerous occasions also tried to fix it, but they have in a number of instances failed to do so. I want everyone to reflect on the fact that we are addressing only one of the faults in the unemployment system.

My riding, including both land and water, is about four-fifths of the province of Manitoba. There are only about 80,000 people in the riding. Over half of the first nations in Manitoba are in my riding.

In my riding, there are large numbers of people working in seasonal employment in the forestry industry, as the member for Toronto—Danforth said. There are a number in the fishing industry and others within the tourism industry, whether they are guiding or helping out. This motion would definitely increase their opportunity to have more dollars coming into their households, there is no question about it, and ultimately that means more dollars going into their communities.

The people who are collecting unemployment insurance are not taking holidays in the Cayman Islands. They are not going to Mexico. They are not whipping off to Hawaii to spend their money. They are buying milk and bread to put on their tables. They are spending that money in their local communities. If they do not have the dollars coming in from employment insurance, a lot of them will end up having to collect social assistance. They do not want to be collecting social assistance. They have rightfully earned the right to receive employment insurance.

What has happened is that year after year the government has cut the benefits within employment insurance. I have been working pretty much every year since I was 12 years old. I worked every summer. I have been in full time employment since I was 17 or 18. During that course of time I have worked summer jobs that started in May and ended in September, and I had enough weeks in that I was able to collect employment insurance.

As a newly married young mother I moved to where I now live and was able to collect employment insurance for a period of time, but I still went out to look for work. I did not sit back and say, "Gosh, I have all this money". Members must bear in mind that I was probably getting a good percentage more than a lot of the individuals are getting now. I still looked for work. I expect that most people on employment insurance want to do the same thing.

Over time, after I had each of my children I was able to take time off and receive maternity benefits because there was a program that helped offset the costs. We were a young family and were able to hold our own while doing that. I went back to work each time. I expect that most people on employment insurance want to do the same. It is not their fault that they are living in communities where there is no employment and they cannot do it.

It is being suggested by those who oppose this motion that these individuals should somehow travel across the country with all the money they have stashed away because they must have stashed away a pile of money in their seasonal jobs from which they are trying to earn enough of a living to support their families. They must be able to stash a pile away, those who oppose this motion say, so that when they are unemployed they can take a \$2,000 or \$3,000 trip from one end of the country to a place where there may be some employment for a few weeks. How ridiculous is that?

These are individuals who cannot afford to travel that far without getting some money. There used to be money within the employment insurance system for relocating for periods of time. There used to be dollars available for that. That is gone. It was one of the benefits that was stripped out of the employment insurance program.

On top of taking away those dollars and cutting benefits, percentage rates have been established so that if people have collected once they are going to be punished for having to collect again and they will lose more dollars.

• (1635)

All we asking for in this motion is to put a little of that money back in. It would be one thing if the money were not there, but there is \$46 billion from employment insurance premiums that the government is using for other things. Is that fair? Is that just? Is it fair that all of those people who are working and paying their premiums into their insurance plan now cannot get decent benefits because the government wants to use the money, as my colleague from Toronto—Danforth said, to give \$4.6 billion in corporate tax cuts?

What is wrong with this picture? Who are members representing here in this House? Is it not those workers and those employers who have paid in the money?

Should we not be improving the benefits and putting dollars back into local communities? This is not money to use on a holiday to the Cayman Islands or Mexico. This is money going back into Prince

### *Supply*

Rupert, The Pas, Thompson, Bras d'Or and Acadie—Bathurst, into numerous communities across the country. I am sure some would even end up going into Alberta, as rich as people are in Alberta. We all hear about how rich people are in Alberta, but I know there are people who are unemployed in Alberta and who need some additional dollars, who want to work but maybe at certain times do not have those jobs available.

It is not as if the dollars are not there within the employment insurance program, but we have a government that wants to use those dollars for other things. How dare the Liberals? How dare they come into the House and talk about their wonderful surplus when time and time again benefits have been cut from the employment insurance program?

If people are paying into an insurance plan for their house or even for car insurance and they see the plan building up and there is money there, they want to see the benefits improved. Is that not right? People are not expecting that this year the company is going to say, "No, we want another \$500 and the deductible for accidents is going to be increased by another \$500". That is not acceptable, people would say. If the company is making the money from this and not spending it, people want to see the benefits improved. They would want to see their deductible lowered. Rightfully so. It is their money.

In this case, it is our money and our employers' money. We want to see the benefits. It is no different. We are asking for an improvement in the benefits. The dollars are there. As for anyone who talks about irresponsible spending, that is just not the case. These are dollars that are in the employment insurance program.

Now if we want to keep that program honest and if we want to keep the government honest with the employment insurance program, there is no question about it: a separate fund should be set up. I understand that we are going to hear that the Auditor General thinks it should be included in general revenue and the government may at some point have to offset the cost. At \$46 billion, that is a whole lot of offsetting, so that just does not cut it with me.

The reality is that there is room to improve the benefits within the employment insurance program. This is one aspect of improvement that we want to see. The dollars are there. Not doing it is irresponsible and it is unconscionable. Quite frankly, I would like to say that it is almost like extortion to keep taking money from workers and not putting dollars back into the program that they and their employers are paying the premiums for.

There are things that can be done to improve the program. That is what should be happening. That is what we are calling for here. We are calling for an improvement in the benefits by way of reducing the number of weeks. We are not asking for anything unreasonable. We are not asking for the moon. We are not asking for additional tax dollars to be paid. The premiums have been paid and the money is there. I hope everyone in the House will support the motion.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciated the hon. member's speech.

*Supply*

We are all aware of the obvious bad faith emanating from the Liberal side, from the member for Bourassa in particular. He was in Jonquière in 2000, and promised some union members, steelworkers if I remember correctly, that there would be changes made to EI but these were never forthcoming. Again this week, I am told, he did his utmost in committee to delay the study of a bill to improve one aspect of EI.

When it comes down to it, are not the federal Liberals nothing more than proponents of that neo-liberalism so unpopular everywhere in the world for its propensity to make working and living conditions worse for workers to turn them into more flexible tools for big business? When they are not able to earn a decent living, they are forced to accept just any job. One might therefore say that the Liberals are contributing to worsening working conditions everywhere in Canada.

This is my question for the hon. member. Are we not dealing here with neo-liberal politics, pure and simple?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Mr. Speaker, there is no question. One certainly would get that impression. I honestly do not believe that each and every one of my colleagues on the Liberal side think that way. I do believe they are getting rooked into doing something that is not right because they have a controlling body that says they have to do this because it wants to give corporate tax cuts. I think a lot of good people on the governing side are getting rooked in and they are falling into it, somehow believing they cannot do anything for working people.

There is no question that if people in the fishing industry or the forestry industry are unable to get some assistance in downtimes, they will have to move or go on social assistance or their industry will be wiped out. Maybe there is some unscrupulous plan to put them out of business for good so a large corporation can take over the fishing industry. We hear these different stories of different things happening.

I would ask that all my colleagues on the governing side not get rooked in by those people within their party who want to benefit large corporations.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as an employer over quite a number of years, the biggest asset I had in my company were my employees. Employment insurance was a big cost to our company and it was one thing for which I never objected paying.

There were various times over my years when I would have people come to me who needed one or two more weeks so they could qualify for employment insurance. I would hire them on whether I needed them or not to ensure they got their weeks. I felt they paid in and they deserved that.

However, I have been in and out of the House today. I look across at all the government people who are so interested in this today, the people whom the NDP members aligned themselves with in this recent budget. All I have heard today coming from that corner at various times was how wrong the Conservative Party is. It has not been the Conservative Party that has been in power for the last 12 years when lot of these changes were made.

I stand wholeheartedly for a lot of the things that have been said over there, but we have to remember from where this has been coming. Sometimes when you are looking for support for something, you do not keep beating on someone who might support it. I would just leave you with that bit of advice.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would remind all members to make their comments through the Chair. The hon. member for Churchill.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond. One would pretty much have to be around the debate the whole day to see where the initial blows come from before the other ones start coming back. I guess it would be nice if the ball would not go back and forth sometimes in the House, Mr. Speaker, and you have to catch it in the middle to put a halt to it.

As far as the budget goes, the New Democratic Party has supported a budget that made changes that reflected things we wanted to see happen. Over the course of time, I have to admit there have been times I have supported items that have come from the Conservatives when they were good, although they have been few and far between. I have supported items that have come from the Bloc. We have done that all around.

However, in dealing with this issue today, my colleague and I have talked about work issues before. I know he thinks an awful lot along the same lines as we do on a good many issues. In this case, he should look at the issue and vote accordingly to the issue and the motion rather than deal with everything that has come before the House or will come in the upcoming years.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we could fully endorse what was said by the last two speakers, especially by the leader of the NDP. He is completely right to say that the need is great. The difficulties endured by the unemployed, and consequently by their families, are the result of unacceptable policies. This is how one of my neo-liberal friends described these policies just a little while ago. They are based, actually, on a total refusal to improve the lives of these people, in order to give other things priority.

Where our views diverge—I might add, in passing, that my colleagues and I are going to vote in favour of this motion—because we perceive things differently, is in our approach. They say that the need is great. So why not do what is necessary to meet the need?

Something does not make sense in their approach. It seems rooted in some kind of embarrassment about being considered—I am not exactly sure—demanding or unreasonable. However, the 28 recommendations of the Standing Committee on Human Resources and Skills Development give us an idea of the extent of the measures that should be taken to deal with this problem.

The need is too great, under the circumstances, to feel embarrassed about maybe being considered unreasonable. We have a lot of difficulty understanding the NDP's approach in this regard.

*Supply*

In politics, you will agree, it is often a question of perception. It is hard to avoid considering them in a similar situation. With all due respect for my colleagues in the NDP, I must say that our perception is that the Liberal government did not want to offend its friends of convenience so that the budget would pass.

At the same time, the Liberal government did not want to give the impression that it was abandoning the unemployed, because it had abandoned them during the negotiations over the budget. It therefore had to find some half measure, which was not close to meeting the need of course, in order to give the impression that the NDP had obtained something.

We are going to vote in favour of this motion and I encourage all my colleagues to do the same. Nevertheless, it does not go far enough. The perception that the people and we ourselves are left with is the one I just described.

We do not share the NDP's piecemeal approach. However, the approach that we take is one that my friend in the NDP supported until just recently, that is to say, until the debate and vote at second reading of the budget. We feel—and I say this with all due respect for our colleagues—that the NDP turned its back on the unemployed in all these dealings.

Was it intentional? I am not ascribing motives to them. I think that they are sincere, as we all are, in wanting to address the unemployment situation. They are going about it the wrong way, however, in light of the strategic considerations I raised earlier.

• (1650)

On December 13, Senator Pierrette Ringuette, who was sitting on the Prime Minister's task force, raised a dissenting voice, advocating for 12 weeks. Like the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, she did not make the assistance conditional on a 10% unemployment rate. This means that the recommendation is now being watered down.

On December 16, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities tabled part one of its report, which contained the first eight recommendations, unanimous recommendations that is. This report included the recommendation for an independent employment insurance fund—to keep the government from dipping into it—to be managed by commissioners representing both groups of contributors: employers and employees. It provided for a mechanism to ensure that the fund is managed safely at arm's length and, more importantly, in the interest of the workers and employers who pay into it, especially the unemployed, of course.

On February 15, the second part of this report was tabled. It contained a total of 28 recommendations. Recommendation 14 contains the 12 week measure, but without the condition of 10% or more unemployment in each region. This explains why we cannot support the NDP's reasoning in this regard.

On February 23, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, at the time, the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, put forward three measures and tabled them. Her riding is not the poorest in the country. In Quebec this is where the highest rate of income and lowest rate of unemployment are to be found. So, one of

these measures is the best 14 weeks with the rate of unemployment indicator of 10% and over.

The NDP's motion unfortunately is influenced by the measure of the minister of the time.

Finally, Bill C-280 tabled by my colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord institutionalizes the creation of the independent EI fund. The EI file is brought to attention of the whole House. Our NDP colleagues were present when all these measures were put forward, when parliamentarians and the House took these steps. They joined in. I really think they agree with us that all these measures must be adopted.

I am going to repeat what I have said. I do not want to tell them off, but I think that we have to speak the truth to one another. We have a lot of difficulty understanding today why the measure before us falls short. In terms of perception, it does not fit with the concerns expressed by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I do not know whether it is House practice to have people speak as if they are at a meeting. It seems to me there is only one forum here, that of the House of Commons.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I want to hear the hon. member.

• (1655)

[*English*]

Perhaps I could encourage members to take their private conversations into the lobby.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to point out to the hon. members who just left that we were very respectful when they spoke. We did not hold parallel forums.

I am going to conclude the second part of my speech. I simply want to draw the attention of my distinguished NDP colleagues, who are about to vote on the budget. Did they read it? I imagine they did. Did they read carefully?

I refer them to pages 243, 244 and 245. The measure proposed by the NDP will generate new costs totalling between \$100 million and \$125 million for the government. Part of the amount of \$320 million would already be committed, if the 14 week period is reduced. So, this is very little, considering the \$16.3 billion budget for the year that just ended.

### Supply

Let us take a look at the budget. What strikes me is the measure that the NDP is about to endorse. The government says it must spend more efficiently. This is why it launched, on December 16, 2003, an extensive exercise to review government to shift expenditures from low-priority areas—that is in the government's view—to high-priority areas. It has given the cabinet committee on expenditure review a number of responsibilities relating to cost reduction. The government says, "Savings identified in the course of expenditure review can provide the government with further funds to invest in today's priorities and tomorrow's opportunities".

As regards these cuts, for which the expenditure review committee will be responsible, the budget includes the following, on page 245, "About \$2.3 billion of the total savings will be achieved through improved efficiency in the employment insurance program, and a further \$155 million in the Canada Pension Plan". What does this mean? It means cuts in the employment insurance program. Some members might argue that these cuts will not necessarily be made to benefits, that they may target the staff, etc. That does not change anything, because these are still cuts to the system.

At the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst introduced a motion to appoint a counsellor in every employment insurance office to help the unemployed find their way through the system. It was defeated. Not only will no money be added, but \$2.3 billion will be cut.

Our friends in the NDP thump their chests and say they got \$4.3 billion in the negotiations over the budget. However, the Prime Minister said that only \$1 billion of this is new money. When we do the math, it becomes clear that it was the unemployed who were sacrificed.

Today I am asking the NDP members who are going to vote to take a close look at that. Tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, or the day after the vote, I would ask them to explain their decision to the unemployed, when they used to campaign alongside us to have the entire employment insurance system restored and to ensure that the money which was misappropriated—as my colleague explained earlier—is used to benefit the unemployed. Not only are our friends not moving in this direction any more, but by supporting this budget, they are going to find themselves authorizing cuts of \$2.3 billion.

• (1700)

That is what they need to look at.

There are other aspects. I am sorry, I do not want to drown us in figures, but since we are dealing with this, let us take major corrective action. The government has done \$46 billion of damage to the unemployed. This is how much it misappropriated when it managed to produce surpluses by reducing accessibility. I repeat for people who have not yet understood that of all those who contribute to employment insurance and are laid off some day, only 38% can hope to receive benefits because the constraints are so great that people are not eligible.

If all 28 recommendations of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities were taken and implemented in full, and

if the measure on increasing benefits from 55% to 60% of salary were included, the additional expenditure would be \$1.9 billion.

Some will ask me if that would lead to an increase in premiums. Last year, the EI fund showed a \$3.3 billion surplus. Year after year, the surplus has varied from \$3 billion to \$7 billion. All we hear from the Liberal government is that premiums could be reduced. People who contribute to the program say that the amount of the premiums is not the problem, they can pay that. The problem is the amount of the benefits received or the ineligibility to receive benefits.

There has been a surplus each and every year, and this year will be no exception. The surplus will be \$2.2 billion. That is money left after all benefits have been paid, even though premiums were reduced by 3¢ in December. There is still the issue of the \$46 billion that was stolen, and I think that is the right word. That money has to be put back into the EI fund.

In short, what we are saying is that we will support the motion even though it does not address the whole issue. This motion does not solve the problems resulting from the restrictive measures imposed by the Liberal government, and we deplore that fact.

We invite members of the House not only to vote in favour of this motion, but to decide right now that they will vote in favour of Bill C-280, which is now in committee, and that they will start thinking seriously about ways of getting the EI program back on the right track. In that respect, we invite our colleagues from the Conservative Party, and also our Liberal colleagues, if they still have some common sense left and, more importantly, some sensitivity to the plight of the less fortunate in our society, to join us in voting in favour of the measures I just mentioned.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Chambly—Borduas for his remarks and his almost timid support. I say that because I feel the Bloc Québécois's reaction to our motion is unfortunate.

I do not know if this member or the other members of the House remember, but not so long ago, I introduced a bill in the House proposing 15 amendments to EI. Unfortunately, the Liberals and the Conservatives voted against it.

Today's motion seeks to obtain at least \$20 million to assist and bring relief to people in regions where they have to work 12 weeks in order to qualify for EI and where the divisor of 14 applies, thereby reducing their benefits.

I would have preferred to hear the Bloc congratulating the NDP for this measure. If it is so bad, if we have brought shame on the workers or if we are not defending them adequately, the Bloc Québécois will have the opportunity to do better by presenting its own motion. I invite him to make the motion he truly wants to submit to the House. I guarantee that we will vote in favour of such a motion.

*Supply*

It is not that I disapprove of what the Bloc member has said. Yes, the motion does not go far enough. On the other hand, we want to try to do at least something for the workers of Quebec's north shore, Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands, the workers of Caraquet and Shippagan, New Brunswick, and the workers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Liberals will vote against the motion, as the minister announced this morning. This is proof of their lack of concern about employment insurance. The Liberals are even saying no to the little we had in mind. I am proud to be able to show the workers just how unwilling the Liberals are to support them.

Our motion was not comparable to the bill I had proposed, with 15 changes. The Liberals rejected it, claiming it was overly ambitious. So I proposed the most minimal change possible that would still help the workers of Gaspé, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador, and in all other parts of the country where the unemployment rate is such that people would have to work only 12 weeks to be eligible for EI. That is what I have presented.

That was my comment. Today I would like to see the Bloc Québécois join forces with the NDP instead of criticizing them. They have announced their intention to vote in favour of the motion. If we have done such a bad job, then tomorrow in its opposition day the Bloc will be able to introduce a motion in favour of workers, whom it claims to support. I am issuing the challenge to the Bloc to present a motion on employment insurance in support of the workers it claims to be such a staunch supporter of.

● (1705)

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Speaker, I am not claiming for starters that the NDP is not up to it. The motion or solution is not up to it. The NDP could be up to it if it took an approach for a policy that is not piecemeal, a policy that solves only part of the problem while continuing to discriminate elsewhere.

Our colleague asked us to debate employment insurance for a day. If we were to do this, it would be in regard to all the recommendations. So far, we have not proposed bills with only partial solutions. We have proposed two bills: Bill C-280 on an independent employment insurance fund—for the same very well known reasons—in order to shelter this fund from pickpockets, and Bill C-278 on all the measures. That is what we need to emphasize. The member did the same thing, but we should leave it at that. A measure like the one that the NDP is proposing today suits the Liberal government. We try for a whole day to debate something that is so limited in comparison with the extent of the problem, knowing in advance that the Liberals will vote against it. They are against it. My friend acknowledges this himself. So why waste time on something that does not solve the problem?

**An hon. member:** There must be some purpose.

**M. Yves Lessard:** Well, yes. So there has to be some consistency, some cohesiveness in what the parties are doing in regard to the objectives we are trying to achieve. Someone must not claim, however, to have a temporary solution that will make it better and give people a half smile. Maybe in this way some of our group will be among the chosen. It does not work like that. That is not what people expect of us. They expect us to have policies, which are supported and defended by the party, and to do so in a sufficiently

intelligent way to convince other colleagues of the nature of the problem.

This is a problem of our society as a whole and not just of a riding. The question is whether we are going to stand up for the most disadvantaged in our society or continue to work against them, with their money, the very money that they have put aside their whole lives by working to pay for insurance in case they ever have the misfortune of losing their job. This is really a social concept that we should share. If one does not share it, one will always end up with people like some of those in the Liberal party.

I encourage our colleagues who have already stood with the Conservatives to share this with us and vote this way.

● (1710)

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I just want to take a moment at the outset to congratulate my colleague from Chambly—Borduas on his excellent speech. I represent an area where the issue of unemployment is a source of very serious concern. It is experienced daily. At present, plant workers are wondering how much longer they will be able to work. It is a matter of weeks. Money is sought to ensure that they will be eligible for employment insurance because they will not have accumulated enough weeks of work.

As our colleague from Chambly—Borduas demonstrated, the employment insurance issue is a much too vast and complicated issue to be resolved with a simple measure. Really, this is tantamount—and I would like to hear the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas on this—to trying to tackle poverty one chunk at a time. When we had time to deal with the issue, after the budget was brought down, the NDP went quiet. They did not participate in the debate on the poverty experienced by the unemployed and the problems faced by the regions. They did not get involved at all. Today, attempts are made to backtrack and try to take a piecemeal approach to dealing with the problem. I think that is a bad strategy and a bad idea. I would like to know what the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas thinks about that.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Speaker, I will be brief.

We have to realize that, as parliamentarians, we have to run a country, not part of a country. In other words, we have to take care of everyone affected by the issue of unemployment, not just some. We cannot look at just one thing that is wrong. We have to look at the cause of the many things that are wrong. That is what needs to be fixed.

The cause of the many things that are wrong is a policy that harms almost everyone right now and it needs to be addressed. My colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine is totally right about this. Seniors, women and young people are being discriminated against in employment and unemployment. There is also the issue of immigrants who are brought here to work, and who are paid employment insurance benefits when they are not even entitled to them.

All of this needs to be resolved in one fell swoop with a consistent and coherent policy.

*Private Members' Business**[English]*

**Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, let the record show that today, when we had a debate about employment insurance and about what the country could do for the unemployed, the Bloc Québécois, instead of attacking the Liberals and the Conservatives who are not going to vote for this motion and who have a history of not being willing to do what needs to be done for the unemployed in this country, spent the whole day attacking the NDP.

To me, this shows a kind of collective small mindedness when it comes to politics. There are a lot of people in the rest of the country who think that the Bloc Québécois is some sort of social democratic party. We get this on the left in the rest of the country that the Bloc Québécois is progressive and social democratic.

However, when it had a chance to work together with a real social democratic party to really do something for the unemployed in this country, what did it do? Its members spent all day huffing and puffing against the NDP. I thought the House leader of the Bloc Québécois was going to explode there at one point.

We are like the little pigs that made their house out of bricks because Bloc Québécois members can huff and puff all like they like, but long after they are gone, there will still be a real social democratic party in this House fighting for the unemployed, just like the NDP was doing before the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine ever knew where the Parliament Buildings were.

We have been fighting for the unemployed in this country for the last 25 to 26 years that I have been here, and long before I got here. To have to sit here all day and listen to the kind of cheap political rhetoric that is coming from my separatist friends has been certainly an emotional challenge.

I take it the time has expired because otherwise I would love to go on, as you might imagine, but out of deference to your body language, Madam Speaker, you seem to be telling me that we have arrived at the end of the day, so I will sit down.

• (1715)

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to the order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, June 7, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[Translation]***WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION ACT**

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ)** moved that Bill C-360, an act to prevent psychological harassment in the workplace and to amend the Canada Labour Code be read the second time and referred to a committee.

## SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** Before beginning private members' business, I have a short statement to make with regard to the provisions of Bill C-360, an act to prevent psychological harassment in the workplace and to amend the Canada Labour Code

*[English]*

As with all private members' bills, the Chair has examined this bill to determine whether its provisions would require a royal recommendation and thus prevent the Chair from putting the question to a vote at third reading.

It has been the practice to raise such concerns about private members' bills before the House and before the House takes a decision at second reading.

Bill C-360 proposes to provide protection from psychological harassment in the workplace by instituting a procedure whereby employees are given recourse to having their cases investigated and dealt with through remedial or disciplinary action.

This bill contains a provision which appears to propose spending that only the Crown can recommend under our system of parliamentary government.

Clause 8 creates a psychological harassment complaints committee, consisting of five members appointed by the commissioner, to hold office at pleasure for a period of three years, with the possibility of renewed terms. This clearly involves new spending for a distinct purpose.

• (1720)

*[Translation]*

Thus, in its current form, I could not agree to put the question at third reading of the bill, unless it were given royal recommendation.

*[English]*

Today, however, the debate continues on the motion for second reading as scheduled, and the motion shall be put to a vote at the close of this second reading debate.

*Private Members' Business*

[Translation]

## SECOND READING

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to your caveat on this bill. However, we could look at the Labour Relations Board, which already has commissioners who could be given the mandate proposed in the bill. As for the representatives of the employees and the employers, in its process, the commission already calls on their services. I just wanted to remind you of that. It might not involve any spending.

Although a policy already exists in the federal public service to address psychological harassment in the workplace, the fact is its application is inconsistent, or inadequate. As a result, there is serious harm and injustice done to employees or managers who, through no fault of their own, are victims of harassment.

There are many examples of these victims who, for lack of specific measures that should be introduced by the employer, or out of fear, have not reported the harassment they have suffered and end up unjustly punished. There are also many examples of victims who have filed a complaint and had it ignored or mishandled, or have lost their job as a result.

In recent years, I have met a number of these victims and tried to help them. Having studied their cases, as well as the numerous other cases that are not yet settled, I am presenting this bill.

The present policy has been in place since 1994. There have been a few changes, but it still continues to allow unacceptable behaviour, because of incorrect enforcement and the fact that it does not ensure objectivity in handling complaints. The process is left to managers, and these are often the ones who abuse the power of their position or are unaware of what harassment really is.

At the present time, this is the process: there is a policy in place and the employee who has been harassed contacts his or her immediate superior, in order to have the complaint handled, a complaint filed in writing and in the prescribed form. But then it is that immediate superior who decides whether or not there has been harassment.

If that superior was the one guilty of the harassment, he will decide there is no case. The person then has to move up to the regional level. What does that level do to find out what happened? Contacts the immediate superior, the one who has decided the complaint of harassment was unfounded. Then the person can move on to the third level, which is the deputy minister or the department. Once again, the immediate superior will be consulted.

If the immediate superior decides that the complaint is justified, does he have the necessary expertise to handle it? Not likely.

At the present time, 40% of departments have adopted the Treasury Board policy in its entirety, in June 2001. Approximately 15% have opted for appending the policy to a document which explains the position of the department and its process for handling complaints. Only 45% of departments have chosen to distribute a distinct policy to their employees.

I am aware of some psychological harassment cases that have been dragging on for four or five years at the departments of Justice,

Citizenship and Immigration, Correctional Services, National Defence, Transport, Health, Environment and Industry.

• (1725)

Crown corporations are also subject to the Canada Labour Code and their employees are also victims of psychological harassment, for example, Bell Canada, Canada Post, Statistics Canada, the National Capital Commission, and NAV CANADA, a former division of Air Canada.

Already here, we have an initial example of the cause of the problem: Treasury Board has set a policy that is not being applied properly. Furthermore, there is no obligation to act, no guarantee that the departments will correctly and adequately apply such a policy and that the complaint resolution process will be in the victim's best interests.

In recent years, there have been a number of studies on the impact of and harm done by psychological violence. The study by the International Labour Office is the most in-depth one on the subject. It describes vertical violence, which is when a person in authority is abusive or bullies a subordinate or a peer. Such an individual, through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating behaviour, seeks to belittle one or more employees. For example, bullies make life difficult for anyone able to do their job better than they can; they yell at their employees; they insist that their way is the only way; they refuse to delegate work and they take away responsibilities on the pretext that the employee is incompetent. And the list goes on.

There is also horizontal violence, which is psychological harassment by a group of an individual. As a result, a number of people join forces to persecute a specific employee by constantly criticizing them, isolating them, and spreading all kinds of rumours about them.

Managers may face horizontal harassment when they transfer to a given service or department and the employees decide that they do not want the new manager. Just like employees, managers can be victims of psychological harassment by their peers.

In the bill I introduced, psychological harassment is defined in clause 2. It means any behaviour that affects a person's dignity, is vexatious, discredits, humiliates or intimidates the person, interferes with their work, or takes the form of abuse or threats. It also includes any instance where a person feels mistreated, threatened, intimidated or abused in their work environment by vicious rumours, swear words or abusive language.

Such violence in the workplace is due to a combination of factors, including the individual in question, of course, the work environment and work organization. In talking about psychological violence, we are dealing with human beings whose behaviour and reactions are affected by changes and the work climate. Globalization, with all the changes it is bringing about, is coming really close to constituting psychological violence. It is creating added stress, with everyone trying to hold on to their jobs, going as far as discrediting someone else, if need be.

*Private Members' Business*

There is a thin line between management and harassment. It is difficult to know whether there is intimidation or violence in the workplace. Numerous studies show that the difference between efficient management and psychological violence is extremely subtle.

• (1730)

However, objective comments designed to provide constructive feedback are generally not considered as psychological violence or intimidation, but rather as tools to help employees improve their performance.

In light of this, it is essential that any harassment complaint be processed expeditiously by a qualified person.

The bill essentially draws on the existing policy. I repeat, the bill essentially draws on the existing policy. It is not that we or I oppose the policy, but it is full of holes, like Swiss cheese. It has no teeth and does not provide victims with any protection.

The bill draws on the policy, adding, in subclause 4 of clause 3, the requirement of due diligence, so that complaints are dealt with quickly. Likewise, clause 5 provides that a person will act as commissioner for the prevention of harassment in the workplace. This person should be disinterested and neutral, someone, who, because of his or her expertise and experience, knowledge of psychological harassment, may appoint, as indicated in clause 8, persons knowledgeable about this problem, to a psychological harassment complaints committee. He or she can deal with complaints, decide and order action so justice may be served. Corrective measures must be taken, and various forms of compensation put forward to ensure the victims receive justice. Subclause 2 of clause 17 gives the commissioner this latitude.

In order to ensure the impartiality of the process, the bill includes in the committee a representative of the union and of the employer. They are included because they are required under existing labour legislation to represent the victim employee. I refer here to the union. They are also included because they have a responsibility to provide employees with a workplace free of harassment. I refer to the employer.

Furthermore, as both are responsible in part for the climate of work in an organization, it is a good idea to include both in the committee. Clause 18 of the bill requires the commissioner to report to Parliament his or her activities arising from the application of this legislation. It is vital to have this independent official report to Parliament. His or her credibility and effectiveness depend on it.

It must be remembered too that parliamentarians are accountable for government's management to the public. So they should know what goes on and how employees are treated.

The bill will also help employees who are victims of harassment by enabling them to protect their health as well as their rights. While awaiting acknowledgement of the merits of their complaint by the committee, employees will be able to file a grievance or take any other recourse provided by federal statute or other legislation in effect in Canada.

Thus, any other employee witnessing a situation of psychological harassment will be required to report the situation so as not to be an accomplice to it.

Psychological harassment is a moral destruction process that can lead to mental illness or suicide. It is a serious behaviour that needs to be dealt with very quickly and cannot be ignored. This is why, under clauses 3(4) and 3(5) of the bill, any manager or supervisor who is aware of such behaviour and does not take appropriate action is liable to criminal prosecution and to a fine.

Finally, the bill amends section 15.1 of the Canada Labour Code to prohibit acts of psychological harassment and thus protect all Canadian workers employed by Crown corporations or Canadian businesses and governed by the Code.

• (1735)

The bill I put forward today is not a partisan bill. I want to make it clear that it is the product of consultations with a wide group of employees who have been victims of psychological harassment, whom I met on several occasions and who helped me draft it with House staff, as well as unions that want to improve the work environment within organizations.

In closing, I will say that, according to the International Labour Office, Canada is fifth among countries where psychological harassment in the workplace is most frequent. Only France and Belgium have dared propose legislation in that regard. If this bill were adopted, we would be the third country in the world to have such legislation. We would be a leader in the protection of workers' rights. Canadian workers would be guaranteed fair and equitable treatment.

What I am asking my colleagues in the House is to pass the bill at second reading so it can be considered in committee and so I can call as witnesses all the employees from all the departments who have to deal with psychological harassment.

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I congratulate the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville, who worked really hard to come up with Bill C-360, which is now before us. I also invite hon. members to read the report that she produced. It is very interesting. It explains what psychological harassment is about, and what its consequences are on the health of the victim and on his or her environment.

My colleague is very determined to defend this bill, and I support her initiative. I also congratulate her, because it is very important to pass this kind of legislation to help victims of psychological harassment. Psychological harassment is bad, insidious, and it often leads to physical harassment when women are victims of spousal abuse. This cycle often begins with psychological harassment. Consequently, there is no place for this type of harassment, particularly in those institutions that are governed by the Canada Labour Code.

I have a question for my colleague. Earlier, she told us about the federal policy that currently exists and that should deal with psychological harassment. She said that this policy is like Swiss cheese, in that it is full of holes.

*Private Members' Business*

I wonder if she could elaborate on that policy. How is it flawed and why are we not able to prevent psychological harassment in federal institutions?

• (1740)

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Drummond. She is right. Since the year 2000, when I became a member of Parliament, people have come to me to report cases of psychological harassment. I have several federal institutions in my area. Obviously, it was through the people who work there that I got interested in this issue of psychological harassment. I have used all the means I could to uphold the rights of the victims whose harassment has been recognized by the institution, but who have yet to win their case.

As I said, the policy is as full of holes as a Swiss cheese. The Treasury Board has used it as an incentive to encourage federal managers to try to prevent psychological harassment. This is not a bad idea. It has many positive aspects. But the managers use it however they please.

Earlier, I provided figures on the departments that do or do not implement this policy and on those that have their own. This does not make sense. There is a lack of consistency. The manager is the one who decides whether there is psychological harassment. In all the cases I mentioned earlier, and in all departments, it turned out that it was the manager who was guilty of harassment.

That being said, there is no other legislation to help people who have been waiting for a decision for five or six years. Only one aggrieved employee, Joanna Gualtieri, has received compensation of \$8 million from the government, once her complaint was recognized. But the others cannot fend for themselves. With legislation, though, we could help them, and justice could be done.

[*English*]

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to join in the debate today on Bill C-360, which is an act to prevent psychological harassment in the workplace and to amend the Canada Labour Code.

The member opposite has identified an issue that is also of concern to us on this side of the House. The government and other stakeholders in federal jurisdictions have increasingly focused attention on issues surrounding the workplace environment, both physical and psychological.

Harassment in the workplace, how to identify it, how to control it and how to respond when it does occur, is an issue that officials in the labour program of the ministry take very seriously and it is something the government monitors closely. We have always been firmly committed to creating work environments where all employees are treated with respect and dignity all the time. We are working on a number of fronts to meet those objectives.

I will begin with some background.

As members of the House will recall, there are three parts of the Canada Labour Code. Part I deals with industrial relations matters such as union organizing, collective bargaining, mediation, conciliation, and so on. Part II deals with health and safety. Part III deals with employment standards, such as vacation entitlements, family

benefits like parental leave, and also deals with the subject of sexual harassment.

Bill C-360 proposes some changes to part III of the Canada Labour Code. As I mentioned, part III already has provisions concerning sexual harassment. Employers are required to ensure that employees are not subject to sexual harassment. They are also required, after consultation with employees or their representatives, to issue and post a policy statement concerning sexual harassment. Bill C-360 would add psychological harassment to these requirements. However, this proposal may be premature.

Part III of the code is currently the subject of a comprehensive independent review. In addition, the bill is put forward as an attempt to deal with psychological harassment for federal civil servants, but part III of the code does not apply to the public service and is therefore not an appropriate instrument to respond to this issue.

Given that the target group of Bill C-360 is the federal public service, it is important to note that the Treasury Board already has policies in place regarding workplace harassment. In fact the Treasury Board introduced a policy to protect its employees from harassment more than 20 years ago. At that time it was the first employer in Canada to include personal harassment and abuse of authority as forms of harassment in its policies.

Beyond the central agencies, crown corporations are able to introduce their own programs on workplace harassment. The fact is that Canada's public sector is already doing a great deal to prevent and to protect its employees from workplace harassment. My colleagues will provide more information on measures that the Government of Canada has in place to ensure its workplaces are free of harassment. That will happen perhaps later in this debate, but let me return to the Canada Labour Code.

We believe the proper way to amend a complex piece of legislation such as that is through a comprehensive and holistic review with careful, extensive consultations with representatives of employers and employees. The Canada Labour Code is an important piece of legislation. Part III establishes basic working conditions and promotes fair, stable and cooperative workplaces while maintaining workplace flexibility.

If members recall, last December the Minister of Labour announced a major review of part III of the code through an independent commission led by Harry W. Arthurs. This review, which follows earlier reviews of parts I and II of the code, is now under way. Since the review is expected to produce proposals for legislative changes to part III, it would not be timely to move ahead with ad hoc changes as Bill C-360 proposes. Conversely, there are many reasons why it was timely to undertake a review of part III. In fact this section of the code has not had a comprehensive review for nearly 40 years.

The current review of part III will deal with the changing nature of work, the knowledge based economy and the need for extensive learning in the workplace. It recognizes the intensity of competition in the global marketplace with increased pressures on workplace productivity and responsiveness.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1745)

The review will also look at new forms of workplace structures and new forms of employment relationships, including work-life balance and the need to accommodate evolving family structures. Demographic issues like the aging of the workforce and increasing diversity will also be addressed.

In order to understand this broad context, Commissioner Arthurs has launched a very wide-ranging series of research projects, which will be made public.

Commissioner Arthurs wants to hear what Canadians have to say. They are invited to present their views on these issues as well as any other relevant issue. Persons making submissions are encouraged to take into account the impact of their recommendations on workers and their families, employers, communities and the Canadian economy as well.

It is expected that Commissioner Arthurs will present his report to the minister by early 2006. Assisting the commissioner is a panel of experts and special representatives of business and labour. We have asked Commissioner Arthurs to work toward a consensus on recommendations to the extent possible. I view the consultations and consensus building dimension of the commissioner's work to be extremely important.

Let us not forget that in other jurisdictions there is similar concern for the well-being of workers. As the member opposite has stated, legislation on psychological harassment was brought into effect in Quebec in June 2004. This was the first such legislation enacted in North America. The new legislation is being reviewed and an evaluation report is due to be published in 2006. We will review the report for information and monitor the Quebec experience closely.

The government is engaged on a number of fronts to address the kind of issues that Bill C-360 raises. Those of us on this side of the House are concerned about the implications of these developments as anyone else.

We on this side of the House commend the member opposite for bringing this matter to the House. We are equally interested in addressing these issues. However, because of the current review of Commissioner Arthurs and the other technical circumstances I outlined earlier, the bill may have difficulty securing sufficient support among members of the House.

• (1750)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I also wish to address Bill C-360. There is no question that prevention of psychological harassment is the best way to combat psychological harassment at work, and employers need to take the leadership role in engaging conflict.

However, conflict is not always easy to manage as it can involve the work environment, the employer, employees between employees, the physical layout of the work environment, loyalties, emotions and the general subtleties of a workplace. This is compounded by the fact that unlike physical injury which can be easily identified and in some ways measured, psychological impact is not as easy to determine or to assess. That by itself is no reason not to deal with the issue of psychological harassment in the workplace.

The definition in the proposed bill is quite wide ranging. It talks about any vexatious behaviour, which essentially means anything causing annoyance or worry, or purely to cause annoyance without sufficient grounds, or inappropriate or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures that affect an employee's dignity or psychological or physical integrity that results in a harmful workplace.

The legislation is very similar or close to the legislation that has been in existence in Quebec for a short period of time, and there has not been an overwhelming response or report yet to gauge the effect of that. Some of the commentary on that legislation reads as follows:

The vexatious nature is generally gauged from the standpoint of the person experiencing the situation and who is reporting it...

The hostile gestures towards the employee are not necessarily flagrant. Indeed, it is not essential that such a gesture be aggressive in nature in order for it to be considered hostile. For example, an employee could be the victim of comments, actions or gestures which, when taken on their own, may seem harmless or insignificant, but the accumulation or combination of them may be considered a harassment situation...

The term "unwanted" refers to all of the objectionable conduct. Indeed, the victim does not have to give verbal expression to his refusal of such behaviour, but the essential element leading to the ascertainment of harassment is that the behaviour itself is unwanted. It must be possible for the facts in question to be objectively perceived as unwanted.

All I am trying to suggest is that it is a subjective-objective kind of a test which makes it awfully difficult when we have all these factors in play in a workplace setting. It involves a certain measure of value judgment and the people who should have the most to say about how this should work or what the legislation should be are employers, employees, union, management and those involved in various kinds of businesses.

Therefore, it is very important that the whole issue be settled in the widest possible range after the widest possible consultation. I do not believe that could happen in the context of a private member's bill.

In addition, psychological harassment relates to the abuse of authority and it defines a number of actions, including interfering in any other way with the career of the employee.

It is wide ranging. It does set a system in place that is very comprehensive. It talks about the reporting process, the complaint process, the review process and it establishes a commissioner who is responsible to oversee this act and the working of it. It talks about a psychological harassment complaints committee composed of up to five people. It encompasses a framework for another bureaucracy to deal with an issue in the workplace when perhaps we already have the mechanisms and the items in place to deal with harassment in the workplace at present.

A review is underway at present under part II of the Canada Labour Code, dealing with occupational health and safety. That review deals with this whole issue of psychological abuse.

• (1755)

This regulatory review committee has a working group to review all the concerns and positions of not only labour and management, but of various employee representatives, such as the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Auto Workers, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, as well as a number of employer representatives.

*Private Members' Business*

It is not as though the issue of psychological harassment is unknown or foreign. It is something that has been dealt with through collective bargaining agreements. It has been dealt with through the grievance process and there have been certain rules that have been established. It has been dealt with in the common law through the court system, through the means of constructive dismissal, et cetera. It is not something that is totally new. This group is already reviewing these very issues under the occupational health safety mechanism which has an organization and the people in place.

Part of their review of the draft regulations is to address workplace violence, which would include direct and indirect actions for employees, in the course of or as a result of employment, who are threatened or harmed or are subjected to any action that could reasonably be expected to cause them harm.

One of the other important issues that they are looking at is preventing violence in the workplace. They are coming up with a number of principles that are important, such as the provision of a safe, healthy and violence free workplace, a principle that provides attention, resources and time to control workplace violence, hazards, including but not limited to conduct such as bullying, teasing, abusive and other aggressive behaviour, and prevention and protection against violence in the workplace.

It is important that this type of abuse be prevented. It is important that we hear all the players. We have a review process in place now under part II, and we have all the stakeholders involved.

We have another review, which was mentioned a while ago, under part III of the Canada Labour Code by Professor Arthurs which is far-ranging. The bill intends to amend part III of the Canada Labour Code by adding psychological harassment to the same section that deals with sexual harassment.

That issue has already been raised before Professor Arthurs who intends to conduct a wide ranging review in various cities and communities throughout the country, in large centres and small centres. He intends to involve various stakeholders and large and small businesses. He allows for input through the Internet and through submissions. He has a panel with him designed to deal with all these kinds of issues.

For that reason it would seem to me that this bill is not timely.

One of the stakeholders said the following:

Violence in Workplace regulations, (developed by a government/employer/union committee), soon to be gazetted will deal [with] the kind of threats associated with bullying

Furthermore, he said:

But perhaps most of all, the issue has been seized by the Part III review being conducted by Harry Arthurs and clearly a private member's bill on this subject is not warranted. Arthurs will be addressing the issue in his report which has already come up in the consultations he has been conducting.

Furthermore, Bill C-360 would create a new bureaucracy that is not justified.

We do not need another bureaucracy. We already have the means and the mechanics in place to deal with this issue sufficiently. There is a balancing of interests. It is not just the employers that are affected, but it is employees between employees.

We want to be careful because the consequences are significant. The unintended consequences will be important. We must ensure

that we approach this in a logical fashion, in a proper review and take sufficient time to ensure the end result is something that is acceptable both to unions and management, to employers, to employees and all affected.

• (1800)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this private member's bill. It concerns an important subject which does not get the due diligence and discussion it really merits.

Bill C-360 is aptly named. There seems to be a lot of spin with what is happening on the subject matter. It is important to note at the outset that the private member who has brought this bill forward is contributing to an important debate. The member is saying there is a role for Parliament to play in correcting a very serious problem in our workplaces.

I understand Commissioner Arthurs is doing a report and I understand that others in the public domain are debating the issue. We should be inviting those people to sit at the table in committee. We should move the bill ahead, vote for it and hearing from those people in committee. It is a reasonable way to make sure that we do not end up with a government report that sits on a shelf and does not see any significant life brought to it or end up with a process which leaves issues that are very important outside the purview and beyond the reach of members of Parliament.

I want to talk about the value of discussing this issue today. It ties it back to members of Parliament having an opportunity not only to raise public awareness about psychological harassment in the workplace but also to make a statement to the Canadian public that the Canada Labour Code must deal with this subject matter in a much more comprehensive way. As legislators we have a duty and responsibility to pass laws or to change laws to deal with the changing nature of the workplace.

The title of Bill C-360 is an act to prevent psychological harassment in the workplace and to amend the Canada Labour Code. It has a very good summary, which states:

This enactment defines psychological harassment and abuse of power, requires the public service of Canada to provide its employees with employment free of psychological harassment, and requires every employee of the public service of Canada to disclose behaviour that is contrary to these principles.

The enactment also provides for the exercise of recourse, the imposition of fines and the taking of remedial action when an employee who has made a disclosure is subjected to retaliation.

Lastly, the enactment amends the Canada Labour Code to prohibit acts of psychological harassment.

*Private Members' Business*

I am quite concerned, especially given the current climate we are in, with the cloud of suspicion hanging over Parliament relating to, for example, the sponsorship scandal, ad scam. In the past the New Democratic Party has been pushing to get whistleblower legislation passed. We have been thinking about all those public servants who have felt that their employment would be endangered, who are concerned about whether they would be able to progress through the public service if they spoke out, or if they did things that questioned their employers. They are concerned that they would face specific limitations in their occupations or that they would be put in an area where they would experience threats from managers or the people overseeing them.

It pushes toward an element of public accountability that Canadians have been asking for. They want people to feel free and clear to come forward and not to be intimidated.

Imagine if we had had that free environment prior to ad scam, and workers felt that they could come forward. I think of other issues such as the Radwanski situation where employees felt intimidated. I think of the Department of Health where heroes from the medical profession came forward. They worked for Health Canada and had been acting in the public's interest but were berated by their own department and political and bureaucratic interests that seemed to survive longer than any individual.

It is very important to deal with psychological harassment if we want true freedom for whistleblowers and others and to make sure that there is accountability in the workplace.

● (1805)

I want to revisit one of the preambles in the whereas clause of this bill because it is important to put it in the context of the changing Canadian workforce. In the preamble it defines the Canada Labour Code by stating:

Whereas the Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for which a pardon has been granted....

What we are talking about is psychological harassment. I remember the days when the elements of, for example, race and gender were not considered as serious offences in the workplace. People went to work and experienced basically a glass ceiling, for example, which a lot of women faced and still face in Canadian society, but it was more overt. It is the same for people of different races and visible minorities.

On top of that, it used to be acceptable in Canadian society for people to tell jokes at the expense of someone's race, disability or sexual orientation. I know some people still feel that is appropriate.

My wife is a visible minority. Different people have approached me at times to tell me a joke thinking that because I am a white male I might be able to associate with some type of despicable put-down on some racial element and understand it. People are surprised when I tell them that it is not acceptable, that I am very insulted and that they cannot do that in the workplace. That is why laws exist.

Psychological harassment is one of the categories that I do not think we have paid enough due diligence to. Once again I go back to thinking about the freedom of expression for whistleblowers and making sure they are not going to feel berated or belittled, for

example, if they bring forward a concern about something that is happening in the workplace, to the point where it is not acceptable.

Reasonable people are going to apply the law properly. Reasonable people do not want to create problems in the workplace. They want to go to work in a safe environment in the morning, which is why there are laws. We want to improve those laws so people can go to work feeling they have the freedom of expression but that they will not be discriminated against. I argue that people do not want to be belittled at work. They do not want to have their self-esteem taken away because someone does something or says something to make them feel like less of a person for apparent power, self-interest or outright bullying. I can assure everyone that it happens.

I do want to say that when serious things of that nature do occur there is a vehicle at the end of the day to which the employee can go and a process that is fair to the individuals having this cast upon them in terms of a complaint. There will be a clear definition. I believe that is a more reasoned approach of dealing with this issue as opposed to the ad hoc way it is happening now.

That protection is not only for those who are feeling harassed but also for those who have been accused of that type of harassment because there will be the due diligence of a commissioner involved. I like the element in the bill of having the commissioner. A committee structure will be set up that the commissioner has to follow, has people involved with and provides advice, including people from outside the workplace. I believe that environment is healthy, especially in making difficult decisions.

When we get to the point about decisions, if someone is found responsible there will be repercussions. I think that will stop some of the lesser types of harassment that are not necessary. People will think twice because there is a process. I have seen a lot of overt issues.

I have worked on behalf of persons with disabilities. Because of stronger laws related to persons with disabilities, when I worked for them they could not deny them outright and say that because people are in wheelchairs they cannot get a job, whereas now we can actually provide the accommodations necessary through partnership to make sure people are employed. That alone has stopped some of that harassment.

● (1810)

I think the bill is worthy of pushing on to at least the committee level so we can hear the delegations that the other parties seem to be clamouring have all the solutions.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville for the excellent work she has done on this bill. The work put into drafting this bill and seeing it through required good analysis of the subject matter, judicious consultations, determination, a lot of energy and resources, but mostly a lot of heart. When a bill has all these ingredients, it is a good bill and can only be successful. The hon. member's presentation was also very judicious and very enlightening. I thank my colleague for all those reasons.

Psychological harassment is a difficult subject that we have been talking about for far too long. It is not unlike sexual harassment. We talked about that for a very long time before creating legislation to put an end to it, and it worked. The same will be true for psychological harassment. It is a concern in our society.

The Government of Quebec introduced a bill on this exactly one year ago. This bill became law. I will talk about it later. Psychological harassment does not necessarily need to be punished. It needs to be banished and eliminated. That is the direction any bill should take. Any bill on this issue should have a more convincing effect than a simple policy or the goodwill of managers or other colleagues. There absolutely needs to be legislation.

Marie-France Hirigoyen, psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, defined psychological harassment very well. I will read her definition:

Moral harassment at work is defined as any abusive conduct (action, word, behaviour, attitude, etc.) that adversely affects, through its repetition or systematization, the psychic or physical dignity or integrity of a person, compromising that person's employment or the work environment.

Bill C-360 really meets the objective to prevent psychological harassment, under this definition. This bill seeks to prevent psychological harassment, as I said earlier. It is applicable not only to the entire public service, but also to all employees subject to the Canada Labour Code, such as radio and television, bank, grain company, port and airport employees.

This has created two categories of workers in Quebec, which has excellent legislation, as we know, to prevent psychological harassment. This legislation came into force exactly one year ago June 1. A symposium is being held on June 10 to evaluate the results. However, some results are already clear.

In short, there are two categories of workers in Quebec. There are those, approximately 3 million in total, who are subject to the Canada Labour Code. They are entitled, for example, to a precautionary cessation of work. They benefit from anti-scab legislation and also legislation against psychological harassment. Furthermore, 10% of workers—8% of whom come under the Canada Labour Code—are not covered by such protections.

Two sisters or brothers living under the same roof might have very different working conditions. People whose jobs fall under the Canada Labour Code are at a clear disadvantage. In Quebec, there must no longer be two categories of workers.

We in the Bloc Québécois have a good solution for this. That solution is sovereignty. We will get back to that later.

Until Quebec achieves sovereignty, the Canada Labour Code must contain the same provisions as the Quebec code. One of the ways this uniformity can be achieved would be to pass this bill on psychological harassment.

The Quebec legislation came into effect on June 1, 2004. It is an innovative piece of legislation, a first in North America. Everyone agrees on that. Its first performance report has just been released. At the time it came out, that is May 28, there had been close to 2,300 complaints of psychological harassment, 2,266 to be exact. Most of these were justified, and very few were frivolous. Today, 45% of them have been settled, and the complainants have been able to

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

enjoy a healthier working environment. It is important to point that out, because it is the reason for having a bill such as this.

Obviously, this means 27% of complainants did not proceed. When there is a new bill in place, some people do not really understand how it works.

•(1815)

Do they fit within the definition of psychological harassment? Indeed, 27% of files ended up not proceeding, and that is fine.

As I said earlier, a symposium will be held on June 10 and the legislation will be examined there. It will also be a good time to discuss it here.

I would mention in passing that two thirds of the SMEs in Quebec with 50 employees or more have adopted measures to prevent psychological harassment. While it was feared that more and more labour disputes would involve legal action, the effect has been the opposite, one of promoting improved labour relations.

In January, labour ministers from the provinces, including Quebec, met in Toronto. They discussed problems of health, safety, workplace well-being, work-life balance and psychological harassment. They recognized the uniqueness and merit of the Quebec legislation. They met unions, management and people from government. They looked at Quebec legislation. The minister from Ontario stated there was clearly a close link between occupational health and safety and the success of a business, because physically and mentally healthy individuals working in safe surroundings increase the productivity of companies and keep them competitive.

I will conclude on this point. It was mentioned earlier that the Arthurs commission was studying part 3 of the Canada Labour Code. However, we can chew gum and walk at the same time. We can examine this bill in committee and let Harry Arthurs do his work.

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped from the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

### DEPORTATION OF THE ACADIANS

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to reiterate my position toward the standpoint of the British Crown in relation to the deportation of the Acadians, which happened in the middle of the 18th century, as well as the apparent laissez-faire of the current Canadian government on this issue.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

At the outset, I would like to state, just as the Minister of Canadian Heritage did, that the Royal Proclamation of December 9, 2003 is a historical gesture that was welcome. However, whereas the government seems to feel that it is sufficient, that it is now time to turn the page, to take the next call, I am with those who argue otherwise. Although I have said so many times in this House, allow me to state it again.

It is not incumbent on Canada, nor even on the Canadian crown, to apologize or, simply, to acknowledge the harm inflicted on the Acadian people due to the deportation, as Canada as we know it today did not yet exist when the horrors the Acadians had to endure were perpetrated.

It is the authority on behalf of which these reprehensible acts were perpetrated, namely the British Crown—this same authority that must at least accept the moral responsibility for these tragic events—that has to do what needs to be done in these circumstances. This solemn act must not be performed by the Governor General of Canada, but by the Queen herself.

In that regard, Her Majesty made an official visit to Canada a few days ago. Since she does not come to our country very often, would it not have been possible for her to add a short stop on Acadian soil to her visits to Saskatchewan and Alberta? I am sure it would have.

However, it is obvious that the government chose to turn a deaf ear to the pressing demands from many stakeholders asking that the British Crown recognize the prejudice caused to the Acadian people during these terrible events, which destroyed the lives of thousands of innocent people. Instead, the government decided that all the focus had to be on one presumably happy chapter in Canadian history, namely the 100th anniversary of the entry of two provinces into the Canadian federation, thus avoiding subjecting the Queen to a darker, less glorious anniversary, but one just as important in the history of the peoples who built Canada and the entire American continent, namely the 250th anniversary of the deportation of Acadians by British authorities.

Interestingly enough, this anniversary seems important enough that Canadian Heritage is funding activities to recognize it, but not enough to bring it to the attention of the British Crown, on behalf of which these acts were committed, making this sad commemoration necessary today.

The minister should agree with me that it would have been logistically easy and humanly beneficial to put this side trip on Her Majesty's agenda. It would undoubtedly have been disturbing for the Crown, but so much hoped for, noble and significant for all Acadians, including for the descendants of those unfortunate people who were deported and scattered here and there around the world.

It would have been so simple for the sovereign of both Canada and the United Kingdom to espouse the terms of the Canadian royal proclamation and to recognize, in her capacity as the British Crown, that a reprehensible and highly cruel act was committed against some of the subjects of one of her predecessors, in flagrant violation of the provisions of the *Magna Carta*.

Let us keep in mind that those who were deprived of their property and forced into ramshackle boats, while their homes were

torched before their very eyes, were essentially resourceful farmers who only wanted to live in peace in North America.

Did we just miss that long awaited historical opportunity? I am afraid so. However, I still believe that, if the Minister of Canadian Heritage and this government would put as much effort into pleading this noble cause before their sovereign as they do to clinging to power and defending their forever tainted integrity, Her Majesty, who is said to be very wise, would certainly grant this humble request from her loyal subjects.

● (1820)

[English]

**Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is well known that the 18th century expulsion of Acadians from their land was an extremely sad and tragic event in the history of our great country. The story of the expulsion and indeed the survival and courage shown by Acadians at that time is well known. It attests to their courage and extraordinary qualities they displayed at the time and continue to display to this day. They survived because of their perseverance against incredible odds.

It was for this very reason that the Government of Canada proceeded with the signing of a royal proclamation in December 2003, a document that quite properly and eloquently spoke of the suffering and the loss sustained by those Acadians banished from their homeland. To further honour and commemorate this event, the government also designated July 28 as the official day of commemoration.

The member from the Bloc Québécois is clearly not satisfied that the Queen did not go to the east coast. I want to draw the member's attention to the fact that it is not the Government of Canada that controls the Queen's agenda. The Queen controls her own agenda. The Government of Canada along with the provinces and territories all work together to give her the opportunity to visit places we would like her to see. She has in the past visited Atlantic Canada.

I would also like to draw to the attention of the House the fact that the Queen and His Royal Highness marked the centenary of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. The Queen and the Duke joined western Canadians in celebrating this very important event that spoke to the spirit of the nation builders in that part of our great country: aboriginal peoples, fur traders, the Métis, the Northwest Mounted Police, railway workers, and thousands of immigrants who made the west strong and indeed Canada strong.

For the member's edification, the invitation that was forwarded to Buckingham Palace was sent in January 2000 by the Governor General at the request of the Prime Minister. Given the many demands made on the Queen's time, we should give her a great vote of thanks for taking the time to come and enjoy these celebrations that commemorated the centenary of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The planning of the 2005 visit has been ongoing since 2003. It was only in September 2004 that the final itinerary was put together. It is important to mention something else. The Queen also visited our country during her Golden Jubilee in 2002. At that time she visited Nunavut, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick.

I do not think anything will satisfy members across the way. Rather than carping and whining about the Queen, they should be thanking the Government of Canada for what it has done to rightly honour the great sacrifices the Acadian people made historically and to honour them as being an incredible and extraordinary part of the history of our country. They should also thank the Queen for coming to Canada to celebrate the centenary of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Madam Speaker, like the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the parliamentary secretary is trying to use a simplistic discourse to have those who still believe in justice perceived as whiners.

On February 23, I simply asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage if she intended to intervene again with the Queen in order to specifically ask that she go to Acadia to do what needs to be done with regard to the Acadian people.

The minister replied in jest that she did not control the Queen's agenda. By giving such a reply, the minister not only joked about an issue that deserves more consideration and respect, she also squarely eluded the question.

Therefore, I am putting that question again and I hope that, this time, the parliamentary secretary will avoid making hollow statements and will show more respect for those who are patiently waiting for this royal recognition. When will this government do what was suggested by Sheila Copps, the predecessor of the current Minister of Canadian Heritage, and formally ask Her Majesty to go to Grand-Pré, in Acadia, to read the royal proclamation that he seems so proud of?

*Adjournment Proceedings*

[*English*]

**Hon. Keith Martin:** Madam Speaker, perhaps the member did not listen to my speech so I will repeat the salient points. I will outline once again what our government has done to commemorate this extraordinary and profoundly tragic part of our history which took place 250 years ago, to honour the Acadians who are here in our country today, to honour their history and to honour the members of their families who so long ago paid enormous sacrifices.

We signed a royal proclamation in December 2003. We have honoured them also by designating July 28 as an official day of commemoration. I also want to draw to the member's attention once again that the Queen visited New Brunswick during her golden jubilee year in 2002.

The Queen is the Queen of all of the Commonwealth that stretches around the globe. She cannot be everywhere at any one time, but she has honoured us by visiting our country many times, and the member from the Bloc Québécois should sign a letter thanking the Queen for visiting Canada once again.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*English*]

Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a. m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:30 p.m.)



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