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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

UNITED WAY

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, United Way campaigns are currently under way. In my riding of Leeds—Grenville, volunteers headed up by executive director Judi Baril are busy working hard to raise money for this worthy cause.

I am pleased to report that members on this side of the House are helping out. Next Monday evening, October 22, members of the Blue hockey team are travelling to Kemptville, some 30 minutes south of Ottawa, to take on the Leeds—Grenville United Way All-Stars, a team that consists of municipal politicians and others from my riding.

The hockey game begins at 8 p.m. and will be followed by a reception. Tickets at \$10 per person are still available for the game. I invite all members who are looking for something worthwhile to do next Monday evening to take the short drive to the north end of my riding to see the Blue team in its next victory.

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PERSONS CASE AWARDS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2007 Governor General's awards in tribute to the Persons Case were presented today to recognize the contribution made by six outstanding individuals in advancing women's equality.

Wendy Robbins, Shari Graydon, Éleine Hémond, Mildred Louise Burns, Viviana Astudillo-Clavijo, and Muriel Smith, who comes

from my riding of Winnipeg South Centre, are all being recognized today.

Muriel is an inspiring role model in her community and abroad, as a teacher, a mentor and the first Canadian woman to become a deputy premier. Some of her many achievements include bringing forth the first pay equity legislation, creating a network of women's shelters, and a zero tolerance domestic violence policy in the judicial system.

The award to honour the 50th anniversary of the Persons Case gives us the opportunity to celebrate the work of these extraordinary women who have enriched their communities and indeed Canada by working for the advancement of women in substantial ways. I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing and paying tribute to them.

* * *

[Translation]

ÉLAINE HÉMOND

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to pay tribute to Éleine Hémond, who this morning received an award in commemoration of the Persons Case, so named because it had to do with the legal recognition of women as “persons” in 1929.

If Ms. Hémond can now be ranked with the Famous Five, it is because she is the type of woman whose determination and tenacity have helped advance women's rights to equality in all spheres of society, and contributed much to civic and democratic action.

One of this extraordinary woman's many accomplishments is Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie, which received international recognition when it won the Condorcet-Aron award in August 2005.

Underlying all her efforts is a strong belief in the equality of men and women in all spheres of politics.

Congratulations to Ms. Hémond, we owe her much.

* * *

• (1405)

[English]

PERSONS CASE AWARDS

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by offering my congratulations and gratitude to the six magnificent women who today were honoured by the Governor General with the persons award.

Statements by Members

Tomorrow is an important landmark for women in Canadian politics. It does indeed mark the date in 1918 that women were finally recognized as persons under the law. This meant that Canada had turned a corner and women could finally begin to take their rightful place in the political life of our nation.

The new law laid the groundwork for the 1921 election when a woman was finally elected to this House and it eventually led to the 1930 appointment of a woman to the Senate.

Women have come a long way since 1918, but we have not come far enough. Sadly, in this Parliament only 21.4% of the elected representatives are women. That is not enough representation for 51% of our population.

Public policy impacts men and women differently. Equality therefore demands equal representation in decision making and public affairs. We need to ensure that women's voices are heard more consistently in this—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

* * *

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Kootenay—Columbia are enthusiastic about yesterday's throne speech.

Our mandate is based on five clear priorities: a proud and sovereign Canada in which the government rigorously defends Canada's place in the world; a strong federation; a prosperous future; a healthy environment for Canadians, in which the government will continue to improve the environment and health of Canadians; and a safe and secure Canada, in which the government will continue to tackle crime and strengthen the security of Canadians by reintroducing important crime legislation with the new tackling violent crime act and by putting a strong focus on safe communities and youth and property crime.

Our government is going to make effective use of all resources while it gets tough on crime, and it is going to repeal the long gun registry, which has proven to be an abysmal waste of money.

The throne speech is about getting the job done in the Kootenays.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, October 17 is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The theme this year is "Working together out of poverty", which highlights the need for a truly global anti-poverty alliance.

One in five people around the world live on less than one dollar a day. Right here in Canada, poverty is a daily fact of life for over one million children, and in aboriginal communities, poverty only compounds the challenges aboriginals already face.

As Canadians, we can make a difference by volunteering our time or giving our money, but it is imperative for the Conservative government to ensure that it provides leadership and delivers on behalf of the most vulnerable in our society and around the world.

We must work together as MPs from all parties to ensure that families, children and aboriginal people living in poverty do so no longer.

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[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. I would like to express my support for the students at Chêne-Bleu high school in my riding, Vaudreuil-Soulanges, who are participating today in the global call to action against poverty and in the United Nations' millennium development goals campaign. I invite all parliamentarians to stand up and take part in the "Stand up Against Poverty" challenge.

Last year, more than 23 million men, women and children from 87 countries, including 10,000 from Quebec, stood up together to eliminate poverty around the world.

The message to governments everywhere is clear: they should do everything they can to achieve the millennium development goals.

All across Quebec, including in my riding, Vaudreuil-Soulanges, many of us are working to fight poverty, hunger and homelessness. Together with my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would invite all members of Parliament to stand up against poverty.

* * *

[*English*]

SENATE OF CANADA

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday my constituent Bert Brown was sworn in as Canada's newest senator. Our Prime Minister appointed Mr. Brown after the province of Alberta twice elected him Alberta's senator-in-waiting.

No Canadian has done as much to advance the cause of Senate reform as Bert Brown. He has been a tireless advocate for the democratization of the upper house for over two decades. He is a perfect role model for elected senators, and yesterday's swearing-in ceremony demonstrates that our government is serious about moving forward on Senate reform. Over 300,000 Albertans voted for him in the province's 2004 Senate election. More Albertans voted for Bert Brown than all Liberal candidates put together in the last general election in my province.

In 1989 Alberta first elected Senate nominee Stan Waters, who later was appointed to the Senate. The federal Liberals have appointed none of those elected since.

Liberals should be ashamed of their refusal to accept Senate reform. It is time for the Liberals to follow the example of the Conservative Party and support an elected Senate.

Statements by Members

●(1410)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has given aboriginal people in Canada a slap in the face. At the insistence of the minority Conservative government, Canada was one of just four countries to vote against the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people at the General Assembly last month. This marked the first time that our nation has voted against a major international human rights document.

The decision to not support the declaration is a stain on Canada's international human rights reputation and an affront to the aboriginal peoples of Canada and all nations. By not supporting the declaration, the government has sent a message to aboriginal Canadians that their government is not interested in being held to even a modest standard.

It is unacceptable that the government has abandoned Canada's leadership role on human rights for indigenous peoples.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARDS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Governor General's Awards in commemoration of the "persons" case pay tribute to the determination and dedication of the famous five. These national awards salute women who are working to promote women's full participation in building our country.

Today, six Canadian women who are upholding the tradition of courage and determination started by the Famous Five received the 2007 Governor General's Award. These outstanding women are Mildred Burns of Montreal, Shari Graydon of Kingston, Éline Hémond of Quebec City, Wendy Robbins of Fredericton, Muriel Smith of Winnipeg and Viviana Clavijo of Toronto.

On behalf of our government, I would like to express our recognition and admiration for these inspiring women, who are working steadfastly and with conviction to promote women's full participation in all facets of Canadian society.

* * *

[English]

PORT OF CHURCHILL

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Governor General of Canada outlined our government's long term agenda based on five clear priorities, including a focus on Arctic sovereignty and our north.

On October 5, the Prime Minister announced \$68 million to help guarantee the success of the Port of Churchill. His visit there was an important step in strengthening and re-establishing Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic.

Today, the Port of Churchill inaugurates its first international two-way traffic shipment.

[Translation]

This is an important moment for Churchill's economy.

[English]

Western Economic Diversification has been working closely on this project, and I am pleased to see the first of many positive results.

[Translation]

I would like to take this opportunity to underscore the vital role Churchill has played in Canada's history.

[English]

As the main Arctic Ocean seaport in North America, Churchill has an important place in the government's realization of a strong Arctic vision. The north needs our attention and with our government, it is getting it.

* * *

IRAQ

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past year I have had the pleasure of meeting some young Americans who have come to Canada because of their opposition to the illegal war in Iraq.

[Translation]

They are here because they want no part of this immoral, disastrous war. Some of them lived through the horror of the invasion.

[English]

Some Canadians have criticized these young men and women for having the courage to speak out against this war. Let us look at this in context.

Young U.S. citizens, many of whom are part of the 47 million without health care, are attracted to the slick ads that promote the glamour of military life. They are promised a job, a uniform, a college education along with free medical and dental care. However, once reality sets in they see the horror of this war and some choose to come to Canada.

[Translation]

I call on our government to welcome these young Americans to Canada so that they can become loyal, productive members of our society.

[English]

Let Canada once again be known as a refuge from militarism.

Statements by Members

●(1415)

*[Translation]***GATINEAU SOUP KITCHEN**

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 11, 2007, I was very pleased to attend the sixth annual media supper, which is held every year to raise funds for the breakfasts served by the Soupière de l'Amitié de Gatineau. Donations are received from businesses, organizations and citizens. The three-course meal is prepared by cuisine and pastry students from the Centre Professionnel Relais de la Lièvre-Seigneurie.

The Soupière de l'Amitié de Gatineau aims to fight poverty and impoverishment in all its forms and in all areas of human existence.

During the 2006-07 school year, it served 117,000 breakfasts in 24 schools in the Outaouais.

I would like to commend the extraordinary work of the entire team at the soup kitchen. I would like to thank and congratulate the members of the local media who, for the past six years, have been contributing to the enormous success of this event. For a few hours' time, various local media personalities donned their aprons and served a meal to everyone who came out for this worthy cause.

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SAINT-HYACINTHE—BAGOT RIDING

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on September 17, the voters in Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot placed their trust in me as the Bloc member to represent them in the House of Commons. I would like to thank them and say how proud I am to have been chosen to assert their aspirations and to defend their interests, and those of all Quebeckers.

My countrymen are entitled to have elected representatives who demonstrate, at all times, that they are worthy of being entrusted with such responsibility and who are effective in their actions. In this regard, I am pleased to be a member of the excellent team of Bloc MPs led by Gilles Duceppe.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the volunteers who worked tirelessly on those beautiful summer days to get me elected. I would also like to recognize my predecessor in Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot who left me a riding where the citizens are proud of the work accomplished by the Bloc.

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*[English]***GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while many Canadians enjoyed their summer on vacation or with their families, the Prime Minister and his party were busy being investigated by Elections Canada.

Apparently, Elections Canada has revealed that at least 66 Conservative candidates participated in a scheme that allowed the Conservative Party to overspend on the last election by more than \$1 million and candidates then billed the party for almost another \$1 million in padded rebates.

It seems the party that touted accountability as its theme has been unmasked. Conservative members of the procedure and House affairs committee used every trick in their dirty handbook to block the committee from actually investigating these improprieties.

It is no wonder the Prime Minister was in no hurry to get back to the House. Around here, he might actually have to answer for his deceitful actions.

* * *

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Governor General presented a Speech from the Throne which outlined our government's five clear priorities for this new session. One of those priorities provided effective economic leadership for a prosperous future. Our government believes that hard-working Canadians pay too much tax and our tax system must reward this hard work, encourage investment and job creation and promote Canadian business on a world stage.

The government wants to ensure economic security for all Canadians and will bring forward a long term plan of broad based tax relief, further reduce the GST, strengthen the economy through our long term economic plan, "Advantage Canada".

Since taking office we have announced more than \$40 billion in tax cuts for families, individuals and businesses. This is good for the economy and it is good for Canadians.

Under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and our Conservative government, we are building a better Canada.

The Speaker: I should remind hon. members that naming other hon. members is not in order, and I am surprised the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's would make that mistake given his extensive experience in the House.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot made the same mistake, perhaps because this was her first speech in this House.

[English]

Therefore, the next time members will recall that we do not name members. We use titles and such like.

* * *

*[Translation]***NEW MEMBER**

The Speaker: I have the honour to announce that the Clerk of the House has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a certificate of the election of Mr. Denis Lebel, member for the electoral district of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean.

* * *

NEW MEMBER INTRODUCED

Mr. Denis Lebel, member for the electoral district of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, is introduced by the Right Honourable Stephen Harper and the hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn.

ORAL QUESTIONS

•(1420)

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a government that cynically wrapped itself in the Federal Accountability Act, its own unethical behaviour is coming home to roost.

We now have three independent investigations being conducted into the unethical practices of the Conservatives: investigations by Elections Canada, the Privacy Commissioner and the Ontario Provincial Police.

What has the Prime Minister done to get to the bottom of this? Absolutely nothing.

When will the Prime Minister come clean on the role his staff has played in this sordid affair? When will he start demonstrating some of the accountability that used to mean something to him?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess after an entire summer the best the member could come up with is a story where we refused to give an appointment to someone. When it was the Liberals in power, the issue was to whom they gave appointments. With us, the problem is an appointment that should not have been made and was never made. That is why we never made it.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are currently three investigations underway into questionable practices by this government. For a party that claims to be as pure as the driven snow, this is a harsh dose of reality. Elections Canada is looking into allegations that the Conservatives may have cheated during the last federal election by hiding the fact that they exceeded their election expense limits. And the Prime Minister is doing nothing about it.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well from his own party's practices that what he says is entirely untrue. Our election financing activities are entirely legal. We know they are legal because they are what the law permits and because that is what other parties have done: grouped advertising buys, grouped collections of materials, the transfers from ridings to the central party.

Guess what I have just defined? The way the Liberal Party has won elections for years. However, there is one difference. We did not dip into public funds the way the Liberals did for years and years to do it.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately Elections Canada takes a different view.

Today we have had more dodges and rhetoric and no answers.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister finally do the right thing and ask his staff, who are currently under independent investigation, to cooperate fully with the investigators and to step aside until this matter is cleared up?

•(1425)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our party always cooperates fully. The question is, why does the Liberal Party not want to open its books?

When this issue arose at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, there was a question about opening books for investigations on how spending was done for the past four years. As I recall, one party voted against that, and that was the Liberal Party. Why? I guess it was because of the \$40 million that is still stashed somewhere, or maybe it was spent on previous election campaigns.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the architects of this in and out money scam are people like Michael Donison, former executive director of the Conservative Party. Where is Mr. Donison now? He is a senior policy adviser for the Minister for Democratic Reform.

He is not the only one. Andrea Paine is also implicated in this scandal and she is the senior policy adviser for who? The same minister.

How can Canadians have any faith in the legislation the government brings forth when it is getting advice from people Elections Canada says broke the law?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada has said no such thing. No laws were broken. We complied fully with the law.

I can tell the House who did break the law. The party over there actually admitted it broke the law, returned moneys to the public coffers, but only a small fraction of the moneys that the Auditor General told us were actually stolen from Canadian taxpayers.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at least eight candidates or official agents of the Conservative Party who were involved in this scheme are now on the payroll at taxpayers' expense. For instance, there is the chief of staff to the Minister of Public Safety, the special assistant to the Minister of the Environment, as well as his former press secretary.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to drop his ridiculous case against Elections Canada?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after a summer away, the best the Liberals can do is come up with stories that have no basis about corrections. However, it is not surprising, because the one thing the Liberal Party knows a lot about is correction.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in December 2005, the Prime Minister gave a speech in Quebec City in which he promised to put an end to domineering and paternalistic federalism by monitoring federal spending power. He even condemned some of the previous government's centralizing policies, such as the social union agreement.

When the Prime Minister stated in his Speech from the Throne that he wants to “place formal limits on the use of the federal spending power for new shared-cost programs”, is he not simply rehashing the social union agreement that was decried by the National Assembly?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has kept its word. For the first time ever, the government will introduce legislation to place formal limits on the use of the federal spending power in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

Quebec's minister of intergovernmental affairs said that the federal government would try to pass a bill in Parliament to limit federal spending power. That is good news. That is a step in the right direction and it is worth celebrating.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's minister of intergovernmental affairs also said that he would like to see the bill and that he wanted full financial compensation.

Here is an interesting quote: “Any new program will be designed so that non-participating provinces will be compensated, provided they establish equivalent or comparable initiatives.” That was part of Jean Chrétien's 1996 Speech from the Throne, and that is more or less what appears in the most recent Speech from the Throne.

Does the Prime Minister agree that this sounds strangely familiar?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, none of the previous governments have introduced a bill, with the support of the government of Quebec, to meet the historic demands that the province has articulated over the past four decades.

I hope that the Bloc Québécois will support the Speech from the Throne and the measures described therein because we do not need the Bloc voting against Quebec's interests here.

• (1430)

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is true: we have the Conservatives.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government said that it would place limits on the use of the federal spending power for shared-cost programs. There is nothing stopping the government from continuing to encroach on Quebec's jurisdictions by launching programs that are not shared-cost, as it did with the Mental Health Commission.

Will the Prime Minister deny that that is exactly what the Speech from the Throne proposes?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has already said this, and the Speech from the Throne

stated it yesterday: we will table a bill. We are prepared to work with our Bloc colleague on an issue that is so important to the Bloc and to Quebecers.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the Prime Minister agree with the Quebec intergovernmental affairs minister that eliminating the federal spending power means that Quebec has an unconditional right to opt out with full financial compensation when the federal government encroaches on Quebec's exclusive jurisdictions?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the Bloc is a separatist party but we are a federalist party and we will work together with the provinces, including Quebec, to ensure that when we do introduce new cost shared programs that we have the support of the majority of the provinces. If one province would like to opt out, as long as it delivers a comparable service to its citizens and we have comparable services across the country we will work with them.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne continues to take this country in the wrong direction.

The Prime Minister has failed to bring back the entire clean air act. He has failed to change direction in the war on Afghanistan and he has failed to even acknowledge the growing prosperity gap that is making life tougher for Canadians, even middle class families.

The NDP will stand united against the Conservative agenda because we know where we stand.

Why has the Prime Minister abandoned fairness for ordinary Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House knows well, the throne speech addressed the very issues that the leader of the NDP just talked about: concerns about poverty, homelessness and some of the rising cost pressures on the middle class.

If the leader of the NDP had not decided several weeks before the throne speech was read that he would oppose it, he would have noticed these things in the throne speech.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that in this speech there were no solutions to the problems facing families today. There is talk of the homeless, but no solutions were offered.

The government refuses to change directions when it comes to this war of aggression in Afghanistan. It refuses to propose an action plan for climate change.

The Prime Minister does not have the right or the mandate to do whatever he likes.

Why did he abandon today's families in this Speech from the Throne?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, this government has acknowledged these problems, not only in the Speech from the Throne, but also in two budgets. As a matter of fact, we have helped Canadians by lowering taxes and investing in important programs to address poverty and help the middle class.

Once again, if the leader of the NDP had not decided several weeks ago to oppose this throne speech, he would have read it before commenting on it.

* * *

[*English*]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to date, the government's Ministers of Public Safety, Foreign Affairs, Transport, Heritage, along with the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary and 12 other Conservative MPs have been implicated in the in and out money scams.

Will the government inform the House now how much it will cost Canadian taxpayers for Elections Canada to defend itself from the frivolous, Conservative initiated court challenge?

• (1435)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the Liberals have not yet decided what they will do on the throne speech and have nothing else to talk about.

Certainly I can tell the member this. What I do know—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know it is the first question period in some time but I would ask hon. members to have some sympathy. My voice is weak today because of my cold. I cannot call for order at the normal tone and members may not be hearing me. We need to have some order so we can hear the answers and the questions.

The government House leader has the floor and we will have some order, please.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the practices that our party is engaged in are the same as all other parties. In fact, we wanted to shine a light on that by inviting the procedure and House affairs committee to do a thorough study into the Conservative Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party and their use of transfers between national parties and riding associations dating back to 1997.

We were happy about a full investigation but they voted against it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, will the Prime Minister respond to these questions?

Last year, the Conservatives admitted that they had violated the election financing laws and they had to resubmit their financial statements. They do not want to spend their money on lawyers who defend the rights of linguistic minorities in my province, yet they will pay lawyers to defend their partisan interests.

If the investigation finds that the Conservative Party is guilty, will the Prime Minister reimburse Canadians for his legal bills?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we always comply with the law. We did in this particular case and we always will in the future.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is refusing to be honest with Canadians about what it did during the last election while it campaigned on accountability. We need look no further than the parliamentary committee that was investigating this very issue which was shut down by the Conservative government, silenced.

Canadians deserve to know what the government did during the last election before they are plunged into another election.

When will the government end its appeal against Elections Canada and simply admit that it broke the law?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our party will not plunge this country into an election. We want to govern and we want to govern until 2009. If we are to be plunged into an election, we know who will make that decision. It will be the folks right across the aisle.

I remind members that the people who shut down the investigation, the inquiry and the study at the procedure and House affairs committee were not members of the Conservative Party. It was the Liberal Party that voted against it. I have the minutes right here if members want to look at them.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives laundered over \$1.2 million in national advertising expenses through local campaigns, which is against the law. Even worse, they tried to pad bank accounts of 66 Conservative riding associations with over \$780,000 with taxpayer funded rebates, again against the law.

They have done everything they can to avoid coming clean: shutting down parliamentary hearings with prorogation and taking Elections Canada to court.

Why will the Conservative government not admit that it broke the law in the last election and finally be honest with Canadians?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me illuminate for Canadians how the Liberal Party has practised this. For years, its advertising, its promotional materials and even its lawn signs have been purchased by grouped purchases and grouped advertising buys, exactly the same thing they are complaining we did.

Oral Questions

That is why so many of them had a picture of the member for LaSalle—Émard on their signs as they went down to defeat in that election after they were guilty of taking the public's money to fund their campaigns on the side, as condemned by the Auditor General and judged by Canadians quite harshly.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne, the government boasts, in one breath, about having an open federalism and respecting each level of government and then, in the next breath, it announces Canada-wide regulations to centralize the financial sector in Toronto. Yet, in Quebec, the National Assembly, the Autorité des marchés financiers, and the Montreal Stock Exchange stated that they were against the establishment of a centralized commission.

Does the Minister of Finance intend to respect the Quebec consensus and announce that he will not be going ahead with his project for a pan-Canadian securities commission which infringes on the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec and runs counter to its interests?

• (1440)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question. He said that our government believes that the constitutional authority of each level of government must be respected.

[English]

Our intention is to act within the federal constitutional power with respect to all matters relating to trade and commerce in Canada. Certainly we intend to respect the constitutional authority, as it is, of the various provinces with respect to various issues.

I remind the member opposite that the call is not for a federal securities regulator but for a common securities regulator.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it was this position that was denounced by the National Assembly of Quebec. The minister is speaking out of both sides of his mouth in the same Throne Speech. That is what we are condemning today.

In addition to the World Bank and the OECD, which have stated that the current system works very well, two professors from Laval University have added, in a study, that a single organization would be more expensive and less effective.

How can the minister continue to justify his project when all the facts are against it, when the Quebec minister of finance and the opposition parties in Quebec oppose his project? When will he understand that Quebec does not want his pan-Canadian commission?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I say, I certainly intend to respect the constitutional powers of

Quebec and the other provinces but what is called for is a common securities regulator. When one deals with a common securities regulator we are not dealing with constitutional issues because the provinces and the federal government would agree.

I would remind the member opposite also that the Minister of Finance in Quebec has called for national enforcement with respect to securities which necessarily involves the Government of Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government says it wants to include mandatory targets to effectively deal with greenhouse gases, but what it is not saying is that what it has in mind are intensity targets, not absolute targets. This means that even if we pollute less with every barrel of oil, but we produce more oil, we end up with more pollution, not less.

Will the Prime Minister admit that such is the reality, the same approach as his friend George Bush?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to correct my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. That is not the case at all. Our program will ensure an absolute reduction of greenhouse gases. In the 10 long years that the member was critic for his party, there was a 33% increase in greenhouse gases.

This government is getting a lot more done than the previous government did.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the Conservatives' program will kill the Kyoto protocol. That is the reality.

The government is also promising to set up a carbon exchange. My question is simple. Can the Prime Minister tell us where, in Canada, he intends to set up this future exchange: Montreal, Toronto, or somewhere else?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be very clear. The directors of the Montreal and Toronto exchanges were very clear. They are saying that the market will determine this decision and that it is not a decision to be made in the halls here in Ottawa. That is what the director of the Montreal exchange said.

We are very busy working on this file. For the first time, Canada will have an exchange. That is something we never had in the first 10 years of that member's mandate.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives pretend that they are interested in accountability. Some joke.

The police are now investigating allegations that a mayoralty candidate was bribed to drop out of the race in exchange for a federal appointment. Conservative campaign chair John Reynolds and the Prime Minister's campaign director Doug Finley have also been named by Conservative staff in court documents.

Will the Prime Minister tell his officials to step aside from any role within the Conservative government or the party until the conclusion of the police investigation?

• (1445)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, absolutely nothing improper took place on the part of this government or the Conservative Party. No appointment was made; no offer was ever made. In fact, when the minister was approached with the suggestion of an offer, he said it was crazy and he would never consider it.

I have no idea why this is the best those members can come up with. It is a big difference from the days when appointments were made.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Ottawa has admitted to police that he and Mr. Reynolds discussed giving his political rival a Parole Board appointment. An aide to the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board told police that the offer was in the works through Doug Finley.

It is time that the Prime Minister stop hiding and tell the truth. Why is he defending these two men? Why are they still working for him while they are under police investigation?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are pretty simple. From this government's side, no offer was ever made, no appointment ever given.

* * *

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of my constituents were recipients of mysterious Rosh Hashanah greetings from the Prime Minister. It was a mystery because they had no idea they were on such a government mailing list. One constituent, Michelle Kofman, was one of those Canadians. She wants to know two things: how does the Prime Minister know her religious affiliation and how did his office get her personal information?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, all members of this House I suspect, certainly all party leaders, send holiday greetings around the time of Christmas to millions of Canadians on publicly available lists. We make no apology for doing the same thing with Canada's Jewish community to celebrate their important high holidays as well.

We believe, unlike the Liberals, in multiculturalism and celebrating all of our cultural communities' holidays and important dates.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ms. Kofman and Canadians deserve a full and complete answer from the government. The Privacy Commissioner has been asked to investigate, one of three investigations involving the Prime Minister and the Conservative government.

Oral Questions

Why is the government compiling lists of Canadians according to their religious and ethnic affiliation?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I promise the member opposite that if she sends me a Christmas card, I am not going to launch an investigation.

The fact of the matter is that Canada is a beautiful mosaic made up of people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. This government believes in sharing greetings with Canadians from all of those backgrounds at important times in different cultural and religious communities. We make no apology for doing so.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, fighting crime is a priority of all governments because safer communities are a priority for Canadians. I know this because I hear concerns from my constituents about violent criminals, auto theft and drug dealers.

According to a recent survey two-thirds of Canadians support our government's approach to criminal justice. Could the Minister of Justice tell the House how our justice agenda will help make our communities safer?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for all her efforts to fight crime in this country.

My colleagues and I have been right across the country this summer explaining and discussing with Canadians our crime fighting agenda. This is in contrast to the Liberal Party. It has been talking about fighting this summer, but that is just within the Liberal Party. That is not the same thing as fighting crime.

We will be introducing the tackling violent crime bill. We will be making improvements to the Youth Criminal Justice Act. As I said to some of my colleagues when they asked me about this, we are just getting started.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, anyone fortunate enough to buy a \$100,000 luxury car receives a \$1,000 gift, thanks to the 1% cut in the GST.

On the other hand, the average family, which might struggle to spend \$100 on clothing for their children, receives \$1.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us why he refuses to take simple, concrete action in the interest of the middle class, particularly, by removing the exorbitant fees charged at ATMs?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): I knew, Mr. Speaker, that the Liberals are against reducing the GST. I did not know that the NDP is also against reducing the GST, which after all is a tax cut that benefits every Canadian who makes purchases across Canada, including Canadians who do not pay income tax.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know it was my first question, but I was actually expecting a response, so I will be a little bit more direct.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We have to be able to hear the hon. member for Outremont's question or he will not get a response at all.

The hon. member for Outremont has the floor. We will all want to hear his question.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, last year the Minister of Finance went cap in hand to the banks to ask them to reduce abusive ATM fees. He was turned down flat and sent packing.

Why should a worker whose paycheque is deposited automatically by his employer have to give the bank president a \$3 tip to have access to his own money? Why does he have to pay these abusive ATM fees?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to his portfolio as finance critic. I think the question was about the GST, at least the first question.

I remind him that a very learned member of the NDP said, "I just as soon that they got rid of the GST and do something else. I haven't given up on Mr. Jean Chrétien keeping his promise and keeping his word in getting rid of the GST". That was Bob Rae in 1994 who was NDP then and who now I think is a Liberal. It is very confusing when it comes to GST and the opposition parties.

* * *

EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has stated that he resolved the issue of the Nova Scotia offshore agreement. He has not. What he has done, Mr. Speaker, is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for West Nova.

[English]

Hon. Robert Thibault: What he has really done, Mr. Speaker, is bully the weak premier into accepting a lesser deal. The Atlantic accord was supposed to be to Nova Scotia's benefit above and beyond any benefits or revenues coming from equalization or any other program. He has turned it into an either-or proposition for Nova Scotians. When will the Prime Minister stop misleading Nova Scotians and apologize to Nova Scotians?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary, most Nova Scotians to whom I have talked have been applauding the Prime Minister and Premier

Rodney MacDonald for putting an end to a misunderstanding about the budget interpretation, the Atlantic accord.

What we see happening is a Liberal member who does not like good news. He certainly does not like to see issues that the Liberals struggled with for so many years, particularly issues around the Crown's share, finally resolved by a fair-minded, flexible Prime Minister. That is what has happened.

[Translation]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the political minister for Nova Scotia reneged on an agreement signed with David Orchard and said in this House that a Conservative member could vote against the budget and not face any repercussions. We all know what happened to the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley. Now, he claims to have resolved the Atlantic accord issue, but without any documentation, agreement, analysis or proof.

Why should Nova Scotians believe this minister?

● (1455)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians and particularly members of his own riding have become accustomed to this type of bluster and wind coming from the member opposite. In fact, if he were a car, he would run on a mix of adrenalin and vitriol, but the truth on this issue is that Nova Scotians are extremely pleased to see the issue around the offshore deal now put to rest.

They are glad to see an Atlantic gateway underway. They are glad to see the progress that is happening throughout Atlantic Canada under the Conservative Party, unlike messes around the Digby wharf and the devolution of the Digby ferry, all of these issues that happened under the former minister's watch. He made a mess in his riding. We are cleaning it up.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, *The Daily News* in Halifax wrote an article the other day. It said that under the new arrangement to which the minister just referred, "—the province also gives up all claim to all entitlements guaranteed in the Atlantic Accord".

That line sends a shiver down the spine of every Nova Scotian. I do not think it is right. I hope it is not right, but the fact of the matter is that we just do not have a signed agreement that we can check to see whether it is right or not.

When will the government just produce a copy of the agreement so that we can all assess it and decide whether it is a good deal?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's interest in this issue. I know he has followed it over the summer.

Oral Questions

I also understand that he has had the opportunity to speak to not only the current Premier, Rodney MacDonald, but he has also had the opportunity to speak to former Premier John Hamm who thinks this is a good deal for Nova Scotia, as do most Nova Scotians.

This allows us to be the full beneficiaries of the Atlantic accord with the additional portion of Crown share that was left out under the previous government. This speaks well to the future of Nova Scotia's offshore and our ability to be the primary beneficiaries of both the accord and the new equalization formula.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the House that I did have the opportunity to talk to former Premier John Hamm. I asked him if he had seen a copy of the contract. He said, “No, I haven’t”. So, I do not know how he came to the conclusion, but I have great respect for John Hamm. None of us have seen the contract.

There was an exchange of letters. The minister of finance for Nova Scotia said that the federal minister will make amendments to the 2007 budget to reverse the changes to the equalization formula made in the 2007 budget. There is no reference to this in the throne speech, so when will the minister table the amendments as promised in the exchange of letters?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite surprised, quite frankly, to see the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley now casting doubt on the position put forward by former Premier Hamm.

I know he is very concerned about the details and also very concerned about his own personal situation. We just wish that he would work a little bit more productively in the interests of Nova Scotians, put his own personal crusade aside, and accept what is good for his province.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's position on Afghanistan is paradoxical, to say the least. It has just appointed a panel of experts headed by John Manley to review Canada's mission in Afghanistan, yet we learned from the throne speech that the mandate for the mission will be extended until 2011.

Are we to understand that the government has already decided that Canada will remain in the Kandahar region until 2011 and that creating the panel was merely a way of presenting us with a fait accompli?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague did not read yesterday's throne speech very carefully. I would like to quote from page 7 of the speech, which is very clear on this: “Our Government does not believe that Canada should simply abandon the people of Afghanistan after February 2009”.

That is clear. We are engaged in a humanitarian mission with all the United Nations and NATO countries. We are proud to be taking part in a mission to defend human rights in Afghanistan.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs should read the speech himself instead of eating Joe Louis and handing them out in Afghanistan.

For months, the Bloc Québécois has been calling on the government to restore the humanitarian side of the mission and the balance between Canada's humanitarian and military activities in Afghanistan. But what did we learn from the throne speech yesterday? We learned that the government will be buying more military equipment. The government made \$20 billion in spending promises last year and is making additional promises this year. What this means is that for the Conservative Party, the military side of the mission takes precedence over everything else. We find this absolutely unacceptable.

● (1500)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the rest of the international community, we all know that there can be no development without security, that there can be no economic development without security, that there can be no respect for human rights without security. The two are linked, and this is important. That is why we are in Afghanistan with our colleagues from France, England and many other countries.

* * *

[*English*]

DARFUR

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the people of Darfur, time is running out.

In late August my wife and I adopted two more children from Darfur. Each night I hear their nightmares and I am challenged as a father to know how best to respond.

Right now there are millions of such nightmares taking place in Darfur, and we as a peacekeeping country are being challenged to take action. We can no longer afford our silence. So I ask, when will the Prime Minister break the silence and work with all parties here and create a course of action that every one of us in this House can be proud of?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's commitment to Sudan, to Darfur, is very important to our country. Canada is the fourth-largest contributor in international aid to the African Union. We are also working with the UN and the African Union towards a peace process. This is why, in the Speech from the Throne, we said that we were promoting the universal values of freedom, freedom of expression and democracy. This is what we must do and will always do with respect to this issue and others that are equally important.

Oral Questions

[English]

INDUSTRY

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been wide coverage in the press of the issue of foreign investment specifically as it relates to concerns about national security and investments by foreign state-owned enterprises.

Last spring the Liberal opposition leader wanted to take us back to the economic policies of the 1970s by calling for a moratorium on foreign investment.

Will the Minister of Industry assure Canadians that the government is not, and will not become, protectionist?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position is quite clear. Canada is open for business but is not for sale. Foreign investment is essential to our prosperity. That said, the Investment Canada framework, the Investment Canada Act, is not perfect.

First, we will proceed with situations where there is a non-strictly commercial objective and unclear governance that may not be beneficial to Canada in the context of state-owned enterprises. I am currently examining the need for guidelines in such circumstances. Second, unlike many other countries, including our trading partners, Canada does not have a national security test. We will be looking at that this autumn.

We will protect the interests of Canadians while advancing foreign investment in our country.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has repeatedly ignored the will of the House. He has no intention of honouring the decisions made by elected members.

How can any member claiming to be committed to the environment let the throne speech pass when the government refuses to bring back the entire clean air and climate change act?

When did the Prime Minister lose his respect for the House of Commons, and why does he have such disdain for this place and its members?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the challenge of global warming has gone unaddressed in this country for far too long.

Environmentalists and industry cannot come to a consensus. The premiers met this summer; they cannot come to a consensus. Neither can parties in this House.

This government is acting in a big way through mandatory regulations requiring the big polluters to cut their emissions, new transportation initiatives to address that sector, as well as major initiatives in energy conservation and efficiency.

We will not study any more. We will not research any more. This government is committed to acting and we are acting.

● (1505)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is the government is ignoring the will of this House. The Prime Minister himself said that the Prime Minister has the moral responsibility to respect the will of the House.

Despite promises and motions adopted in this House, there is no public appointments commission, no seniors charter, no benefits for veterans and no parliamentary budget office.

I ask again, has the Prime Minister lost his moral responsibility to respect the votes in this House? When did he acquire such contempt for this place?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been abundantly clear that we have a moral responsibility to act on the global crisis that is global warming. We do not want to study this issue for another year. We do not want to put off action that is required.

Just this spring we began to act by regulating for the first time in Canadian history the big polluters to clean up their act. There are more initiatives on transportation, on energy efficiency and on energy conservation and programs so that Canadians themselves can help in this global effort.

We will not shirk our responsibilities. We are going to act.

* * *

DARFUR

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know words will not save lives in Darfur; only action will. Mass murders and rapes continue. The situation is getting worse in that part of the Sudan.

The United Nations Secretary General has pleaded for the resources for troops and for air and ground transport. Without these assets, the mission will likely fail.

I have a simple question for the government. Will the government contribute to these assets for the UN, or will it turn its back and allow Darfur's agony to continue?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we are contributing. We are the fourth-largest contributor to the African Union. I think that is a significant contribution.

Furthermore, as a country, we strongly support the African Union and United Nations-led political process for Darfur which is to start soon, at the end of the month.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since we are on the topic of the environment, over the last few months Canada has been at the forefront of international action on climate change, including the leadership shown by the Prime Minister at the G-8, at APEC and at the United Nations.

Last month Canada was part of a major international deal that involved countries like China to phase out harmful ozone-depleting chemicals.

Could the Minister of the Environment tell the House how Canada is once again showing real international leadership on the world stage to fight pollution?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that today, three political parties asked questions on the environment, every party except for the official opposition.

Four weeks ago the world gathered in Montreal to tackle ozone-depleting substances. We built on the Montreal protocol, which was first negotiated in 1987 by the then prime minister, Brian Mulroney.

We were able to accelerate by 10 years the phase-out of these ozone-depleting substances, the worst being HCFC, which is a major and potent greenhouse gas.

This government is not talking about taking action on the environment; we are delivering the goods.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Jozefina Topalli, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case, namely: Shari Graydon, Mildred Burns, Éline Hémond, Wendy Robbins, Muriel Smith and Viviana Astudillo-Clavijo.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1510)

[English]

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Privacy Commissioner concerning the Privacy Act for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2007.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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ROUND TABLE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, in accordance to paragraph 10(2a) of the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, the response of the National Round Table on the

Routine Proceedings

Environment and the Economy to its obligations under the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act.

[English]

This report is permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table a document entitled "Individual Member's Expenditures for the Fiscal Year 2006-2007".

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Article 19 of the International Labour Organization's Constitution, member States are required to bring recently adopted conventions and recommendations to the attention of the competent authorities.

* * *

MARITIME LABOUR CONVENTION

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table in this House two copies, in both official languages, of the report on the Maritime Labour Convention adopted by the International Labour Conference in February 2006.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I wish to table two copies, in both official languages, of the government's response to the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on Chapter 5 of the November 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada, "Relocating Members of the Canadian Forces, RCMP, and Federal Public Service".

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[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 17 petitions.

*Routine Proceedings***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics entitled "Statutory Review of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA)", tabled in the House of Commons on May 2, 2007.

* * *

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand there have been consultations among the parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the adoption of the following motion:

[Translation]

That,

Whereas Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Burma's National League for Democracy, has been recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize as one of the world's leading champions of peace, democracy and non-violence;

[English]

Whereas she has been repeatedly deprived of her liberty and contact with her family since July 1989 as retribution for her support for the cause of freedom, democracy, human rights and justice for the people of Burma;

[Translation]

Whereas she led the National League for Democracy to victory in multi-party democratic elections in 1990, the results of which were ignored by the military regime;

[English]

Whereas she remains one of the leading forces in the continuing struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma and a symbol of the desire of the people of Burma for political freedom;

● (1515)

[Translation]

Whereas recent events show that her desire for democracy and peace is deeply shared by the people of that country;

[English]

Whereas her long struggle to bring freedom and democracy to the people of Burma has made her the embodiment of these ideals and an inspiration to all of us;

[Translation]

Whereas Canada has previously acknowledged the contribution of other leading champions of human dignity, granting them honorary Canadian citizenship,

[English]

Therefore, this House resolves to bestow the title "Honorary Canadian Citizen" on Aung San Suu Kyi and requests that the people of Canada demonstrate their friendship and solidarity with Aung San Suu Kyi as an honorary citizen of Canada and, through her, to the people of Burma.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: 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)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to speak to this motion.

[English]

Our nation is built on our founding values: freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Throughout our history, Canadians have fought and died defending these values and we believe they should be the birthright of all human beings.

[Translation]

We stand with those who protect our values, and especially with those who are denied those values. Unfortunately, there are many countries in which citizens are denied these fundamental rights and freedoms.

[English]

However, few have faced such brutal repression as the long-suffering people of Burma. For nearly two decades, they have endured the unrelenting tyranny of an unelected military dictatorship.

[Translation]

Over the past few weeks, the latest peaceful demonstrations have been violently put down by the despots who now control Burma.

[English]

Tens of thousands of Burmese took their noble cause to the streets. Thousands were arrested and imprisoned and there have been countless reports of beatings, torture and summary executions.

[Translation]

Canadians were horrified and scandalized by these events.

[English]

There have been public protests in support of the Burmese people in cities across our country, including on Parliament Hill last week. All Canadians know that what is happening in Burma is an attack on the values we hold dear, indeed an attack on the values of civilization itself. They want us to act and we must.

[Translation]

Earlier this month, we demanded a special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the situation in Burma. Together with the international community, we condemned the regime's brutality.

[English]

The protesters in Burma, here in Canada and around the world are rallying behind Aung San Suu Kyi. A Nobel Peace Prize winner, she is the living embodiment of the long struggle for freedom and democracy in her country.

Her National League for Democracy won a landslide election but was not allowed to form a government. In fact, she has been a political prisoner for most of the last 18 years. More than anyone else, she has focused international attention on the plight of her people.

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[*Translation*]

That is why, today, we are conferring honorary Canadian citizenship on Aung San Suu Kyi.

[*English*]

To acknowledge and support her long, courageous battle for freedom and democracy in Burma, I urge and thank all parliamentarians for supporting this motion. I hope it will be adopted unanimously in both chambers of this Parliament so that it can be clear as always that Canada stands for universal values that are under siege today in Burma, and once again, to also send to Aung San Suu Kyi the important message that Canadians and indeed all civilized people of the world stand behind her in her quest for democracy and freedom in that country.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1520)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Burma that has over 35 members of Parliament and senators from all parties and the people of Burma, we are very happy and thank the government for picking up our agenda item from last May to make Daw Aung San Suu Kyi an honorary Canadian citizen.

We are especially pleased that this occurs at this particular time of crisis and great need for the people of Burma. The Liberal opposition has long supported the bestowing of the title “Honorary Canadian Citizen” on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, so that the people of Canada may demonstrate their friendship and solidarity through her to the people of Burma.

It is our sincerest honour and privilege to see that this symbol of unity of our two peoples has finally come to pass. We hope it will be followed by many more actions of support for the Burmese people.

Aung San Suu Kyi's courage is the courage to sacrifice her life in order to give life to an entire nation. She continues to inspire people throughout the world and to strive to attain democracy, human rights and ethnic unity through peaceful means and for this she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

There are unspeakable human rights abuses by totalitarian governments in many countries of today's world. For the freedom fighters in these struggles, Aung San Suu Kyi is an international symbol of heroic and peaceful resistance in the face of oppression.

To quote the chairman of the Nobel Peace Prize committee, “She is an outstanding example of the power of the powerless”.

Think of the incredible personal sacrifices Aung San Suu Kyi has made to lead the peaceful struggle of her people. She lived through the assassination of Burma's martyred independence leader, General Aung San, her father. She escaped an assassination attempt on May 30, 2003 by thugs of the USDA supported by the regime who beat 100 of her supporters to death in the failed assassination attempt.

Imagine what government in the world would arrest a Nobel Peace Prize winner. She has now spent over 4,000 days under house arrest. She is isolated and allowed no visitors. Her phone line has been cut and her mail is intercepted.

However, Aung San Suu Kyi herself says “The only real prison is fear”. When her husband was dying of cancer, the military junta dictatorship would not let him pay one last visit to his wife, even after a request by the Pope and the Secretary General of the UN.

In 1988, the brutal military dictatorship murdered 3,000 peaceful students and human rights protestors. Imagine soldiers going into Burmese houses, forcing the young children into labour, raping wives and torturing and murdering Burmese citizens who disagreed or objected, except for the hundreds of thousands who have fled to refugee camps across the border.

What kind of government anywhere in the world would murder and torture peaceful monks? It is this outrageous regime that the peaceful human rights protestors and the rest of the world under UN responsibility to protect are up against.

For this, the Burmese people need a leader to lead them to freedom. They have one, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who will soon be a Canadian citizen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is our duty to make Aung San Suu Kyi an honorary citizen of Canada and at the same to recognize her unflinching dedication to her country and her people. As the head of the National League for Democracy, she led Burma to its first democratic election. Elected President, she was removed by the military junta, which quashed the election results and placed her under house arrest. In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Burma lives under the rule of dictatorship and military terror. Rights and freedoms are repressed. The recent peaceful protest by monks shows how entrenched the military junta is in its refusal to accept change. Repression continues and the international community is protesting.

I would remind the House that this Parliament supported a report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development which forcefully denounced the systematic and repeated violations of human rights by the junta, especially with regard to minorities. This report urged the authorities of Burma to immediately free all political prisoners, particularly Aung San Suu Kyi. It called on this government to provide tangible support for the legitimate authorities, the government in exile in particular. The report recommended that a number of economic sanctions be placed on Burma. It asked Canada to exert pressure on the UN Secretary General to establish a framework for finally getting the military junta to negotiate a peaceful transition to democracy in cooperation with the National League for Democracy and representatives of ethnic minorities, as proclaimed since 1994 in all UN resolutions in respect of Burma.

The Bloc Québécois fully supports the decision by the Parliament of Canada to bestow honorary Canadian citizenship on Aung San Suu Kyi. Having appeased our conscience, however, we would not want to stop there. Efforts to liberate Burma must continue. The manifest desire of its citizens to achieve democracy must be supported. The Parliament of Canada must stand by their side.

Routine Proceedings

• (1525)

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is pleased to enthusiastically support the motion.

[Translation]

The NDP will be pleased to support this motion.

[English]

None of us are indifferent to the images we have seen the past few weeks from Burma. In one of the world's most brutal dictatorships, Burmese monks had the courage to defy the authorities. They led the ordinary people of Burma, in peaceful demonstrations, to demand that generals step aside and allow the democratically elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, to take her rightful place. The brutal military junta responded by arresting and killing those brave, heroic monks and their followers.

Throughout almost two decades, Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy have been denied their election victory. This outright affront to democracy should have been dealt with long ago. The world has been too silent on the flagrant violations of human rights suffered by the Burmese people. We have shied away from tough action that can make the difference in a country like Burma. Forced labour, torture, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, denial of freedom of expression and association are a daily reality for the people of Burma.

Aung San Suu Kyi is the rightful leader of the democratically led government of Burma, a democratically led government yet to be recognized by the military junta. She has often called on the international community to "use your liberty to promote ours".

Today we have a chance to do just that. To truly honour Aung San Suu Kyi we must support her efforts in bringing democracy to Burma. She called upon the international community to put pressure on the junta by withdrawing western investment from her country. She has argued that the presence of western investment in Burma provides both financial and moral support for the junta. As she said, "Western companies give the regime a chance to say: "Look: even companies from Western democracies support us".

At a press conference on October 3, I declared that Canadian companies and public pension funds investing in Burma had been complicit in propping up the military regime and that the Canadian government must do more to stop this complicity.

New Democrats fully expect Canadian companies operating throughout the world to hold themselves to the highest standards of corporate social responsibility. The Canadian government cannot speak out for human rights in places like Burma and then allow Canadian companies to undermine these efforts by cooperating and legitimizing the regimes responsible for violating human rights in the first place. That is why we have heeded the call from Aung San Suu Kyi and demanded a carefully targeted divestment campaign to increase the pressure on the junta.

I remind the House of another person who had the honour of Canadian citizenship bestowed upon him, Nelson Mandela. When Mr. Mandela was in prison, Canada took leadership by ensuring all Canadian companies divested from the brutal apartheid regime of

South Africa. That was the beginning of the end of apartheid. To truly honour Aung San Suu Kyi's fight for democracy and human rights we need the same leadership today.

Once again, the NDP caucus supports this motion. Her words echo in this chamber today, "use your liberty to promote ours". Let us heed her call.

* * *

• (1530)

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of the Canadian delegations of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, respecting their participation at the meeting of the Co-operation and Development Committee of the APF, held in Hanoi, Vietnam, from March 6 to 8, 2007. These reports also deal with their participation at the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians Seminar on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, held in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, from May 3 to 4, 2007. Finally, these reports deal with the meeting of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee of the APF, held in Sofia, Bulgaria, from May 22 to 24, 2007.

* * *

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-462, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (refundable tax credit for low-income earners).

He said: Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest responsibilities any government has is its duty to help those who are most underprivileged in our society. Homelessness, lower education levels and poor health outcomes saps hope and destroys futures. Within Canada there is a group of the poor that has to labour underneath that. Within that group are nearly one million children who labour under poverty.

It is for this reason that it is my honour to introduce in the House a private member's bill that would introduce the Canadian low income supplement. This supplement would put \$2,000 in the hands of every family that earns under \$20,000 a year, declining to zero for those families that earn less than \$40,000. It puts real money in the hands of those who are most underprivileged in our society.

The government is enjoying a \$14 billion surplus. Conservatives failed to introduce any credible poverty reduction plan in the Speech from the Throne and, quite frankly, have increased taxes on the poor. This is remarkable and unconscionable.

The Address

Therefore, I ask the government to support and quickly pass this private member's bill, pass the Canadian low income supplement, put real money in the hands of those Canadians who are underprivileged and ensure that they have the hope and the future to which all Canadians aspire.

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

* * *

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, if a member of a political party in the House has not made his or her speech during the first round, at the conclusion of government orders, today, regarding the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, the period will be extended to allow members to complete their speeches.

The Speaker: Does the government House leader have the unanimous consent of this House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: 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)

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS**HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I present to the House three pages of petitions from people around Burlington, Ontario and Hamilton, Ontario. The petitioners ask that the government continue its work on stopping the human trafficking issue in Canada.

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to table a petition presented by constituents from my riding, asking the federal government to immediately announce the withdrawal of Canadian troops from combat zones in Afghanistan at the end of the mission, in 2009, and also an immediate rebalancing of this mission, to put more emphasis on the humanitarian component and less emphasis on the military one.

There is significant support in every region of Quebec for the Bloc Québécois' reasonable position. It is my hope that the government will act quickly.

[*English*]

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition

on the income trust broken promise, on behalf of Mrs. Gina Palmer of Calgary, Alberta, who remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said "the greatest fraud is a promise not kept".

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he had promised never to tax income trusts, but he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax, which permanently wiped out \$25 billion from hard-earned retirement savings from over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Conservative minority government to: first, admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the 31.5% punitive tax.

LITERACY

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present my first petition in this second sitting of the 39th Parliament that calls on Parliament to reinstate the funding of literacy programs cut by the Conservative government.

The petitioners, who are from St. John's East, note the importance of literacy for social and economic development and the impact it has on our society. They recognize the need for Canada to help the 38% of Canadians who have trouble reading and writing. They also recognize the \$17.7 million cut from the funding of literacy programs, which contributed \$10 billion annually in literacy costs to Canada.

I stand with the petitioners from St. John's East in calling for a reinstatement of literacy funding and to undertake a national literacy strategy to ensure that all Canadians have an opportunity to achieve vital skills.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

● (1540)

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from October 16 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured, as leader of Her Majesty's official opposition, to rise today and lead the Liberal Party of Canada in responding to the Speech from the Throne to open the second session of the 39th Parliament of Canada.

I would like to begin by congratulating the Governor General for the elegance with which she delivered the Speech from the Throne. Unfortunately, my congratulations will almost have to stop there. The meagre Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday is so vague, so full of holes and raises so many concerns that it warrants little praise.

The Address

Yet, somehow, in thinking about this a lot, I may find something relatively positive to say about the speech. It is not as bad as the one we would have heard from the Conservative Party if it had been a majority government.

As the Prime Minister's most trusted political adviser, Professor Tom Flanagan, recently described, if the Conservatives form a majority government, rural economies would be threatened by a fatal assault on supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board. Health care would be subject to an agenda of Conservative "radical reform". One may imagine what that means.

The work of our police officers and the safety of our citizens would be threatened by the absolute dismantling of the gun registry and our environment would be neglected by those who believe that, to quote Mr. Flanagan's incredibly irresponsible statement, "global warming may threaten the planet, but it actually improves the weather in Canada".

Canadians can count on the Liberal Party. The Conservative Party will never form a majority.

[*Translation*]

The throne speech we heard yesterday, with all of its weaknesses, has to be assessed in light of the fact that Canadians do not want another election right now. They want Parliament to do its job.

Three general elections in three and a half years, not to mention the provincial elections held recently or to be held shortly, would be too much in the eyes of Canadians.

The Prime Minister and his government may be increasingly frustrated by an opposition that prevents them from implementing their ultra-Conservative program; but we, the official opposition, are determined to make Parliament work. That is what Canadians want.

Let us look at the more positive aspects of the Speech from the Throne. It is encouraging to see that the government intends to expand the scope of the Action Plan for Official Languages, which linguistic minorities are in the bad habit of calling the Dion plan. We hope the government will keep this promise and table a robust plan that it will not have to call the Dion plan II.

But why stop there? Why not revive the court challenges program that has done so much to protect minority rights? And why not reinstate the bilingual requirement for officers of the Canadian Forces?

We are pleased to see that the government has finally decided to offer an official apology to the victims of the Indian residential schools. This does not in any way discharge the government of its obligation to right the terrible wrongs caused by its rejection of the Kelowna Accord, which delayed urgently needed measures in education, health and infrastructure, and by its refusal to sign the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We are also pleased with the government's interest in Canada's North and we support its intention to set up a world-class research station there. However, we would like to know the location of the site, the budget and the deadlines for achieving this plan.

It was high time for the government to keep its promise of mapping the Arctic seabed. It made that promise 18 months ago. We

would like to know how the government intends to respect the crucial 2013 deadline to show that the continental shelf falls within Canadian territory, which our country is required to do since it ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The government also talked about expanding aerial surveillance in the North, but then why not deploy fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft, as the previous Liberal government planned to do?

One may also ask why the government makes no mention of the building of small craft harbours in the Arctic, when such a measure could create jobs and increase trade and tourism in northern Canada.

And why not take a collaborative diplomatic approach to assert our interests with the Arctic Council, the only international organization of circumpolar countries, which can deal with major Arctic issues, and within which Canada must still play a leadership role?

• (1545)

Finally, to conclude on the North, how can one talk about the North without talking about enhancing the quality of life of its inhabitants, the quality of life of the Inuit people and services that are provided to them, particularly at a time when global warming has such a profound effect on their way of life?

In another positive point in the Speech from the Throne, we were pleased to learn that the government was committed to supporting our veterans. However, the throne speech does not contain any provision to enhance the quality of life of active members of our armed forces and their families, particularly to help them overcome the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder that often follow their deployment overseas.

We take note of the government's intention to modernize the Canadian armed forces. However, we have some concerns about the way that it wants to do so. Will the government continue with its troubling reliance on contracting without tender? Contracts of \$30 billion have already been awarded in this manner.

It is good to learn that the government has decided to make a commitment toward Haiti, but it remains vague on the exact nature of this commitment. Is it financial aid for basic health care? Is it funds for reforestation? We still do not know.

• (1550)

[*English*]

Of course we applaud the decision to grant Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi honorary Canadian citizenship. This is an idea that we fully support and that our colleague from the Yukon has been promoting for months.

Let me now turn my attention to the more problematic sections of the speech, starting with the absurd expression that the Prime Minister keeps repeating. Let me tell the Prime Minister that when he argues that "Canada is back" he diminishes the fine tradition of Canadian peacekeeping and international leadership that long preceded the Conservative government's election to office.

And for that, Canadians must wonder where the Prime Minister was back when Canada obtained an international treaty banning landmines; when Canada was a main architect of the International Criminal Court; when Canadian armed forces airplanes were the only ones operating an airlift in and out of Kigali during the Rwanda genocide; when our soldiers fought to protect Bosnia's civilian population; or when Canada hosted the world in Montreal and rallied it around the Kyoto protocol.

The government's continued ambiguity on the mission in Afghanistan is also disconcerting. The government is being deliberately ambiguous about the length of the mission in Kandahar. In fact, it does not want to mention the word Kandahar. Nor does it mention the words "combat mission". It refuses to call the Canadian mission in Kandahar what it is: a counter-insurgency combat mission in which our troops are required to proactively seek out and engage the Taliban.

The Prime Minister now wants Canadians to believe that this combat mission is a training mission. It is not. If the government wants to transform it into a training mission after February 2009, that could be an acceptable option, one that we have advocated for since last February and one that the blue ribbon panel on Afghanistan has been instructed to consider.

Still, the government should immediately notify NATO and the government of Afghanistan that our combat mission in Kandahar will end in February 2009. By refusing to do so, the government makes it more difficult to replace our troops and to prepare a new Canadian mission.

There is another question on Afghanistan. Why has the government asked the Manley panel to look at four options while the throne speech already chooses one of the four options: accelerated training of the Afghan army and police? Perhaps the Prime Minister should inform the panel that its work is done.

The mission in Afghanistan is an important one, but we cannot remain silent, as the throne speech does, on our other responsibilities around the world. Why has the Prime Minister turned his back on Africa? And what does the government intend to do in Darfur?

• (1555)

Beyond these international issues, we also have important domestic challenges to address. I would like to discuss the important issue of our federation, which has recently been affected by the Prime Minister's breach of trust with so many provinces.

The throne speech states that "the constitutional jurisdiction of each order of government should be respected", but the Prime Minister should start by respecting premiers. It is inconceivable that after 19 months in office the Prime Minister of Canada has refused to call a first ministers meeting with the premiers. This is not open federalism. It is simply "my door is closed" federalism.

Hence, the Prime Minister wants to go ahead with his unilateral reform of the Senate despite the fact that many provinces have expressed serious disagreement with his proposals.

Now he is announcing that he will introduce legislation to formally limit the federal spending power. The Prime Minister should understand, however, that he must convene the premiers to

The Address

discuss this most important issue. Otherwise, he would simply be guilty of more closed-door federalism.

[*Translation*]

Could I humbly suggest that the Prime Minister consult me on the issue of the federal spending power just as he consulted me before introducing the motion on the Quebec nation within Canada?

When he does, I will tell him that the federal spending power as he described it in the throne speech falls short of the present limits to that power that I myself, under the leadership of former Prime Minister Chrétien, introduced in the throne speech of 1996. More importantly, the proposed limits fall short of the social union agreement of which I was the architect.

To continue with my exercise in humility, I will add that no federal politician placed greater limits on the federal spending power than I did, but I did so without reducing its usefulness.

[*English*]

Let us hope that the Prime Minister's objective conforms with the spirit of the social union framework agreement; that is, to use the federal spending power as a tool both for social progress and for partnership between the governments of our great federation.

In Canada federal spending power has been instrumental in building the Canada-wide social programs that all Canadians value, such as medicare. It has been essential in promoting equality of opportunity for all Canadians, helping to ensure access to social programs and services to Canadians wherever they are in Canada.

The social union framework agreement, SUFA, recently helped to successfully negotiate the early learning and child care agreements with the provinces and territories. These agreements have, sadly, been cancelled by the Conservatives, depriving millions of children and families of billions of dollars in funding to improve their early childhood development opportunities.

We Liberals will make sure that the initiatives of the Conservative government do not in any way diminish the value of the federal spending power as a tool to promote social progress for Canadians and good partnerships between governments. We will not allow the Prime Minister to build a federalism of firewalls.

Let me also remind the government that today in Canada more than half a million of our senior citizens live in poverty. The men and women who built this country deserve better.

Today in Canada, more than one million children live in poverty. We cannot waste a generation. All of our children deserve to share in the bounty of our nation.

A plan to fight poverty is urgent and, let me tell everyone, it will be at the heart of our Liberal agenda.

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•(1600)

[*Translation*]

Earlier, I mentioned our health care plan, which is the result of a wise use of the federal spending power. In the throne speech, the government congratulates itself—not really honestly, I might add—for the progress it made in shortening wait times. Unfortunately, we do not see any such progress. In fact, according to a recent report by the Fraser Institute, the average wait time for surgery in Canada now stands at 18.3 weeks, the longest it has ever been.

Now, I come to the economy. The Conservative government inherited an unprecedented economic dynamism thanks to the efforts of Canadians and to a decade of sound financial management by the previous Liberal government. The economy has not been in such good shape since Confederation. This is the longest growth period in decades. We have the highest growth rate of all G-8 countries with major job creation, balanced budgets, a trade surplus and a reduction of our national debt. Our country is the only one to have succeeded in putting its pension plan on a solid footing for the long term.

Over the past 19 months, the Conservative government has been content with just riding on this strong economy without having any plans or convincing scheme to enhance our economy's potential. That is what I call being near-sighted. Let us not delude ourselves into thinking that there will be no end to the current growth. The fact is that this government has done more harm than good in terms of Canada's international competitiveness. It is about to allocate \$12 billion per year to cut the GST by two points, a measure that will not allow Canadians to bring more money home, does nothing to combat poverty and does not make our economy more competitive in any way.

[*English*]

The Conservatives' interest deductibility proposal is a frontal attack on the competitiveness of Canadian companies and has been denounced as the worst tax policy in 35 years. It will cost Canadian companies billions and will serve mainly to enrich foreign governments. The Prime Minister has not listened to common sense, but it is not too late for him to do so.

It is not the time to make such mistakes. The parity of our currency with the U.S. dollar, the uncertainty of the U.S. market, the high cost of energy, and the new powerhouses of India and China are all putting pressure on our economy and on the exporters and manufacturers that generate the jobs upon which we depend to maintain our high standard of living. Nearly 80,000 workers have lost their jobs in the manufacturing sector this year alone.

To maintain these jobs, and to enhance this standard of living well into the future, we must find ways to improve the innovation, competitiveness and productivity of our businesses and workers.

The throne speech mentions infrastructure. It mentions post-secondary education. It mentions science and technology. It mentions the manufacturing, forestry, fisheries, mining, resources, tourism and agriculture sectors. But a mention is no substitute for a plan. We hope that the fall economic and fiscal update will provide clarity on how the government will improve Canada's competitiveness.

The throne speech promises tax cuts, but the government actually raised income tax rates in the lowest bracket from 15% to 15.5%. This decision costs Canadians over a billion dollars every year.

On international trade, the government did not explain why it closed consulates in key markets such as St. Petersburg, Osaka and Milan.

The government went to lengths to hide the flawed softwood lumber agreement, an agreement that cost the Canadian industry at least \$1 billion, which is being put in the hands of those now using the money to sue our companies.

On the matter of criminal justice and security for Canadians, the government laments that much of its legislation did not pass. What the government always fails to mention is that for months it systematically refused Liberal offers to fast track the majority of its legislation. Of the six bills the government wants to reintroduce as part of the tackling violent crime bill, we already support five.

It is the government that obstructed the passage of these bills, causing them to die on the order paper at prorogation, and it did so to the detriment of the security of Canadians. Hopefully the government will be more cooperative in the coming session. We urge the government to stop playing politics with the Criminal Code and to stop putting partisan politics ahead of the safety of Canadians.

Further, with respect to the tackling violent crime bill, we obviously want to see exactly what the legislation will say. We could support it if it includes measures that would make Canadians safer. We Liberals are tough on crime and we are tough on the causes of crime.

•(1605)

As for the Anti-terrorism Act, the government has not indicated what changes we can expect. We hope that this time it will be informed by the 100 recommendations made by the House and the Senate in their recent reports and that it will not renew its attempts to play politics with such an important issue.

[*Translation*]

This brings me to the most disappointing aspect of the Speech from the Throne: extremely weak environmental protection measures.

Once again, the government missed an opportunity to meet the challenge of fighting global warming, the most serious environmental threat facing humanity today.

In this Speech from the Throne, the government said that Canada's greenhouse gas emissions could not be reduced to the level required under the Kyoto protocol for the first phase of implementation, that is between 2008 and 2012. One thing is sure, with this government's so-called plan, greenhouse gas emissions are bound to continue increasing in Canada.

Let me outline the damages the Prime Minister and his government have caused to Canada.

• (1610)

[*English*]

All I need to do is sum up the Sierra Club of Canada's Kyoto report card for 2007. It explains that last year the Conservatives cut over \$5 billion worth of investment in environment and climate change programs. The Sierra Club said:

Federal programs were slashed, and the importance of addressing global warming was downplayed.

An entire year was lost.

The Sierra Club goes on to say:

—Canada had a plan for reaching its Kyoto targets. This plan, Project Green...had provided a foundation for action upon which new Conservative initiatives could have been built.... Instead of improving Project Green, the new government shredded it along with its programs and its institutions, in March 2006.

This is what the government has been doing to Canada. It has spent all of 2007 trying to reannounce the programs it scrapped in 2006, changing their names and their logos with less money, less commitment, no coherence and incompetence in implementation.

This is what the Conservatives have done to Canada. Now look at what they have done to the world.

Let me again quote the Sierra Club:

The current government also inherited the presidency of the International Climate negotiations, which had been led by former environment minister [the Leader of the Opposition]. The Canadian government's efforts at the international climate change conference in Montreal won Canada international praise.

Under the new Conservative government, Canada quickly went from hero to zero. At an international conference in Bonn, Canada attempted to sabotage the Kyoto Protocol.

It is what the Prime Minister means when he says that Canada is back.

In contrast, in 2007, the official opposition proposed an enhanced climate change plan to conquer our industrial emissions, the carbon budget. When we launched this carbon budget in March 2007, the Pembina Institute said:

This is the strongest proposal for regulating industrial greenhouse gas pollution made by any political party in Canada.

—it sets the right targets and the right timelines....

The Climate Action Network said:

This is great. It's hard to ask for much more

[*Translation*]

It is important to recognize that the other two opposition parties agreed to include this regulatory plan in Bill C-30 on air quality and climate change.

On August 23, I wrote to the Prime Minister to ask him not to scrap Bill C-30 after proroguing the House. The Prime Minister did not even deign to reply. On reading the throne speech, we can see why.

[*English*]

The Conservatives will only bring forward the minor parts of the clean air and climate change act, the ones they allow their members to support. As a result, the regulatory framework to cut and bring

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down gas emissions is gone. The regulatory framework to improve air quality is gone. The autonomous emissions standards are gone. This is a step backwards in the face of a major global challenge.

What are we left with? We are left with a government plan that has been panned by all credible experts in Canada and abroad, a climate change plan that has been panned by all the experts, like the new Nobel Prize winner, Al Gore, who called the Prime Minister's plan "a complete and total fraud, designed to mislead the Canadian people".

The Pembina Institute, that once rated Project Green, the Liberal plan killed by the Conservatives, would have delivered almost seven times more reduction than the government's current approach.

The Deutsche Bank said, "We think that the Canadian government has materially overstated the cost of complying with Kyoto. Under current policies, we would expect Canada's industrial gas emissions to continue rising over 2006-2020".

According to the C.D. Howe Institute, with the government plan, "overall emissions in Canada are unlikely to fall below current levels" until 2050 and beyond.

The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research said:

—targets set by your government are so easy to meet that oil companies could end up with a windfall of \$400 million worth of easy credits.

Under the Conservative plan polluters do not pay; polluters get paid.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

I could also quote the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, which also harshly criticized the government's plan.

The throne speech states that national regulations to reduce emissions will be implemented this year. We do not know what the government is talking about, since its own regulations will not see the light before 2010 at the earliest. Does this mean that the government has changed its mind and will assign a monetary value to carbon in 2008?

Let us hope that the government understands that it must significantly strengthen all its initiatives to protect the environment and fight climate change.

Canadians can count on the official opposition to press the government to take action and be accountable. The government must understand that any deadline set for meeting our targets for the first phase of implementation of the Kyoto protocol, which ends in 2012, can be corrected during the second phase, after 2012. But to do that, we have to start today. That is why the government has to significantly toughen its measures to fight climate change.

The official opposition will cooperate fully with the government to help it reach real targets. Canada must remain a party to the Kyoto protocol, the only international accord to fight what is a global threat.

*The Address**[English]*

The official opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech.

Canadians can count on the official opposition to do everything it can to make this Parliament work. To that end, we will propose amendments and we will not make the government fall on its throne speech, which would cause a third general election in four years, something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want.

The amendments we are putting forward would enable us to support the throne speech. If they are rejected, we will do as the NDP when it decided on October 16, 2006 to abstain on the vote on the softwood lumber agreement in order to avoid causing an election.

As another leader of the official opposition said some years ago, “I believe it's not in the national interest to have an election now. What has become apparent is that the Bloc Québécois and the NDP will grandstand on these things but it is up to us, our caucus, to decide whether the time has come to have an election. In our judgment and I think in Canadians' judgment it is not that time”.

Everybody will have guessed that this leader of the opposition, quoted on March 10, 2005, is our current Prime Minister when he was explaining his party's dissension to the 2005 budget.

I will now move an amendment that could even allow the official opposition to support the throne speech if it met with the approval of the House. I move:

That the motion be amended by adding the following:

• (1620)

[Translation]

and this House calls upon the government to recognize that any shortfall in meeting our 2012 Kyoto commitments would be a result of their decision to kill the previous government's innovative Project Green plan, followed by 18 months of inaction, and the government must replace its weak approach with real action to create the momentum required for Canada to catch-up in the second phase of Kyoto;

to announce now that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end in February 2009 in order to facilitate a replacement, and begin discussions with NATO and the Government of Afghanistan on what non-combat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan;

to end 18 months of inaction in the fight against poverty in Canada by building on the good work of the previous Liberal government that funded such initiatives as the Canada Child Tax Benefit, affordable housing, literacy, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) and the Working Income Tax Benefit; and

to stop taking for granted the unprecedented strong economy and fiscal success inherited by this government from its predecessor and bring forward proposals to reduce corporate taxes and other measures that will improve the economy of Canada, especially in sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture, and lessen the impact of the government's egregious mistakes on income trusts and interest deductibility.

[English]

The Speaker: The leader of the opposition has moved that the address be amended by adding thereto the following:

—and this House calls upon the government—

May I dispense?

Some hon. members: No.

*[Chair read text of amendment to house]***The Speaker:**

The question is on the amendment.

Questions and comments. The hon. Minister of Transport.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition treated us to quite a lecture this afternoon.

Over the past 40 years, this country has seen a number of attempts to limit federal spending power. These discussions have usually ended in failure. For example, in the 1960s, there was the debate over the Victoria charter. There were constitutional talks between 1968 and 1971, and in 1978 and 1979. There was the Meech Lake accord, in which the opposition party played a major role. There was the Charlottetown accord, and there was social union.

This brings me to my main point: the Leader of the Opposition is telling everyone to pay attention to him because he is Mr. Canada and he managed to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, I can see that the members opposite are quite humble, but the Leader of the Opposition is laying it on thick when he says that after he took care of social union, everything worked out well.

Allow me to speak the truth. Allow me to tell you the facts. Social union never happened in the provinces. The Leader of the Opposition can stand up and tell us all about the Kyoto accord, but he has not even taken the time to negotiate with the provinces. Furthermore, when the new member for Outremont was Quebec's Minister of the Environment, he was unable to reach an agreement with the narrow-minded Leader of the Opposition who refused to have anything to do with the Government of Quebec.

In closing, I would like the Leader of the Opposition to explain his own stance on federal spending power to members of this House and to tell us how he plans to ensure that all Quebeckers and Canadians are united in a stronger, better Canada.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his presentation on constitutional law, even though he got carried away somewhat towards the end.

I cannot find anything in his remarks that contradicts what I said in my speech. No one restricted the federal spending power more than we did in 1996 and through the framework agreement on social union.

In fact, the wording used by the Prime Minister in the Speech from the Throne does not go as far. Why? First, because it deals strictly with shared costs programs, and these programs have almost all disappeared. By contrast, the framework agreement on social union includes all forms of transfers to the provinces.

The Address

Second, the agreement clearly specifies that the support of a majority of provinces is required to implement a Canada-wide program that relates to a social provincial jurisdiction.

Third, the federal government cannot set up programs. It can agree on objectives with the provinces, but it is the provinces that establish their own programs. If they have achieved, partially or totally, their objectives, then they can invest in a related area.

This is how the Government of Canada and the Quebec government negotiated the daycare agreement. The Quebec government felt that it had enough daycare spaces—I do not know whether Quebecers shared that view, but that was the Quebec government's point of view. In the social union framework agreement, the Government of Canada agreed that the Quebec government could invest in other areas relating to children and families. There was an agreement involving hundreds of millions of dollars. What happened? The same thing that happened to the negotiations on the Kyoto protocol: the Conservatives took office and cancelled these programs. Shame on them!

• (1630)

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one would have the impression from the speech by the hon. member that he has major concerns with the direction that the government has taken and the fact that there are fundamental disagreements. We share that assessment of the Speech from the Throne and of the direction of the government.

However, instead of presenting self-congratulatory amendments and offering to simply sit in their place and abstain, I offer to the Leader of the Opposition and his party the option to do the right thing which is to join with the NDP, which is going to be rising in opposition to the direction of the government.

It cannot be sugar-coated, it cannot be tinkered with, with self-congratulatory commentary and amendments. Will the hon. Leader of the Opposition do the right thing, show some leadership, and stand up to the Conservative government and its agenda which is wrong for Canada?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I have a responsibility that the hon. member does not. I intend to become prime minister of this country. I remember a leader of the opposition not so many years ago, whom I just quoted, who said exactly the same thing. It worked for him and it will work for me.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest when the Leader of the Opposition said that it was not in the national interest to have an election. I will tell the House what is in the national interest. It is to keep this man as Prime Minister of Canada for the next two years.

I have a question for the Leader of the Opposition. Sheila Copps, a former Liberal minister of the environment; Christine Stewart, a former Liberal minister of the environment; and David Anderson, a former Liberal minister of the environment, all said that the Liberal Party in government lacked the commitment to follow through and to fight global warming.

We read now in a new book authored by the former leader of the Liberal Party, which I should quote, where it states that his successor

did serious damage to Canada's progress and reputation in the process of abandoning the fight for climate change.

I will table the particular section, but can the member now respond to Jean Chrétien's new book who has blamed his successors? One of his successors was Paul Martin who put you in charge of the file—

• (1635)

The Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of the Environment was here earlier and heard me rebuke some members for using other members' names in the course of putting questions and he just made that same blunder himself. I am shocked. I know he would not want to continue in this way and he will want to put his question forthwith because we have very little time left.

Hon. John Baird: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I forgot that member was still a member of the House.

I will say very directly to the Leader of the Opposition that this government and the Conservative Party will take responsibility for the next 10 years. Will he stand on his feet and apologize to Canadians and take responsibility for the miserable record of the Liberal Party over the last 10 years?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the proof that the Prime Minister is all posturing is that he named this gentleman as Minister of the Environment.

I will tell members what the Minister of the Environment would say if he really cared about the environment. He would say that he agrees there was a plan in April 2005. It is not true and a fallacy that there was no plan. There was one.

The Conservatives decided to kill the plan and do nothing because they thought it would be good for the environment, and then they would try to justify to Canada and the world why they did it.

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, for allowing me to reply to the Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday by Her Excellency the Governor General.

[English]

In 2006 Canadians went to the polls and voted for change. Our government ran on a clear platform. We received a clear mandate and we are delivering what we promised.

Now, a mere 21 months later, I believe we can say with pride that the government is clean, the economy is strong, and the country is united.

[Translation]

In the eyes of the world, Canada is back. This change, after years of scandal, inaction and threats to national unity, brings home to us the strength of Canada's foundational values.

[English]

We have a love of freedom, a commitment to democracy, a reverence for human rights, and an adherence to the rule of law. Notwithstanding our imperfections, we have built a society that genuinely aspires to the highest ideals of civilization.

The Address

[Translation]

We balance the rewards of individual initiative with a collective commitment to help those in need.

[English]

We value people for who they are and what they contribute, and not for who they know or where they come from. We leave the conflicts of older worlds behind to live together here in harmony and we reach beyond our shores to help resolve those conflicts.

[Translation]

The generations that came before us set our country on this noble path: the Aboriginal people who established Canada's first settlements, long before the arrival of Europeans; the French adventurers who laid the foundations of the Canadian state on the shores of the St-Lawrence nearly 400 years ago.

[English]

The British settlers brought their democratic ideals and institutions that we have modelled into our own and of course the immigrants from every corner of the earth have enriched our society with their traditions and ambitions.

Canada is their legacy to us. Enriching this heritage for future generations is our duty to them. Every day millions of Canadians are doing just that. They are setting the nation's moral compass by teaching their children right from wrong. They are building our economy with their hard work and they are making our communities better by giving more than they take.

● (1640)

[Translation]

In return for all that they give to this country, Canadians expect one thing from their government: principled, focused and effective leadership so that they can confidently plan for their future in a prosperous, safe and united country.

[English]

We titled our first Speech from the Throne "Turning a New Leaf", reflecting our mandate for change. We have delivered on that mandate.

Now that we have turned a new leaf, it is time to fix our sights on Canada's longer term horizons, on where we want to go into the 21st century and how we will get there. That is why, for the second session of the 39th Parliament, our throne speech is titled "Strong Leadership. A Better Canada". Strong leadership delivers more than it promises rather than promising more than it can deliver. We promise Canadians simply this: a better Canada for all of us.

We take inspiration from the great explorers of our true north Radisson and Des Groseilliers, Hudson and Franklin, Bernier, Amundsen and the rest. Just as they were guided by the North Star, we will be guided by a five point agenda for Canada. Our plan is principled and focused. We will strengthen the Canada of tomorrow while delivering real benefits to Canadians today.

[Translation]

For this session of Parliament, our government has five core priorities for a better Canada. We want to strengthen Canada's

sovereignty and place in the world; protect our environment and the health of our fellow Canadians; steer our economy toward long-term prosperity; modernize our federation and democratic institutions; and make our streets and communities safe again.

I do not intend to elaborate on everything included in the Speech from the Throne, but allow me to touch briefly on some aspects of the government's agenda.

[English]

I would be remiss if I did not begin by addressing briefly the comments of the Leader of the Opposition. I, of course, take him at his word that he does not intend to force this Parliament to an election and that he will allow, indeed, the throne speech to pass and the government to proceed with its agenda.

As I listened to the Leader of the Opposition, it reminded me a little of the professor who goes through our term paper, marks all over it everything he disagrees with and then passes us anyway.

I have a bit of a different interpretation than the leader of the NDP on the remarks of the leader of the Liberal Party. While there was much criticism, I thought there was, if we actually cut through some of the verbiage, a fair degree of agreement, or at least apparent agreement, on the main priorities.

I note on Afghanistan that the main problem of the Leader of the Opposition seems to be calling it a combat mission rather than a military mission. I did not hear a claim or a call for Canada to simply leave cold turkey and abandon the Afghan people.

On crime, the Leader of the Opposition said that he would now consider passing all the government's crime legislation. Of course, we will be watching to see that happens in both Houses.

On the economy, I did not hear anything that differed substantially from the government's main lines of approach to the economy. In fact, I think he praised the very strong record that the Minister of Finance had created on the performance of the Canadian economy. I know he would like to take credit for that, but he has to be in power to do that.

On the federation and on democratic reform, whether it was the spending power of the Senate, I was not clear whether he was against those things or they were his ideas in the first place.

Most important, the Leader of the Opposition did not repeat his claim today, as he has so often in the past, that he could actually meet the Kyoto target, because we know that he could not and cannot.

Most important, of all the things I take note of, the Leader of the Opposition said that I was in fact his role model as the Leader of the Opposition.

Let me begin in terms of the substance of the throne speech with Canada's place in the world.

The Address

It is an understatement that we live in a global village where the economy, the security, the ideas and ideology and even the diseases of any one part of the world can be immediately linked or transmitted to another part. Canadians have always understood the critical nature of our connections to the rest of the world. We have never been an isolationist country.

• (1645)

Whereas in the past Canada participated in the world through its membership in the French and British empires, today we are a fully sovereign country. For the federal government, there is nothing more fundamental than the protection of this country's sovereignty.

[*Translation*]

Our most important potential sovereignty challenge is on our arctic doorstep.

[*English*]

Our most important potential sovereignty challenge today is on our Arctic doorstep where retreating polar ice, rising global demand for resources and the prospect of year round shipping are creating new challenges and exciting opportunities for the north. As Stan Rogers once sang, Franklin's dream of tracing "one warm line through a land so wild and savage" to "make a Northwest Passage to the sea", seems about to be realized. However, it must be on our terms.

To ensure this we cannot just point at a map and say it is ours. Protecting and inserting our sovereignty in the Arctic and elsewhere requires real effort, expense and sacrifice. We cannot go 10 years without sending a single ship to the passage as our predecessors did. We have to use the north or we risk losing it.

[*Translation*]

Conservative governments going all the way back to Confederation have understood the importance of Canada's true North.

John A. Macdonald, who oversaw Canada's acquisition of our vast lands to the north and west, was the first to apply the "use it or lose it" principle of sovereignty.

[*English*]

Macdonald said, "were we so faint-hearted as not to take possession of it, the Americans would be only too glad of the opportunity and would hoist the American flag". And so he assured our possession over the Arctic claims of Britain, just as he had created the Northwest Mounted Police to assure our sovereignty in western Canada.

Half a century ago, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker extolled his northern vision. He foresaw that Canada's future development and prosperity would depend on efficient transportation networks linking northern resources to southern markets. "Roads to resources" he called them. Therefore, he built, among others, our northern most road, the 700 kilometre Dempster Highway from Yukon to the Mackenzie River delta.

The opposition of the day has always dismissed such initiatives as unnecessary, fanciful and even wasteful, and history has always proven it wrong.

[*Translation*]

That is why our government established a strategy for the North, and why we have already taken a number of steps to affirm our presence and sovereignty in the Canadian Arctic.

[*English*]

In our first two budgets, for example, we have taken strong measures to strengthen the ability of our territorial governments to deliver services to northerners, with particular emphasis on northern housing for first nations and Inuit.

We are expanding our military and coast guard presence into the high Arctic and improving our surveillance capacity, including strengthening the Arctic Rangers.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

We are stepping up our environmental activities and increasing the number of protected areas, as reflected in our recent announcement concerning a massive expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories.

And to mark International Polar Year, we are enhancing research in the High Arctic.

[*English*]

These research activities will help confirm our unassailable ownership of the Arctic Archipelago and the waters around them, including the Northwest Passage, along with the resources that lie beneath the land, the sea and the ice.

We will proceed with the first ever comprehensive mapping of Canada's Arctic seabed as well as the establishment of a world-class research station to be located in the Arctic itself. It will become the hub of our scientific activities in the north, gathering knowledge that will support our sovereignty and assist with resource development and environmental protection. The other Arctic nations of this planet already have most or all of these capabilities. Under our watch, Canada will not be left behind when it comes to the Arctic.

I should add that many of my colleagues will be working on these northern initiatives. They will be led by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, who has done such a terrific job of getting Canadian agriculture back on track.

[*Translation*]

Of course, our role in the world is not just about our own sovereignty. It is also about effective action beyond our borders, in concert with our friends in the international community.

And we cannot be completely effective in either of these respects without solid, well-led and well-equipped armed forces.

[*English*]

That is why our government will continue rebuilding our long-neglected Canadian military. We want to ensure that our men and women in uniform are able to do the work that we ask of them at home and abroad as safely and as effectively as possible.

*The Address**[Translation]*

I have visited our troops in Kandahar twice in the past 21 months. The Minister of National Defence, the Minister of National Revenue and former national Defence minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, the Minister of International Cooperation, and several other colleagues have as well.

[English]

I have also attended Red Friday rallies and other events where communities, friends and others show their support. I have spoken to many of our soldiers and to their families, including some who have lost loved ones.

The soldiers who are serving this country in Afghanistan and the families and the friends who are supporting them back home rank among the finest Canadians I have ever known. Their compassion for the people of Afghanistan, their resolve in the face of a barbaric opponent, their manifest skill and professionalism and the diplomats and development officers they work with are a credit to our great country.

[Translation]

Our mission in Afghanistan is a noble and necessary endeavour. It is making a difference in the lives of men who were victims of Taliban oppression, for children forced to live in ignorance, and for women who had no human rights.

[English]

Remember, all of us, that these are ordinary human beings like ourselves, the vast, vast majority of whom just want to live in peace, give their families hope and build a future for their communities.

Parliament will have to make some decisions on the future of the Afghan mission post-2009 within the next year. I hope all parliamentarians will pay attention to the analysis and advice, which the former deputy prime minister, John Manley, and this panel of eminent Canadians will share with us in the near future.

For our part, both in and out of power, this party has faithfully supported our military and their mission since it began in Kabul in 2002 and, of course, since our forces were sent to Kandahar in 2005 by the previous government.

● (1655)

[Translation]

We cannot understate the responsibilities we have undertaken to the Afghan people, to the international community, and to the men and women of our diplomatic, development, and defence forces who have made such enormous sacrifices on behalf of all of us.

[English]

Once again, we cannot understate the responsibilities we have undertaken to the Afghan people, to the international community and to the men and women of our diplomatic development and defence forces who have made such enormous sacrifices on behalf of all of us. This Parliament must not let those people down, Mr. Speaker, and I can assure you we will not let them down.

[Translation]

The mission in Afghanistan reflects our conviction that Canadian foreign policy must promote our values and defend our interests. This philosophy is at the very heart of all our international policy initiatives. It was behind our call to confer honorary Canadian citizenship on Aung San Suu Kyi, who has waged a heroic struggle to bring democracy to Burma. It is seen in our participation in the United Nations mission in Haiti. It guides our international assistance programs, which will be refocused and strengthened over the coming weeks.

[English]

Our conviction that foreign policy must promote our values and serve our interests drives our effort to renew Canada's engagement in the Americas. Many nations in Latin America and the Caribbean are pursuing market reforms and democratic development, but others are falling back to economic nationalism and protectionism, to political populism and authoritarianism. That is why it is so important for countries like Canada to engage in their own hemisphere, to demonstrate that there are alternative models that can meet people's aspirations. Their choice is not simply between unfettered capitalism and cold war socialism.

[Translation]

The Canadian model of democratic freedom and economic openness, combined with effective regional and social support, offers a middle course for countries seeking democratic institutions, free markets and social equality.

[English]

Canada can make a difference in the world.

I do have to respond to a couple of things that were said earlier on Africa. This government is the only government among the G-8 that is meeting its commitments in Africa. It has to be said.

In Darfur, a brutal, brutal tragedy for so many people, this government has been involved in assisting the United Nations and the African Union. When I met last month with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, I made it clear that he can expect Canada's help in any way that the United Nations requires that help in Sudan.

We can make a difference. But we will not make a difference by returning to the days when the government lurched from one fashionable international cause to the next, never pausing to assess whether we were making an impact or whether we even had the necessary capabilities to do so. In short, we will not be returning to the days of a government with an announcement on everything but a plan for nothing, as was the case with the previous government, most notably on the environment and climate change.

I met with leaders who helped draft the consensus climate change statements at the G-8 and APEC. They were not asking me how we were going to achieve our Kyoto target. They had figured out a long time ago, when Canada's last government spent a decade raising emissions year after year after year, that that government had no intention of meeting the Kyoto target.

The Address

What those leaders want to know is simply what target we are going to achieve and do we have a plan to achieve it. The Minister of the Environment has been clear. The targets he has set, a 20% reduction by 2020 and a 60% to 70% reduction by 2050, are among the most aggressive in the world going forward and have been recognized internationally to set the stage. He is moving now to implement the plan to achieve them.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

And thanks to his efforts and those of his colleagues, we are engaged in a major effort to establish an international protocol that is to include all large emitters, including giants like the United States and China. The government will move forward with its plan for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants.

There is no time to lose arguing about yet another “new plan” that will never be implemented.

[*English*]

It is time. We have heard enough from the Leader of the Opposition with his seventh, eighth or ninth plan. It is time to pass the throne speech and let the Minister of the Environment get the job done, just as it is time to let the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Industry and all of their colleagues get on with the job of strengthening the position of the Canadian economy for long term prosperity.

I am pleased to report, wherever I go in the world, that Canada's economic fundamentals are very strong.

[*Translation*]

The Minister of Finance just announced one of the largest paydowns of federal debt in Canadian history, the direct result of which will be a reduction in personal income taxes under our Tax Back Guarantee legislated in Budget 2007.

Canada continues to enjoy one of the longest periods of economic growth in its history.

[*English*]

Unemployment has fallen to its lowest level in nearly two generations. Inflation and interest rates remain low. The real disposable income of Canadian households has been increasing strongly since this government took office, but we cannot be, and are not, complacent about the continued growth of the Canadian economy.

Recent volatility in financial markets emanating from the U.S. sub-prime market may be with us for some time to come. There is weakness in some of our export markets. Good jobs are threatened in some of our traditional industries and cost pressures in some parts of the country are creating their own pressures on the budgets of working families. Our government is aware of these challenges.

[*Translation*]

We have responded and, in this session, we will pursue our action in struggling sectors such as the manufacturing, forestry, fishery and tourism industries. We will also continue to take steps to bolster Canadian agriculture.

[*English*]

Speaking of agriculture, this spring when it looked like there would be marketing choice for western barley farmers, prices went up. When marketing choice was swept off the table, prices went down. The Canadian Wheat Board is supposed to be getting the best prices for farmers. That is what marketing choice will deliver and we will not rest until we deliver the choice that western farmers voted for.

[*Translation*]

Just as we will not stop defending producers in supply-managed industries.

The Minister of Finance will soon be presenting the fall economic and fiscal update, which will report on our progress. Our plan for Canada's future prosperity is clear.

[*English*]

We are undertaking the largest public infrastructure investments in this country in over half a century. We are strengthening policies on science and technology, research and education. We are helping the disabled and those in poverty move into the workforce.

As the 20th anniversary of our free trade agreement with the United States approaches, we are reinvigorating our trade negotiations to open more markets to Canadian products, as we have done with EFTA. Of course we are dedicated to paying down debt, keeping spending focused on results and reducing taxes for Canadians.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

We have cut the GST by one point, cut corporate taxes, and provided specific tax incentives for families, students, children's sports, tool expenses, and public transit.

[*English*]

We will also be bringing forward a further long term plan of broad-based tax relief in this session.

I notice that the Leader of the Opposition, after voting against every single tax reduction this government has introduced, has now become outspoken in calling for tax cuts for large corporations. They cannot contribute any more. Let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, we will reduce taxes for all businesses as well as for all individuals and families in this country. Because in this country, there is only one party which, over the long sweep of our history, has been consistently committed to low taxes, direct benefits for families, fiscal discipline, and a free and fair market powered by the energy and creativity of the private sector, and that is the Conservative Party.

One of the intangibles that has recently been working to the advantage of all Canadians and to the advantage of our economy has been the clear improvement in national unity since our government took office. I know the Bloc is not happy but that is the idea.

The Address

One of the important steps along this road was the recognition that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada, a measure widely supported in this House last year. That was a controversial act and some predicted, and I know they genuinely believed, that it would lead this country in the wrong direction. I have spoken in various parts of our country and outside our country in French and English, not just Quebec. I have urged, and I continue to urge, all Canadians to look at the beneficial effect that this historic recognition has had on the national unity of this country. Canada is more united today than it has been at any time since our centennial 40 years ago.

[Translation]

I believe that the results of the last election and reaction to the action taken since then—action on UNESCO, the nation, fiscal balance—are sending a very important message to us all.

Canadians, and Quebecois in particular, want to move forward. They have had enough of the old quarrels. They are fed up with the bickering between centralists and separatists, between those who would keep all the power in Ottawa, and those that would give all the power to an independent Quebec.

George-Étienne Cartier, MacDonald and their colleagues created a federation that, although not perfect, has served Canadians well for 140 years. In fact, the federation of 1867 created one of the most solid political institutions in the world, unbroken by tyranny or conquest, unbroken by social disorder or economic chaos.

And we mustn't forget that Canada—a country born in French, a country with two languages and a multitude of cultures, which will soon be celebrating the 400th anniversary of the founding of its first capital, Québec—is one of the biggest success stories in history.

● (1710)

[English]

Of course, I do not argue that Canada is perfect, and so we are committed to reforming it for the better. Our government has worked hard to respect the federal division of powers, to strengthen long-neglected federal jurisdictions, and to work cooperatively with the provinces.

[Translation]

In the next session, in accordance with our government practice, we will be introducing legislation to place formal limits on the use of federal spending power with respect to new programs in areas of provincial jurisdiction without provincial consent and to provide for opting out with compensation.

[English]

This is a historic measure, one that has already been welcomed by the government of Quebec.

I noticed that the Leader of the Opposition talked about why this would be a bad thing. One of the reasons he stated for how this would be a bad thing is that this might prevent him from trying to take the child care allowance from Canadian families and instead give it back to lobbyists, to researchers, to advocates and to other politicians. We are going to make sure we get that money directly to Canadian families.

We will also act within the federal jurisdiction to strengthen Canada's economic union, which is a fundamental responsibility for the national government, one that it must take in the interests of all Canadians.

When I say that Canada is not perfect, I think most Canadians recognize immediately that the Senate, as presently constituted, is one of its obvious imperfections.

I must admit to being rather disappointed that the Senate chose not to adopt the tenure bill, even after an excellent report on the subject prepared by the former Speaker of the Senate, Dan Hays. The government will reintroduce in the House, in a slightly amended form, the bill to shorten senators' tenure from a maximum of 45 years to eight years. I am tempted to say that such a reform should be a no-brainer, but I have been surprised before.

On the other hand, the government, while still supportive of allowing for the direct consultation of voters in the selection of senators, does recognize that this is a complex and controversial measure for some members. As such, the government will, upon reintroducing this bill, ask that it be sent to committee before second reading in order to get as wide-ranging a parliamentary input as possible.

Let me just say that I remain convinced the country deserves a reformed Senate, and an elected Senate for that matter, but the country needs the Senate to change, and if the Senate cannot be reformed, I think most Canadians will eventually conclude that it should be abolished.

In terms of reform, let us also hope that the opposition will see fit to stop delaying the adoption of the former Bill C-44. In this country, we are long past the time when the rights of aboriginal people living on reserve should be fully protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

I noted with great interest, of course, the leader of the Liberal Party talking about compassion and help for the less well off, but I do have to point out that ours is the government that signed the residential schools settlement and that is now implementing it and preparing the apology; that has cut the right of landing fee to people who have come to this country; that has increased funding for official languages communities across this country; that has redressed finally, after so many years, the Chinese head tax; that has established the Air-India inquiry which was so demanded; and that has concluded a settlement with the sufferers of hepatitis C. These are our proudest moments and they show the difference between talking and acting.

● (1715)

[Translation]

Last but not least, I would like to draw attention to the fifth part of our government's long-term agenda for a better Canada, a point that affects many Canadians.

Canadians have always been proud of their safe streets and communities—something that long distinguished us from our friends across the border. Today, however, crime is erasing the promise of our Constitution, the promise of peace, order and good government.

The Address

[English]

Canadians want their safe streets and communities back. They want leadership that is tough on crime and reliable on national security and that is exactly what they are going to get from this government. Under our government, the protection of law-abiding citizens and their property is once again becoming the top priority of our criminal justice system and this will be the agenda we will pursue if Parliament adopts this throne speech. In short, the opposition cannot allow it to pass and then obstruct our core priorities.

[Translation]

That brings me to our first piece of legislation. Last year, our first bill was our historic anti-corruption law, the Accountability Act. This year, our first bill will be our comprehensive justice reform bill, the Tackling Violent Crime Act.

[English]

Just as the accountability act cleaned up corruption in government, the tackling violent crime act will be a first step in cleaning up crime in our streets and communities. And it will be a matter of confidence, because the time for talk has passed and the time for action has long since arrived.

Canadians are fed up with a criminal justice system that puts the rights of criminals ahead of the rights of law-abiding citizens, fed up with a revolving door bail system and soft sentences for serious offenders, and fed up with feeling unsafe in their homes and public places.

[Translation]

In the first session of Parliament, our government introduced 13 justice bills. Seven have been passed into law, but six, which included several key policy measures, were held up by the opposition.

[English]

Though we accommodated many opposition amendments, the bills were held up in opposition-controlled House committees or by the Liberal majority in the Senate for a grand total of 976 days. That is simply not acceptable.

Canadians are losing patience, so Bill C-2, our tackling violent crime act, to be spearheaded by the Minister of Justice, will reintroduce the key elements of those bills. It will, for example, take action on sentencing for gun crimes. Too often, people convicted of violent crimes involving firearms do little or no time. That is unacceptable. Under our law, serious gun crime will mean serious mandatory prison time.

Furthermore, in too many cases bail has been granted to people charged with serious weapons offences, and while on bail some of them have committed appalling new crimes. That is also unacceptable. Our bill will make it tougher for accused gun criminals to get bail.

● (1720)

[Translation]

The Tackling Violent Crime Act will also crack down on sexual predators. For far too long now, these predators have gone after our

children. That too is unacceptable. This legislation will protect our children by raising the age of protection.

[English]

Our legislation will also crack down on drug- and alcohol-impaired driving. Too many innocent people have died at the hands of drunk or stoned drivers. Again, that is unacceptable. The tackling violent crime bill will give police and prosecutors more tools to get impaired drivers off our roads and keep them off.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, too many of the most violent, repeat and dangerous offenders in this country wind up back on our streets where they can offend again, again and again. Each time they do, Canadians look at their records, their rap sheets, and ask, "Why on earth was this person ever let out of prison?" There is nothing more unacceptable than that.

[Translation]

Again, let us be clear. We are talking about a few dozen of the most violent, dangerous individuals in this country. Our bill will make sure they stay behind bars, where they belong.

[English]

I have no doubt that some people will say we are being too aggressive. From high up in their academic ivory towers or from the boardrooms of their law firms, they will look down on the streets they never set foot on and say things like, "Criminals are really just victims of injustice, oppression and social exclusion".

Try telling that to their real victims. Tell it to women who do not feel safe walking in their neighbourhoods at night or having their children in those neighbourhoods during the day. Tell it to the innocent teenager killed in a gang shootout on the streets of Toronto.

[Translation]

Tell it to the young girl in Quebec who was out riding her bike when she was struck by a drunk driver.

[English]

Tell it to the two Prairie boys who were kidnapped and horribly abused by a serial pedophile.

Tell it to the police, the prosecutors and the elected politicians of all stripes at all levels of government, including municipal and provincial, who have been clamouring for these laws for years.

There is no good reason for the official opposition to oppose or to delay Bill C-2. In fact, the official opposition campaigned in favour of virtually all of these initiatives in the last election and has had enough days, weeks and months, and in some cases over a year, to delay their passage. That is why we are making the tackling violent crime act a matter of confidence. We will be seeking timely passage of this legislation and, as is the case with confidence measures, the government will not accept amendments to the substance of these initiatives.

An hon. member: What happened to democracy?

The Address

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: What happened to democracy is that the people of Canada voted for this and have waited for a year while the opposition tried to change its position on this legislation. Democracy will tolerate that no longer.

[Translation]

This Parliament must get done what it was elected to do.

[English]

This Parliament must get done in a reasonable period of time what it was elected to do. This government has been working, and this Parliament sometimes has been helping, to make our economy stronger, our system cleaner, our federation more united and our streets safer, to put families and taxpayers at the centre of our efforts, and to voice our values and interests effectively in the affairs of the world. These are the right priorities and our country is moving in the right direction.

• (1725)

[Translation]

I urge this Parliament to support the Speech from the Throne.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but begin by rejecting, with some indignation, the absurd proposition on the other side of the House that there is only one party that cares about the victims of crime. This is really too ridiculous.

Our party over many years has shown as full a concern for the victims of crime as any other party and we have also shown in the House of Commons, as the other side will fully know, our willingness to cooperate with any measures that actually do increase the public safety of our fellow citizens. That is the test on this side of the House and this side of the House should tell the other side of the House that if they actually seek cooperation to increase the safety of citizens as opposed to playing rhetorical games they will always get support from this side of the House.

Let me pass, however, to another matter where there is considerable confusion in the message of the Prime Minister. Our men and women are in combat in southern Afghanistan. The Prime Minister continues to confuse Canadians about the war being fought in their name.

Last week the Prime Minister asked an expert panel, led by John Manley, to consider four options for the future of Canada's role in Afghanistan after February 2009. Mr. Manley told us that the list of options did not include continuing the current combat mission but the Prime Minister contradicted him and suggested that continuing a training mission was essentially an extension of the combat mission.

[Translation]

Our soldiers are currently engaged in a combat mission, not a training mission. Canadians need clarity on this issue; they deserve it.

[English]

Last night's Speech from the Throne announced that the government's preferred option is to extend the current mission to at least 2011. If it is a combat role that the government wants to

extend it should get up in the House and say so. If it is a training role then it should be clear.

My view is that the government actually knows what it wants to do and, if it does, why is it using Mr. Manley and other distinguished Canadians as pawns in its game of manipulation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, first, on the issue of crime, this party was elected partly because Canadians were saying that after 13 years they were tired of criminals having such a high priority in our system and victims and ordinary Canadians in their protection not having a high enough priority. That is why the government was elected.

We have had cooperation on a wide range of these initiatives from the New Democratic Party. We have had cooperation on some of these initiatives from the Bloc Québécois. What we have had from the Liberal Party is it saying that it agrees then shoving them to committee or the Senate where it can delay them or make them go away as quickly as they possibly can.

We are going to be shining the spotlight on that and if the Liberal Party genuinely supports these initiatives, which have been thoroughly debated in the House and in committee, it will get these through both chambers in a matter of days.

On the question that the deputy leader asked on Afghanistan, let me just repeat what we have said. First, when we announced the panel last week, the Leader of the Opposition said that just because we had announced the panel did not mean the government did not have to state its own preference. Now that we have stated our own preference he is saying that we are trying to somehow sabotage the panel.

Mr. Manley obviously takes Canada's international responsibilities very seriously. He is a Liberal. He is not a supporter of my party. Mr. Manley and his colleagues, and certainly Mr. Manley was aware of the government's position in the throne speech.

Let me just say what we want to do. We have been very clear that this mission today has a wide range of elements. Over the past year we have been shifting the emphasis in Afghanistan toward the training of Afghan forces. That is going successfully but our honest assessment today is that we will not be in a position to complete that and to ensure that the Afghan forces can take care of their own security in Kandahar by February 2009.

I believe we are obliged not to leave that province, for which we have taken international responsibility in front of the whole international community, in chaos. Our preferences to continue that track and we believe it should be completed by 2011.

Mr. Manley will examine that option and his colleagues will examine a number of other options and he will bring those to the government. The government will then present those options to Parliament for a debate and a vote before we proceed further.

The Address

• (1730)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am constantly hearing from parents who have to wait months and months for child care. Our child care centres are in crisis because they cannot recruit the staff to stay open. I am hearing from mothers who need to go back to work but cannot find child care and yet the Prime Minister says that the government has offered more choice to parents with the \$100 a month. It is some choice, indeed.

I am wondering when the government will make a commitment to ongoing systematic funding to really give choice to parents and help out working families.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I need to say that no matter what amount of money the government gives to parents, the response of the NDP will always be that it is not enough. We are aware of that but the reality is that Canadian parents are strongly supportive of this financial assistance that provides them more flexibility in their child care choices.

We are also aware of the necessity of creating more child care spaces in this country. More have been created in this country since this government took office and the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development continues to work with our provinces to ensure that they continue to increase.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an amendment to the Conservative Party's first Speech from the Throne, dealing with the establishment of a support program for older workers, was agreed to. Last year, that is a year later, following the budget, a committee was formed to study the issue. That committee's mandate was supposed to expire on September 30, but it was just extended for several more months.

Is the Prime Minister aware that, because of his behaviour, because he did not keep his word and honour the commitment made in the Speech from the Throne, today, that is a year and a half later, a lot of people are forced to rely on welfare? These are older workers who do not have access to training to find another job.

And the Prime Minister has better not tell me again that these people should think about retraining. They worked for the same company for 30 or 35 years and are now 58 or 60 years old. Today, they have to rely on welfare. Unfortunately, some of them have even gone as far as to take their own lives.

Will the Prime Minister finally honour the commitment that was made? And will he see to it that a real support program for older workers is established? Such a program would help them keep their dignity by giving them income security until they are eligible for old age security benefits.

• (1735)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that these needs are growing in some communities. At the same time, this government has been taking measures from the start. We signed an agreement with the United States to help the forest industry. We included tax incentives in both budgets to improve the position of certain industries in certain communities.

In addition, in cooperation with the provinces, we created a program for older workers. We took initiatives in both budgets, and the Bloc supported those budgets.

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. When I look at the Speech from the Throne it says, "bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in the British Empire", "the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Citizenship Act", "40th anniversary of the Order of Canada". My point of order is to allow the Prime Minister to explain why the 25th anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is not in the Speech from the Throne.

The Speaker: I think that might be a matter of debate rather than a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its throne speech, the government recalls historic events, such as the presence of the Queen on October 14, 1957.

I would like to remind the government of another historic event. When Canada was formed, there was a contract between the two founding peoples. That contract provided that, in the only province where it was in the majority—Quebec—the francophone people had sovereignty over areas such as health, education and social services.

That contract was violated by the central government in Ottawa by virtue of spending authority that it gave itself unilaterally. No Government of Quebec has ever recognized that authority. This is a critical issue for Quebec, and we have made it a priority.

We must also remember that, at this very moment, Quebeckers are in Afghanistan, fighting in one of the most dangerous parts of the world. We owe them our unswerving support. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to tell them that we admire their courage and that they can count on our support.

However, the Bloc Québécois certainly will not support a militaristic policy and agree to have Canada's combat mission extended beyond February 2009.

The Bloc Québécois has long been the staunchest defender of the Kyoto accord in the House of Commons, and today I want to reiterate our determination to fight climate change.

This issue is a crucial one for Quebec, because implementing the Kyoto protocol would provide it with a unique opportunity to accelerate its economic growth.

For the Quebec nation, agriculture is more than a mere economic sector. Agriculture is also inextricably linked to the development of our land and to Quebeckers settling on it. As the song says, "our great-great-grandfathers cleared the land". Let us also not forget that it is the supply management system that allows a large number of our agricultural producers to remain active, to develop and to use our national land.

The Address

In conclusion, I urge the government to remember that Quebec without its regions is no longer Quebec. And those regions are currently experiencing an unprecedented forestry crisis. Forestry workers, and their families and neighbours, are suffering from this crisis, and I want to tell them that we will not let them down.

The elimination of the federal spending power, the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan in February 2009, the implementation of the Kyoto protocol, fully maintaining the supply management system and supporting those regions affected by a major forestry crisis are the five main priorities of the Quebec nation.

With its Speech from the Throne, the government has clearly shown that it rejects Quebecers' priorities. Consequently, the Bloc Québécois rejects this throne speech.

I am going to begin with the federal spending power.

In a speech delivered in Quebec City on December 19, 2005, the Prime Minister said this, in reference to the federal spending power:

This outrageous spending power gave rise to domineering and paternalistic federalism, which is a serious threat to the future of our federation—

The Prime Minister said those words exactly 668 days ago. He has had all the time necessary to act, but he has done nothing to eliminate this domineering and paternalistic federalism.

Not only has he not done anything, he has made things worse with new federal intrusions in Quebec's jurisdictions. He has created a federal mental health agency, which is something that falls under Quebec's jurisdiction. He has set up the Canadian agency for the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials which, again, is something that comes under Quebec's jurisdiction.

• (1740)

For many months, its Minister of Finance has been attempting to ram through the creation of a federal securities commission. That is another Quebec jurisdiction.

Yesterday, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion opposing the Conservative government's desire to establish a federal securities commission. The Quebec Minister of Finance was forced to escalate the rhetoric in order to head it off. Ms. Jérôme-Forget said, "The federal government should put into practice the open federalism that it espouses."

The Prime Minister failed to keep his promise for 668 days. He claims that his government had to give a new throne speech because it had fulfilled its previous commitments. That is not true. The Prime Minister broke his main promise to Quebec.

In this new throne speech, the Conservative government promises to limit federal spending power in new programs. That is to say that all federal meddling in Quebec jurisdictions, all this meddling that makes this federalism of which he spoke domineering and paternalistic, will continue.

In addition, the government continues to want to impose conditions on Quebec, which is unacceptable because we are talking about exclusive areas of jurisdiction. By taking this stand, it is going against the Quebec National Assembly and the Government of Quebec which affirmed, yesterday again, through its Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, that Quebec does not recognize this so-

called federal spending power. I will read an excerpt from the Throne Speech. In speaking of federal spending power for any new shared-cost programs, he says and I quote:

—non-participating provinces will be compensated, provided they establish equivalent or comparable initiatives.

This is an excerpt from the 1996 Throne Speech of Jean Chrétien's government, which proposed the social union.

I will read another excerpt.

Our government will allow provinces and territories to opt out with reasonable compensation if they offer compatible programs.

These two excerpts are practically identical. The first is from Jean Chrétien's government and the second from the current Conservative government. In short, the Conservative government is now proposing the same thing as Jean Chrétien. I would like to point out that the social union was rejected by the National Assembly.

When he was still in the opposition, the Prime Minister wanted Canada to take part in the war in Iraq. On March 26, 2003, when talking about Iraq, he said: "We should be there with our allies". He was in this House, seated on this side, a few seats away from me. That is what he said. It was very clear; just check. Lucky for us he was not Prime Minister of a majority government at the time.

We now know the militaristic inclinations of the Conservative leader. We saw him at work during the crisis in Lebanon, when he stirred the pot.

In his government's speech, he announced more exorbitant military spending. We know that his goal is for Canada to continue to fight the war in Afghanistan until 2011. We know that, but on the issue of Afghanistan, the Conservative leader is trying to buy time to make his wish come true.

Instead of immediately notifying NATO that we are withdrawing in February 2009 in order to focus as quickly as possible on humanitarian aid and reconstruction, he created a panel to deceive the public. We absolutely will not give our support on this issue to a Prime Minister who wanted to push us into the war in Iraq.

• (1745)

One of the government's five priorities is to strengthen Canada's place in the world. The Prime Minister said that the government is back as a credible player on the international stage, but the opposite is true. The Conservative government is losing all credibility in the world by wanting to withdraw Canada from the Kyoto protocol and join a group of countries led by George Bush, who rejects this international agreement.

By acting this way, Canada is going back on its word. By acting this way, it is going against the unanimous view of the National Assembly and Quebec's environment minister. Even the leader of the ADQ is disappointed.

By refusing to adopt the territorial approach, it is showing that its openness to Quebec is nothing more than a farce. The government talks about mandatory targets, but we know that it is firm in its position and that it is talking about intensity targets, which means more pollution.

The Address

The Conservative government announced that it will set up a carbon exchange. This exchange should be located in Montreal, which already has a carbon exchange, and not in Toronto or Winnipeg.

The only thing the government has to do is set up a regulatory framework with absolute targets. In this Speech from the Throne, the government simply showed its true priority and that is the well being of the oil industry, which it is carefully protecting.

The Prime Minister is siding with big oil, but we are siding with the values and interests of Quebecers.

The government promised to support supply management. We will give the government the benefit of the doubt even though it has not told us what it intends to do. However, we know that some ministers would like to do away with it. I am warning the government that we will not cut it any slack on this issue.

Our fifth priority is support for regions undergoing crises in the forestry and manufacturing industries. The Speech from the Throne suggested that the government was prepared to take action because it praised Canadians who have worked hard their whole lives.

Personally, I know people who have worked hard for decades and who have just lost their jobs. These people are just as honourable as any member of this House. These people paid their taxes and their employment insurance premiums for decades, and after a few months, they get nothing. These people find themselves having to dip into their life savings to maintain their dignity.

This Conservative government is washing its hands of the whole thing. It abandoned them. It ignored the appeals of unions, the Premier of Quebec and the entire National Assembly.

The Prime Minister refused to create an assistance program for older workers who just need a little help bridging the gap to retirement. He refused to provide concrete measures to support the regions and the people affected by crises in the forestry and manufacturing sectors. The Conservative government has abandoned the regions.

There will come a day when we will all remember that the Prime Minister decided to help an oil industry that was swimming in cash rather than the regions of Quebec and workers struggling with a serious crisis in the forestry industry.

When it laid out its priorities, the Conservative leader's government went against Quebec's National Assembly on a number of issues. It announced that it will once again try to destroy the gun registry, a position that is contrary to the unanimous will of Quebec's National Assembly.

It also announced that it wants to make the Young Offenders Act tougher, in blatant disregard for the unanimous will of Quebec's National Assembly.

The Prime Minister would rather reform the Senate than abolish it, once again ignoring the Government of Quebec.

● (1750)

By expressing his desire to use the federal trade and commerce power to impose free trade between the provinces, a federal

securities commission, he is using threats and once again breaking his promise to practice open federalism.

The government promises to invest in the Windsor-Detroit corridor and the Pacific gateway, but nothing is planned for the Montreal-New York corridor. This is proof of the powerlessness, and even insignificance, of Quebec ministers on this issue, since nothing was said about the St. Lawrence, the natural gateway to the Atlantic. It is also proof of their powerlessness when it comes to seasonal workers, since no employment insurance reforms were mentioned.

This government led an attack against groups defending women's rights, and we might have hoped for a change in direction. All we see is the government's complete insensitivity towards and disregard for women. These groups are not mentioned anywhere in the throne speech. The Bloc Québécois will continue to defend women's rights.

The only possible conclusion we can reach on this throne speech is that the Prime Minister's Conservative government has run out of steam in its efforts to fool Quebec. This speech shows that the Prime Minister is not sincere in his openness to Quebec.

Indeed, on the federal spending power issue, the Conservative government is proposing the same kind of domineering and paternalistic federalism put forward by Jean Chrétien, which was rejected by the National Assembly. It comes in conflict with the will expressed by Quebec's National Assembly on issues such as securities, Kyoto, the forestry crisis, young offenders, the gun registry and the Senate. This is a lengthy list.

Just a few months after recognizing Quebec as a nation, the Conservative government is renegeing on just about every one of its initial promises. Day in and day out, the Quebec caucus of the Conservative Party of Canada demonstrates its inability to stand up for Quebec's interests and values. By refusing to address Quebec priorities in its throne speech, the Conservative government has shown that its discourse about open federalism toward Quebec was really hot air. The Conservatives' so-called openness is nothing but a political marketing strategy which is looking more and more like a sting operation against the Quebec nation. As things currently stand, no Quebec representative worthy of the name could support this Speech from the Throne.

Consequently, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Joliette:

That the amendment be amended in paragraph 1 by replacing the words "of their decision to kill the previous government's innovative Project Green plan, followed by 18 months of inaction," with the following: "of the inaction of the Liberal and Conservative governments"; and

by replacing paragraphs 3 and 4 with the following: "to put forward tangible measures to help the workers, businesses and regions affected by the crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors"; and

"to eliminate the federal spending power in areas that fall under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces by ensuring the right to opt out with full financial compensation and with no strings attached from any federal program that encroaches on the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces."

● (1755)

The Speaker: The question is on the subamendment.

The Address

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not new. The Bloc had announced that it would vote against the Speech from the Throne. It said loud and clear that it wanted to defeat our government. It defeated the previous government, saying that Liberals are centralizers who still deny that there is fiscal imbalance.

However, since it came into office, the Conservative government has offered open federalism. Let us think, among other things, about the seat that Quebec got at UNESCO; let us think about the recognition of the Quebec nation; let us think about the settlement of the fiscal imbalance; let us think about the historic measure that was announced yesterday, that is, restricting federal spending power. This is on top of other measures that were taken, including strong support for supply management.

This cannot be more clear. It is clearly written. Yet, the Bloc continues to make a big scene.

Quebec has 75 members of Parliament out of a total of 308. What does this mean? It means that Bloc members will never make their promises a reality.

However, Quebec is getting stronger with a Conservative government. Why? Because we are able to make our promises a reality. We keep our word and we keep our commitments.

Why would the Bloc defeat a government that helps Quebec make progress? I cannot understand this. Is it really in Quebec's interests to content itself with trying to defeat a government that keeps its word, at last, and that respects its commitments toward Quebec and Canada? That is the question.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I will answer his question.

First of all, it is said that Quebec stands proud at UNESCO. I understand, because it has no seat; it has no choice but to stand. This seems self-evident to me.

Quebec is told that it can be part of the Canadian delegation, but that it can speak only when it agrees with the federal representative. If Quebec does not agree, it will be told what it was told in Nairobi: "When you do not agree, go and talk in the hallway". That is the message for Quebec at UNESCO.

The Prime Minister, who talked so often about Belgium, should follow that country's example. When the two communities do not agree, Belgium abstains at UNESCO. In this way, Quebec would really have a place, just as it does at the summit of la Francophonie, where it has the right to speak.

Second, the member talks about the recognition of Quebec as a nation. I said then that that had consequences. When the government recognizes the Quebec nation, it must also recognize the language of that nation, French. However, under the Canada Labour Code, the federal statute that governs relations in banks, airports, ports, telecommunications, communications and interprovincial transportation companies, Bill 101 does not apply in those areas.

Yet under subsection 178(1) of the Canada Labour Code, the federal government recognizes that the minimum wage in effect is the wage set by each province and that the federal minimum wage must be adapted to the minimum wage in each province.

If the government can do that with the minimum wage, could it not also do so with the language, which I believe is just as important as the minimum wage?

When we propose an amendment to the Canada Labour Code, we will see whether the member who is saying that his party delivers on its commitments will rise to say that the language of work in Quebec should be French in banks, airports, ports and telecommunications and at Radio-Canada. Currently, this is not the case.

I cannot wait to see him get up. I cannot wait to see whether he will stand up for Quebec for once.

● (1800)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is often said that a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable. Those should be the first people that it should be helping in times of need, so that we can all rise and progress together.

I would like to ask the member what he thinks about a throne speech, during International Poverty Week when there are demonstrations all across Canada, where there is nothing to help the most vulnerable, nothing on a poverty strategy, nothing for literacy, nothing for women's programs that were recently cut, nothing for the people who are on waiting lists and very sick, nothing to replace the Court Challenges Program for people fighting for their rights, no celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and nothing for students who can least afford an education?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, those are exactly the reasons why we on this side will vote against the throne speech. I will tell members something. The Prime Minister said in the throne speech that he is inspired by the North Star. I think he is much more inspired by the 50 stars on the American flag.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have often said it has been very hard to follow the I Ching of the Bloc Québécois when it comes to what it will or will not support. However, for two straight years it dutifully stood any time Mr. Harper needed support. In fact—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I think the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay may have been referring to the Prime Minister. If he was, I know he would want to refer to him by that title rather than by name since that is not permitted in the House.

This is the third or fourth time this has happened today.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I stand corrected on my first day back in House.

However, we must remember that when it came to the softwood lumber agreement which established the principle that not Ottawa would be able to vet provincial jurisdiction but Washington would, the Bloc members stood up. When the government put nail after nail into Kyoto, they stood up and said, "We got a transit pass so we can go back to our people and say that we stood up every time they told us to stand up".

The Address

I will not use the name of the Prime Minister, but I will ask this question. Having played the Prime Minister's poodle for the last two years, is the Bloc Québécois now, because of the byelection losses, trying to move to the role of angry chihuahua?

• (1805)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I never thought the member would give me an occasion to say that they are trying to hide something from Canadians and Quebeckers. They often said they never gave the vote of confidence to the Tory government.

In the House we cannot say that they lied, so I will not say it. However, the fact is the first throne speech was adopted unanimously in the House. It means the member voted for it. The last vote on the first Tory budget—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie has the floor.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, they do not want me to speak. They are afraid of what I will say.

The last vote on the first Tory government budget, June 6, 2006, was adopted unanimously in the House. The Liberals and the NDP said that after six weeks of debate, they did not realize we were voting on the budget. Either they were incompetent or, and I cannot say the word, they were not telling the truth, obviously.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to take part in this debate. It is a privilege for me to rise in this House today to reply to the Conservative government's throne speech on behalf of the NDP caucus.

[*English*]

Our caucus is guided by principles. It is united and it is growing. I lead a party that knows what it believes. Like most hardworking Canadians, we believe that the government is taking this country in the wrong direction, and the agenda laid out in this throne speech continues to take Canada down the wrong path.

At a time when Canada is at war, our climate is in crisis and the middle class families are falling further and further behind, the government had an obligation to show leadership. It did not do it. It has proven once again that it cannot be counted on.

We did listen very carefully to the speech and I do want to say, in addition, that we listened to the Prime Minister today very carefully.

We are intrigued, for instance, to learn that the Prime Minister is now open to the NDP proposal of long-standing that the Senate should be abolished.

If he is serious, he should start by putting somebody who is elected by the people to be in charge of signing cheques with the people's money and not an unelected senator, Michael Fortier. We suggest he check out the voters in the riding in which he lives. Of course, he passed up on the opportunity to present himself to be elected on that occasion in Outremont.

[*Translation*]

If he is serious about abolishing the Senate, the Prime Minister should start by asking Michael Fortier to resign and get himself elected to the House of Commons.

[*English*]

We also welcome the proposed apology in the Speech from the Throne to Canada's first nations for the terrible injustices and abuses of the residential schools system.

Over the summer I travelled to communities across the country and I listened to countless stories from hardworking folks who are having real trouble making ends meet. Today, when more wealth is being created in our country than at any other time in its history, families are working longer just to make those ends meet.

In fact, average Canadians today are squeezing 200 more hours of work out of each year than they did just nine years ago just to keep up. And yet, the income gap between those at the top and the rest is at a 30 year high. Something is fundamentally wrong with this picture and Canadians know it.

Nearly two-thirds of Canadians say they are not benefiting from the economic growth that is being generated in this country. It is wrong. It needs to change.

It is what the NDP has been calling the prosperity gap and it is growing in our country. It is putting working families and the middle class further and further behind. It is creating more homelessness and poverty. We now have two million seniors living in poverty in this country after they helped to build the basics that gave us the wealth that we have today.

While a few people at the top are enjoying the benefits of the current economy, everyone else is not. Sure we have seen the windfall salaries and extraordinary bonuses of CEOs, but wages for everyone else are essentially stagnant and falling for an awful lot of families. As a result of the government's agenda, the middle class in Canada is falling behind.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Last summer, people told me that they were expecting action from the government to help their families make ends meet, to make the necessities of life more affordable and to ensure them greater financial security.

The government could have chosen to reduce the gap between the rich and the rest of us. Reducing that gap could and should have been a priority for the present session. Instead, the Conservatives chose to do nothing. They just do not care.

[*English*]

Over the years vague promises for action have not alleviated the crisis in Canada's manufacturing and resource sectors. What is needed is real leadership in these key sectors of the economy, but the Conservative agenda fails to give hope to the families and the communities which are suffering massive job losses as a result of the government's devastating policies. It is also failing to provide leadership for families when it comes to health care.

The Address

Millions of families cannot find a doctor. Wait times are still far too high for too many and the cost of prescription drugs continues to skyrocket to points where people simply cannot pay for the medications they need. When I spoke to the Canadian Pharmacists Association, I told the story of how some people go to that counter with a prescription their doctor says they need and once it is provided and the cost is known, they have to walk away from that medication because they cannot afford it. The two women pharmacists I explained this to said, "This happens each and every day with all of our pharmacist members in the country". This is a tragedy.

Out-of-pocket spending on prescription drugs is now more than 70% higher than it was in 1992. Canadian households are spending \$3 billion a year on prescription drugs. By ignoring these fundamental issues the Conservative agenda, as it was laid out in the throne speech, has turned its back on improving health care for today's families.

Despite the Conservative indifference to all this, the NDP is going to redouble its efforts in its campaign for universal drug coverage, so that the hardworking families of this country can get the drugs they need based on their doctor's advice and not on their accountant's advice.

[*Translation*]

Last summer, I had the opportunity to speak with many Canadians who work hard for their money. In particular, I spent a lot of time in Montreal, including in Outremont, obviously for good reasons. I noticed one thing: voters from Quebec, like voters from all of Canada, are no longer just concerned about climate change, they are now clearly worried.

[*English*]

Working Canadians are becoming fundamentally anxious about the crisis of climate change and about the future that will follow, the future of their children and their grandchildren. Working Canadians are becoming more and more anxious about it. They are angry that the current government and the preceding government failed to get Canada on the right track for tackling climate change and the crisis that goes along with it. The air we breathe is getting dirtier, not cleaner.

[*Translation*]

Under the Liberals, greenhouse gases, which are so harmful, increased by 23% beyond our Kyoto objectives. They increased faster in Canada under the Liberal Party, when the current leader of the Liberal Party was Minister of the Environment, than they did in the United States under the Bush administration.

We are facing an unprecedented global crisis, and it is simply unacceptable for the government to use Liberal failures as an excuse for inaction. We must act.

●(1815)

[*English*]

As we face an unprecedented global crisis, this is not the time to use past failures, as the Prime Minister is wont to do, as an excuse for future inaction. We have to work even harder to honour our international obligations to stop climate change.

That is why this is the time once and for all to take real action, not water down the clean air act and the climate change act as stated in the throne speech. That is not the path to follow for Canada to respond to the crisis. It is a course involving fundamentally inaction and indifference on climate change. This has a profound impact in every corner of this country and no more important than in Canada's north.

Unlike some other leaders, I successfully completed a visit to Canada's Arctic this summer. I had the opportunity to visit the north last year as well. I saw firsthand the huge impact that climate change is having on our Arctic. It is truly horrifying to see the rate of change: the rapidity of the retreating glaciers that the elders told me about, which only a few years before had come right down to bodies of water and have now disappeared back beyond the mountains; the melting permafrost; new vegetation appearing in areas where there had never been vegetation before, particularly around the national park near Pangnirtung; the all but disappeared caribou; the collapse of the multi-million dollar commercial ice fishery because of rising ocean temperatures in that region.

I spoke with the elders who are bearing witness to the greatest deterioration of their environment and therefore to their way of life that they have ever witnessed. Time is running out. I saw countless examples of the social and economic impacts of years of neglect.

As we mark this day, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the way to offer real opportunity and hope for the north is to begin to invest in the social and economic infrastructure, not just the military infrastructure, in the north. Only after we tackle illiteracy, disease, homelessness and provide hope to the peoples of Canada's north will we be truly exercising Arctic sovereignty.

While the government has moved in the right direction to address past wrongs to the aboriginal people, as I mentioned earlier, with the apology concerning residential schools, the government took a sad step back when it voted against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Once again in the Conservative agenda aboriginal people were treated as second-class citizens in this country. It is not right.

During my travels this summer I also heard folks tell me that the combat mission in Afghanistan is not the right mission for Canada. It is not the role that Canadians want to see their country play on the world stage.

The NDP has been a consistent voice for peace, reconstruction and aid. We speak on behalf of millions of everyday Canadians who want the government to change direction in Afghanistan, who want to help bring in real security and a peace process, a peace that is lasting. Only the NDP has always been clear and consistent on this issue. It is the wrong mission for Canada.

The Address

[Translation]

The Conservative Party successfully extended the mission in Afghanistan until 2009 with the support of the Liberal Party. The Conservatives and the Liberals want to participate in the war of aggression until at least 2009 and we know that the Bloc Québécois agrees with that.

Only the NDP is calling for the immediate withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan. Our position in favour of peace has not changed, is consistent, and is based on the principles shared by most Canadians.

[English]

The Prime Minister has said that he is seeking a mandate to govern with this throne speech. The NDP has a mandate to oppose the direction of the government. The agenda laid out in the Conservative throne speech continues to take Canada in the wrong direction on key issues and therefore cannot be supported.

• (1820)

[Translation]

The NDP is a party of principles. We are not afraid of the consequences of our actions because we firmly believe in these principles. This is why we will oppose the Speech from the Throne. Unlike the leader of the Liberal Party, we will not pretend. We will not criticize, only to later sit back and hide behind excuses. We will not shirk our responsibility.

We will vote against this throne speech on behalf of the 2.5 million Canadians who voted for the NDP, but also on behalf of all Canadians who voted against this government and who cannot count on the Liberals.

[English]

The NDP will oppose this throne speech because our caucus has principles. We know what we believe. Our members will be in place for each and every vote, and we will rise when it is our turn to vote and demonstrate clearly our opposition to the wrong direction in which the government is taking Canada.

We will leave the revisionist history and games to others. If the leader of the official opposition wants to stop the government's agenda, then I invite him to join us in voting against this throne speech. That is what the NDP will be doing: showing leadership.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed but not surprised by the position taken by the leader of the NDP because he has, after all, opposed many measures that the government has brought in that have been good for Canadians.

He has opposed measures that removed 885,000 low income Canadians from the federal tax rolls, most of them low income seniors. He has opposed a measure that provided a 40% increase to secondary school funding that was made by this government. He opposed \$4.5 billion committed to environmental initiatives on behalf of this government, many that will make significant improvements in his own riding of Toronto—Danforth.

The NDP has opposed the working income tax benefit. That party has opposed funding for affordable housing. It has opposed the numerous tax credits that this government has brought forward to

help working families with young children, so I am disappointed but I am not surprised.

He says that the NDP has principles, which is why they are voting against this throne speech. I would like to ask the leader of the NDP, who proposes that he is so principled, where are his principles when it comes to standing up for the women and children of Afghanistan whom our forces are helping defend each and every day? Where are his principles when he stands and calls for our troops to leave Afghanistan, abandoning these people to a cruel fate? Where are those principles? That is what I would like the hon. member to respond to.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his recitation. In fact a number of the items that he was mentioning, some of the spending that he was indicating actually came about by virtue of the NDP and its principles.

When the former government was intent on a major corporate tax cut, something it really had difficulty letting go of right up to the present day, and something supported by the current government at the time when the Conservatives sat in their chairs and did not stand up on a certain budget vote, what our party said was that the growing prosperity gap needed to be addressed. In a bill that became known as Bill C-48, funds for public transit, for affordable housing, for post-secondary education, for foreign aid and for protecting the wages of workers were provided.

[Translation]

It is interesting to see that hon. members from the Conservative Party and some ministers are presently travelling all over Canada making big announcements using the money our party gave them, yet they voted against the important Bill C-48.

• (1825)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to hear that the member went to the north, after the many trips our leader made to the north.

The hon. member decided how he would vote on the throne speech before it even came out. Now he will be voting against a lot of initiatives for the north because he made a decision beforehand.

Why is it the principles of the NDP to decide to vote against everything when the NDP members do not even know what is in the document? Does this mean it is the principles of the NDP to vote against the policies of aboriginal people, to vote against new national parks, to vote against the new water strategy, to vote against safe drinking water for first nations and to vote against tougher environmental standards?

Do all NDP members agree that we should vote against consumer protection, Arctic sovereignty, housing for aboriginal people in the north, benefits for the reservists in the military, supporting democracy in Haiti, tax cuts for the first ever air pollution regulations, linguistic duality, support for Canada's researchers, the Atlantic and Pacific corridors, safer bridges, support for farmers, training for aboriginal people, and lowering the age of consent?

The Address

Is it the principles of the NDP members to vote against all those things and to decide to vote against the throne speech even before hearing what is in the throne speech?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I can only imagine some of the thoughts that are occurring to the friends on the government side: the recruiting of a pamphlet writer for the Conservative Party.

I may be mistaken and the member may correct me, but I thought I heard earlier that the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the member's party, was recommending that his members remain seated when it comes time to vote one way or the other on the Speech from the Throne, about which the member was waxing eloquent on behalf of the Conservatives a moment ago. Apparently in the case of the member, perhaps some kind of a glue product will be required because of his enthusiasm for the policies of the Conservatives.

When the time comes, I will be happy to point this out to the people of the Yukon, whom I have visited countless times.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know the opinion of the member who just spoke. First, I am sure he realizes that we share many reasons to vote against the throne speech. Thus, I would like to know if we totally agree about one of the elements of the speech, that is the federal spending power. I still have difficulty finding that in the British North America Act. However, others before us read it that way and this power is now probably accepted by many Canadian provinces.

You will recognize that as a province Quebec has always been the most protective of its jurisdictions. There is no need to elaborate on the reasons why this is so.

I wonder if the hon. member shares my point of view on the limits to the federal spending power. I think that each time a majority of provinces agree to have the federal government spend in a provincial area of jurisdiction, Quebec should be offered full and unconditional financial compensation.

Hon. Jack Layton: I thank the member for his question.

This has been the NDP strategy for a long time. For example, in a few weeks, we will vote on a bill concerning child care in Canada. We are very proud of this bill, presented by the member for Victoria at third reading. It contains a clause with a direct and clear provision concerning full compensation for Quebec. Until now, during votes, this bill has been supported by the Bloc Québécois. This indicates the direction that the NDP is taking about this kind of issue.

• (1830)

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Toronto—Danforth a question about Afghanistan.

For all that member's talk of compassion and human rights, why is he so eager to pull our troops out of Afghanistan, thereby abandoning that nation's citizens to the brutality of the Taliban? Women would have absolutely zero human rights as a result. Is it his solution that we should negotiate with Taliban terrorists?

My NDP opponent for the next election told the Moose Jaw *Times Herald* yesterday that the more Canada attacked offensively, the broader the base of the insurgency in Afghanistan. What a ludicrous

statement and how demoralizing to our troops. It is a statement that is absolutely void of principles. Our troops deserve better.

Afghan citizens have made tremendous strides because of the work of our armed forces and our brave men and women in uniform. They deserve to be praised at every step and not be told that because of their attacks they have somehow added to the insurgency in Afghanistan.

I would like a brief response from the member. Is it still his strategy to negotiate with terrorists?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, evidently our candidate apparently in the riding, which that member represents currently, was citing a report or at least adopting the same position of a report that came forward from the United Nations. It talked about how support from the insurgency grew as the aggressive fighting continued. One thing is for sure, increased aerial bombing of villages, which is driving up the death rate for civilians, is in fact increasing support for the insurgency.

When President Karzai was in Canada last, he spoke to me about the importance of a negotiated solution and said that no military end was in sight. I was disappointed in the Speech from the Throne for its lack of recognition of the importance of ultimately a negotiation taking place. Even the Bush administration has acknowledged that at some point this will happen. I did not think I would have to make the accusation that our Prime Minister had fallen behind George Bush, but I am afraid I will have to do that in this instance.

What saddened me about the speech was there was no reference that I could find to peace, to seeking out a ceasefire, so our brave troops could at least begin to see some light at the end of the tunnel. Instead it was the notion of prolonged warfare. That is not where Canadians want to go.

The Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments and concludes the debate for today.

Pursuant to the order adopted earlier this day, we are now moving to private members' business.

[*Translation*]

It being 6:33 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business according to the order indicated in today's order paper.

* * *

[*English*]

PRECINCTS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe there have been consultations among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House order that Alexan Kulbashian and Paul Fromm be denied admittance to the precincts of the House of Commons during the present session to preserve the dignity and integrity of the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: 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)

* * *

• (1835)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Deputy Speaker: Before we begin private members' business today, I would like to remind the House that yesterday the Speaker made a statement in which he reminded the House that all items of private members' business originating in the House of Commons that were listed on the order paper during the previous session are reinstated to the order paper and shall be deemed to have been considered and approved at all stages completed at the time of prorogation of the first session. This also means that those items on the order of precedence remain on the order of precedence or, as the case may be, are referred to committee or sent to the Senate.

Just as individual items of private members' business continue their legislative progress from session to session, the Chair's rulings on these same items likewise survive prorogation. Specifically, there are six bills on which the Chair either ruled or commented with regard to the issue of the royal recommendation. The purpose of this statement is to remind the House of those rulings or statements.

Members will recall that on May 4 the Speaker made a statement expressing concern regarding the spending provisions contemplated by two bills, namely: Bill C-357, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (Employment Insurance Account and premium rate setting) and another Act in consequence, standing in the name of the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Bill C-362, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (residency requirement), standing in the name of the member for Brampton West.

Just as was done last May, the Chair invites members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for a royal recommendation for these two bills or any of the other bills on the order of precedence to do so at an early opportunity.

Members will also recall that during the last session some private members' bills were found by the Speaker to require a royal recommendation. At the time of prorogation, there were four such bills on the order of precedence or in committee. Let us review briefly the situation in each of these four cases.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-265, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualification for and entitlement to benefits), standing in the name of the member for Acadie—Bathurst, was before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of persons with disabilities. The Chair ruled, on March 23, 2007, that the bill, in its present form, needed to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

[*English*]

Bill C-284, An Act to amend the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act (Canada access grants), standing in the name of the member for Halifax West, was awaiting debate at report stage. On

November 9, 2006, the Chair had ruled that the bill, in its form at second reading, needed to be accompanied by a royal recommendation. In committee all clauses of the bill were deleted. In its present eviscerated form, Bill C-284 need no longer be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

Bill C-303, an act for early learning and child care, standing in the name of the member for Victoria, was awaiting debate at report stage in the House. The Chair ruled on November 6, 2006, that the bill, in its form at second reading, needed to be accompanied by a royal recommendation. The Chair finds that the amendments reported back from committee do not remove the requirement that the bill be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

[*Translation*]

Finally, Bill C-269, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system), standing in the name of the member for Laurentides—Labelle, was at third reading in the House. The Chair ruled, also on November 6, 2006, that the bill, in its form at second reading, needed to be accompanied by a royal recommendation and reminded members, on April 18, 2007, that the amendments reported back from committee did not remove this requirement.

[*English*]

Consistent with past practice, although today's debate on Bill C-269 may proceed, the Chair wishes to remind members that the question on third reading of the bill in its present form will not be put unless a royal recommendation is received.

I thank hon. members for their attention.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ) moved that Bill C-269, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system), be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking again today and, this time, it is in the name of groups and associations who stand up for the rights of the unemployed, as well as in the name of everyone who does not qualify for employment insurance benefits as the insurance program stands, since it does not fit anymore the reality of workers in Quebec.

Bill C-269, which aims at improving the employment insurance program, is a message of hope for workers in the various regions of Quebec, who are being hit especially hard by the crisis in the forest industry and by massive closures of plants and mills.

Although there is not much time remaining, it is not too late for the government to finally grant the royal recommendation to this bill, which—I believe I should recall—is supported by all parties represented in the House, except the Conservative Party.

Private Members' Business

This bill aims particularly at reducing nationally each qualifying period by 70 hours. It also aims at increasing the benefit period from 45 to 50 weeks. This would end the “black hole” effect, where unemployed workers find themselves in distress for periods of up to 10 weeks.

This bill would increase weekly benefits from the current 55% of insurable earnings to 60%—unstable jobs are generally the least well paid, and these changes would provide claimants with the bare minimum.

This bill would also eliminate the waiting period between the time when people lose their jobs and apply for benefits and the time when they receive their first cheques—workers should not be penalized for losing their jobs, and they still have financial obligations even if the money is a long time coming.

The bill would also eliminate the presumption that persons related to each other do not deal with each other at arm's length. It is not up to workers to prove their good faith when they lose their jobs; it is up to the system to investigate if there is any doubt.

This bill would also increase the maximum yearly insurable earnings from \$39,000 to \$41,500 and introduce an indexing formula. The current contribution formula is actually a regressive tax that affects low-income earners the most. It is worth noting that the maximum was once \$43,000.

This bill would calculate benefits based on the 12 best weeks so as not to penalize seasonal workers who sometimes work small weeks.

Finally, this bill would extend program coverage to the growing number of self-employed workers in the labour market who have no coverage should they become unemployed.

Today I would like to tell everyone I met in Quebec over the past year that the Bloc Québécois has fought long and hard to provide them with an employment insurance program that recognizes their realities as workers and that is there to provide insurance paid for solely by workers and employers.

As we all know, Bill C-269 requires a royal recommendation from the government. Without it, the House cannot pass this bill, and workers will never be able to benefit from this insurance fairly because of the program's current criteria.

What will happen to the multi-billion dollar surplus in the employment insurance coffers?

Why not give that money to workers by improving the program as set out in Bill C-269?

Why is this government not giving Quebec workers their due instead of sending its Minister of Foreign Affairs to hand out Jos. Louis cakes to the soldiers in Kandahar to boost troop morale?

Has he ever wondered about the morale of those losing their jobs in Roberval, Maniwaki, Saint-Raymond-de-Portneuf or Mont-Laurier, who do not qualify under the current system?

• (1845)

Has he ever wondered about their morale and the economic uncertainty of the families of these workers who cannot benefit from

the employment insurance system because of the Conservatives' obsession with ideology?

The Conservative government has treated the unemployed with contempt and it did so again in yesterday's Throne Speech. The Bloc Québécois was looking for special measures to help workers in areas affected by the forestry crisis. What was the government's response? It had none. There was no plan and not even a hint of an assistance program for older workers.

The Bloc Québécois will make sure that it reminds Quebec workers, in the next election, that they have to make do with such a mediocre employment insurance system that does not at all meet their needs because of this Conservative government.

I would like to use the forum provided today to reveal the Conservative vision of the unemployed and the employment insurance system. At second reading of Bill C-269, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Minister of Veterans Affairs stated, and I quote:

It might be useful to take a moment to remind the House what those basic objectives are. The first, of course, is that EI is to provide financial assistance by replacing a portion of employment income lost in times of temporary unemployment. It is an insurance program. Premiums are paid and coverage is provided.

The second is that the program seeks to promote a positive attachment to the labour market. We do not want to create a culture of dependency on EI. Employment is the ultimate objective and our new government's priority continues to be to help Canadians participate in the labour market.

The third is that EI must be run on a financially responsible and sustainable basis. Any proposals for change must be looked at in the context of these three principles.

Using these three objectives, I want therefore to shed light on the perception of the Conservatives towards the unemployed workers and the employment insurance program.

First, the Conservatives say that this is an insurance program to which workers subscribe to receive guaranteed coverage. But in fact, the coverage is far from being guaranteed since, in the latest Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report, the beneficiaries/unemployed ratio was 44.8%. If more than half of the unemployed workers do not have access to this employment insurance program, how can the Conservatives talk about guaranteed coverage? While all workers subscribe to this insurance, only four out of ten qualify for benefits, and the situation is even more disastrous for women, since only three out of ten qualify.

The second objective, according to the Conservatives, is to promote active participation in the labour market by avoiding the creation of a culture of dependency on employment insurance.

This statement contradicts the first one by saying that employment insurance is to be used to work. While we are in favour of people returning to the labour market as quickly as possible, the program is quite hardly accessible as it stands. It provides only 55% of insured earnings, which is quite insufficient in creating a culture of dependency. You and I will agree that nobody wishes to be unemployed.

Private Members' Business

According to the Conservatives, there are workers who prefer to be unemployed even under favourable labour market conditions. I would like the Conservatives to come and say this to the people in my riding, especially these days. The whole northern part of the Laurentides—Labelle riding is being hit hard by the crisis in the forest industry, and the Conservatives are certainly not doing anything to help these people.

• (1850)

I am talking about 35,000 people who live in the Antoine-Labelle RCM, a one-industry municipality where more than 80% of the local economy depends on the forestry industry.

Currently, more than 80% of the plants and sawmills are closed—either indefinitely or permanently—and the ones that are still open have considerably reduced their operations, for an indefinite time.

Since 2004, the most significant job losses in Quebec in the forestry industry occurred in the north of my riding. The people in my riding want to work, but the Conservatives have done nothing to help relaunch the forestry industry and they are doing nothing to give the people at home a decent income to weather this crisis.

Having a system that better suits the needs of Quebec workers would not encourage the unemployed to live on the public purse; it would simply give back a bit of dignity to the workers. That is what Bill C-269 is all about.

The third objective expressed by the Conservatives is simply scandalous. Again, I will quote the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs: “EI must be run on a financially responsible and sustainable basis”.

Since the mid 1990s, the fund has generated over \$50 billion in surplus. Last year alone, \$2 billion of it went toward the debt, while over half the unemployed were denied access to insurance and had to turn to social assistance. We all know that the fund will accumulate billions more in surplus this year. The measures in Bill C-269 are sustainable and financially responsible.

In light of these three principles expressed by the Conservatives, they must support Bill C-269.

I am putting the Conservatives on notice. If they do not give the workers in Quebec the employment insurance they deserve, the Conservatives will pay for it in the next election. I will make it my duty to remind the electors of Laurentides—Labelle of how their Conservative government took care of the morale of Quebec's unemployed during its mandate.

[English]

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand this is the third bill that has proposed changes to the EI program and that it would cost the system over \$6 billion. Moreover, it may have disincentives to encourage people to return to work. Given that our unemployment rate is at a historic low and that there seems to be a strong demand for skilled workers, it seems that at this time the bill may be redundant and may actually lead to unintended consequences.

I wonder if the member could explain or justify the billions of dollars that this would cost. Particularly I am surprised that this

comes from a Bloc member, a party that generally does not like national programs like the EI in the first place.

• (1855)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, if we were to again introduce a bill like this one, perhaps it would be more useful to the Bloc Québécois to ask that the employment insurance account be transferred to all the provinces, so that each one would manage it. This could be included in a future bill that would be introduced in the House. I think the Bloc Québécois would be more favourable to such an initiative.

I also find it awful to hear the hon. member say that the bill, with the changes that we want to bring to the current system, would tend to discourage people from rejoining the labour force. Since the forestry crisis, in 2004, a total of 1,500 jobs have been lost in my RCM, which accounts for one third of my riding.

I spent the summer with the 35,000 people who live in my RCM. I would like hon. members to come and spend some time there, just to feel the sullenness that prevails right now.

The benefit period has now ended and people no longer have any option other than welfare. People who worked in the forestry industry have assets, including homes, equipment, trucks, etc. In order to get welfare benefits, they must first dispose of all their assets. It is like asking a family that has worked for 30 years in the forestry industry to now do without all its belongings and rely on society, on welfare. Despite the measures taken by the Conservative government, out of the 1,500 workers who have been laid off since January 2007, only two were able to get training to return to work.

These people were confident and hopeful that the Conservative government would support Bill C-269. Whether in my riding, or during the tour that I and my colleague, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas, did in Quebec, there is not a single day that I did not meet someone who wished me luck with Bill C-269, because they needed this legislation in their area.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle agree with me when I say that there is very little difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals when it comes to employment insurance?

A Conservative member just asked her if she was not worried about workers relying on employment insurance and refusing to go to work. Does she not agree with me that it is actually the Conservatives, just like the Liberal government before them, who really depend on employment insurance?

That is why they like to call it the employment insurance program. In reality, it is an unemployment insurance program. It is the governments in power that are dependent on unemployment insurance, not the workers. If the workers have a job to go to, they will go to work. It is the governments that depend on employment insurance, because they dipped into the employment insurance fund, taking \$54 billion on the backs of the workers.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with my hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. Under the Liberal government, the employment insurance fund was used to balance the budget. When the Conservatives voted in favour of an independent fund, the surpluses generated remained in the consolidated fund and were used for other purposes.

Whether under the Liberals or, now, under the Conservatives, this fund has been very useful. They probably also need it to finance, among other things, national defence, equipment and putting—

• (1900)

The Deputy Speaker: I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but her time has expired.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-269, a bill to amend the Employment Insurance Act, as put forward by my colleague from the Bloc, is a flawed bill and one that we cannot support.

As I followed the remarks of previous speakers, I have to say that I found it a little surprising to hear the Bloc asking us to support the bill. The evidence just does not support such a broadly expanded program.

What evidence shows is that the EI system is currently meeting the demands of the vast majority of Canadians. Eighty-three per cent of unemployed Canadians who have paid into the program qualify for benefits and this rises to more than 90% in areas of high unemployment.

The evidence also shows that even claimants in high unemployment regions rarely use more than 70% of the benefits. Where exactly is the evidence to suggest that the changes in the bill are warranted? It is not just that the bill is not supported by the evidence. We see the opposition asking for support of flawed bills with routine frequency.

What is so surprising is that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are asking for support on a bill that the sponsor's own party and all opposition parties cared so little about that they refused to do their due diligence. They brought forth no accurate costing estimates, had no public hearings, had no consultation with major stakeholders and had no study on the bill's ramifications to Canadians or to the long term viability of the EI program itself.

Canadians sent this Conservative government to Ottawa to clean things up, to provide accountability, sound management and good public policy. The bill provides none of this but our government does.

We cannot support any bill that has been given so little oversight and so little consideration by Parliament, let alone a bill that proposes such drastic and costly changes to a program as important as this, especially when the changes are not backed by a shred of evidence.

Routine motions and decisions about what to have for lunch are given more serious analysis and debate than the one hour and fifteen minutes Bill C-269 was given by the opposition at committee stage. It is even more puzzling to be asked to support the bill when the Bloc and the opposition parties have been heaping one EI related bill after another onto the order paper asking for implementation of all but prioritizing on none.

The implementation of this bill would cost \$3.7 billion, \$1.1 billion for Bill C-278 and \$1.4 billion for C-265. There are 16 more EI bills to come, 9 of which are too complicated to cost but it is fair to say that they will not be free. It would cost \$4.7 billion for the remaining seven bills. The cost of these bills is astronomical and the opposition has supported them all without giving them any careful study.

These bills represent more than \$11 billion in new annual spending for the EI account. This would put the program into a deficit within a year and bankrupt the program. Canadians are looking to the government to act responsibly and carefully. They want a government that will ensure the long term viability of the EI system and protect it from a patchwork of proposals made by the opposition, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Canadians expect that if the opposition is proposing to spend billions, it might also spend more than five minutes figuring out whether that much money is needed and where it will come from.

Listening to the public who are affected by these types of changes in policy seems so basic and yet Canadians have not been consulted. Employers who pay into the fund are concerned. Workers who see deductions on their paycheques are concerned and small business owners are concerned but the opposition did not want to hear from any of these groups.

• (1905)

Workers are left to wonder if Bill C-269 is better than the measures that this government introduced to extend compassionate care benefits. Is it better than our pilot projects extending benefits for best weeks and seasonal workers, which Canadians were looking for and this government provided?

The member talked about the forestry industry. We do care and that is why we improved and implemented targeted initiatives for older workers to help the vulnerable workers in certain industries that have been affected by layoff, such as the forestry industry.

All of those initiatives have been implemented since the previous Parliament, which was when the Bloc last proposed this bill and the Liberals last opposed it. Does the Bloc want to scrap all these initiatives in exchange for its bill?

Canadians appreciate that their new government is getting things done for them in a measured but meaningful way and they expect the same from all the parties in House. However, they are getting the same old, same old from the Bloc Québécois because the same old, same old is all it ever has to offer.

Private Members' Business

One does not have to look further than the recent byelection results in Quebec to know what Quebecers think about the Bloc's proposals for this country. Canadians are shocked to see the Bloc propose the same types of changes it has been proposing for more than a decade. It is becoming increasingly clear to the people in Quebec that the Bloc has simply run out of things to say.

We know what Canadians have to say about the Liberal practice of spending public money with little or no oversight. One can imagine the reaction of all Canadians to find that the Bloc now wants to travel down that same road.

We are all tired of seeing public funds disappear into black holes, only to be explained as a mistake or worse, as the Auditor General described, "a rule-breaking sponsorship program, a scandal of major proportions". Canadians want better oversight when it comes to their money and they want better long term planning. This bill goes against all of those principles.

We have all watched the cost of the Liberal programs balloon to billions of dollars. We must be very leery of the Bloc's untested assertion that Bill C-269 will cost just over \$1 billion to implement when all outside estimates put the real cost at triple or even quadruple that amount.

Who is right in their figures? Is the sponsor of the bill correct when she says that it will cost \$1.7 billion or is the Conseil du patronat du Québec and others right in pegging it at \$3.7 billion? This would have been a prime question for the committee to have considered but unfortunately they did not bother seeking the input of witnesses like the Conseil du patronat, hard-working Canadians or even the Department of Human Resources and Social Development.

How can Canadians have confidence in this bill when they were completely cut out of the process by the opposition? A true and meaningful inquiry into Bill C-269 and the many unanswered questions around the bill would have gone a long way toward giving Canadians and this government confidence in a bill like this. Unfortunately, the opposition did not care enough to do its due diligence.

When the Canadian public went to the polls to choose a new government, they elected a Conservative government because they knew that we understood accountability. We know that accountability does not just mean explaining money that was spent last year. It means being able to plan expenditures before they go out of control.

We are asking the questions Canadians want asked because we know that the answers are important. However, without those answers and without the confidence of Canadians we cannot support this bill.

This government's record of measured improvements to the EI program proves that we have made EI a priority by our approach. However, our approach will not be piecemeal. We will look at the entirety of the EI program and not just one small aspect of it. Canadians expect more from this minister than that. They want him to properly manage a program that benefits the whole country.

Last night's Speech from the Throne outlined this government's priorities and reconfirmed our commitment to make the EI system

responsive to Canadians' needs. We will continue to take measures to improve the governance and management of the employment insurance account and we will ensure that these changes are measured and responsible. I look forward to the minister's next steps in improving the EI program, which I am sure will be presented in the House in due course.

• (1910)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak in the final hour of debate on Bill C-269, an act to make improvements to the Employment Insurance Act.

Members will recall that last May the entire Liberal caucus stood in the House to vote in support of Bill C-269 at report stage. This followed significant Liberal efforts at the human resources committee along with our colleagues in the Bloc and the NDP to make this legislation better.

During that period we worked cooperatively with other opposition parties on amendments that we thought would improve the main elements of this bill. We negotiated not only with colleagues in this House, but also with organizations and unions that have long sought changes to the employment insurance system. At committee all parties, except the Conservative Party, supported our efforts to improve the EI system.

I would like to mention some of the colleagues on my side of the House who have worked so hard to see improvements in EI. The member for Madawaska—Restigouche has been a champion of EI reform since he was elected in 2004. The members for Cape Breton—Canso, Sydney—Victoria, West Nova, our very quiet member for Labrador and the member for Beauséjour have championed changes as well.

We had hoped that the bill would go to third and final reading and then to the Senate for deliberations there, but unfortunately that was blocked when the government refused to give royal recommendation. It does not want to give any more money to improve employment insurance.

Many of us wonder why the government would reject outright the effort of all opposition parties to make improvements when there is a \$14 billion surplus in Canada. If last night's throne speech is any indication, we should be concerned. In the throne speech, one sentence referenced employment insurance where it said:

Our Government will also take measures to improve the governance and management of the Employment Insurance Account.

Uh-oh, that is not good news. The knees we see shaking are those of Canadian workers, because most Canadians know that when Conservatives mention that they are looking to "improve" a social program such as EI, it is usually the opposite. In many cases the Conservatives tend to slash the program because of their ideological distaste to help those who need help the most.

Private Members' Business

What they said in the Speech from the Throne was a vague statement that is worrisome. It is certainly worrisome in my province of Nova Scotia and in New Brunswick, throughout rural Canada and Quebec and large parts of this nation where employment insurance has become a very important part of our social infrastructure. I would not be surprised to see this be the thin edge of the wedge, so to speak: maternity benefits, sick benefits and using EI as a tool to send more Canadians, Atlantic Canadians, out west.

We all know of the significant elements in the Conservative caucus who do not believe that the social programs we have built up are worthwhile. There are a lot of other examples of legislation brought forth by members who want to improve the lives of Canadians but which have been rejected by the government.

The parliamentary secretary who just spoke said that this bill was not based on a foundation, that it was not costed and not well thought out. This bill has a lot of merit, but let me talk about another bill on EI brought forward by the member for Sydney—Victoria.

Bill C-278 was meant to extend sick benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. That bill was fully costed. That bill was brought forward by the member for Sydney—Victoria with the full support of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, the Canadian Cancer Society and other organizations that realize there has been a changed dynamic in health care in this country. No longer are people dying as much from heart attacks and cancer. That is the good news. The bad news is that they have to live with them. They have to recover. Fifteen weeks is not enough.

The member for Sydney—Victoria brought forward a bill, and that bill did not get the support of the government. That bill did not get royal recommendation. Even members on the human resources committee said it was a well thought out bill when the member appeared at committee. It is a thoroughly necessary piece of legislation.

When bills like Bill C-269 are rejected, it demoralizes Canadians. Employment insurance is set up to help people who need help. It is not the fault of people who are out of work. I suspect there may be government members who still believe that people who are not working are not working because they choose not to work. That is clearly not the case.

• (1915)

Those members on the other side of the House do not believe that government should actually help people. We see that all the time.

Why would they not support a bill that would extend sick benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks for people who have gone through cancer, who have put in the mental and the human resource effort to recover from cancer, but who cannot go back to work right away? They simply cannot do it. There is a gap in the system that has not been addressed.

We worked cooperatively with other opposition parties to make improvements in Bill C-269 as well. In November, Liberal members of the human resources committee began discussions with the Bloc and NDP members, as we are supposed to do in a minority Parliament to make legislation work, to make it more palatable, and to make it more reasonable so that it can come to this place and be defended.

The discussions were focused on making the proposals of Bill C-269 more reasonable. Significant changes were agreed to by the parties. The Bloc and the NDP adjusted their views. So did the labour unions that were part of those discussions.

The original proposal was to lower the qualifying period to 360 hours of work across the board. It was adjusted to a flat 70 hour reduction. For us, we also made a proposal to eliminate the distinction between new entrants and re-entrants. It was amended. We believe there should be some disincentive for people to enter the employment insurance system the first time. If they need it, they should have it, but if it is made too easy, people become dependent upon that system, so that distinction was eliminated.

Other proposed changes in the bill would eliminate the two week waiting period. People need employment insurance because they need it, not because they want it. Why aggravate the situation? Why insult people by saying they have to wait two weeks to get employment insurance?

The five week black hole at the end was also eliminated as part of the bill. I think that makes sense. I wrote down what the parliamentary secretary just said in referring to how people are tired of money disappearing down black holes. Is employment insurance a black hole? Are people who are out of work through no fault of their own a black hole in Canada? Or are they part of the social infrastructure that we are proud to have built up in this nation? I think it is the latter.

There have been a number of private members' bills on EI. Since the 1990s, EI has been put on a solid footing. There were many years in the 1970s and 1980s when income going to the EI fund was in fact less than was paid out. In other words, there was a deficit.

Now, deficit or surplus, it all goes into the consolidated revenue fund, but for many years we were paying out a lot more than we were paying in because of the economy. The Liberal government of the 1990s fixed the economy so more money was being paid in than paid out.

Mr. James Bezan: We planted the garden. You guys just picked the flowers.

Mr. Michael Savage: We now have some amount of money every year that is considered surplus. It does not get carried from year to year. It comes out of the consolidated revenue fund. In my view it is time to look at that system and say, "Now that we have made the system sustainable, we should be doing more to help the people who need help".

In 2004 we started some pilot projects so that we extended benefits to people who actually needed them. Over the 10 years between mid-1990 and mid-2000, we drastically reduced premiums for those who pay premiums. The system is actuarially evaluated every year, but we still have a surplus. I think we should look at that surplus. It is an insurance system. To me, what we put in and what we pay out should balance.

There is an opportunity for us to do something. The bill is part of that. It is not the only thing. Part time workers, low income workers, and persons who are self-employed, including many in our artistic and cultural community, do not and cannot apply for employment insurance. We should look at doing more to increase the productivity of Canada.

We support the bill. It is not the only thing we should do, but in my view it is one of the things we should do to fully recognize that people who are receiving employment insurance are doing so not because they want to but because they have to.

In Canada we have built up a social infrastructure that makes us unique in some ways. I am proud of that social infrastructure. Large parts of Canada need that social infrastructure. In fact, at a time when the economy is doing well, having been turned around in the 1990s, it is now the time to reinvest in a lot of programs. We should be doing more on poverty and we should be doing more to help people get educated, but we should also be doing more to ensure that people who need help because they have been thrown out of work through no fault of their own have access to the money in the EI system.

Liberals supported Bill C-269 along the way. We worked with our colleagues in other parties and with labour unions and organizations throughout Canada to make this bill palatable and to make sure that it meets the needs of Canadians. I think it is an improvement.

We are proud to continue to support Bill C-269. We wish the government would give it a royal recommendation. We wish government members would open their eyes and look at bills like Bill C-278 as well, because it makes Canada stronger, not weaker, when we help those who actually need help the most.

• (1920)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-269. However, I would first like to welcome our new pages, who are here to assist us, to the Parliament of Canada, their Parliament.

It is fairly difficult to remain seated when listening to all that was said. However, that is part of our responsibilities. I do not wish to waste too much time speaking about the Liberals because I agree with what my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso just said. My only problem is that they were the ones, between 1993 and 2006 and especially in 1996, who made cuts. These draconian cuts to employment insurance led us to where we are today. Yet they had an opportunity to make changes. It was not until they were in opposition that they saw the light at the end of the tunnel. It is unfortunate that they did not see it when they were in power. In view of the \$54 billion surplus, it is quite unreasonable.

What can we say about the member for Beauséjour and his support for the bills? Personally, I moved a motion with regard to the 12 best weeks and he voted against this motion, as did the member for Madawaska—Restigouche. The purpose of the motion was to provide citizens of northeast New Brunswick with the opportunity to use the 12 best weeks. They voted against it. I do not wish to waste too much time on this matter as I only have ten minutes. I would like to speak about the current government.

Private Members' Business

Earlier, I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development say that the government had to be careful with public money. It is as if they had to use taxpayers' money, which they have a responsibility to take care of, to pay the national debt.

I believe they have forgotten the definition of employment insurance. It is not public money, but money that belongs to workers and employers. Unfortunately, employers have had to lay off workers, and people have lost their jobs. Employment insurance is special insurance that helps men and women who have lost their jobs.

When I hear the government say that people are dependent on employment insurance or are abusing the system and I see that the government took \$54 billion from the employment insurance fund to pay the debt and wipe out the deficit, I wonder just who is dependent on employment insurance. Who is dependent on it? Who is suffering as a result?

Today, the government has nothing to be proud of. This week, for example, in Acadie—Bathurst, people from Tracadie-Sheila, Shipagan, Caraquet and Lamèque called me to say they had been waiting for 49 days for a decision about their employment insurance. They have been waiting for 49 days to find out whether or not they will get employment insurance.

What does Bill C-269 call for? I would have liked something better. I would have liked people to qualify for employment insurance after 350 or 360 hours. The three opposition parties agreed that each stage could be reduced by 70 hours. People who qualified for employment insurance after 420 hours could qualify after 350 hours, people who qualified after 910 hours could qualify after 840 and people who qualified after 700 could qualify after 630. We agreed to make a proposal to that effect.

The parliamentary secretary says that the bills are ridiculous, that the numbers are all wrong, that Canadians were not given the opportunity to come and express their views before Parliament. She forgot to say that nearly all the bills are similar.

• (1925)

If the government agrees to Bill C-269, there might be no need to introduce Bill C-265 because they are very similar.

When I introduced a bill in the House of Commons with 14 proposed changes to the employment insurance system, the Liberals and the Conservatives voted against it. I tried again with bills that would have cost a mere \$350 million. Again they voted against them.

The Speech from the Throne scares me. Canada's Conservative government is telling us that it will take steps to improve the governance and management of the employment insurance fund. I am afraid because I think that the Conservatives will make yet more changes to employment insurance that will take even more away from families in need.

Private Members' Business

We have seen that the government is perfectly capable of depriving a family of two weeks' salary. The waiting period after losing a job is two weeks. How can they deprive people who work seasonally, who work in fishing, forestry, tourism and other industries, of two weeks' pay? How can they deprive these families of benefits that will help them pay for groceries or things their children need for school? How can the government say that it represents Canadians and workers and that it is acting in workers' best interest?

We have been told that 83% of workers can or do qualify for employment insurance. That is not true. We have checked. Only 38% of men in Canada qualify for employment insurance. Only 32% of women qualify.

Bill C-269 would also increase the benefit period by five weeks. What would the government rather do? It does not want people in Atlantic Canada, in Quebec or in northern Ontario who have seasonal jobs to qualify for employment insurance. It wants them to go work in Alberta where there are jobs for them. It is heartless. It makes families miserable.

Some people have to leave their family. A man who goes to Alberta gets a call from his wife who tells him if he does not come home, they are getting a divorce. He is forced to leave his job and return to his family. Even though the law is clear on the fact that one can leave employment for family reasons, the federal government turns around and cuts employment insurance. Is that the kind of system it wants? This is unacceptable.

Bill C-269 is a reasonable bill. It does not use public funds. These are funds that belong to the workers and not to the general funds the Conservative government uses to pay down the debt. Absolutely not.

The bill would eliminate the presumption that persons related to each other do not deal with each other at arm's length. How many times have we seen the example of a person who works for their brother-in-law, sister-in-law, sister or brother. When people apply for employment insurance, they are asked the following discriminatory question, among others: are you related to your employer? An investigation is automatically launched. People have to wait 40 or 50 days to find out whether they are entitled to employment insurance or not. This is totally discriminatory.

Furthermore, I am sure there is someone listening to me who lost their employment and received severance pay. Even if he gets employment insurance benefits, the government is still there to take away the severance pay. This causes the claimant more problems, instead of helping him find a new job or start a small business. Not once has the federal government, neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals, ever helped workers.

•(1930)

Now the Conservatives do not want to give the royal recommendation because they have dipped into the employment insurance fund and have become dependent on it. If they have not, then they should give it back to the people.

They say we have not studied Bill C-269. We have been studying this situation for 10 years and we know what Canadians want. It is a good bill. That is why the NDP will support it.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly happy to speak to this important bill this evening, especially since this is a crucial bill for workers who have the misfortune of losing their jobs.

Before starting in on my speech, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle, who introduced this bill. In my opinion, she represents all workers in Quebec, but particularly those from her riding, for whom she does an extraordinary job. I think that her speech today was very representative of the work she does in her riding.

I would also like to congratulate and honour all the advocacy groups for the unemployed in Quebec and the other provinces, which are doing incredible work to defend people who are experiencing difficulties and who must deal with this infamous program that has been damaged by two successive governments. They are doing extraordinary work. In Quebec, I am thinking in particular of everyone working for the Sans-Chemise coalition, the labour federations, the groups of unemployed workers, the Conseil national des chômeurs and MASSE. I must say that the reason we have made it to third reading with this bill—and this is the first time this has happened—is because of their efforts and because of our work with the two other opposition parties.

There is nothing honourable about the route the Liberals took with the Employment Insurance Act. However, we must recognize that efforts are now being made. Sometimes, with an election defeat comes wisdom and a greater understanding of the least advantaged in our society. I think that is where the Liberal Party is at right now. This needs to be acknowledged. The NDP has always been consistent and in agreement with us when it comes to defending the unemployed.

As I said, Bill C-269 has never gone so far. At the same time, it is important to remember one thing: as the two main parties in the House acknowledged today, the economy is booming. It has been a long time since the economy was this dynamic, and we have lost sight of the fact that hundreds and thousands of people are losing their jobs. I do not have to go far for examples. In the past four or five years, 125,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector. In the forestry sector, 25,000 jobs have been lost, and just recently, a large number of manufacturing jobs have been lost.

Every region is affected, including regions represented by members who are currently in power. In Quebec, in the riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, shoe manufacturers have been laying people off for two years. In Saint-Émile, for instance, several hundred workers have lost their jobs.

What has the member done for them? What did he do to make sure the throne speech contained some minimal measures to remedy the situation? The Conservatives are in power. Nothing. Nyet.

The situation is the same in the Mégantic—L'Érable riding. The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable is also the Secretary of State (Agriculture). It is an important position. But what has he done for the people who just lost their jobs at the Bell mine in Thetford Mines? He knew about it for a month, but the Speech from the Throne makes no mention of it. Yet, the Conservatives are in power. They say they must be elected, because they will do something for these people. They are in power, yet they do nothing. They say we do nothing here, but we are not the ones in power.

• (1935)

At least we have the ability to indicate to the other parties where the problems lie and how to correct them. They, on the other hand, were elected to properly administer and to ease the suffering of our workers, yet they are not doing so.

I was completely dismayed to see there was nothing for these people in the throne speech. In Jonquière—Alma, the Minister of Labour's riding, hundreds of people have been laid off over the past two years. Nevertheless, there is nothing for the POWA program or to correct employment insurance.

Even worse, they are about to vote against the bill. That goes against the interests of the people they represent. Then they strut about in other ridings, saying that the Bloc and the NDP do nothing, that they are the ones in power and that we should trust them. That is fine. When they have the chance to put their money where their mouth is, as it were, they fail to do so. It is shameful.

And then they ask us to elect them? Something is wrong with this picture. Someone, somewhere, is deceiving someone, and it is not us.

Today is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. I listened to the leaders of the two main parties speak about it. What an opportunity and what a wonderful coincidence. Today we are speaking about a bill to enact measures to alleviate poverty. Poverty is not an act of divine providence, but rather the result of human action, of whether or not we have appropriate measures in place.

Today, we have the opportunity to signal our intention to vote for a tangible measure to alleviate poverty, Bill C-269.

As my NDP colleague just mentioned, less than 45% of all workers who pay into employment insurance can hope to receive benefits should they have the misfortune of losing their jobs. When a person who pays into the employment insurance fund loses their job and is not eligible for benefits because the eligibility requirements have been tightened so much, they are not the only one who is plunged into poverty. Their family is also affected. The region is also

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prevented from receiving an influx of money that belongs to these workers and that would improve the local economy.

Workers and employers pay into the fund, but the money is kept in Ottawa. In the regions, the cuts to this program represent an annual loss of roughly \$30 million per riding. Ultimately, it is the provinces that have to bear the burden of supporting these people financially through welfare or other programs.

There is injustice right down the line. With Bill C-269, we have the opportunity to correct this situation in part. Earlier, the parliamentary secretary talked about costs. I will tone down the rhetoric here; this is demagoguery. When the government adds up the costs of measures in various bills that are actually included in a single bill, Bill C-269, and gets \$11 billion, it is deliberately trying to mislead people.

It is said that there has been no meaningful inquiry. I have here a document from Malcolm Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, dated December 7, 2005, that details all the costs. If Bill C-269 is adopted as is, it will cost \$1.9 billion. In the past 10 years, the employment insurance fund has always generated an annual surplus of over \$3 billion.

Where will the money come from? It will come from the fund that belongs to the workers and employers. That is where it will come from.

• (1940)

The Conservative Party must grant the royal recommendation. Then we will believe it is sincere. In fact, it can do so. There is a precedent concerning an employment insurance bill. If it refuses to do so, it will again be acting against the interests of workers and families.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the hon. member has expired.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

It being 7:41 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:41 p.m.)

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