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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Monday, September 28, 2009**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, September 28, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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• (1100)

[*English*]

## BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the House that Mr. Cuzner, member for the electoral district of Cape Breton—Canso, has been appointed member of the Board of Internal Economy in place of Mr. Bélanger, member for the electoral district of Ottawa—Vanier, for the purposes and under the provisions of article 50 of the Parliament of Canada Act.

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## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if you sought it, I think you would find unanimous consent of the House for the presentation of the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London have the unanimous consent of the House to present this report?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** That being the case, Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), this report contains the list of items added to the order of precedence as a result of the replenishment that took place on Tuesday, May 26, 2009, under private members' business. That should not be designated non-votable.

• (1105)

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2) this report is deemed concurred in.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

### CRIMINAL CODE

**Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC)** moved that Bill C-391, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the House on my private members' bill, Bill C-391, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry).

Bill C-391 is a clear and straightforward bill that would bring an end to the wasteful and ineffective long-gun registry. My bill would bring an end to an era of targeting law-abiding citizens who legally own firearms in Canada, and I believe it would help us to refocus much-needed resources, energy and effort onto tackling crime in Canada.

I know full well that gun-crime prevention is an important issue to all members in this House and to all Canadians. We should never forget the tragedies that have resulted from the commission of gun crimes in Canada, and the pain and the heartache felt by victims of gun crime and their families. Victims are so often forgotten, and none of us in this House would want to do anything that would compromise the safety or the security of Canadians or create even more victims of gun violence.

As a mother and a member of Parliament who represents thousands of families in my riding, I believe that ending gang violence, drug crime and domestic violence in order to see our communities be safer and whole should be a priority. It is something I do not take lightly. That is why if I believed that the long gun registry would help reduce crime or make our streets even a little bit safer, I would be the first one to stand up and support it.

Sadly, the long gun registry is doing nothing to end gun crime. It is doing nothing to protect our communities, and it is doing nothing to help police officers do their job. That is why I cannot support it, and I believe the long gun registry must end. That is why I have introduced Bill C-391.

There are numerous reasons why the long-gun registry needs to end and why members from both sides of this House need to represent their constituents' wishes as well as make use of their own good judgment as members of Parliament to help us end the long gun registry once and for all.

*Private Members' Business*

We know that criminals do not register firearms. They do not obey laws. In fact criminals scoff at our laws and at the police officers who enforce them. We know criminals are not registering their firearms before they use them, and to suggest that they do is not only ridiculous but it is reckless and dangerous.

We see proof of this day after day. We see front-line police officers fighting gun crime on the streets, while the criminals they are up against are using handguns, not registered long guns. In some jurisdictions handguns are used in 97% of the crimes, and the majority of those handguns are smuggled across the border into Canada illegally.

In fact 93% of gun crimes in the last eight years have been committed with illegal guns and unregistered guns. That is a staggering statistic and one that flies in the face of any argument supporting the long-gun registry. That is also why so many front-line police officers support ending the long gun registry. They recognize that this registry goes after the wrong group of people.

Police officers would rather see time, money and resources going into apprehending criminals who smuggle handguns and the individuals who use them for committing crimes rather than being spent on registering firearms legally owned and operated by law-abiding citizens.

I want to acknowledge and thank the Saskatoon Police Association and the Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers for having the courage and the leadership, for speaking out in support of Bill C-391, and for supporting ending the long-gun registry.

The support of front-line police officers across this country is vital, not only to ending the long-gun registry but also to refocusing our attention on criminals and criminal behaviour. Their support is very important because front-line police officers are not sitting behind a desk trying to score political points or gain favour. They are on the streets dealing with dangerous criminals every hour of every day, and we need to listen to what they are saying about tackling crime in Canada.

When the long gun registry was introduced 14 years ago, Canadians were told the cost would be in the range of \$1 million. We now know that the cost has ballooned to almost \$2 billion, and we can be certain that costs will continue to grow. As the Auditor General said in 2006, it is impossible to tell where the ceiling of those costs will be because so many of them are hidden.

• (1110)

We can only imagine the ways that \$2 billion could have helped to fight crime in Canada and could have helped those who are at risk for getting involved in criminal activity. We can only imagine how many officers could have been trained, equipped and on our streets right now. We can only imagine how many programs could have been developed and how much support could have been provided to both families and kids who are looking to belong and instead find themselves involved in drugs and gangs. We can only imagine how many better uses could have been made of \$2 billion, which instead has gone into this useless and dysfunctional registry.

However, there is another cost borne by law-abiding citizens in this country. That cost is not only in dollars and cents but is the high

cost borne by farmers, hunters, sport shooters and other firearms owners in being called criminals if they do not comply with this nonsensical regulatory regime. Not only that, but they are treated as suspect, as second-class citizens, their only crime being that they legally own and operate a firearm.

Just last week we heard that the personal and private information of firearms owners across Canada, which came from the registry, was passed on to a polling company without the permission of those individuals and without the authorization of the minister.

This is absolutely wrong and a complete misuse of the national registry information. The release of this private information has undermined and compromised the safety of these law-abiding gun owners, and I believe that it compromises the safety of all Canadians.

Many opponents of the long gun registry have expressed deep concern over the years about information like this getting into the wrong hands and the registry becoming a shopping list for thieves and gangsters instead of a tool to protect Canadians. This recent breach of privacy shows why these fears exist and why they are very real. It is yet another compelling reason to end the long gun registry.

What did Canadians get? What benefit are they receiving from the long gun registry? Nothing, absolutely nothing. We know that Canadians have put their trust in this government in large part because of our commitment to actually get tough on crime and to make our streets and communities safer. We have been doing that, and we continue to do so with legislation that gives police and judges real tools to apprehend criminals and keep them off of our streets.

Tackling the illegal use of firearms is an important mandate of our government's public safety agenda. We recently introduced longer mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes and tough new rules on bail for serious weapon-related crimes. Our government has also put more police on the street to fight crimes.

That is why instead of defending the ineffective long-gun registry, the opposition needs to stop stalling and hindering these important pieces of legislation, which our government has introduced, so that we can pass them and see them become law.

I am proud of what this government is doing, and I know the residents of the riding which I am so honoured to represent, the riding of Portage—Lisgar, support our stand and our action on crime. They want to see us continue as do the vast majority of Canadians. We can no longer settle for the false sense of security that the expensive long-gun registry gives.

As a member of Parliament I will never take lightly our responsibility as the governing body of Canada to approach the problem of gun crime. I believe we need to do so with intelligence, sophistication and the best technology, but we also need to do so with a healthy dose of common sense.

In order to do that, we need to look past that initial assumption that all problems can be solved with more of the same thing: another registry, another bureaucracy and another bundle of red tape, because as we have seen to this point, it is not working.

*Private Members' Business*

The Auditor General in her 2002 report condemned the long-gun registry as being inefficient and wasteful and as containing data that is unreliable. The Auditor General also stated that there is no evidence that the registry helps reduce crime.

In 2003 only twice was a registered long gun used in a homicide. From 1997 to 2004 there were nine times in total. In each one of these cases the registry did nothing to stop the crime. Obviously we would like to see that statistic at zero for any homicide, whether the gun used was registered or not.

• (1115)

However, these statistics prove what law enforcement is telling us, what the Auditor General has told us, and what Canadians know to be true. The long gun registry is a waste, it benefits no one, and it needs to end.

My legislation would repeal the requirements for individuals and businesses to register non-restricted long guns. What my bill does not do is change the licence requirements and the process for any individual who wants to own a firearm. Anyone wishing to own a firearm, including long guns, will still be required to complete a full safety course. Individuals will still be required to have a full police background check and any individual with a history of violence, mental illness, domestic violence or any kind of criminal or risky behaviour will be denied a licence and will not be allowed to own a firearm. This is a significant point for Canadians to know. My bill only ends the long gun registry. It will not end the licensing process.

Licensing is very important to Canadians because it provides the necessary steps to ensure that firearms do not get into the hands of the individuals who should never have them and of course, police officers will have immediate access to all of this information so they will be able to tell who has a licence to own a firearm and where they live. Furthermore, a registry will stay in place for prohibited and restricted firearms such as handguns.

I have received thousands of signatures from Canadians across the country. I have received letters, phone calls and emails. I believe many members of Parliament from both sides of the House have also been receiving the same communication proving it is the will of the people to get rid of the long gun registry. It is time that we listened to Canadians.

I want to thank my colleagues from across the floor from Thunder Bay—Superior North and from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for all of their support and their courage in regard to Bill C-391. I also want to thank the member for Yorkton—Melville for his assistance and his hard work on this issue in the past.

Many opposition members have stated publicly they could support legislation that is limited to ending the long gun registry. That is exactly what Bill C-391 does. It ends the long gun registry, nothing more and nothing less. I challenge each one of these opposition members of Parliament to stand up for what their constituents want and what they believe is in the best interests of Canadians, and support this bill.

I also want to challenge and encourage the leader of the Liberal Party and the leader of the NDP to allow their members to vote freely on the bill. We are all being watched and we will all be judged on how we handle the issue of the long gun registry, an issue that

affects Canadians from every region of this country. I am asking for the support of all members of Parliament to pass Bill C-391 and to work together to eliminate the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. Let us take this opportunity to refocus on tackling real crime in Canada. We need to do this to improve the lives, the safety and the well-being of Canadians for the benefit of all Canadians.

**Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I noticed that in the member's speech there were a number of things she did not mention. She mentioned the Auditor General's report of 2002, but she did not mention the Auditor General's report of 2006 that indicated substantial progress. She also failed to mention the fact the RCMP said that cancelling the long gun portion of the registry would only save \$3 million. She also failed to mention that both the Canadian Police Association and Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have said that the registry, as it pertains to long guns, is an essential part of their ability to keep our communities safe.

I wonder why the member is focusing her attention here on trying to eliminate something that police say is vital for doing their job instead of taking action, as an example, on Michael Jackson's report which is stating that the Conservative policies are following those that failed in the United States by the Republicans, in turning our prisons into crime factories, in failing so miserably in how we deal with our correctional system, and why they are so failing on the issue of crime by actually focusing on something that is a false issue and a false argument.

• (1120)

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, as I stated in my speech, if I thought that the long gun registry would help reduce crime at all, I would be the first one standing up to defend it. None of us in this country wants to see gun crime increase and the stakeholders who are probably the most vocal are the police officers on the streets.

Unfortunately, there is a bit of a disconnect between the leaders of the association and the associations themselves. It would be very interesting if we would ask each one of the associations to individually poll their members and ask them what their opinion is of the long gun registry. They would not support this registry and it is for the reasons we have talked about. It is a huge cost and it has benefited no one, but primarily it is focusing on the wrong people. We need to refocus on the criminals.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the first argument out of the mouths of the Conservatives when they talk about the long gun registry has to do with its cost.

Do they not realize that the money needed to set up the long gun registry has already been spent? To abolish the long gun registry would be a terrible waste of the initial investment, which we thought was quite high and for which we have often criticized the previous government.

Does the hon. member have the same numbers I do? I believe the annual cost of registering long guns is \$15 million. Since they want to continue with registering handguns, and they are right to want to do so, the savings will be roughly half that amount.

*Private Members' Business*

Every police force in the country, except for Saskatchewan's, believes that this would save lives every year.

Does the hon. member not think that \$7.5 million a year is worth it?

[English]

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member, unfortunately, when it comes to crime, the members of the Bloc lost a lot of credibility when they voted against minimum sentences for those who traffic in humans and minors.

On the point he brought forward, if it were actually increasing the safety of Canadians, nobody in this House would mind spending the money. We would say, "Yes, let's spend the money; let's protect Canadians; let's make them safer". However, it is not doing that. Almost 97% of the crime, in many jurisdictions, is committed with illegally smuggled-in handguns, not long guns. I think as a group, as members of Parliament, we have a responsibility to look at legislation. If it is working, we need to support it, and we need to encourage it. If it is not working, we need to end it, and we need to refocus on criminals and criminal activity.

**Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when I speak on this matter, as I have in the past, I have to reflect upon the fact that there is really a false argument being made here.

When I was growing up as a child, I had the opportunity to go with my grandfather to his hunting camp, to drive into northern Ontario and to learn from him how important hunting was to his life and what a passion it was, not just for himself but for his friends. I learned to fire a gun from my grandfather. I learned from him what it meant to be a responsible gun owner and how those who own guns and hunt have such a deep passion for the outdoors.

This is something that was confirmed to me again when I had the opportunity in my riding to go to the 50th anniversary of the Pickering Rod and Gun Club.

However, this argument is not about stopping hunting or me trying to destroy the legacy of my grandfather enjoying the outdoors. It is quite the opposite. If we were interested in stopping such things, we would bring motions into the House to make hunting illegal, but no such thing has been done.

When I wanted to have a dog, I had to register my dog. I registered and I got a dog. Similarly, if people wish to get a gun, they have to register their weapons. They are no more blocked from getting a weapon because of that registration than they are blocked from getting a dog because they need to register their pet. They are no more blocked from driving because of the requirement to register the vehicle than they are from owning a gun because they have to register it.

It is a false argument and it is an argument that is used to drive a wedge and create something that is more of a symbol than a reality to say that there are certain individuals who just do not get gun ownership and who are against people owning guns, and to try to create this as some sort of symbol.

If it were not for the fact that it was such a vital tool for community safety, perhaps that symbol would be enough. I understand the member, in speaking, did not respect the opinion of

the Canadian Police Association, but they are elected by police officers. She may not respect the position of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, but I will tell members that from meeting with chiefs of police in every different region of the country, they have told me this is a vital tool for their police forces in conducting their jobs. That is something I take to heart.

When I am told by the RCMP that scrapping the program would save a meagre \$3 million, I have to ask the question: why is this being done? I have to also ask, if the Conservatives are so bent upon trying to get rid of the registry, why are they leaving it to a private member's bill to get rid of it? Why is this not a government motion?

I think the real reason is that the Conservatives themselves do not want to see this gun registry scrapped. I think that they want to continue to use it as a symbol and a tool, and use it as something to aggravate and to create political noise, as opposed to actually ever changing anything, because I do not believe that they would stand in opposition to the chiefs of police and the Canadian Police Association who say that they want to have this vital tool continue.

If we doubt its use, if we doubt the efficacy of this program, the best way for me to describe its import, instead of giving my own personal opinion, is to read from a letter from the Canadian Police Association dated April 7, where the association talks about why it needs this tool to keep our community safe. The letter states:

In 2008, police services queried the registry on average over 9,400 times a day; over 3.4 million times a year. This includes over 2 million checks of individuals, 900,000 address checks, and 74,000 checks of serial numbers on firearms.

They then go on to talk about the importance of the program and why registration is such a key component.

Licensing firearms owners and registering firearms are important in reducing misuse and illegal trade in firearms, for a number of reasons:

1. Rigorously screening and licensing firearms owners reduces the risk for those who pose a threat to themselves or others. Already there is evidence that the system has been effective in preventing people who should not have guns from getting access.

2. Licensing of firearm owners also discourages casual gun ownership. Owning a firearm is a big responsibility and licensing is a reasonable requirement. While not penalizing responsible firearm owners, licensing and registration encourage people to get rid of unwanted, unused and unnecessary firearms.

● (1125)

3. Registration increases accountability of firearms owners by linking the firearm to the owner. This encourages owners to abide by safe storage laws, and compels owners to report firearm thefts where storage may have been a contributing factor. Safe storage of firearms:

—Reduces firearms on the black market from break-ins;

—Reduces unauthorized use of firearms;

—Reduces heat of moment use of firearms; and,

—Reduces accidents, particularly involving children.

4. Registration provides valuable ownership information to law enforcement in the enforcement of firearm prohibition orders and in support of police investigations. Already we have seen a number of concrete examples of police investigations which have been aided by access to the information contained in the registry.

5. While police will never rely entirely on information contained in the registry, it is helpful to know if guns are likely to be present when approaching a volatile situation, for example, in responding to a domestic violence call. The officer, in assessing threat and risk can weigh this information.

*Private Members' Business*

6. Registration facilitates proof of possession of stolen and smuggled firearms and aid in prosecutions. Previously it was very difficult to prove possession of illegal firearms and shotguns.

7. Registration provides better information to assist in investigation of thefts and other firearms occurrences.

8. Recovered firearms can be tracked to the registered owner using firearms registration information.

9. Registration is critical to enforcing licensing. Without registration, there is nothing to prevent a licensed gun owner from selling or giving an unregistered weapon to an unlicensed individual.

10. Illegal guns start off as legal guns. Registration helps to prevent the transition from legal to illegal ownership, and helps to identify where the transition to illegal ownership occurs.

They go on to talk about the need for the registry as it pertains to long guns. They say:

Fifteen police officers have been murdered with firearms in the performance of their duties in the past decade... Only two of these officers were killed with handguns, the thirteen others were all killed with rifles or shotguns. The ability to identify the ownership and source of these firearms can be of critical importance in investigating and prosecuting suspects in these crimes. Evidence leading to the arrest and conviction of two men for manslaughter for their involvement in the 2005 murder of four RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe Alberta, included a registered unrestricted rifle found at the scene of the crime.

There are a couple of other items that I will quickly point to. Spousal homicides involving firearms occur twice as frequently with long guns compared to handguns. Suicides are five times more likely to be committed with long guns rather than handguns. The majority of guns recovered or seized by police are non-registered long guns. Murders with rifles and shotguns have decreased dramatically since 1991, in part because of stronger controls of firearms.

If my colleagues want to dispute this information and these facts, I suggest they talk to the men and women who keep our communities safe: the police officers who are charged with the responsibility of community safety and the chiefs of police who cite this information. I suggest that they weigh that information against the savings of \$3 million.

Certainly I think the tool is worth far more than that savings of \$3 million per year. I think it is important to recognize that when we think of crime and how it is committed, crimes involving guns are often not committed by people who have committed crimes previously. They are heat of the moment crimes. They are crimes committed by people we never suspected to be criminals in the first place.

When we ask somebody to register their gun, we do not expect them to be committing a crime, no more than when we ask somebody to register their vehicle do we expect they are going to be in an accident. However, we want to make sure wherever possible that those who own those weapons are responsible and that the police have every tool at their disposal to keep our communities safe.

On that basis this bill is both irresponsible and unnecessary, and my submission to the House is that it needs to be defeated.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain why registration for all firearms is a good idea, with good results. Gun control is one of the best ways to prevent murder, the most dangerous crime, and the one that has the greatest impact on the victims and their loved ones.

There is a direct link between easy access to firearms and the murder rate. That is why these measures receive nearly unanimous support from police officers and from the public safety agencies that deal with victims of gun crimes. This is true in Canada, where the Association des directeurs de police du Québec and the Canadian Police Association, an association for police officers, have repeatedly spoken in favour of these measures. The United States does not have gun control. The murder rate there is three times higher than in Canada. If we go to the United States, we are three times more likely to be the victim of murder than we are in Canada, and five times more likely than if we are in Quebec.

Opponents of gun control often say that real criminals will always find ways to get guns. They will find ways to get around these measures, which only end up making things more difficult for honest people. Perhaps. But those real criminals are not the ones primarily responsible for the murder rate. Many people who kill with firearms have no criminal past. Fights, altercations and lovers' quarrels could all end in murder if there were easier access to firearms.

Furthermore, one of the greatest current threats to public safety is street gangs. They do not have the money that serious criminals do. In the United States, they have easy access to firearms, but not in Canada. It is more complicated and expensive because guns must be obtained illegally. It also takes much longer. In addition, it is possible that these young thugs would not qualify for a licence.

The system protects us from many of the impulsive crimes that produce the more extreme statistics in the United States. One of the statistics that shows quite clearly that most homicides are not committed by hardened criminals is the number of women shot to death by their spouses. That rate is five times higher in the United States than in Canada, and the rate of firearm homicides is eight times higher.

It is truly scandalous that the program has cost so much money. Unfortunately, the Auditor General is still unable to tell us why. We are therefore calling for an independent inquiry to find out. We have been calling for an inquiry for a long time now, but neither of the two previous governments followed through. It looks like some people might have something to hide.

Some might consider our position to be paradoxical, but it is not contradictory. We deplore the waste of public funds and the mismanagement, but this program is nevertheless necessary and has a positive effect on public safety. Cancelling the program and therefore failing to make the most of the money that has already been invested would be truly wasteful.

I believe that nearly all Quebecers agree. We feel like a guy who has just realized that he paid way too much for his nice house, but burning it down would not make things better. We might feel the same way about the construction of a new bridge that caused a huge financial scandal, but demolishing the bridge would not fix anything. We have to use what we have and make sure that the cost of building future bridges is reasonable.

*Private Members' Business*

People do not mind licensing their snowmobiles, their ATVs, big and small, their sports cars and their collector's cars. In my case, I got a licence not for my dog, like the previous member, but for my cat. The licence cost \$10. I do not feel like a criminal just because I own a cat. People also agree to take an exam to obtain the right to operate snowmobiles, sports cars or collector's cars. Certain risks are also associated with firearms.

•(1135)

In a society that cares about the safety of its citizens, potential monitoring measures are proportional to the danger presented by each of these things.

Here are some examples. Why do police officers want the registry and how can it be useful to them? If my memory is correct—I did not have a chance to check this in advance—I think it is under section 118 of the Criminal Code that individuals can have their firearms taken away in certain circumstances. This provision can help families when they see a family member falling into depression and are afraid he or she might commit suicide. It could also apply in other circumstances, such as in an unhappy marriage, when the woman sees her husband's attitude has changed considerably and she is afraid he might use his firearms. In such circumstances, when crimes like that or suicide attempts are a legitimate fear, individuals can turn to a judge. After hearing the evidence, the judge can order that those registered firearms be taken away.

In such cases, the firearms registry is essential to the work of police officers, so they know what firearms to expect when they have to go get them. I would again remind the House that, contrary to the Conservatives' belief, homicide is not usually committed by people who already have a criminal record. Many crimes, even the most horrific, are often committed by people with no prior criminal record. Quebeckers will clearly recall the most abominable such crime committed this year at least. A doctor, a surgeon in fact, killed his children because he could not accept the fact that his wife had left him. It is usually in times of profound emotional distress that people commit such acts.

There was also the case a little over a year ago of a female police officer who was killed in Laval by someone who had just received permission from a judge to take back his firearms for hunting season. The police officer knew this person very well. He was not a gangster. Like many people who commit crimes sometimes, he was not suffering from mental illness that would excuse his actions and perhaps result in an acquittal. He knew the police officer well and often had her come over to deal with all sorts of little problems. This time when he called her, she did not feel threatened and he shot her through the door and killed her. This is not a crime that was committed by a bunch of gangsters.

The suicide rate is another significant aspect of this issue. With the arrival of the firearms registry there has been a significant drop in the suicide rate in Quebec in the past eight years and we are pleased about that. A number of measures have been taken, such as opening hot lines for people in distress and crisis. Suicide prevention organizations are some of the biggest proponents of the current registry.

We have to set aside the emotional reactions that suggest that our freedom is guaranteed because of the right to bear arms. Indeed, we

have the right to drive an automobile. An automobile is more dangerous than a firearm and we register it. We agree to register all sorts of dangerous things. The most dangerous among them are firearms.

•(1140)

[English]

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in the almost nine years since I have been elected, I do not know how many times I have spoken in the House and a lot more in committee, both in the justice committee and in the public safety and national security committee, on the issue of the gun registry. What has consistently frustrated me from the very beginning is the lack of willingness of those who are opposed to the gun registry to deal with facts rather than emotion, to deal with the gun registry on a factual basis rather than as some kind of iconic devil out there that has been perpetrated by prior Liberal governments against farmers and people who enjoy hunting. I know I will not make a difference today to those people, but I believe it is absolutely paramount that we deal with the facts.

There is absolutely no question that guns continue to be a problem in our society. No member of the House who has spent any amount of time studying the issue will dispute that fact.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** Hand guns, Joe, and you know it.

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** Mr. Speaker, I am now hearing from the member for Yorkton—Melville who has been consistently on the side of refusing to deal with the facts.

Let us just deal with one fact regarding police officers. This comes from a letter from Mr. Momy, who is the current president of the Canadian Police Association. From 1999 to 2008 there were 15 police officers killed in this country. Like the member from the Bloc, I was at the funeral of the woman police officer just outside Montreal, Quebec. We took time off from the election in 2006 to go to that funeral. It was a tragedy for her family. She was an exemplary police officer. She was one of those 15 officers that had been killed over a 10 year period. Only two of those officers were killed with handguns. The other 13 were killed with long guns.

We could say that the firearm registry was in effect during that period of time, and ask why it did not stop those killings. There is a simple answer, and if the member for Portage—Lisgar was willing to deal with the facts she might know this. Throughout most of that period of time, the long gun registry was not being enforced. As a result of that lack of enforcement, we had significantly additional deaths, including among our police forces.

Let me state another example of the effectiveness of the long gun registry. Another tragedy in our country was the death of those four RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe. We know from the same letter and from other sources that the key mechanism used in determining that the two men, who were subsequently convicted of aiding and abetting, had been involved in aiding and abetting the perpetrator of that crime was the long gun registry.

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner:** That is absolutely wrong.



*Private Members' Business*

**Mr. Joe Comartin:** Mr. Speaker, I am hearing from the member that that is wrong. I heard from her when she stood up to attack the police chiefs and the leadership of the police associations in this country by calling them people who sit behind their desks and do not know what is going on in the street. Every single one of those men and women who lead the chiefs of police and the professional police associations came off the street. There is not one of them who did not come off the street. They know what they are talking about.

The information I just gave the House on the incident in Mayerthorpe came directly from Mr. Momy. I invite the member for Portage—Lisgar to have a meeting with him. Maybe she would find out that in fact they have surveyed their membership on an ongoing basis. The last time there was a survey was in 2004. That survey was based on if we had the gun registry under financial control, which we were beginning to achieve at that time—I think we had finished it around 2005-06—the police officers across the country by an overwhelming majority said to get the costs under the control and if that was the case, and it is now, then they support the long gun registry.

• (1145)

It is impossible to go through this in any kind of detail, but I want to cover one more point on the cost issue.

I have studied this extensively, as I sat on the public safety committee for a number of years. We know that we brought the cost under control. It is irrefutable, and we heard it from the Auditor General, from the RCMP which is administering the registry now, and from some of the other speakers today, that if we get rid of the long gun registry, the savings would be somewhere between a minimum of \$2 million and a maximum of \$5 million.

Again, we heard from the member for Portage—Lisgar, who has brought forth this bill, that we should be using all that money, and of course the Conservatives think in terms of the \$2 billion, which is a totally fabricated figure, mostly coming from the member for Yorkton—Melville. The savings this year, and for the last three to four years, would be in the range of \$2 million to \$5 million. I will use the example of a police officer on the street. Somewhere between \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year has to be spent for the officer's wages, benefits and all the required equipment. It costs between \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year to equip and staff one police officer in this country. If we do the math fairly quickly using the figure of \$200,000, we would get 10 more police officers and if it is the higher figure of \$5 million—my math is going to fail me here—it would be 25 police officers.

If we do that we are going to see a proliferation of long guns in the country. After we brought the registry in and we were charging people to register their long guns, the number of weapons in this country dropped dramatically, we think by as much as several million and maybe as high as seven million. Corresponding to that drop we saw a drop in the number of suicides and accidental deaths, and that one was very significant. We saw fewer deaths as a result. We can do all sorts of analyses but there is no other explanation for the drop in the suicide rate and the drop in the accidental deaths as a result of the use of long guns than the fact that there were fewer of them in our country.

There is not a Canadian, and I do not think there is a member on the opposite side, as strong as they are against the long gun registry, who would say that spending between \$2 million and \$5 million on the long gun registry to save 20 or 30 and maybe as many as 100 lives from suicides and accidental deaths is not worth it. Again, if we get rid of the long gun registry, other than some attempt by the member for Yorkton—Melville in a previous incarnation of this bill, that being Bill C-301, there is nobody who wants to either curtail the use of and certainly not get rid of the registry that registers restricted weapons, mostly handguns. That savings is minimal. We need the long gun registry in order to ensure that we do not have a proliferation of guns back in the hands of people who are careless with them. That is really what the number of suicides and accidental deaths mean to us.

Mr. Speaker, I am really sorry that I ran out of time. I think there is work that can be done on the registry, and in fact on the acquisition certificates, that would make it a better and more effective system. That is what we should be driving at, not getting rid of the long gun registry, because getting the long gun registry out of our system is going to save very little money and we are going to have additional deaths in this country.

• (1150)

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise today to support private member's Bill C-391, which is groundbreaking legislation to finally bring a conclusion to the wasteful long gun registry.

At the outset, I want to thank Dennis Young, who is now retired but who worked endless hours, days, weeks and years on this file. He sorted through over 550 access to information requests to expose the firearms registry fiasco. That is a lot of work over the 15 years that we have been battling that absurd legislation.

I also want to thank the member for Portage—Lisgar for her work on this file and assisting by bringing forward this private member's bill. She has done a lot of work. It is a huge learning curve to find out all about this firearms registry file. I also thank my staff, Brant and Sandy and all the others who have worked on this issue.

I am standing today filled with hope because so many Canadians are finally demanding a swift finale to a bureaucratic nightmare that has run more than 500 times over budget without saving a single life. That is the bottom line. There has never been a government program that has so spun out of control as this one and continues to waste taxpayers' dollars.

The gun registry is the epitome of political pretense. It pretends to protect us by reducing crime, but in fact, it does just the opposite. Ten years ago we had a government that introduced specious and hollow legislation designed to dupe the Canadian public into believing they would be safer if gun owners were forced to lay a piece of paper beside their long guns. Laying a piece of paper beside their long guns was portrayed as gun control and that it would save lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was empty paternalism in the raw then and it continues to be so now.

*Private Members' Business*

It was a government that tried to tell people, "We know what is best for all of us, and just bow down and do what we tell you. It flies in the face of common sense, but do it anyway". That is what we heard from that government. Unfortunately, the propaganda blitz took hold and many people believed that the gun registry somehow protected their best interests. They concluded that the gun registry would separate criminals from the guns they used to rob, kill and intimidate.

That government did not stop to think that criminals do not register their guns and even if they did register them, as the head of Hells Angels did, it had absolutely no influence on their evil deeds. That government did not stop to think that Canadian hunters, sport shooters and farmers would suddenly be turned into criminals themselves if they did not register their guns, which flies in the face of many of the arguments that are heard from the NDP, Bloc and Liberals in regard to why people should register their guns.

While the gun registry was supposed to target the criminal use of long guns, it actually targeted responsible gun owners who were doing nothing wrong in the first place. It is truly repugnant that the disingenuous Liberal government of the day tried to dupe Canadians into thinking that the registry would reduce crime. The Liberal government was dishonest, pretending to take care of us when the opposite was true. It was there to try to win votes, and it did not matter if it would save lives or not.

This ploy, this deception continues to this day. The gun registry is still portrayed as gun control, which it is not. Latter day registry proponents continue the subterfuge by pretending that the registry is working. They have to cook statistics to prove their point. We have heard many of them today, statistics quoted endlessly, totally irrelevant to the argument. Sometimes the licensing addresses the issues they were trying to portray the gun registry as addressing.

It is not enough that it has cost Canadians billions of dollars which should have been spent to put more police and technology on our streets for the past decade, but what is particularly galling is the fact that the gun registry is actually placing Canadians in harm's way. It is doing the polar opposite of what it pretends to do.

•(1155)

Recent evidence shows that the list of gun owners, their guns, their addresses and phone numbers were placed into the hands of a major Canadian polling company for what is called a customer satisfaction survey. What a joke. The whereabouts of gun owners and their firearms has been made public, which is surely one of the most serious breaches of national security in the history of Canada.

Can anyone imagine the horror of gun owners who have been identified by the Canada Firearms Centre to EKOS Research Associates? I can assure the CFC that the gun owners being called by EKOS are neither satisfied nor are they customers. Calling gun owners customers in the RCMP files is absurd in the extreme. They risk criminal charges if they are not in that file. Are the criminals in our prisons customers as well? This is a misuse of the term.

Members of Parliament have been receiving emails, letters and faxes from licensed gun owners who want something done immediately about the security leak.

Until recently, most Canadians believed that the gun registry was merely a lame and wasteful appendage of the federal government. Now it has evolved into an agency that has leaked encrypted personal information that should never have seen the light of day. This is a sad day for Canada and it is potentially a dangerous day for every Canadian whose name appears in the gun registry.

It is even possible that a crime has been committed by making public this secret government information. Surely this breach of trust, this breach of security, this breach of common sense will be the final nail in the registry's coffin.

I also want to remind people who have not been following this file closely that this is not the first breach of security. Back in 2004, I exposed one of the most serious risks gun owners face when they register their firearms. I received this information through Access to Information. I received confirmation from the RCMP that there were hundreds of confirmed breaches. I have the list here and members can go to my website. According to the RCMP's own files, there are hundreds of confirmed breaches. That means that the information on the registry was given to those people not authorized to receive it.

I want to give the House an example of why this is very serious. In Edmonton, right after someone registered his valuable firearms, his home was broken into. The thieves did not take all the valuable things that thieves would normally take. They went through that house until they found the very securely locked up firearms and took them. How did they know where those firearms were?

Those breaches of security are serious because it gives criminals a shopping list. They know where to find the tools of the trade. That is one of the main reasons the registry should not exist. That information is falling into the wrong hands. I could go into this a lot more.

There were many instances where the RCMP actually laid charges because of the breaches of information. There were many cases where we do not know where that information went, which criminal group, organization or person received that information.

This inane registry has been kept alive by former governments to deceive the people of Canada, and Bill C-391 is a timely and accurate tool to shut it down.

*Government Orders*

Many members of the opposition parties still claim to the long disproved notion that Canadian police run thousands of gun registry checks every day. Our party and the firearms experts have explained time and again that every non-gun related check of the Canadian Police Information Centre, CPIC, pings the registry and increases the count clock.

The anti-gun lobby chooses not to hear us even though most would admit nearly all of those so-called registry checks occur when police officers run simple licence plate numbers for minor driving infractions.

It is one thing to support one's personal lead but it is another to intentionally mislead the Canadian public into thinking the gun registry is somehow a valuable tool.

I have many quotations here that I will not be able to read but I would refer members to my website. There are over 30 pages of comments from police officers who say that we should get rid of the gun registry because it is putting their officers in harm's way and that it is hurting them. Police officers in my riding specifically instruct those people under them not to consult the registry.

I wish I had a lot more time to go through this. One can imagine, after 15 years dealing with this file, how much I have accumulated to show this is a complete waste of money. I would like to refer people to my website because it contains a history of what this fiasco has done to our country.

We need to get rid of the registry now. I wish I had more time to explain why.

• (1200)

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the bill seeks to eliminate the long arms registry that was set up by Parliament in law.

Back in 1994, when the issue of the registry was first put forward, one of the things the Conservative members failed to mention was that the crime committed using long arms was actually greater than crime by handguns.

How could it have been greater? When we had a system where there was nothing to require the safe storage, training, registration and so on, all kinds of problems were happening. In fact, long arms were being stored by the front door and if there was a problem they would get the gun and go ahead.

If the mover of the bill says that the registry has done nothing to reduce crime, her own facts say that in fact now long arm crime is away down. Therefore, obviously it worked. Then she concludes that it is not helping to alleviate crime so we should get rid of the long arm registry.

If we follow that logic, then she must also say that we need to get rid of the handgun registry because clearly the registry is expensive, wasteful and does not do anything. That is not the truth. When police officers and public safety officers who have access to the CPIC system go into a situation where they are not sure whether there is a risk, that tool is available to them.

I intend to complete my speech the next time we deal with the bill but I do want to say that the member has raised selective facts. If she

wants the bill to be passed, she needs to put it all on the table. It needs to be true, full and plain and the member needs to be accountable for her words. We will see.

• (1205)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** 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.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed from September 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity today to take part in this vital debate that concerns so many Canadians. I will begin by saying that I think Canadians are looking to this government to provide meaningful assistance and we are delivering the goods to Canadians.

It is mystifying, however, how the leader of the official opposition and his party are behaving. On the one hand, they apparently care so little about the unemployed that they could not actually be bothered to show up at committee meetings that were held this summer and technical briefings on this particular bill. We had great hopes for these particular meetings and it upset many of us to find that the Liberals were not prepared to work with us.

On the other hand, they say that they want to rush this legislation through so it will not interfere with their scheme to plunge the country into another unnecessary, expensive election. Nobody wants an election because we are currently fighting a global economic downturn and we need to have this government continue to show the stewardship and good management that we are showing.

The Liberals do not care about the nearly \$1 billion in assistance for long-tenured workers because they are too interested in spending one-third of a billion dollars to advance their leader's personal ambitions. They should be ashamed.

This Conservative government is focused on fighting the recession. The Leader of the Opposition is focused on fighting the recovery. As part of our efforts to ensure economic recovery, our government has introduced many enhancements to the EI system. The bill before us today continues this process. It continues to help Canadian families. It is a much needed step to meet the needs of long-term workers.

*Government Orders*

It is no secret that the global economic slowdown has affected the lives of many working Canadians from coast to coast. Through no fault of their own, many workers who have held down jobs for years, often in a single industry, have been laid off, in some cases for the first time ever. With the rapid pace of change, it is not clear that these so-called long-tenured workers will even get those jobs back as a result of changes in the global economy.

Before I address how Bill C-50 would help these workers, I will reflect on the changes that are driving it. I want to focus particularly on the auto industry, which has been such an economic powerhouse for our country over the past years.

For generations, manufacturing was the heart and soul of our country in Montreal, Quebec, Ontario and many other parts of the country and the auto industry was the leader of the pack. Even today, with the global economic recession and what has taken place in Canada, it contributes close to 14% of Canada's gross domestic product. That is right, it employs nearly 1.8 million Canadians and that does not include all Canadians who work in jobs that service the auto industry.

An increasing global economy means more competition from low cost producers and there are more speed bumps slowing down our economic growth. Dramatic fluctuations in energy and commodity prices, as well as the Canadian dollar, for example, make it more difficult for our producers to plan ahead and export at a competitive price not knowing whether they will continue to have workers to build these automobiles and continue the manufacturing process in Canada.

These forces hit the industry hard and continue to hit the industry. The recession has only made conditions more difficult. Nervous investors sit on their capital instead of helping to buy new technology that could make industries more innovative and productive by spending their money. Anxious consumers even sit on their wallets waiting to see if prices will drop even further or whether things will happen differently. Meanwhile, too many new vehicles sit on the lots gathering dust and workers' jobs are in jeopardy.

Through all the shifting fortunes of their industry, Canadian auto workers have rolled with the punches. They have done their jobs and done them extremely well but increasingly they have gone home at the end of each day knowing they might literally be at the end of the line. These dedicated workers have paid their dues. As I mentioned, some have never been laid off before and have had these jobs for 30 years or more. They paid their taxes and have not significantly drawn benefits from employment insurance programs because the jobs have been steady and the manufacturing sector has been strong.

However, many are now laid off and their benefits are fast running out. They deserve more and this Conservative government is delivering more. Through Bill C-50, it is determined to give it to them.

●(1210)

I will now highlight how long-tenured workers would benefit from these proposed changes to the EI system.

The changes before the House today would provide additional EI benefits to long-tenured workers. Specifically, they would provide

from five to twenty weeks of additional benefits, depending upon circumstances and individual eligibility. In so doing, this initiative would provide these individuals with extra time to find alternative programs and employment.

For the purpose of this new measure, long-tenured workers include workers from all sectors from coast to coast, and about two-thirds of EI contributors meet the definition of long-tenured workers. Just about a third of those who have lost their jobs since the end of January and have established an EI claim are also long-tenured workers. Bill C-50 would provide valuable extra time for these people.

By definition, long-tenured workers have been busy working for many years, decades in some cases, and it can be a terrible shock for them to be suddenly unemployed. On the government side, our hearts go to them. We will continue to fight for their priorities in Ottawa and ensure they get the retraining and the benefits necessary in order to continue their lives and their quality of life. Our goal is to get these extended weeks of benefits to claimants as soon as possible.

The changes proposed today should be seen in a larger context, however. Through Canada's economic action plan, our Conservative government has introduced measures that support all unemployed Canadians. Specifically, we have improved the EI system by extending the duration of regular benefits, by making it easier to take part in work-sharing agreements and helping long-tenured workers make the transition to new careers.

We are also freezing EI premiums until 2010 at the same rate as this year. We are providing an additional \$1.5 billion to the provinces and territories to help support skills training, which is so important for these tenured workers who cannot go back to the same jobs they had before.

I also want to pay particular attention to an initiative that complements the one before the House today.

Of all Canadians who lose their jobs, long-tenured workers may have the biggest struggle to get back in the labour force. Many have a specific expertise, such as the auto sector, honed from years of practice and work, which is not readily transferrable to another job in this new marketplace and new global economy. These individuals may need training to develop new skills that can help them find meaningful work in new industries or new occupations.

The career transition assistance initiative, which is part of Canada's economic action plan and of which I am so proud, was designed to meet the particular needs of long-tenured workers.

*Government Orders*

The government has taken some very positive steps and this case has two components. The first is provisions for up to 104 weeks of regular EI benefits to long-tenured workers taking part in training that extends more than 20 weeks. The second provides earlier access to benefits for long-tenured workers who invest part or all of their severance packages in training.

Many hard-working Canadians have held down jobs for years and rarely have drawn upon the employment insurance program. Now, when times are tough, they deserve a government that will come to their aid. They deserve every opportunity to sharpen their skills without falling further behind, and we in this Conservative government are doing just that. The career transition assistance initiative gives them that chance.

I have spoken at length about this initiative because it concerns long-tenured workers, the same target group that we are addressing through Bill C-50. Indeed, by extending EI benefits for long-tenured workers, this bill is a natural complement to existing initiatives put in place through Canada's economic action plan. An extra five to twenty weeks of employment insurance benefits could make all the difference to long-tenured workers and their families, workers who have given so much of themselves to their jobs and who are now out of work, often for the first time.

By helping to meet the specific needs of these workers, the bill would ultimately help all of us. It would help all Canadians and our economy. Our country cannot afford to let long-tenured workers stay idle too long. They have too much experience and we need to put that to work for Canada, and they certainly want to get back to work just as soon as they can.

This government is coming to the aid of Canadian workers.

• (1215)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with fascination to my hon. colleague's dissertation. What has concerned New Democrats for some time now, as we have seen this economic crisis roll across manufacturing, particularly in the resource sector, is entire communities have had their economic base wiped out. Simply turning that around is not feasible at this moment. Expecting people to reinvent themselves as entrepreneurs in communities like Red Rock, Smooth Rock Falls and Opasatika is simply not realistic.

The issue for us is if we can get these workers through the winter when we are trying to get smaller value added operations up and off the ground. It is the difference between restoring some fundamental economic viability and seeing entire regions plunged into heavy levels of poverty.

I know my hon. colleague represents a resource-based region. Many workers in my region have gone to his region and we would like to have them back working in our region. However, given the issues before us, how soon can we get this money flowing so we can assure those workers they will make it through the winter and can make their house payments?

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Mr. Speaker, first, if the Liberals would not have walked out this summer during the EI committee special hearings, maybe we could have already had this in front of the House for a vote, and we look forward to the support of the NDP. However, the

government is moving forward. We are trying to get it done as quickly as possible. With those members help maybe, we might be able to get this money flowing as quickly as possible.

I appreciate the member's constituents who come to northern Alberta. Six per cent of the GDP comes from my riding. Right now we need people working there because there are jobs. We expect those people to go back home and take that money with them so they can share it across Canada. We enjoy them being there and very much welcome them.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, accountability in this place really gets strained at times. The member will know that the government did not propose any new initiatives at the summer meetings, none. The Conservatives could have suggested the idea of this bill, but they did not. Now the member is somehow suggesting that the Liberals walked out. The Liberals had no meeting to go to. There was no meeting called after the failure to table the documents by the minister.

The other point I want to make is this, and I hope the member will comment on it. It seems that the minister and the member now are making hay over the fact that there was a meeting called to give a briefing on this important bill. They are saying not one Liberal showed up for the meeting. However, if the member would go to the minister's office, or the minister's aide and look at the email that was sent out, he will see that only one Liberal member was given notice of it. If he is complaining that no Liberals attended, it is pretty hard to attend when we do not even get notice. I hope the member will withdraw his criticism of the members who would have liked to attend.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Mr. Speaker, there are four parties in this place that have been elected by all Canadians, and we are only one of those parties. We have formed government, but we are looking for ideas from everyone. We have sought ideas from the NDP even. We have sought ideas from the Liberals and the Bloc. We know Canadians put all members here and we expect, just like all Canadians, that they work with us. The Liberal members walking out of those meetings was not beneficial.

We need MPs in this place who will work with the government, who will promote good ideas, who will work together to get them. If we would have had those committee meetings with that input from the Liberal Party, which in essence cancelled those meetings, we could have maybe had the bill done more quickly. However, it is too late now. Now we have to seek support from other parties because the Liberals have obviously turned their blind ambition into an election platform for no reason. Canadians do not want an election now. We are in a global economic crisis and the Liberals should act maturely, recognize that and work with us to get this and other bills through, which Canadians so desperately need at this time.

*Government Orders*

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois today on Bill C-50 to reform employment insurance.

I deliberately did not intervene in the previous debate between the Conservative and the NDP members. I allowed the NDP member to ask his questions because I am trying to figure it out. This bill, supported by the New Democratic Party, will help the auto sector. The Conservative member's speech was eloquent and 65% of his presentation addressed that aspect.

It is true that the automobile sector is in crisis. In 2008, the Conference Board already forecast the loss of 15,000 jobs in that sector. Workers in the auto sector are considered long-tenured workers.

To date, 15,836 jobs have been lost in the Quebec forestry sector, more than will be lost in the auto sector. No bill or assistance has been introduced to help the forestry sector. When we talk about this to the Conservatives, they tell us that those workers must switch careers. Forestry workers will probably be transformed into oil sands workers in the riding of our Conservative colleague from Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

This is ridiculous because the forest is like a garden with trees that grow back, whereas the oil sands provide non-renewable energy. One day, there will be no more. To hear the Conservatives talk, they are going to increase oil sands production fivefold. Thus, we will exhaust these resources more quickly. This Parliament, with the support of the NDP, is attempting to transform forestry workers into oil sands or oil production workers. That is just ludicrous, especially from the New Democratic Party.

I find it particularly ridiculous that we are creating new classes of workers. There are long-tenured workers, who are the auto workers. The remaining workers—in the forestry, tourism, agriculture and fisheries sectors—are not long-tenured workers. Even though these people have devoted their lives to maintaining industries that are found in all regions of Quebec and the rest of Canada, they are not treated in the same way by the NDP because they do not consider them to be long-tenured workers.

This is an aberration, and it is frustrating, because a great deal of money is being spent. The Bloc Québécois has introduced bills in this House, and the other parties have defeated them. The Bloc Québécois has tabled plans for employment insurance. Before the latest budget came down, the Bloc Québécois was the only opposition party that proposed a recovery plan. The Minister of Finance even congratulated us. But the Liberals supported the Conservatives on that budget, all because some members of this House are trying to save their own jobs instead of defending their constituents' jobs. I find that scary.

The Liberals wanted to save their jobs when the latest budget was tabled, because their polling numbers were not very good. Now, the New Democrats want to save their jobs, because their polling numbers are not very good. No one is thinking about the workers, and that is scary.

Once again, it is a good thing the Bloc Québécois members are standing up in this Parliament on behalf of workers in Quebec, especially forestry workers. I repeat that 15,836 forestry jobs have been lost in Quebec to date. We do not care much about polls, and it will not bother us to go to an election if we no longer have confidence in this government, which is ignoring a whole slew of workers who have lost their jobs. We will not hesitate to put our seats on the line on that issue. That is the strength of the Bloc Québécois. All the analysts and reporters are wondering what is happening in Quebec and why Quebecers do not like Canada.

It is simple. Quebecers just want members who defend their interests. That is what we do every day, and we take pride in doing it. What is happening right now in this House is out of control. It is an aberration, especially when it comes to this bill, which is designed as an assistance program for the automotive industry.

I believe that our Conservative colleague was honest: for 60% of his presentation, he talked about the auto sector, saying that it represented 14% of GDP.

• (1225)

What he forgot to mention is that, according to the Conference Board, some 15,000 jobs were lost in that sector and that over 15,000 jobs were lost in the forestry sector in Quebec alone. He forgot to mention that. He also forgot to mention the fact that his party has decided to ignore forestry workers.

He forgot to mention that his party is not planning to do anything to help agricultural, tourism and fisheries workers. He forgot to mention that. What I have the hardest time understanding is why the NDP is supporting this. I know that people in ridings in the Gaspé peninsula are starting to get angry. When people—workers who have dedicated their lives to fisheries, forestry, tourism and agriculture—see a party like the New Democratic Party, which claims to be the great defender of all workers, support a bill that will help only one industry, the auto industry, I can see why people in NDP ridings might start wondering what is going on. Those people are looking at Quebec and I am sure they are very glad to see that Quebec, at least, has MPs who are defending workers' interests. The only party doing that is the Bloc Québécois.

The government has created a new category of workers, so-called “long-tenured workers”. Simply put, these are workers who, over the past five years, have collected no more than 35 weeks of employment insurance benefits. So, the government created this new class of workers, and all other workers are not long-tenured. I find this term appalling. Conservative and NDP MPs use the term “long-tenured workers” as though workers in forestry, fisheries, tourism and agriculture were not long-tenured workers, even though these people have dedicated their lives to sustaining industries that, in some cases, are seasonal and, in others, like forestry, have been going through a huge crisis for the past five years.

*Government Orders*

If the Conservative Party—and the Liberal Party in its day—had made a similar effort to get the forestry industry out of the crisis, the industry would now be leading the Canadian economy and we would be out of the recession by now. That is the truth. But once again, forestry does not get the same treatment. It never does. People forget that in the forest, the trees keep growing. There will always be trees. We are sitting on one of the best assets in Quebec's economy, and one of the best in Canada's economy.

Once again, some members in this House—the Conservatives, the Liberals last spring at budget time, and the NDP today—are ignoring the forestry industry. These people are being cast aside. They hear promises. Maybe we will see what happens during an election campaign debate. For five years now, the Bloc Québécois has been rising in this House to say that there is a crisis in the forestry industry. We need to help this industry. It will take loan guarantees. We must be able to modernize our companies. We want to be able to do so because in Quebec, the forestry industry represents 108,000 jobs. That is the reality.

There are forestry workers in the other provinces, too. If we had addressed the forestry crisis five years ago, we could have already come out of the current economic crisis. But once again, the other parties, for purely partisan reasons, have decided to save their own skins. Today, it is the NDP, who, over the next four, five or six weeks will try to make us understand that this measure is truly good for the economy. These members need only return to their ridings and talk to their constituents to understand that these outrageous measures are not good for the economy.

What we needed was a real overhaul of the employment insurance system, especially because, as of 1996, the federal government no longer contributes to the employment insurance fund. It is funded entirely by workers and employers. That is the reality. The Conservatives even have the gall to say that they will use this money to pay down the debt they have racked up.

So, once again, I am proud to stand here on behalf of forestry, agricultural, tourism and fisheries workers. We are obviously against this bill because it is unfair for all the long-tenured workers in these industries.

• (1230)

[*English*]

**Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I admire the member for his work. He is on the transport committee with me. I agree with him that we need to have a longer-term vision. This government is the first in many years to look at a long-term vision for renewable resources in this country, recognizing that we cannot renew some of the resources we currently take out of the earth

However, I would disagree with the member on some of what he said. The Bloc is toothless. Only the 10 Conservative members in Quebec can deliver the goods to Quebecers. I think that all Canadians and Quebecers realize that. We have provided many options. This government continues to provide options. We have provided billions of dollars for the agricultural industry and for the forestry sector in Quebec and other places in Canada. In my own

riding, I have a huge forestry sector. I have mills that have shut down just in the last few months.

I recognize what happens to families in communities such as Slave Lake and High Prairie that are devastated as a result of mill shutdowns. I am wondering what the member is suggesting we do in this particular case. If the world is not buying Canadian lumber, what is the Bloc going to do? They cannot do anything. It is only this government that can deliver for Canadians and Quebecers.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, as my Conservative colleague said, there are only a few Conservative members in Quebec. If he had any backbone, he would no longer be a member of that party, especially considering the bill before us, which is clearly bad for Quebec workers. That would be the first thing he could do.

As for the rest, I understand that a program that allows workers in his riding, as he said, to transition from the forestry sector to the oil sands is a program adapted to his needs. However, I am trying to make him understand that the oil sands will not last forever. What will Alberta do when there is no more oil? After all, it is a non-renewable energy source.

In the end, perhaps they will be happy to have programs that will help all workers by considering everyone, not just auto workers, as long-tenured workers. That is the problem I have with the Conservative Party, but I have an even bigger problem with the New Democratic Party, for getting into bed with the Conservatives.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am a little confused by what my hon. colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel just said. I do know whether he plans to support the government or not. Yet that is the most important question. It is because of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP that the government can continue to claim that the bill it introduced will help Canadian workers.

[*English*]

I think my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel is actually speaking on the government side. Perhaps he will answer this question.

He has read the bill. He knows that the bill will not create one single job. He knows as well that the bill is intended to help long-tenured workers.

Just think about that language, long-tenured workers who have contributed for a minimum of  $x$  number of years and have not drawn out more than  $x$  number of weeks of pay. That means it helps nobody in the auto industry because the auto industry has been using the employment insurance system in order to retool, upgrade and do all kinds of other things.

It means that none of those employees can profit. Why would the member support the government in a smoke-and-mirrors exercise?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, as my colleague clearly stated, it is true that he may not have understood everything. The point of my speech was to indicate that we will be voting against this bill, as I just mentioned.

*Government Orders*

However, coming from a Liberal member, it is understandable that he would be asking why we supported a government motion two weeks ago. Quite simply, we supported it because adopting the renovation tax credit was good for Quebeckers. I can understand that it is rather difficult for a Liberal member to rise and defend our constituents. Rising to defend personal interests is a Liberal trademark. That is his problem.

• (1235)

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I understand why my Liberal colleagues are frustrated. It is because in this House they have never been interested in any Canadian job. They are interested only in Liberal jobs. That has been the issue with them from the beginning.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question. In terms of this bill there is \$1 billion on the table that will go to EI. He can say it is only going to a region but it is going to long-tenured workers. Will he not support money getting to unemployed workers?

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, I can understand because just now the member told the Conservative member that a number of citizens in his riding had moved to work in the Conservative member's riding. That is not what I hope for as an MP. I hope that all my constituents will be able to work in my riding. I will be a valiant Quebecker and, unlike the NDP, defend the interests of the workers of my riding.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on Bill C-50, concerning the Employment Insurance Act and potential amendments.

My first reaction was to wonder why, if this was really important, it did not happen last May when numerous employment insurance bills were coming before the House on a regular basis. Why did it not happen during the meetings that were negotiated with the Liberal Party to sit down and work out important changes that could help the unemployed? Five hundred thousand families are living on EI right now. Jobs have been lost.

We have debates going on about a stimulus program, and we are going to get this infrastructure money out, and it is going to be shovel ready. How many people can remember when the government kept talking about shovel ready? In most people's minds all it takes is approving the money and giving the money to the approved project, and it is ready to go.

However, that is not the way it works. In fact, at the end of the last fiscal year, which ended March 31, 2009, there was about \$3.5 billion of infrastructure funding that lapsed. It was for approved projects that were ready to go. We knew that the economy was under duress. Unemployment was rising and that is when we needed the investment.

Why did it not happen? Why did that \$3.5 billion not get out before the end of the fiscal year? It was because the government wanted to manage the bottom line. It did not want to show a bigger deficit than what it was already going to have, because it had promised to balance the books.

I have raised these points to raise the issues of credibility and accountability. Accountability to me is when one can say "I can explain my actions and my decisions or my words truthfully and honestly and in plain and simple language. I can explain and justify them, and everybody will understand".

However, what we have had is a lot of fuzz. We have had a lot of code words. The minister responsible for infrastructure will not talk about how many projects money has gone out for. He talks about what the government has announced.

There is a project that got money this past week which was announced six years ago. Therefore when the minister responsible for infrastructure talks about something being announced, it means nothing. It is simply trying to evade the reality that in fact monies have not gone out.

We are faced with an employment insurance problem, and we have a bill that has come forward. I think there has been a fair bit of debate and I do not want to repeat it. However, it is clear that there are many good arguments that this bill for long-tenured workers who have not claimed EI but have paid into the system means they are going to be able to draw benefits for longer periods. However, the benefit period will depend on the industry that the worker comes from, whether it be auto, forestry or the resources. Under the bill, that makes a difference.

I looked at the minister's speech, and I did not see that. The minister boasted that she had called for a briefing. In her speech and in question period that same day, Thursday, September 17, the minister went out of her way to make the point that we had a briefing and not one Liberal member came, and that therefore they do not support these important changes for workers.

I found that really hard to believe, because I did not see anything. It took me a couple of hours to track it all down, and what I found is that the e-mail from the minister's office went to only one Liberal member of Parliament. Then the minister had the gall to get up in the House and say, "not one Liberal member attended the briefing meeting".

• (1240)

That is not my opinion, that is a fact. Government members can ask for a copy of the emails to prove it.

Other members have said that. The parliamentary secretary said the same thing in a speech. They have said that not one Liberal member showed up. When a notice is sent out to only one member, and if that member's staff happens to miss it or the member cannot make it, what do we do? It is not being accountable. It is not being truthful and plain. It is playing games. It is casting aspersions. If the truth were known, if it was in plain and simple language, it would not be an issue, and it should not be brought up.



*Government Orders*

If the minister's only argument is that the Liberals do not care, that argument just fell apart. On top of that, her colleagues are parroting the same erroneous facts. That is the reality that we have to live with here.

I raise this accountability issue because the member for Selkirk—Interlake on the Friday we were last here went through a little scenario about employment insurance premiums. He said that when the Liberals were in government, they kept raising employment insurance premiums.

After that but before question period, and the record can be checked, I rose on a point of order with the Speaker because this was clearly not a matter of fact. It was, in fact, the reverse. For 12 years in a row the Liberals reduced employment insurance premiums from the position they were at when we took over from Brian Mulroney. I did not know how to deal with this matter other than to raise it with the Speaker and the Speaker had to rule it as a matter of debate.

We have to think about this. If someone says something that is factually incorrect, not a matter of opinion but just factually incorrect, and another member rises to challenge it, there is no recourse in this place. A member has no recourse when another member gives misinformation that he or she knew or ought to have known was false.

The people of Canada continue to get the same rhetoric, the same misinformation. Suddenly, that misinformation shows up in all the Conservative literature that those members send out to everybody else's ridings. Everybody knows about the \$30 million worth of ten percenters sent out to ridings of other members of Parliament—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. The hon. Minister of Transport is rising on a point of order.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do apologize to my colleague and friend from Mississauga South.

Pursuant to an order of the House of Commons dated February 3, 2009, I have the honour to table the third report on Canada's economic action plan.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me deal with one more issue of accountability and basically telling the truth.

The parliamentary secretary talked about Liberal members walking out of the EI meetings in the summer that were organized by the leader of the official opposition. At page 5112 of *Hansard* of September 17, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour went through the full agenda and the activities that took place. I will not read it, but for reference purposes it stated that every time that government members undertook to put information before the committee in advance of the meeting, they did not. They did table drafts, which meant that when we arrived at the meeting we were given something.

Those meetings were intended to look at opportunities to help 500,000 unemployed Canadians. It is projected that unemployment is going to go to almost 10%. Those meetings were meant to help the unemployed, but the reality is that the government continued to play games. Government members continued to say they would do things but then never delivered.

Now the government has come forward with this legislation. The parliamentary secretary says opposition parties are playing around. If the government were serious about this legislation, it would have referred it to committee before second reading. The bill would have been passed and we would have had this legislation much quicker. Things could have been done.

The reason why the Conservatives did not do that is because if we deal with it at second reading, time will be wasted and it will never get passed in time. Once a bill is passed at second reading, substantive changes cannot be made to it. Therefore, we can only tinker with it at committee and parties that want to improve it have no chance. If the government had referred the bill to committee before second reading, we could have made it a better bill.

That member has not been accountable to Canadians.

• (1245)

**Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, based on my friend's comments, it appears that he is prepared to support this bill and move it through quickly, instead of having an election that is simply for his leader's self-interest.

Is that what the member is suggesting, that we can move forward and get some work done for Canadians now and that he will support this particular bill and the government's agenda on helping the unemployed in this country? Or is he suggesting that the Liberals will not support us and just want to push us to an election?

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, one of the things that Canadians should note is how often government members want to talk on behalf of the opposition parties and what they are going to do. They never address what they have done. They never have addressed some of the key failings of the government, in terms of accountability.

In terms of accountability, and I was working on a little speech here, how about the income trusts broken promise? That was certainly one. How about the fixed election date?

*Government Orders*

How about announcing that the Conservatives will not raise taxes, but then announce that they are going to raise employment insurance premiums by \$13 billion, which is a tax raise, when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance said that premiums are not a tax?

The government is so out of it, in terms of being honest and truthful with Canadians. This place will only be functional when the government becomes accountable.

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it sounds as if this member and perhaps his party are running a little scared and are trying to justify where they are right now.

I have a question for the member. For the people in Thunder Bay—Rainy River, this is a question of a billion dollars for the unemployed or a \$300 million election. I heard loud and clear all summer that the election is not a go. Now we see movement from the government on pension reform, on things that we have been talking about, such as protecting workers' pensions. We have seen some movement from the government in the last week.

Let me ask the hon. member this question. Is he not even interested in moving forward, co-operating and protecting workers' pensions?

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, we spent the entire spring trying to get important changes into the EI system, which the government just totally blocked.

I know the hon. member wants to help his constituents and the industries in his area, but he has to understand that the official opposition has a greater responsibility than simply to pick and choose. We have a responsibility to make sure that Canadians know that we have tried and tried, and that the current government cannot be trusted. We can get some peanuts every now and then, but when it gets down to doing the real work on behalf of Canadians, the current Conservative government is not the one that is going to deliver the goods for Canadians.

•(1250)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

Having consulted the major unions in Quebec, we know that they are unanimously opposed to this bill. *Acadie Nouvelle* reports that unemployed groups, especially on the Acadian peninsula, are against the bill. I believe that my colleague also seriously questions the claim that 190,000 people would benefit from this bill and the \$935 million, while our NDP friends are going one better and saying that the figure is now \$1 billion.

Do they understand how they come up with these figures? To get 190,000 people, 85% of unemployed workers would have to receive their maximum benefit entitlement, whereas only 25% actually do.

Can my colleague tell us whether he has looked at these figures?

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Mississauga South, a short answer, please.

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I cannot do the member's question justice. However, what I can say to him is that there is a litany of problems here with the current government where it always gives us big numbers, such as \$4.5 billion to do this when in fact it is only \$1.5 billion.

Look at the history the government has with the Parliamentary Budget Officer; an officer that in fact the Conservative Party insisted be brought in to oversee and ensure that the government's numbers are right. What do the Conservatives do? They farm the Parliamentary Budget Officer underneath the Library of Parliament and do not give the PBO enough resources to do the job properly. That is not accountability. They are not with the member, and I agree with him. This bill has a billion dollars that is being spent on EI. I believe that there are better initiatives than EI which would help the unemployed today.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to contribute to the debate on Bill C-50. I have the privilege of sitting on the particular committee that looks at these kinds of issues.

I will be speaking to the details of the legislation in just a few moments, but first I want to step back and initially give something of a more general perspective as we get started here.

In the short-term, the Canadian economy is going to recover. Our economy has held up relatively well throughout this recession, though of course that does not mean that it hurts any less when Canadians lose their jobs, particularly for those Canadians who have lost jobs in this period of time. It does not hurt less for those Canadians who have not been able to get back into the workforce as yet.

In the long-term, however, our economy is going to change, and through Canada's economic action plan we are dealing effectively with our current difficulties but we also have a vision for the future. It is crucial that that be said and crucial to have at this point in time.

I do not claim to have the gift of prophecy. I am not a prophet, or the son of a prophet as the Good Book says, but I think it is safe to say that the economy of the future will rely upon some different things. It will rely upon high technology, including forms of technology that we cannot even imagine today. Our traditional industries, especially our resource-based industries, are also seeing some major transformations in this light. We want Canadians to be working in that new economy.

I believe that the world is on the cusp of an economic transition, a crucial change coming that will be just as important in its own way as other major transitions of the 18th and the 19th centuries.

*Government Orders*

The industrial revolution, to take one example, was a tremendous shock to the traditional economies of Europe and America. Millions of hard workers were put out of business by the coming of steam power and mass production. Millions were forced to learn a new way of working. There was a human cost to industrialization but it was temporary, and in the end industrialization created many more jobs than it destroyed. It also brought about a much higher standard of living, and that is important and obvious as well to note.

From the vantage point of two centuries, it is easy to see that industrialization was a good thing. Although there are people who lament its coming and hark back to an earlier era, we do believe that on the whole it was a good thing. In the middle of an economic transition it is not so easy, however, to be philosophical, as we are in these few moments here.

I want to put it rather bluntly. When people are out of work, they cannot pay their mortgages. They stand to lose their cars and their houses. When they do not know whether they will ever have jobs again, because the industry appears to be dying and the skills that they have honed for decades look like they are obsolete, it is not so easy to take that long view, because they are right in the middle of it.

When people lose jobs through not fault of their own, it is a tremendous blow to their identities, self-confidence and sense of security. When we see our families and friends losing their jobs and businesses shut down in our communities, it is hard not to feel real fear about the future; apprehension, anxiety and real fear.

Believe me, our government would like nothing better than to be able to assure Canadians that the downturn will become an upturn and give a specific date, a certain, definite point, but this is a global recession and we are, to a significant degree, affected by what happens in other countries around us and across the globe. Nevertheless, the economic news is encouraging. We can now see the beginning of the end of the recession and the start of our recovery. Canada has weathered that downturn better than most other countries, and I believe we can attribute that to actions by this Conservative government, actions to stimulate the economy, actions to protect jobs and support the unemployed.

We, as the Conservative government, took concrete action to help Canadians through the employment insurance program. We made timely improvements to help Canadians by providing five extra weeks of EI benefits, by making the EI application process easier, faster and better for workers and businesses, as well as increasing opportunities for unemployed Canadians to upgrade their skills and get back into the new and emerging economy.

Canadians are benefiting from those improvements to the EI program. More than 240,000 Canadians have received additional weeks of benefits thanks to the extra five weeks of benefits included in Canada's economic action plan. Canadians are also benefiting from improvements to service delivery. Between April and July, over 750 additional claims-processing staff and over 250 more agents answering calls were hired and trained to help even more Canadians receive their EI benefits as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

• (1255)

Canada's economic action plan also announced the freezing of the employment insurance premium rate for 2010 at \$1.73 per \$100 of

insurable earnings, the same levels as in 2008 and 2009, and actually its lowest level since 1982. I would point out to the Liberal members opposite that while the previous Liberal government may have reduced EI premiums, it is our Conservative government that has them at their lowest level in a quarter of a century.

This government has also created the employment insurance financing board to ensure that the EI premiums paid by hard-working Canadians do not go into general revenues and that they are not available for future governments to use on their pet political projects or to fudge deficit numbers, like the previous Liberal governments did.

I am hearing about the kind of recommendation we are putting into place from chambers of commerce, including the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, that EI premiums should not go into general revenues to be used in a slush fund, pet political project kind of way. Our government's action on that issue is another good thing for Canadians.

I will go back to the freezing of EI premiums for this year, 2009, and next year, 2010. Keeping the EI premium at the same level in 2009 and 2010 rather than allowing it to rise to the break-even level will achieve a projected combined economic stimulus of \$10.5 billion. That measure keeps premium rates lower than they would otherwise be. From an employer perspective, the measure provides an incentive to create and retain jobs, and at the same time it leaves more earnings in the hands of employers, which impacts on consumer spending.

We are assisting businesses and their workers experiencing temporary slowdowns through improved and more accessible work sharing agreements. More than 165,000 Canadians are benefiting from work sharing agreements that are in place with over 5,800 employers across Canada.

It is important to ensure Canada's workforce is in position to get good jobs and bounce back from the recession. To help, we have the career transition assistance program, the CTA, a new initiative launched by our government that will help an estimated 40,000 long-term workers who need additional support for retraining to find new jobs.

Through that initiative, we have extended the duration of EI regular income benefits for eligible workers for up to two years for those who choose to participate in longer term training. As well, we are allowing earlier access to EI for eligible workers investing in their own training by using all or part of their severance packages.

This initiative is being implemented in partnership with provinces and territories. The federal government provides income support through the EI program, and the provinces and territories are responsible for providing training support. By working with the provinces and the territories through this and other programs, we are providing Canadians easier access to training that is tailored to the needs of workers in our country's different regions.

*Government Orders*

As I read the reports from the different chambers across the country, again including my own Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, they are certainly supportive of that training component and EI funds being used to that very good end.

The new legislation we are introducing is part of those efforts. Bill C-50 is about extending regular EI benefits to workers who have lost their jobs after working a long time and who have never, or rarely, collected employment insurance or EI regular benefits; in other words, those who have a long-term attachment to the workforce. That is what this bill is about.

These Canadians have paid taxes and EI premiums for many years. It is only fair and right that we support them and their families in this special time of need.

I appreciate the reasoned support of the NDP, and I wish that other members of the House would support something like this on behalf of their constituents. I encourage all members of the House to support these measures.

• (1300)

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member opposite in terms of the compassion that members of Parliament feel towards those who have lost their jobs and whose families are impacted. I certainly share that view.

It was an interesting, contextual and philosophical set of comments. The word that really struck me, though, was when the member used the word “timely”. If anything, this proposed bill is completely untimely. We have a government that in its update last November claimed that Canada would be in surplus for this year and future years. That was pretty untimely. It was already a country in deficit. The untimely budget in January proposed a \$32 billion deficit, which soon after has skyrocketed to \$55 billion.

The thing that is completely mystifying in terms of the government's performance is that it did absolutely nothing to table this measure during the summer, when there was a Liberal-Conservative EI working group to make exactly the improvements to EI that the member claims this bill is about. Instead, the—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. The hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure what the question was, but I will do my best to respond to the general statements that were made. I do know that the constituents contacting my office have a great appreciation for the five-week extension. I suspect that is the same for members across the way and in this party as well.

We will be extending employment insurance, yet again, for those who have had a long-term attachment to the workforce, and I think that is much appreciated. As the member said, it was a compassionate, caring measure to take. We listen to the input that comes from across the way. In particular, we listen to the input from the Canadian people, who have relayed to the government that this is the kind of temporary measure that is necessary.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague. He is an interested person and member. I am wondering whether he would explain the

ramification of an issue that was brought to the table by my colleague from Mississauga South, and that is the whole question of accountability and trust.

Here we have a member of the government who glories in the achievements of his government, but not one of them has given an indication of what has happened in the last 10 months, where we went from a surplus to a \$56 billion deficit. That is \$60 billion of deficit.

We ask ourselves what that means. It is either an investment or a shortfall. If it is an investment, I would like the member to tell the House what the Canadian public has received for that \$60 billion, because it should have added up to at least 500,000 jobs instead of 500,000 unemployed. Alternatively, it could demonstrate that there is a shortfall of government revenues. Since the Government of Canada takes about 20% of the GDP in taxes, it would mean there has been a shortfall of \$300 billion in economic activity.

Under those circumstances, what would possibly possess Canadians to think they ought to renew confidence in a government that is that incompetent and untrustworthy?

• (1305)

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Mr. Speaker, I have worked with the member in the past. Maybe he should move into the finance critic position and replace the Liberal member who is there; he seems to marshal a fair bit of the supposed evidence at hand.

I would disagree on the premise of a number of the points of why we are in the particular economic condition we are in and, as a government, the extraordinary measures we have had to take. There has been crucial stimulus and infrastructure spending across the country. Those dollars are getting out.

I have done several events and announcements this week. It is much appreciated. People recognize that this is for a period of time. It is infrastructure that is needed in the good times and the bad. It is not for frills or superfluous kinds of stuff; these are very vital things that are being done across the country.

We are in a position of having spent money, but we will come to where we no longer have these deficit budgets and we will work diligently at reducing the major deficit we have in the country.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Essex for his enthusiasm. He always jumps to his feet in my support. I take it as a great compliment.

*Government Orders*

Bill C-50 puts us in a situation where, once again, we bring up employment insurance. I have been here for five and a half years. Time and time again we have talked about employment insurance. We have several amendments on the table. Most of them have to do with the fact that members want to lower the qualification period, or at least the barriers to qualifications in that first period. With Bill C-50, we find ourselves talking about the back end of the system, meaning one gets additional weeks. Usually we do not get that. In private members' legislation we usually get a qualifying period that allows people who are unable to find work to benefit when under normal circumstances they would not.

I welcome this debate. However, I believe the bill completely lacks a focus on those people who are unable to qualify.

Over the past few years we have seen several resolutions passed in the House; some have been voted down and some have been voted for. They have included things like lowering the hours to qualify, such as 360 hours for re-entrance. We also talked about 55% to 60% of the benefits to be paid out when one is receiving EI benefits.

Some of the other issues, including the two-week waiting period, also come up, but time and time again they come up as private members' bills. Now we have government legislation in this direction.

Let me start with my own riding of Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. I want to talk about two types of industry and juxtapose their situation with the intent of this legislation. Let me start with seasonal work and the shrimp plant workers. Work in the plant is a seasonal occupation, as anyone in this country can understand. I am hearing a lot from people who work in particular shrimp plants. Prices have been low. There has been labour unrest in certain cases. They cannot seem to settle on a price. People are unable to qualify for EI in the off season because they lack the hours to qualify.

Bill C-50 does absolutely nothing to address that. At some point I hope the government will give credence to that issue. I would like to see it go to 360 hours, for the reasons I just stated. The majority of my constituents would feel the same way, and I get a lot of feedback from them.

Let me look at another aspect, and this is where we get to the crux of the matter on Bill C-50. Time and again members of the government will stand in the House and say the bill does wonderful things for the long-tenured worker. I would like to give an illustration of a long-tenured worker who has many questions. I live in the town of Bishop's Falls near Grand Falls—Windsor. It recently suffered a major setback when the AbitibiBowater mill closed in the spring of this year. There were upward of 700 people who lost their jobs. Many of these people have called me. They were loggers. We go back to the idea of seasonal work. They were loggers who worked so many weeks of the year and the other weeks could only receive 55% of their income through EI.

Many people will say they do not want to feed into that. They do not want to have someone claiming EI time and time again when they can do other work. One has to understand that this is an aspect of rural Canada. All parties in the House agree it is difficult for seasonal workers in rural areas to get work in the off season and

therefore this system was required. We still need someone to log our forests. We still need someone to farm. We still need people to pave our roads. Rural Canada, especially rural Newfoundland, is now so popular because of its rural aspect. Who will be waiting to show people around? It will be tourism workers. They will be in the same situation. People ask why they cannot do something else. In a town of 100 people or less, there is not a lot of industry to go around. This type of policy helps sustain communities such as this.

● (1310)

I have 172 communities in my riding and only one town, Grand Falls—Windsor, has 13,000 people. I have a collection of communities that is vast but the people are proud and this is the type of legislation they need to sustain themselves within their community.

I want to go back to the logger situation. Bill C-50 is what I have a problem with and the loggers want me to ask the government about a situation. If a claimant is paid less than 36 weeks of regular benefits in the 260 weeks before the beginning of the benefit period, they can qualify. What does that mean? Of the 260 weeks, which is approximately five years, if people have received benefits for over 36 weeks, they are out and receive nothing more. Loggers are included in that but my definition of a logger is a long-tenured worker. What do the Conservatives say to them? What do they say to the shrimp plant workers in this situation?

There is a lot of talk in my province from many corners and not just us. I will quote an individual who has done extensive work on the EI system. I respect her opinion because she probably knows more about the EI system than any person I know. Her name is Lana Payne and she is the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Labour Federation. She has a few things to say about this. She said that Bill C-50 divides the unemployed into two groups: those deemed deserving by the Conservatives of extra benefits and those who are not.

She went on to say that the proposed changes by leaving so many unemployed out essentially blames people for their job losses by penalizing workers who may have had to avail of EI benefits in the past five years.

That brings me to my next point. Many Conservatives have said that they have had people working in the auto industry and had auto plants in their riding and have people who work in newsprint mills and other types of mills. I have a question for them. It is not seasonal work, but in the past five years those mills have suffered shutdowns. The mill was shut down for whatever reason: too much inventory or market conditions persist such that they had to close the mill down for a period of time. What did these people do? They went on EI. For a mill worker, a long-tenured worker, if he or she has received more than 36 weeks, which is about seven weeks a year, which is highly possible, they are out.

*Government Orders*

The Conservatives tell us that they had to cut it off somewhere. Well, this is not the place to be doing that. I do not think it was well thought out in this situation. We could have done something for these individuals. They are long-tenured workers who, through no fault of their own, were in a situation where they were laid off for a period of time which put them in a very rough situation.

Lana Payne said it quite well. As a matter of fact, it is not just Newfoundland and Labrador but it is also the Canadian federation, the CAW. It is of the same ilk where it claims that the government will qualify 190,000 people. People with the CAW are experts. They are not paid to confront the government. They are not just the opposition. These are people who actually stick up for the people who have jobs or used to. I do admit that some people in the mill at Grand Falls-Windsor where I am from will receive extra benefits, if need be, but a lot of them have gone away to work which disqualifies them yet once again.

Finally, just before last January, if workers were laid off before 2009, they are out. So much for Lewisporte Wholesalers in my riding. I do agree that we need more benefits but this particular bill leaves out so many to the point that it becomes an injustice to actually spend so much time to help so few people.

● (1315)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague and it is very clear that the issues of EI are far from being settled.

The question that needs to be asked is how we settle the issue of EI. Do we continue to work as a Parliament and continue to press the government that has been fundamentally against so many of these changes from the beginning and bring change, or do we all jump off the cliff with the Liberal leader because he wants to be prime minister? Those are the questions people are asking me back home.

Many of my constituents who are unemployed will not benefit from this, but they are saying that if they have a choice between giving \$1 billion to the unemployed generally or going to an election at this point, they would rather give to the unemployed.

However, that does not mean the issue of EI is over. In fact, we have our bill, as does the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking. These are bills that are still being brought forward because there are so many problems with EI.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague to put it quite simply to the Canadian people. If it is not good enough, does that mean he will be walking away from the \$1 billion that is on the table so the Liberal leader can force an election, or will he propose clear enough changes so we can make this work and people will get some money?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, in this particular situation I respect some of the bills that he is speaking to in way of lowering the qualifying period. There is no doubt that some people in his riding and in my riding will benefit from this.

However, he did refer to the partisan aspect of it, and I am glad he did. In this particular situation, after going through two years, they wrote to me through these ten-percenters and talked about how the Liberals were propping up a particular government when it was such sacrilege to them.

If the member wants to throw out some partisan arrows, let us have a look. The NDP members, in this particular situation, have now done, in politics, in this particular House, the equivalent to a triple salchow in figure skating. They have twisted themselves into such a pretzel that now they have become this voice of reason when it was no holds barred before this.

I respect his ideas and his will to change EI but I do not respect how disingenuous the partisan snipes are.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I must say that I was quite entertained by that little outburst.

The reality is that his party voted to kill Kyoto, voted to kill pay equity for women and voted to get rid of the right to strike for public sector workers. There is a difference between rolling over and saying “Don't hit me” and trying to present that as a piece of public policy, and saying “if you want to keep this Parliament going, put something on the table.”

We have a \$1 billion on the table. That party has delivered nothing over the last two years except to be a hand puppet for the Conservatives to keep them in power.

I would like to ask the members a question. There is \$1 billion on the table. Will they be taking their toys and going home or will they work with us to get this \$1 billion rolling?

● (1320)

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, did I just hear this correctly? Maybe I will check the record.

I have been called a hand puppet. I know my diminutive stature may dictate as such, but is there not a new coalition underway, or am I mistaken here?

The member has become such a hand puppet that he was not even born. I believe he was created by Jim Henson. It is insane in this particular matter that he could do this and it sounds so disingenuous. I find this absolutely incredible.

Let us get back to the fact that those members killed Kyoto. Let us talk about pay equity. If they felt so compelled, they should take the government down now and then change it. They should go ahead. Now the shoe is on the other foot. Now all of a sudden it is two years of down, down, down they go. What do we say? We say that maybe we will take the government down and that maybe there is no confidence. Now all of a sudden the story changes. No, actually we do have confidence. They flip a coin.

I used to be a weatherman and sometimes predictions would go off track. Sometimes we may want to flip a coin to predict weather. Maybe I should start flipping a coin to find out where the NDP are.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I actually hope to speak specifically to Bill C-50 and give a brief summary on what we are talking about in the House. A lot of what we are hearing today is what is not in the bill.

*Government Orders*

The bill specifically addresses the needs of people whose benefits began after January 4, 2009 and who have claimed less than 35 weeks over the last five years. They would get from five to twenty extra weeks of benefits depending on how long they have been paying into the EI system. The maximum additional weeks for those who have been paying at least 30% of their maximum annual premium in seven of the last ten years is five weeks. To get more they need to have been paying that 30% for a longer period and, to get the full 20 weeks, they need to have paid in for 12 to 15 years. Of course, there is a time limit on this. This measure expires in September 2010. Therefore, what we are talking about is a temporary measure.

In all of the back and forth debate that has happened in the House today, what I have been hearing is the reason not to support the bill because of what it does not contain. What I have not heard is a valid reason for voting against those workers and their families who would benefit from the bill. I have not heard a viable argument that says that those workers who have worked a long time in an industry do not deserve to have this additional benefit.

Much has been said in the House about what is not contained in the bill. I want to touch on that. The bill does not address some of the pressing needs of employment insurance. What many of us in the House know is that in the mid-1990s the Liberal government of the day started to take apart the employment insurance system. As a result of the measures the Liberal government passed in the 1990s, today thousands and thousands of workers simply do not qualify for employment insurance or, if they do qualify, the number of weeks they can claim are insufficient to meet the needs in these economic times.

We have heard people talk about forestry workers and fishers. In my riding, there is no question that many forestry workers would not benefit from Bill C-50. However, I have not heard one forestry worker say that since he or she does not benefit that we should ensure that those people who have worked a long time in a particular industry should not benefit.

The forestry workers in my riding are telling me that we should get on with it, that we should pass the bill and then they will take their issues to Parliament so they can have another piece of legislation that will meet their needs.

Canada has a system that designates labour market areas where unemployment rates are determined. Nanaimo—Cowichan is attached to the Vancouver labour market. Conditions in the Vancouver labour market are better than they are on Vancouver Island so the unemployment rate is lower than it is on Vancouver Island. However, because the unemployment rate is attached to Vancouver, that means that the forestry workers in my riding get less weeks of benefits.

I have been calling on the government to fix that anomaly in the system and to recognize that economic regions that are set, perhaps in Ottawa, do not necessarily recognize the differences in the labour market. This legislation obviously does not deal with this and actually we do not need legislation to fix it. It can be done through a directive.

I know members of the House have spoken about the importance of forestry in their own communities and yet I challenge some of those members because those are the very members who supported the softwood lumber deal.

I want to acknowledge the members of my party, for example, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster who, when the bill came before the House, consistently, with my other colleagues, raised the problems with the softwood lumber agreement. Here we are, some years later, seeing the impact that agreement has had on many of our communities, especially our forestry sector in British Columbia which is in a huge crisis.

● (1325)

I want to remind people that over 90% of the land in British Columbia is crown land, which has some forestry tenure attached to it. This means we are not in a sunset industry in forestry there. We need meaningful reform that will ensure forestry remains viable to the workers, to the families and to their communities. Many communities are suffering because of the softwood lumber agreement.

In addition, as I said, the employment insurance system does not meet the needs of the forestry workers. Many of them have been off and on work for the last five, seven, ten years. Despite all the talk and the rhetoric in the House, we are simply not meeting the needs of the forestry workers.

As well, we have seen the collapse of the sockeye salmon fisheries in British Columbia. I know the minister was out on the west coast, but did not respond to the concerns raised around an overall comprehensive plan to deal with west coast fisheries. This needs to include the fact that many of the commercial fishermen and women will not qualify for employment insurance benefits this year because they simply have not been able to get out on the waters.

Bill C-50 does not deal with the fishermen and women. It may deal, sometimes, with some of the fisheries workers.

In addition, we also have seen that many of our communities, because of those transitions from forestry and from fishing, are now reliant on seasonal and part-time work. In fact, when we look at the numbers that have come out about where jobs have been created, we consistently see that the overwhelming amount of those jobs are in the part-time sector. Bill C-50 does not address the fact that many workers are in part-time seasonal contracts, self-employment.

Again, New Democrats have put forward a comprehensive plan to deal with the deficiencies in the employment insurance system right now.

Back in June, we put a motion before the House of Commons that talked about the kinds of changes we saw as important for the employment insurance system. Those changes included reducing the number of hours that were required to qualify, eliminating the two-week waiting period and increasing the benefit rate.

*Government Orders*

We have also talked in the House many times about the \$57 billion theft from the employment insurance fund. It cannot be described in any other way. Workers and employers contributed premiums to the tune of \$57 billion. That was taken away from workers and their employers and put into the general revenue fund to offset a deficit. In any other place where we have funds that are designated for a particular purpose and they go missing sounds like theft to me. When I talk to workers in my communities, they say they want that money back. They do not want it in their own pockets. They want that money to come back into the employment insurance fund so there is money for training for workers who need to make a transition out of the industry in which they are. They want more money for the kinds of innovations and upgrades that are needed in some of the workplaces. They want a higher benefit rate for workers so they can have money to spend in their communities.

While I talk about benefit rates, we also know that the single biggest economic stimulus that we can provide to families, to their communities, is ensure they have an adequate income. One of the ways we can ensure adequate income is to ensure they qualify for the employment insurance benefits, which they have contributed to for many years.

The NDP support for Bill C-50 should in no way construed as overall support for the Conservative government. In this case we are saying that there are workers out there who can benefit from the increased duration of benefits and there simply is no good reason to tell them they do not deserve to have that money.

•(1330)

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it has been interesting listening to the member turn herself into a pretzel to justify voting for the Conservative government at this point.

How can the member and her party have confidence in the government given that this proposal was not tabled earlier? The appropriate time for tabling it was during the summer with the EI task force. Not only that, the government members deliberately falsified the projections for the Liberal proposal, which was very similar to what the NDP was calling for. Not only did the government not take its commitment to that task force seriously, it deliberately falsified and misled Canadians on the implications of the proposals that were supported by that member's party. How can she have confidence in the government on EI given that history?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I will leave the partisan politics for the Liberals and the Conservatives to sort out.

I want to talk about the fact that I certainly did not turn myself into a pretzel. I was very straightforward in talking about what I saw as being an important aspect of the bill and what I saw as being its deficiencies.

Were we to put the interests of all Canadians front and centre, instead of the partisan politics that play out as being some form of debate in the House, we would talk about what we could do to make a difference in their lives, right here, right now.

Bill C-50, despite the fact it does not cover many of the aspects that are important to members in my community and other communities across the country, will deliver some tangible results

for some workers in our country. Again, I still have not heard a concrete, justifiable reason to turn down the benefits for those workers.

If we want to talk about making Parliament work, if we want to talk about what is in the best interests of Canadians, it does not seem to me that a party that got nothing for supporting the government 79 times can claim it is putting the interests of Canadians front and centre.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a real problem with what was just said. I can appreciate that the member is doing everything she can to make us understand that she supports this bill, but the fact is that the bill is a slap in the face to all the other long-tenured workers outside the auto industry. She has forestry workers in her riding. She says she hopes to convince this government to table new measures. The employment insurance fund has to serve workers, but the Conservative Party said that the fund would serve to wipe out the deficit. That is the reality. That is what my colleague wants to support, even though this government no longer has the confidence of the Bloc Québécois. We believe that it is worth spending 36 days on the campaign trail to get a real employment insurance program for workers in all sectors, including forestry, tourism, farming and fishing.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the \$50-some billion that disappeared from the EI fund was actually prior to the Conservative tenure.

With regard to the current employment insurance bill before the House, I again acknowledge that it does not cover many of the workers. It does not cover some of the forestry workers in my riding who have been in and out of employment now for a number of years. I have talked about the fishermen and fisherwomen who will not be covered under the legislation.

We can argue about the numbers and whether it is 190,000 workers or slightly less than \$1 billion. The fact is up to \$1 billion will go into communities from coast to coast to coast. What reason would the member and other members who have spoken against the bill have to turn it down?

I agree we need to continue to work for those other changes. New Democrats have up to a dozen bills in the House which set out changes that are required for the employment insurance system. We need to pass this legislation and work on some of the other legislation that will fix the deficiencies as identified in the House.

•(1335)

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have this opportunity to express my support for Bill C-50, which would amend the Employment Insurance Act to provide additional EI regular benefits to long tenured workers.



*Government Orders*

As the House is well aware, our government is hard at work to help Canadians in every part of our society deal with the current economic downturn and the challenges that bear on individuals, their families and communities.

We are acutely aware, for example, of the dramatic impact of the global economic downturn on forestry workers in British Columbia. In my riding, across the interior of British Columbia and on Vancouver Island thousands of workers and their families have been affected by forestry plant closures and layoffs. These are men and women who have contributed many years of their lives to building a thriving forestry industry in the province, producing high-quality products in demand throughout Canada and around the world.

I am sure I do not need to say how hard these people work or about the intense pride they take in their jobs. I am equally sure I do not need to explain why they are deserving of our support in this tough economic climate. They have paid their taxes, their dues and their EI premiums. Is it therefore only fair and responsible that we support them and their families in this time of need.

This is why our government is taking unprecedented action to respond to the needs of long-tenured workers who find themselves laid off through no fault of their own. Bill C-50 would enable long-tenured workers in all industries and sectors throughout the country to access additional EI support while our economy recovers. Many of the affected workers have been paying EI premiums for years. In fact, many of these men and women have worked for decades in their particular sectors. They are highly-skilled individuals committed to doing the very best jobs they can. They have paid into the EI program, strengthening it year after year through their contributions, but have never collected EI benefits until now.

Under the legislation, we are proposing the regular EI benefits for these long-tenured workers would be extended by between five and twenty weeks. The amount of the extension would depend on the number of years workers had contributed to the program.

For example, under the legislation, workers who contributed to the program in seven of the past ten years would get an additional five weeks of regular EI benefits. For every additional year of contribution, the number of weeks of benefits would increase by three weeks, up to the twenty week maximum. This additional support would give them more time to look for jobs and, if necessary, get the training they needed to help them participate in the recovering economy.

As I am sure my hon. colleagues will appreciate, our goal is to enable long-tenured workers to access the extended weeks of benefits as soon as possible. We are proposing that these new measures be retroactive so as to cover many workers who are caught up in the peak of layoffs during the recession. We would extend this coverage to claims up to almost a year from now, September 11, 2010. Payments of extended benefits would continue until the fall of 2011 for those who needed them. By that point, we are very hopeful that the most difficult challenges of the economic downturn will be a thing of the past. Workers will be finding and keeping new jobs, sometimes in their former industry and sometimes in a new sector of the economy.

Allow me to be clear that the measures in the bill would not make any permanent changes to the EI eligibility rules. We see the legislation as a temporary, albeit very much needed, response to a temporary situation where Canada's long-tenured workers and their families require our immediate support.

I also want to draw to the attention of the House another measure we have introduced to help long-tenured workers who want to make the transition to a job in a new industry. The career transition assistance initiative extends EI benefits of long-tenured workers to a maximum of two years, while they participate in long-term training. Many of my colleagues have mentioned this valuable flexible program and I would like to mention it as well because it dovetails nicely with the measures in Bill C-50.

Under this initiative, our government is providing an estimated \$500 million to help laid-off long-tenured workers upgrade their skills. We are implementing this initiative in partnership with the provinces and territories. The workers in training receive income support through the federal government's EI program, while the provinces and territories provide training support, including additional money to cover the learner's expenses.

• (1340)

This is an important initiative, and the EI changes proposed by Bill C-50 will build on measures our government has introduced through Canada's economic action plan to assist Canadians who find themselves unemployed during these difficult times. These measures include five extra weeks of EI benefits nationally, increasing the maximum duration of benefits from 45 to 50 weeks in regions of high unemployment.

Under Canada's economic action plan, we have also made changes to the work-sharing program to help workers in the labour force and to protect their jobs. This program offers EI income support to workers who are willing to work a reduced work week while their employer pursues the company's economic recovery plan. In my riding, we are using it in many locations, and it is fabulous.

The changes we have made extend the work-sharing agreements by an additional 14 weeks to maximize the benefits for workers and employees during this recovery period. As of today, there are close to 5,800 active work-sharing agreements across the country, protecting the jobs and skills of over 165,000 Canadians. Forestry workers figure largely in the work-sharing program.

I also want to mention the additional \$60 million over three years that Canada's economic action plan has invested in targeted initiatives for older workers. This initiative enables people 55 to 64 years of age to get the skills upgrading and work experience they need to make the transition to new jobs. Let me add that we are expanding this initiative's reach so that communities with populations lower than 250,000 are now eligible for funding.

*Government Orders*

We are making huge investments in training and retraining workers of all ages. We cannot spare any of them. We need the skills, experience, energy and creativity of Canadians to meet the challenges to come. Our government is focused on what matters to Canadians, on finding solutions to help long-term workers who have worked hard and paid into the system for years but who are having trouble finding employment through no fault of their own, on extending benefits to self-employed Canadians, and on getting Canadians back to work through historic investments in infrastructure and skills training.

It is clear that Bill C-50, the measures the minister has spoken of and those introduced in Canada's economic action plan are working for Canadians to get Canadians back to work. That is why I would like the members of the House to support the bill and support Canadians who want to get back to work.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully and I noted that the member opposite was really talking about a plan that has nothing to do with Bill C-50. She talked about issues that were resident in the Canadian action plan, the same plan that has produced 500,000 unemployed and a deficit that is now at \$56 billion. However, that was only last week. It is probably higher today.

She talked about it serving employees and workers. Some of these projects were ongoing projects and they have their own merit. She did not talk about what this bill does in terms of the jobs it is going to create, where it is going to create them and in which industries they are going to be created.

I noted as well that she very deliberately left out the references in the bill to all the exemptions that displaced workers are going to face if they want to access EI. Those exemptions are all included under this rubric: Anyone who has used the EI system any time in the last five years will be out of luck. Anybody who has already been unemployed as a result of the government's mismanagement—

• (1345)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, I am really glad to speak to that issue. As the hon. member should know, during a time of global recession, it is very complicated. We need to tackle this recession from many different angles. In actual fact, people want to work. Things like the job opportunities program are incredibly well received in British Columbia.

We have taken a multi-faceted approach. Bill C-50 is an absolutely critical piece of that support for the long-tenured workers. However, it is part of a fabric, and our economic action plan is the complete fabric.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the debate back and forth, and I see my colleagues from the Liberal Party flapping like lost ducks.

They are going on about the economic stimulus package, but they voted for it.

When the hon. member's party, very ideological in base, decided to push out a motion that would strip protection for the environment

in the Navigable Waters Protection Act, the Liberals rolled over and voted for it.

When the Conservatives wanted to get rid of pay equity for women, the Liberals rolled over and said they would support it as long as it bought them some time.

The Liberal Party is not concerned about the jobs of average Canadians. Liberal members are concerned about Liberal jobs.

We now have a situation where \$1 billion is on the table. That is not a great amount and there are a lot of issues. Now the Liberals want to throw the \$1 billion out because the Liberal leader wants to be prime minister.

Despite all the failings of that member's party, and now that we have \$1 billion on the table to help the unemployed, does she not think that the Liberal Party should be less worried about their entitlement and more worried about average Canadians?

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Right now we are in the midst of a global economic recession. The last thing that Canadians need is an unwanted, unnecessary, opportunistic election.

I am glad the NDP appreciates the merit of supporting long-tenured workers. We look forward to supporting long-tenured workers.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has attempted to work with all members of Parliament in order to put objectives on the table and to see if we could work with government. We have actually done that.

The NDP has pointed out that all of the collaborative efforts have been for naught. Those members have finally realized that the government cannot produce anything, and it has not. Now the Conservatives are swallowing themselves whole and saying this is a great project. Where is the \$1 billion?

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I will make my answer very quick, Mr. Speaker, because I am not really sure what the question was other than perhaps the NDP and Liberals debating some things.

This is a great bill that would support long-tenured workers. We appreciate that it is going to move forward.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is with interest but also with concern that I am taking part in today's debate on Bill C-50 to provide additional weeks of benefits to certain categories of unemployed people.

The Bloc Québécois—and we have seen this many times here in the House—has always acted and will continue to act as a reasonable and responsible party. It will study every bill introduced, issue by issue. As always, we will act in the interests of Quebeckers.

*Government Orders*

As we said a number of times this morning, we cannot support this bill because it does not address the root of the problem, which is that the employment insurance system is unfair and not suited to the needs of Quebec's workers. The Bloc Québécois and the NDP and some other hon. members know that accessibility is the problem and we have been saying that in this House for a long time.

When it comes to qualifying for employment insurance, far too many workers, who have paid their premiums, are told they are not eligible because they do not have enough hours of work. According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's own numbers released in this House, more than half of unemployed workers—which is not insignificant—do not have access to a system to which they have contributed. This is truly disgraceful.

It will take more than piecemeal measures like Bill C-50 to fix a system that has been full of holes since the many Liberal cuts in the 1990s. It is all well and good to design the best programs around, but if people are not eligible for employment insurance benefits, then all is for naught. That is why we cannot support this bill.

The Bloc Québécois and committees of the unemployed, the Coalition des Sans-Chemise, who have been calling for change for years, and Quebec's unions, have been unanimously demanding a universal 360-hour eligibility threshold. That is what Quebecers need to be eligible for employment insurance. Lowering the eligibility threshold to 360 hours for everyone would immediately help the most vulnerable in our society.

The bill not only does nothing to address the problem of access to the system, but it contains measures that will essentially benefit a certain category of workers in western Canada and in the auto sector in Ontario. In fact, according to Mr. Chevrette, the head of the Quebec Forestry Industry Council, as well as the Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses and unions in Quebec, the measures announced will have little impact in Quebec, because they are not accessible to seasonal workers, forestry workers, young people or vulnerable workers.

In Berthier—Maskinongé, the riding I represent, there is one category of workers this bill does not cover. The government could give 100 weeks of benefits and these workers would not be affected. I am talking about seasonal workers, especially those who work in tourism in my riding. I also want to talk about the many forestry workers in my riding who have unfortunately lost their jobs. They will not be eligible for benefits under Bill C-50. Unemployed forestry workers will not have access to the additional measures being introduced in this bill, unlike auto workers in Ontario.

• (1350)

The president of the Quebec Forest Industry Council points out that nearly all forestry workers are unemployed at least 10 weeks a year. Did the government think about these workers when it drafted Bill C-50? No, even though the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities came up with a number of proposals and recommendations. The Conservatives turned a deaf ear.

Instead of proposing comprehensive, consistent reform, Bill C-50 proposes piecemeal reform of employment insurance that will create a new category of benefit recipients. The criteria in the Con-

servatives' bill mean that there are good and bad recipients. There are good and bad unemployed. People who have been unlucky enough to lose their jobs or to hold seasonal jobs for many years will not be any more eligible for EI and will not benefit from any other measure in this bill. The government is making the poor poorer.

We in the Bloc Québécois refuse to support these mean-spirited, demagogic measures that the Conservatives, with the NDP's support, are trying to impose.

Opportunistic political manoeuvring is not what we need. As we all very well know, a bill was unnecessary. These measures could have been introduced simply through special projects. Instead, we are seeing mass political manipulation. A thorough overhaul is needed so that this program can really meet the needs of all workers.

A few extra weeks of discriminatory benefits are not what we need. Instead, we need a real adjustment program for older workers, which is what we have been asking for for some years, as have workers in Quebec and across Canada—a program that the Liberals cancelled and the Conservatives refuse to bring back, in spite of an electoral promise to that effect.

What we need is a system that can fulfill its main mission, that is, to provide benefits to everyone in a fair manner, long enough to allow people to live with dignity.

The Bloc Québécois understood this, which is why we proposed a series of measures to restore the employment insurance system's main mission. In addition to improved access to the system, the Bloc Québécois is also calling for the elimination of the waiting period.

With that in mind, I presented to the House a petition signed by nearly 4,000 people from my riding, people who are losing their jobs and are asking this House to assist them in their time of need.

I would like to close by saying that if a government is not capable of adequately supporting its citizens when they find themselves out of work, those people inevitably wind up living in poverty.

I would like the members of the Liberal Party to pay close attention to what I am about to say. Speaking of poverty, I would point out that 19% of Canadians are currently living in poverty, while in Sweden for instance, only 11.4% are in the same situation. In France, that number is 14.1%, in Belgium 6.2%, in the United Kingdom 17% and in the United States 23.9%, dead last.

A policy like Bill C-50 will only make all our citizens poorer. We do not support this policy, and we will be voting against this bill.

*Statements by Members*

● (1355)

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent remarks.

I have been listening to this debate since this morning and it is quite something to hear the NDP trying to justify its support for the Conservatives. NDP members have just said that they are proud that the citizens of their riding have gone to work in Conservative ridings. That is just great.

The goal of the members of this House, especially Bloc members, is first to defend the interests of their citizens—in our case, Quebecers. We rise every day so that our citizens can work where they live, in their region.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

**Mr. Guy André:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the member for his excellent question.

We are asking the House to abolish the two-week waiting period. I believe that the NDP was willing to support this measure because, in principle, it represents poor workers and those who have lost their jobs.

Now we see that they support the Conservatives who have introduced a bill that does not at all help the unemployed. There is no mention in this bill of the eligibility threshold for employment insurance, or the 360 hours that the NDP also wanted and was recommended by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The Bloc Québécois stands up for Quebec, for Quebec's workers, for forestry workers, for seasonal workers and for all Quebec's workers.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[*Translation*]**RIDING OF TOBIQUE—MACTAQUAC**

**Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the summer presents a good opportunity to visit with our constituents and to participate in many events in our ridings.

[*English*]

This summer I had the opportunity to attend the Governor General's Caring Canadian Awards and Duke of Edinburgh Gold Awards ceremony in Moncton.

Paul Hanson of Northampton in Tobique—Mactaquac was honoured as a Caring Canadian for his tremendous service to his community, his church and to veterans, for which he also received the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation Award this year.

[*Translation*]

In addition, Roméo LaFrance was honoured for his long-term service to people with intellectual disabilities in the Grand Falls region.

[*English*]

Allison MacEacheron of McLeod Hill received her Gold Award based on activities that included her community service as a volunteer at the local seniors home.

These awards recognize the unselfish dedication of the people who give of their time to make our communities better places in which to live. What is also heartening is that young people gain a sense of community through the Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

I congratulate all the recipients and extend my heartfelt thanks to them for making a difference in the lives of others.

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**BEECHVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH**

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Beechville Baptist Church celebrated its 165th anniversary.

Since 1844 the church has been a vibrant presence in the community and in the lives of the many families it serves.

The anniversary services this weekend were a tremendous success and the feeling in the church yesterday was inspiring and uplifting. It was an honour and a privilege to take part in that celebration.

Pastor Clarence Armstrong Jr., anniversary committee chair Chris Downey, and dozens of other tireless volunteers deserve sincere thanks for organizing both services and for enriching their community through their work for the Beechville Baptist Church year after year.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]**NELLY ARCAN**

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, Nelly Arcan, a young author, who made her mark with her provocative writing, tragically passed away.

Ever since the publication of her first novel, *Whore*, she defied conventions by adopting a feminist style, critical of the tendency of women to be slaves to beauty, advertising, image and society. Her writing is sometimes angry, sometimes disenchanted, and often directly tackled the topic of suicide.

Ironically, she was the epitome of what she stood against. She was a childlike woman obsessed with her image, a prisoner of what she called the burka of the flesh. Her writings sometimes seemed like a cry for help, an attempt to break free.

She leaves behind her works, which include, in addition to *Whore*, *Folle*, *L'enfant dans le miroir*, *À ciel ouvert* and the yet to be published *Paradis clef à main*.

I offer our sincerest condolences to the family, friends and loved ones of Nelly Arcan.

*Statements by Members*

[English]

**COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on October 19 in Montreal, Svend Robinson, the former MP for Burnaby—Douglas, will be honoured by the Conseil québécois des gais et lesbiennes with its Grand Prix. This honour recognizes Svend's outstanding and courageous leadership over many decades in support of the full equality of members of the GLBTTQ community.

On September 18 at a fundraiser for the Qmunity Centre, Vancouver's GLBTTQ community centre, the Canadian Queer Hall of Fame was launched. Founded by Paul Therien, the Queer Hall of Fame's first five inductees were the Right Hon. Pierre Trudeau, marking the 40th anniversary of the decriminalization of homosexuality, Olympic gold medallist Mark Tewkesbury, freedom of speech activist Janine Fuller, Dogwood Monarchist Society founder Ted Northe, and Vancouver fundraiser and entertainer extraordinaire, Robert Kaiser, better known as Joan-E.

Congratulations to all these great community leaders.

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**POLICE AND PEACE OFFICERS' NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY**

**Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the federal government proclaims the last Sunday of each September as Police and Peace Officers' National Memorial Day.

Yesterday here on Parliament Hill, thousands of police and peace officers gathered to honour their colleagues who had died in the line of duty and made the ultimate sacrifice in keeping our communities safe and secure.

This was the 10th year I have had the privilege of participating in this very moving and emotional memorial.

I commend the officers who attended yesterday. Police and peace services throughout all of Canada came together to honour their fallen, including York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge, Deputy Chief Bruce Herridge, and Deputy Chief Eric Jolliffe from my own area.

Police and Peace Officers' National Memorial Day is a lasting tribute to the sacrifice of those brave men and women. They are our heroes. We shall not forget them.

\* \* \*

• (1405)

[Translation]

**MICHÈLE ASSELIN**

**Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Fédération des femmes du Québec has a new president, Alexa Conradi, but we would be remiss if we failed to mention the contribution of the outgoing president, Michèle Asselin.

Ms. Asselin has been at the helm of the Fédération des femmes du Québec for six years. During her tenure, she ensured that the voices of Quebec women were heard when it came to issues that mattered to them, such as poverty and violence against women.

Ms. Asselin worked very hard to reach out to first nations women, a commendable goal that should be of particular interest to this House.

She was also very sensitive to our society's ever-increasing cultural pluralism, and she worked to bring women from all of the cultures that make up our society together.

Today my colleagues and I would like to thank Ms. Asselin for her hard work.

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[English]

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if there ever was living proof that the long gun registry must expire, we have it now. Once again, the registry has placed firearms owners in harm's way. The breach of national security perpetrated by the RCMP-affiliated Canadian Firearms Centre abuses a private database that should never have existed in the first place.

The CFC gave the public polling firm EKOS Research this top secret list of firearms owners on a silver platter for a so-called customer satisfaction survey. The names and addresses of Canadian hunters, sport shooters and farmers have been leaked, and they could be targeted by criminals as a result.

Fortunately, private member's Bill C-391 to scrap the long gun registry received second reading in the House today. Surely in light of this unforgivable security breach there can be no one left who can honestly justify retaining the registry for even one more day.

Also, according to the RCMP's own files, there have been hundreds of confirmed breaches of the firearms registry. The registry has become a shopping list for criminals. Does that explain why gun owners have been the target of robberies after they were forced to register? The gun registry is not gun control, it is the opposite.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**INGRID BETANCOURT**

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last week, during a visit to Quebec, Franco-Colombian Ingrid Betancourt was honoured by Reporters Without Borders and the Université de Montréal. She also received the medal of honour from the National Assembly of Quebec for her commitment to democracy, human rights and freedom of expression.

Elected as a member of Colombia's Parliament in 1994 and its Senate in 1998, this grande dame of politics was running in Colombia's presidential election when she was kidnapped by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia on February 23, 2002. She was released by her captors on July 2, 2008. Ms. Betancourt is an example of perseverance and resistance.

*Statements by Members*

Today, she is careful to point out that a number of her companions are still being held captive in Colombia and that we can help them by continuing the dialogue and denouncing their situation, the same way Quebeckers did for her.

The Bloc Québécois commends this symbol of female courage who continues to stand up for human rights and freedoms.

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[English]

**YOM KIPPUR**

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, known as the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur is the second of the high holidays and conclusion of a 10-day period specifically set aside to focus on introspection and repentance. It is a time of rest, reflection and renewal for Jewish people as they observe the day by fasting, praying, attending synagogue and refraining from work.

Prime Minister Harper said that pluralism is the principle that binds our diverse peoples together. For Canadians, this important holiday provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on the tremendous contributions that members of the Jewish community have made to Canada. It also affords an opportunity to renew our commitment to expose and oppose anti-Semitism in all its forms, including the new and virulent anti-Semitism surfacing around the world.

Yom Kippur is about getting relationships right, man-to-man and man-to-God. May this season be a blessed experience for all who take note.

**The Speaker:** I would remind the hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni that using an hon. member's name is not in order, and I know that with his experience he would not want to repeat that mistake in a subsequent statement.

The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

\* \* \*

• (1410)

**IRAN**

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, how low Canadian foreign policy has dropped. In a week when world leaders turned their attention to the Iranian threat to world peace, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs opted for a local show as opposed to making a substantive contribution to world stability. Yet every day Iran is getting closer to backing up its vicious vitriol with nuclear weaponry. Responsible western nations need to stop Iran's steady march toward its goal and consequent regional destabilization.

Iran's military politics are a global threat, a threat that extends beyond the Middle East and should be treated as such. We need to act now. We need to back up talk with action.

My colleague from Mount Royal has introduced Bill C-412, An Act to combat incitement to genocide, domestic repression and nuclear armament in Iran, a bill which I proudly seconded.

If the government is serious about the Iranian threat, it should adopt the bill, make it law and prove that it can walk the talk.

[Translation]

**LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA**

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have been trying to bring down the government for no good reason, and now the Liberals' political lieutenant is realizing that it is better to retreat from the spotlight and adopt a lower profile.

But we know that is not his style, and it shows that the new Liberal leader is like his predecessor: he lacks leadership and cannot be trusted.

This Liberal leader is like a weather vane spinning around in the wind. He has no vision and is even losing the confidence of his veteran members. It is quite funny to see the Bloc Québécois leader wanting to support a non-confidence motion. Is the Bloc Québécois leader still prepared to support a Liberal motion that no longer has any roots in Quebec?

This Liberal leader, who was foolishly starting to recruit candidates for an election that Canadians do not even want, has nothing better to propose to Canada to address the crisis.

We will not let Canadians down. We will not let the Liberals hold up the economic recovery. We will stay on course. Our economic action plan is producing results, and the Conservative government is working hard for Canadians.

\* \* \*

[English]

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on September 25, at the close of the G20, the Prime Minister told reporters that Canada has no history of colonialism. That came as a surprise to many Canadians, especially aboriginal peoples.

Maybe the Prime Minister has a different definition of colonialism. My dictionary says that it is control by one power over a dependent area or a people, or a policy advocating or based on such control.

The Indian Act was a colonial piece of legislation passed by Canada. It legislated that the Government of Canada would have power over Indians living on reserve. The numbered treaties were signed with Canada, not Britain or France, and those numbered treaties took control of the resources and land that aboriginal peoples had lived on for millennia. The land involved is from western Ontario to the Rockies.

In court cases today, the government uses a remnant of colonial expansion, the right of discovery, as a defence to explain why it will not honour agreements. Bands in B.C. have to prove that indigenous people are living in their communities using archeological evidence going back thousands of years because the government still argues *terra nullius*, or land empty of people, as a reason not to sign fair treaties with first nations.

*Oral Questions*

Canada does have a history of colonialism. Reconciliation—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

\* \* \*

**TIM HORTONS**

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week a Canadian institution came home. After more than a decade of being based in the United States, Tim Hortons has decided to reorganize its Canadian company.

Yet it is not simply its bond with Canadians that has prompted the return. It is our government's economic policies, specifically our commitment to lower taxes, that has brought Tim Hortons home. The company itself stated that it was returning to "take advantage of lower Canadian tax rates".

This government recognizes the link between low taxes and economic growth. Increasing Canada's competitiveness is crucial to creating jobs, and this decision makes the point clear. Shockingly, Liberals were dismissive of this government's support of the return of this Canadian icon. It is not surprising. After all, given the chance, Liberals would raise taxes which would stop growth and investment in its tracks.

Regardless of the Liberal dismissal, we all join Canadians in raising our mugs and saying, "Welcome home, Tim Hortons".

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**PIERRE FALARDEAU**

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the filmmaker and pamphleteer Pierre Falardeau, a man committed to the sovereignist struggle from the beginning of his involvement in the early 1960s, lost the ultimate battle, the battle against cancer, last Friday night.

All of his films, including *15 février 1839*, *Octobre*, *Party* and the renowned *Elvis Gratton*, indeed, his entire work is marked not only by his full and total commitment to this ideal of sovereignty, but also by the fear of seeing his fellow Quebecers completely Americanized.

An uncompromising man, a crusader for freedom, known for speaking his mind and for his strong opinions, he refused to be described as an intellectual, although Camus, La Boétie and Memmi, to name a few, were sources of inspiration for him.

One may not agree with all the opinions of this free-thinking man or how he chose to express them, but we must commend his efforts to remind Quebecers that they are a nation.

Pierre Falardeau's work, which is now part of history, will always be there to remind us.

● (1415)

[*English*]

**YOM KIPPUR**

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today the Jewish community in Canada and around the world is celebrating the most important holiday of the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur.

It is a day set aside for atonement, a day when those of Jewish descent refrain from work, fast and attend synagogue. They come together to remember the year that has passed and to reflect on the year that is to come.

The traditions of Yom Kippur have been celebrated by Jewish Canadians for generations. It is an occasion that has enriched Canada's diversity and given pause to all Canadians to reflect upon the remarkable contributions that the Jewish community has made and continues to make to the Canadian mosaic, to its social, cultural and economic fabric.

On behalf of all Liberals, I extend my warmest wishes to all Jewish Canadians celebrating Yom Kippur today. May good health and happiness be theirs in the year ahead and always.

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**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government's number one priority is the economy.

Now, more than ever, as a government and as a country we must stay focused and let Canada's economic action plan work.

Indeed today we are providing our third report to all Canadians on the implementation of our plan. From Sault Ste. Marie to Victoria to Pangnirtung, our plan is working.

Working with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners, we have reached a level of 90% for 2009-10 funding committed to and being implemented in specific projects.

Only six months into our two-year fiscal plan over 7,500 infrastructure and housing projects are moving forward. Our plan is now projected to create and maintain 220,000 jobs by the end of 2010, even more than the number projected in January. That does not include over 164,000 Canadians benefiting from our expanded work-sharing program.

Now, when the economy is starting a tentative recovery, is not the time for an opportunistic election. Now is the time to stay on course.

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**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[*Translation*]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the report released today, the government claims that 90% of its infrastructure projects are under way, but if we were to ask—

*Oral Questions*

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

**The Speaker:** Order please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff:** Mr. Speaker, in the report released today, the government claims that 90% of its infrastructure projects are under way, but if we were to ask premiers and mayors across Canada, they would say that this is not true.

We now know that only 12% of the projects are under way. So why the chicanery?

How are Canadians supposed to believe what today's report says? *[English]*

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister was very proud to announce on behalf of the Canadian government and to report to all taxpayers is that 90% of the initiatives contained in the economic action plan are indeed under way.

When it comes to measures to allow more credit for Canadians, when it comes to tax cuts for Canadians, when it comes to infrastructure projects, this government is working hard to get the job done. Our number one job is to focus on the economy and to focus on jobs. The Liberals' number one job seems to be to focus on an unnecessary election. That is disgraceful.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, okay, let us talk about jobs.

In January, the government made one of its empty promises about creating 190,000 jobs. Instead, we lost 450,000.

Today, in this report it is promising again, incredibly, to create another 250,000. What is the OECD and the Royal Bank telling us? They are saying we are going to lose 250,000 next year. This dog will not hunt.

When will Canadians be able to trust a government that does not tell the truth?

• (1420)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will tell the House what is happening right across the country.

Infrastructure projects are being tendered; contracts are being issued; shovels are in the ground; engineers and architects are at work. We are working hard with the provinces, with the territories, and with the municipalities in every corner of this country to get the job done.

What Canadians expect is for all of us on this side of the House and that side of the House to work hard, to focus on the economy, to create jobs, and not plunge Canada into an unnecessary and self-interested election, which is what the leader of the Liberal Party would have us do. That is not in the best interests of Canadians. That is only in the best interests of the Liberal Party.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us talk about infrastructure.

According to the Conservative candidate in Markham, infrastructure funds are being spent to help Conservative ridings instead

of helping families in need. Canadians actually want a government that helps all Canadians in time of need.

How can Canadians trust a government that is running an infrastructure program that is basically a rewards program for Conservative candidates?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report that in the great riding of Markham—Unionville, the city of Markham applied for 14 infrastructure stimulus grants and does anyone know how many were approved? All 14 were approved.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the report on the government's economic recovery plan is full of broken promises. It is a smokescreen. Municipalities are still waiting for these projects to get off the ground. People are losing their jobs and they do not have access to employment insurance.

It is clear that the Prime Minister has lost control of the deficit. And now he is telling us that we are on the right track; that is what he is telling us.

If this is what it means to be on the right track, what does he think it means to be on the wrong one?

*[English]*

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government brought forward a comprehensive economic action plan to ensure that we created jobs, to ensure that we put some hope and some opportunity back into it.

Liberals ask, "Where is that plan?" I should mention that they voted for it for 10 months in a row.

We are hard at work. We are focused on the economy. We are working together with our political opponents, whether they are Liberals, whether they are Conservatives, and maybe we could see a little bit of unity come from the Liberal caucus, particularly in the province of Quebec.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, they work for their own interests, not for Canadians.

*[Translation]*

I will tell you what is in this report: wishful thinking, made-up numbers, twisted reality and even a lack of respect for Canadians as a whole.

The Prime Minister is full of himself, but Canadians are still losing their jobs. How can he be so incredibly insensitive? The economy is fragile and people want their government to lead, not throw up smokescreens to hide the truth. So here is my question.

Why is the Prime Minister so scared of the truth?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, maybe we have just seen the Liberal Party's new Quebec lieutenant. For a while there, we thought it was going to be the member for Toronto Centre because all of the Liberal Party's decisions about Quebec are made in Toronto.



### FORESTRY INDUSTRY

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's stimulus package is inadequate and does not meet Quebec's needs. In fact, the Prime Minister himself has admitted that the forestry industry is still experiencing serious difficulties even though there are signs of economic recovery. However, the Prime Minister did nothing to help this industry, which is so important to Quebec.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his stimulus package does nothing to help the forestry industry while giving a major boost to the auto industry?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the economic action plan is in effect. Over 90% of the funds have been committed. Of the 5,500 projects announced, the shovels are in the ground for 4,000 that have been tendered. On this side of the House, we are taking action. Economic recovery is on the horizon although it is still fragile. We must continue to focus on the economy. Canadians and Quebecers can count on this government to do so.

• (1425)

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that there are not many shovels opening logging roads in Quebec.

Even the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has admitted that he has done nothing to help the forestry industry. This federal member even said, and I quote, "Why is it up to me to table solutions?" It must be done.

Will the Prime Minister admit that it is not by setting up phoney committees, as the minister just announced last week, that he will help the forestry industry to get back on track?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the pleasure, together with my colleague, Quebec's minister of economic development, to set up a team to move matters forward, especially the restructuring of the forestry industry. I am going to finish what I started to say last week. I will say it in its entirety. The federal government is not acting alone. The Government of Quebec, the forestry industry, corporate presidents, unions, banks and all partners are involved because we believe that the forestry industry has a future and will be rebuilt with the help of all partners.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, minister Gignac in Quebec has condemned the federal government's passivity in this crisis. Minister Normandeau is calling on the federal government to stop using the softwood lumber agreement as an excuse not to act.

By saying that it is not up to the federal government to come up with solutions to the forestry crisis, is the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec not confirming that his government is taking a passive approach to this crisis?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is a very tough time for the people working in the forestry sector, whether they work in softwood lumber or pulp and

### Oral Questions

paper. I can confirm that the only people who can help the forestry industry, not just by talking, but by taking action, are the members of our government. A few months ago, after a Canada-Quebec committee was set up, we announced \$230 million for the forestry industry in Quebec. This is far more than the Bloc has done in 18 years and more than it will ever do. We are going to keep on supporting the forestry industry and forestry workers.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) is claiming that his government's hands are tied by the softwood lumber agreement, Quebec's natural resources minister is saying that the federal government can come up with creative ways to help the forestry industry while honouring its trade commitments.

What is the government waiting for to help forestry workers in Quebec to the same extent as auto workers in Ontario?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleague that in 2008, Export Development Canada supported the forestry industry in Quebec with nearly \$9 billion in various financial products. As of August 31, 2009, Export Development Canada has provided the forestry industry in Quebec with more than \$7 billion in support, for a total of \$16 billion in two years. He should do the math and then we will talk.

Moreover, last week, when the task team was announced, the Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade of Quebec confirmed that we had to comply with the softwood lumber agreement to avoid a repeat of what happened in Gaspé—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

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[English]

### THE ECONOMY

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is once again trying to paint a rosy picture of the economy, but the real economy and the impact on families is still devastating.

This past week, back in our ridings across the country, New Democrat members of Parliament heard stories that are truly saddening. Now, we are pleased that the government has finally brought forward \$1 billion of extra help for the unemployed, but we have to look for the next step here.

There still are 800,000 people out of work who cannot get help from the EI system. What is the government proposing to do about that, the real economic crisis?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the leader of the NDP that far too many Canadians are experiencing some real challenging times.

*Oral Questions*

That is why this government brought forward the economic action plan. That is why we are working to cut taxes, to put more money in the economy, and to allow more credit to be available to Canadians to help them make purchases. That is why we have made some pretty substantial changes to the employment insurance system, so that there will be more hope and opportunity for people in the future.

What we cannot do is simply see some signs of a fragile recovery and move on. We have to stay focused on the economy, stay focused on job creation, and stay focused on passing much needed reforms to the employment insurance program in this House of Commons.

• (1430)

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government has an opportunity to change direction and to initiate an economic recovery that is truly green. It is just not happening.

The UN report that just came out is showing that Canada is spending much less on the environmentally sustainable jobs, jobs of the future, compared to other G20 countries. Per capita, Canada is investing four times less than the United States, five times less than Australia, and sixteen times less than South Korea. We are not grabbing hold of the opportunities.

Will the government accelerate the pace of green investments as called for by the United Nations?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, many of the infrastructure projects that we have supported and are under construction right across the country are designed and focused to improve our environment.

Let me give two specific examples. Right around the country we are doing a lot of waste water treatment plants. That leads to cleaner water, which is a key priority for Canadians. The Prime Minister made important announcements in Yukon and northwestern British Columbia to get more clean electricity onto the grid. That will get rid of dirty diesel power. It will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and it will make our air cleaner.

That is something that is a priority for this government and that is something we will continue to do in every corner of the country.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, with the Copenhagen summit approaching, this government needs to find a way out of the corner it has backed itself into.

This would be good for the environment, for our future and for our economy.

The UN report shows that the investments that are made now can and must help us combat climate change.

When will we see serious investments in energy efficiency, building renovations, renewable energy and public transportation? When will we see some concrete action from this government?

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have projects that have been approved and are under way right now to get dirty diesel powered generation off the generation mix of Canadians, and to get more clean hydroelectricity to Canadian homes.

We have provided significant support in Prince Edward Island for more wind power, thanks to the good work of the Minister of Fisheries. We are undertaking significant initiatives in every corner of the province to make Canada greener and to assist in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, something that we believe is a key priority not just for Canada but indeed the entire world.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last Monday, someone removed dozens of photos of the Prime Minister from the website for the economic action plan. Why?

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are very focused on infrastructure projects right across the country. We are working hard with our provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

We would not have had the amount of success on infrastructure spending or the type of co-operation we have with the provinces if it were not for the leadership of the Prime Minister, who has put politics aside and is getting the job done.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was actually prepared to respond to at least an attempt at an answer, but that was not even an attempt at one.

I will volunteer that hastily making drastic changes to the website in the middle of the night sure looks like a guilty kid trying to cover his tracks.

Why will the government not admit that it got its hands caught in a taxpayer-paid cookie jar?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while the Liberal Party is trolling the Internet looking for pictures of the Prime Minister, it is this Conservative government that is working hard to create jobs to inspire more hope, to inspire more opportunities for the Canadian economy. That is our priority, not logging on to the worldwide web in the middle of the night like the member opposite.

• (1435)

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today's economic report, in spite of all the blustering across the way, is nothing more than smoke and mirrors.

In June the Conservatives could not justify their phoney claim that 80% of stimulus projects were under way. Now their 90% claim is 10% more ridiculous.

*Oral Questions*

Despite ballooning spending out of control, the Conservatives have failed to deliver on 88% of their infrastructure commitments and are presiding over the biggest job losses in history. That is nothing to be proud of because 486,000 full-time jobs are gone.

Why did the Conservatives not get the job done? Why do they not just step back and let us do the job?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has demonstrated the real goal of the Liberal Party. The Liberals want to move Canada into an opportunistic early election because it suits their political interests, not to fight for the interests of Canadians.

That is why this government is working hard on infrastructure projects. One of the biggest projects under way in the country, where money is being spent, is right in her riding. That is the expansion of the Spadina subway, which this government has committed more than \$666 million to deliver.

Many will ask why the previous Liberal government would not make that type of investment in Toronto. I cannot explain it, but the Prime Minister is getting the job done.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, he is announcing the good commitments that the Liberal Party has already done.

There is not one shred of evidence in this report or any other that backs up the government's claims. The construction season is already gone and only 12% of the promised projects are moving ahead. Spin, press releases, lots of hot air and glitzy Conservative ads that are paid for by taxpayers do not create long-term jobs. In the next 12 months 250,000 more jobs are going to disappear.

If the Conservative government cannot bother to really help Canadians, will it at least start telling them the truth?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals had 13 long years to make infrastructure investments in Toronto. If they had just got that fifth term, they would have got the job done.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, although a recovery seems to be on the way, analysts and unions are predicting that unemployment will continue. Yet the employment insurance bill introduced by the government ignores that reality, particularly for thousands of workers in the forestry industry who have been laid off intermittently over the past few years.

Can the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development tell us if those forestry workers will be eligible under her bill?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for one thing, we know that our economic action plan is working. So far, 7,500 projects have been accepted and 4,000 projects have begun in various regions of the country.

That said, another way of helping people during this recession is by helping those who are hardest hit, including the unemployed.

While we want to help 190,000 people who might lose their jobs for prolonged periods, the Bloc Québécois remains obstinate and is doing everything it can to delay the bill's implementation.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to give her a second chance to answer the question.

Does the minister realize that many so-called long-tenured workers will not have access under this bill? Does she realize that women will not have access under this bill, nor will young people and seasonal workers?

How can the minister be satisfied with a bill that, far from helping unemployed workers, on the contrary, actually excludes them?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would remind the House again that the longer the Bloc Québécois delays the implementation of this bill, the more people are being penalized. We want to help 190,000 workers and we are injecting \$1 billion—well, \$935 million—to help people who are losing their jobs. We want to help these long-tenured workers who have paid into employment insurance for years and years, so they can now have from 5 to 20 weeks longer.

Why are they delaying the application or implementation of this bill?

\* \* \*

**REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT**

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, as time passes, it becomes clearer that this government's recognition of the Quebec nation means nothing. The plan to increase the number of seats in this House is more proof of this. The reform proposes the addition of 34 new seats outside Quebec, which would reduce Quebec's political weight.

Does the government realize that increasing the number of seats and weakening Quebec's political power would take away all meaning from the recognition of the Quebec nation?

• (1440)

[English]

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to fair representation across the country. It would be really helpful if the opposition parties would help the government deal with this global economic recession.

This government is making Canada, including Quebec, better by sound economic management. Come and join us, make Parliament work and make Quebec stronger with all Canadians.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the most disappointing thing here is the quiet resignation of some Conservative ministers from Quebec who feel that this situation is unavoidable. These ministers are supposed to defend the interests of Quebec but they are not doing much. Just like the Liberal leader, who would act the same way, I might add.

If the government was sincere when it recognized the Quebec nation, why does it not respect the unanimous motion passed by Quebec's National Assembly, which calls for this proposal to be abandoned?

[English]

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will ensure that there is fair representation across the country. As far as the Quebec ministers go, those ministers and MPs from the government side have done more for Quebec in the three and a half years we have been in government than the 18 years the Bloc has been present in Parliament.

We all should say thanks to our Quebec members of government. They do more between them than the entire Bloc has done in its entire history.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**HEALTH**

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are many lessons to be learned from the government's lack of reaction to the first wave of H1N1, particularly how it affects our aboriginal communities.

Will the minister take federal responsibility and will she go to the communities affected and personally apologize to those who suffered the most?

Where is the plan to right the wrongs that were made last spring and summer?

[English]

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the pandemic plan for first nations communities was established back in 2006 along with the provinces and territories. I personally met with Grand Chief Ron Evans again this week. I have met with him about five times since the whole issue started with Manitoba. I also met with Chief Harper over the weekend. We are working together to get to the bottom of the situation.

Once a report is available, I will sit down with them to go through what actually happened.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, serious concerns remain about the lack of federal leadership on H1N1. Provinces are taking different approaches on when to administer seasonal flu shots and whether protective masks are necessary or not. These and consistent messages from the provinces and territories send the wrong signal to Canadians.

We need science-based advice and need to agree on the science in order for Canadians to be prepared. When will the Conservatives

finally show leadership and send the provinces and territories a message they can all understand?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the provinces and territories have been working very hard since April to deal with the situation before us. They understand fully and clearly what is before them in terms of the rollout of the vaccine.

Provinces and territories continue to work together to determine the best way to do the rollout come the first week of October. I will continue to work with the provinces and territories. In fact, this morning I was on calls with them again, planning for the rollout of the vaccine in the fall.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in New York last week President Obama, Prime Ministers Brown and Rudd, President Sarkozy and Hu Jintao all stood up to represent their countries on the world stage in preparation for Copenhagen.

When the chips were down, Canada's isolationist Prime Minister turned tail, jumped back on his private jet for a \$60,000 getaway flight to Toronto, leaving in his wake bewildered world partners struggling to deal with the climate change crisis. That is an expensive cup of coffee.

Why did the Prime Minister shirk his responsibilities?

• (1445)

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, contrary to what my hon. colleague says, the Prime Minister did not shirk his responsibilities. The Prime Minister assumed his responsibilities, and we worked as a team.

In talking about a team, one thing I can say, coming from Quebec, is that there is no team there. There are two teams over there. That is why today they do not have a member for Bourassa.

[Translation]

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after almost four years of sabotaging the efforts in Bonn, Bali and Poznan to fight climate change, where do we stand?

There is no national plan, no regulation, and no exchange system.

No one believes their bogus intensity targets can be reached.

Why do these Canadian republicans prefer to attack China and India rather than fostering an international agreement?

Are they simply trying to ruin the Copenhagen summit?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will certainly continue to work with the United Nations process. Just over the course of the last week I participated in the UN process, as did the Prime Minister, and in addition to that in the major economy forum struck by the President of the United States and the Greenland dialogue struck by the chairman of the Copenhagen conference.

*Oral Questions*

We will continue to work with our national program. We will continue as well to work with our international allies in terms of developing something at Copenhagen that is going to find an international treaty that works, something the Liberals never did.

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**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on September 18, before taking the stage to address the United Nations with his racist hate-filled rant against the world, his continued blatant disregard for human rights and his complete dishonesty about his true nuclear intentions, Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad once again denied the Holocaust, describing it as a myth.

What is the government's position on the Iranian regime's continued bigotry towards the Jewish people and the denial of the Holocaust?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ahmadinejad's repeated denial of the Holocaust as well as his anti-Israeli comments run counter to the values not only of the United Nations but also of the values that we all share here.

I might point out that the crackdown on legitimate democratic protests and unjustified arrests over the course of the last several months are things that are completely counterproductive and are completely abhorrent to Canadian values of freedom and democracy. In protest, my colleague the Minister of State for the Americas and I walked out of the speech to stand up for Canadians.

\* \* \*

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in its recent report on the Conservative-Liberal HST sales tax increases targeting British Columbia and Ontario residents, the TD Bank estimates that consumers will be squeezed for \$2.5 billion to \$3 billion more than they already pay.

While many families are struggling to pay rent and put food on the table, the best the Lib-Cons can come up with is increased taxes on everything from school supplies to home heating. How can taking money out of people's pockets in the middle of an economic crisis possibly help the economy?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has been focused on reducing taxes. Our government has been focused on allowing more Canadians to keep more of their hard-earned revenue in their own pockets.

That is why it was this government that brought forward reductions in the goods and services tax. That is why it was this government that oversaw the update of tax freedom day. Tax freedom day now comes a few weeks early and that is thanks to the leadership of this government, thanks to the leadership of the finance minister and thanks to the leadership of the Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives are busy harmonizing tax increases in Ontario and

British Columbia, Quebec is still waiting to be compensated for harmonizing theirs in the 1990s. I am talking about \$2.6 billion.

Instead of his usual bluster, could the Minister of Finance answer the question for once in his life? When will Quebec be compensated?

• (1450)

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is clear. We are negotiating with Quebec, negotiating in good faith. The Premier of Quebec said that some things needed to be tweaked and the Minister of Finance agreed. That is what is happening now. We want this to work. We have an open federalism and we want it to work with Quebec. We will continue to work toward that. It is that simple.

\* \* \*

**NUCLEAR WASTE**

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion to forbid the burial on Quebec territory of nuclear waste and fuel from outside Quebec. Despite the motion, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization is still considering Quebec as a possible dumping site.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources heed the motion passed in the National Assembly and take Quebec off the list?

[*English*]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is talking about the Nuclear Waste Management Organization which is responsible for implementing a safe, secure plan for managing nuclear fuel over the long term. This organization is having a very broad based consultation with Canadian communities all across Canada informing them of this process and indeed receiving their feedback.

Like every other province, Quebec is included in this consultation and I urge people to take part in it.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources, who represents an Ontario riding, needs to understand that Quebec has no intention of becoming her province's nuclear trash can. The Quebec nation is prepared to take responsibility for its own energy choices.

Why does she want to send Ontario's nuclear waste to Quebec?

[*English*]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, this is very much a broad based public consultation. Only those communities that are willing to have the nuclear waste in their communities will be the ones that will be considered. It is very fulsome and very inclusive. If they do not want to participate, we will have the people of Quebec tells us that, not the Bloc.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**YOUTH**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, under these Conservatives, our young people are once again being ignored. Even though young people make up more than 37% of the population, only 0.04% of the economic action plan funds are being invested in youth programs. Moreover, you can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times our youth are mentioned in today's economic report.

If the Conservatives are not concerned about our young people, how can they claim to be concerned about the future of our country?

[English]

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is making very important investments in young Canadians across the country. In my department alone, we are investing well over \$100 million in youth programs across the country that will see young Canadians involved in this country.

I can tell the House, as a young member of Parliament and as a young minister, that all Canadians, young and old, benefit when this economy turns around and starts moving in the right direction with lower taxes and better opportunities. That will only happen with a Conservative government.

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite wants to talk about programs, let us talk about what little the Conservatives did when we did an analysis of all youth skills linked program announcements from January to August and found that 75% of the announcements landed in Conservative held ridings.

How can we trust a government that actively works to divide along partisan lines rather than allowing all young Canadians to contribute to building this great country?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is this government that put unprecedented infrastructure spending in every corner of this country, regardless of how a province or a riding votes.

This government is committed to the equal distribution of infrastructure spending and any proper and fair examination would show that. We are making substantial investments, such as the one the Prime Minister made last week in northwestern British Columbia of \$137 million to support clean electricity, or the investments we are making right here in the city of Ottawa at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University so young people can have better access to a good education which will help them get the jobs they need to succeed in the future.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last spring, the NDP asked that self-employed workers be covered by the employment insurance system.

We tabled a motion in this House that was supported by the majority of members.

The government reiterated on a number of occasions that access to employment insurance by the self-employed was a priority. It was an election promise.

When will the government keep its promise? When will it put forward a plan to extend employment insurance benefits to self-employed workers?

• (1455)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is true that we made this promise during last year's election campaign and that is why, in the meantime, we have continued to help those hard hit by this economic crisis.

We made this promise and we are going to deliver the goods.

[English]

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, workers at the U.S. Steel plant in Nanticoke are currently in a labour dispute, but at the same plant there were layoffs before that dispute was ever started.

ROEs clearly show that these layoffs predate the dispute and yet EI claims are being held up for an average of six to eight weeks. This cannot be news to the Minister of Human Resources. The Nanticoke plant is in her own riding and it is her constituents who are losing their homes.

Will the minister direct her officials to process such claims immediately, and not just for workers in her own riding but for workers right across this country?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very aware of the hardships that are being faced by the steelworkers who are employed by U.S. Steel. I meet with them regularly and I truly am listening to their needs and what they need.

That being said, I do have an obligation to respect the law. The Employment Insurance Act is designed and is legislated to be neutral in the case of a labour dispute, whether that dispute be a lockout or a strike.

As members are aware, each EI case is evaluated on its own unique merits and I know that my department and my officials are working to resolve those cases and resolve them as quickly as possible.

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**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Liberal leader and the Liberal member for Parkdale—High Park had the audacity to launch a major, unwarranted attack on the hard work of the small towns and big cities across our country, including my hometown of Burlington. This was downright shameful.

*Oral Questions*

Could the transport minister please tell the House how our government has been working at record pace with municipal and provincial governments across Canada to create jobs and provide economic stimulus to help fight this recession?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in no unequivocal terms, I agree with the member for Burlington. I, too, was shocked and surprised that the leader of the Liberal Party would attack the provincial government in Ontario and attack the good city of Burlington and its mayor, Cam Jackson, for not moving quickly enough on infrastructure spending

Right across the province and in every corner of the country, infrastructure projects are under way. Tenders are being issued. Contracts are being signed. Steel, concrete and construction equipment are being ordered. We are seeing shovels in the ground. We are getting the job done.

I want to quote one Liberal MPP from Ontario who said, “I’m telling you, I get a lot more [money] from my Conservative seatmate than I ever got from the Liberal MP who—”.

\* \* \*

**GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of contracts, this year the job of resupplying fuel to Canada’s Arctic sovereignty patrol vessels went to, get this, Europe.

Conservatives think that it is fair that European firms can operate in our north without having to use Canadian ships, without having to pay Canadian duties, without having to use Canadian crews or to pay Canadian wages. The rules for Canadian companies, however, are the exact opposite. Effectively, a multi-million dollar subsidy continues to go to European firms to out-compete and replace Canadian companies on Arctic supply.

Will this be fixed by requiring that Canadian government contracts use Canadian registered vessels?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the contract was awarded according to the tender process and all the rules in place were followed.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government refuses to speed up the adoption of the Bloc’s bill to abolish parole after only one-sixth of the sentence has been served. This bill has received the support of the Liberals and the New Democrats. While the Conservatives are dragging their feet, Vincent Lacroix has pleaded guilty to multiple charges of fraud after embezzling millions of dollars from investors.

Does this government realize that its refusal to act quickly means that Vincent Lacroix could be released after serving one-sixth of his sentence?

● (1500)

[*English*]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are certainly pleased to take action. I wish we could get some action out of the Bloc Québécois. We could not even get the Bloc to support mandatory jail terms for people trafficking in children. This is absolutely despicable. I said this to the Bloc before. Bloc members should stand up for all victims because that is the right thing to do in this country.

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**AIRPORT SAFETY**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this weekend, CBC’s *the fifth estate* reported that the government was walking away from aviation safety and security. When I raised this issue before, the minister told the House that this “is an important public role for the government...and we take it very seriously”.

Previously, the Minister of State for Transport told the House that I should apologize for questioning the government’s commitment to safety.

The government should apologize. Its deregulation ideology puts profits before safety and security. Why is the minister putting Canadians’ safety at risk?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am supported by a great team of senior officials at the Department of Transport and a lot of folks who work on the ground. I have no hesitation in saying that we need to do a much better job at listening to their concerns as we move forward with changes.

What we are doing is increasing employee screening, which is important. A lot of good work has been done in the Senate by Senator Kenny and others. We are improving background checks for employees, launching an air cargo screening pilot program and launching efforts to further restrict access to the tarmac and those crucial areas that surround airports.

Allegations that our safety and security is being breached are being treated very seriously and we are working hard to improve the situation.

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**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party has been opposed to the long gun registry since the Liberals introduced it over a decade ago. This morning I debated my private member’s bill which would end the long gun registry and I look forward to opposition members voting their constituents’ wishes and not being whipped on this important issue.

*Routine Proceedings*

My question is for the Minister of Public Safety. It was with great shock that we learned that the Canadian Firearms Centre shared important information about law-abiding gun owners with a polling firm. This is a serious breach of privacy and security. Did the minister approve of this highly inappropriate polling?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her outstanding work on behalf of farmers and outdoors enthusiasts and their lawful rights.

I am very much surprised that this survey took place. I can tell the House that it was undertaken without my authority and without any consultation with me. The high cost of it at \$80,000 is staggeringly poor judgment at an economic time like this.

We have been hearing from firearms owners for years that they feared their privacy would be put at risk and their privacy rights would be deprived if we had a registry like this. What they saw with this survey was exactly those fears coming true. We do not approve of that. That is wrong.

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**FISHERIES**

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the season for the Fraser River sockeye is now long gone and so are the very fish that are the lifeblood of aboriginal communities to commercial fishermen and to sport outfitters and recreational enthusiasts alike for this resource. The government has said nothing about its disappearance. It has announced no plan to investigate, no plan to mitigate and no plan to compensate. It has done only one thing, however. It has cut the very science that is essential to understanding this dilemma and this loss of such a precious resource.

Is it true that the government's Fraser River sockeye plan for next year is to simply wait and see if these fish will come back?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for the information of the House, science has not been cut at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. As a matter of fact, it has been increased.

I have been to British Columbia a number of times and have taken the time to speak to many people. I have probably met with 30 groups or more on the salmon issue in British Columbia. I have listened to their opinions and suggestions. We will take all those opinions and suggestions into consideration as we consider the best options for action.

I hope to announce the direction soon, but I think it is better to make the right decision as opposed to a hasty decision.

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**POINTS OF ORDER**

COMMENTS BY MEMBER FOR WASCANA

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order regarding an incident that happened on Friday, September 18, shortly before adjournment.

On that date the member for Wascana rose to make a statement in the House, at which time he apologized for some unparliamentary remarks he made earlier this year.

You will recall that incident, Mr. Speaker. On June 10 of this year during question period, the member for Wascana, in a question directed to the Minister of Natural Resources said, referring to the minister:

—the minister cannot give the numbers and clearly she cannot tell the truth either.

Following question period on that day, I rose on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, and asked you to make a ruling on whether the remarks made by the member for Wascana were unparliamentary. The member for Wascana responded, defending his words, and said that he did not believe any such words were unparliamentary.

However, to the benefit of the member for Wascana, the Friday before we adjourned for a week, late in the day I must add, the member for Wascana stood to apologize. The point is that we need to clarify something, because the statement and the apology made by the member for Wascana were extremely evasive. Again, these are the words from *Hansard* that are attributed to the member for Wascana:

—I am happy to withdraw any specific word on that occasion—

This is referring to the June 10 question.

—that turns out to be unparliamentary.

The member did not clarify what remarks he made that might have been unparliamentary. In fact the member for Wascana, earlier in his apology, said he still did not believe he said anything that was untoward or unparliamentary.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to make your ruling, which you have not done yet, to give direction to the House as to whether the words by the member for Wascana were unparliamentary. Since the minister to whom those unparliamentary remarks were intended is in the House today, I wonder whether the member for Wascana would rise again and apologize so she can actually hear the apology.

● (1505)

**The Speaker:** Certainly I will examine the matter and come to the House as necessary.

ORAL QUESTIONS

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, just for the record, I would like to correct a statement that I made in response to the H1N1 question today. I meant to say early November and not early October.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

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



## INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region in Ilulissat, Greenland, May 27 and 28, 2009.

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## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114 I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees in the House.

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade. The report is entitled "Exploring Enhanced Commercial Relations with Brazil".

\* \* \*

● (1510)

[Translation]

## BROADCASTING ACT

**Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-444, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and the Telecommunications Act (broadcasting and telecommunications policies).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a bill that will allow the federal government to delegate the authority, to those provinces that so choose, to regulate broadcasting and communications in their territory.

By allowing the creation of a Quebec broadcasting and telecommunications council, this bill will give Quebec the opportunity to establish regulations adapted to the specific needs of the Quebec nation and reflecting its aspirations, which the CRTC cannot do currently.

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

\* \* \*

[English]

## BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is more likely a point of order rather than a motion but I thought it would be appropriate to read this into the record at this time.

Members would know this, but the general public may not.

Given that the third report to Canadians of Canada's economic action plan was tabled today, and pursuant to an Order made on June 19, 2009, I would like to advise that Thursday, October 1, 2009 shall be an allotted day.

## Routine Proceedings

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of this House, the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be deemed concurred in at the end of Government Orders today provided that changes in the membership of the Standing Committee on Finance only take effect on Thursday, October 1, 2009; that the Standing Committee on Finance meet as scheduled on Monday, September 28; Tuesday, September 29; and Wednesday, September 30, 2009; and that the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to meet on Thursday, October 1, 2009 for the purpose of electing a Chair pursuant to Standing Order 106.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. Minister of State and Chief Government Whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose 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)

\* \* \*

## PETITIONS

### ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling several petitions today.

The first is in support of animal welfare in Canada. It is well known that there is scientific consensus and public acknowledgement that animals feel pain and they can experience suffering. Therefore the petition, which bears the signatures of a number of my constituents, calls upon the House to adopt effective animal welfare legislation.

I have another petition which calls on the government to adopt the universal declaration of animal welfare and to advocate in support of a UDAW.

### REGULATION OF ANIMAL TRANSPORTATION

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition calls upon the government to strengthen animal transportation regulations. Currently Canada's allowable transport times are among the longest in the industrial world. Animals that become injured or diseased during lengthy transport threaten the quality, health and safety of Canadian food products. The petitioners are calling for an amendment to the regulations under the Health of Animals Act to reduce the allowable transport time of animals.

*Routine Proceedings*

## TAXATION

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the final petition bears quite a few signatures calling upon the government to exempt hospitals from remitting the GST collected on their property to the Canada Revenue Agency. These petitioners state that the GST collected should be remitted to the appropriate hospital foundation so the funds may be used to purchase medical equipment.

## PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a follow up to the series of petitions in respect of the pain that animals feel, and in view of the fact that babies in the womb for the entire nine months feel some considerable pain caused by the abortion procedures used in this country, the petitioners note that in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms everyone has a right to life, freedom from pain and the kinds of assault on fetuses in the womb. It has been 40-some years, since May 14, 1969, when Parliament changed the law to permit abortions, and since January 28, 1988, Canada has had no law to protect the lives of unborn children.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament, as the Supreme Court has urged as well, to pass legislation for the protection of human life from the time of conception and fertilization until the time of natural death.

• (1515)

## NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a petition today from citizens who want to see a review of NATO's policy when it comes to nuclear disarmament.

The petitioners ask that the Government of Canada press publicly for an urgent review of NATO's nuclear weapons policies to ensure that all NATO states fulfill their international obligations under the non-proliferation treaty to do two things: first, to negotiate and conclude an agreement for the elimination of nuclear weapons and, second, to eliminate reliance on nuclear weapons within NATO's strategic concept.

## FRASER RIVER SEDIMENT

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition that draws the government's attention to the dangerous buildup of silt in the Ladner channel of the Fraser River. The silt is creating a safety hazard for navigation, reducing fish habitat and rapidly diminishing the public's enjoyment of the river.

I applaud the Ladner sediment group's leadership in bringing together different stakeholders to manage this issue. The 459 people who signed this petition call on the federal government to provide the funding for the dredging of Ladner channel so that the silt can be removed at long last.

## JUSTICE

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition signed by roughly 600 people from Ontario and Quebec. They point out that

predators are encouraging and counselling suicide, without penalty, through the Internet.

They are calling on government to enable prosecution of those who encourage or counsel someone to commit suicide by updating our Criminal Code to reflect the new realities of 21st century broadband access, to fund education programs that will empower people who experience depression and mental illness and Canada's vulnerable youth to protect themselves from online predators, and to fund appropriate community support resources.

## LIGHTHOUSES

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of the people of Random—Burin—St. George's to present a petition regarding the move by the Canadian Coast Guard to start to de-man lighthouses throughout the country.

While I stand here on behalf of the people I represent, this is becoming an issue right across the country. In fact the Strathcona Regional District, in Campbell River, B.C., has already written to the Prime Minister expressing concern about this move and pointing out that in 1998 there was an announcement made by then Liberal minister of fisheries David Anderson that there will be no further de-staffing of lighthouses. That position was later affirmed by the Conservative government.

Here we are today looking at the possibility of seeing any number of lighthouses throughout this country de-staffed. There is one in particular that I want to bring to everyone's attention. Fishers make their living from the sea, but the lighthouse on Green Island is also there to help of captains who take the ferry from Saint-Pierre and Miquelon to Fortune and back.

We are talking about many schoolchildren who use that ferry. While captains can determine the weather by calling ahead to the port they are going to, the weather can become very volatile between the two ports. It is something that an automated lighthouse would not be able to predict.

We are calling on the coast guard to rescind any decision it would have to not only de-staff the lighthouse at Green Island but all lighthouses throughout the country.

[*Translation*]

## EUTHANASIA AND ASSISTED SUICIDE

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a 20-page petition signed by the residents of my riding who are opposed to Bill C-384, which proposes to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide.

The petition states that Bill C-384 contradicts fundamental Canadian values and threatens all Canadians by undermining the inherent and inviolable value of each human life and its dignity. It is a real and growing threat to the sick, the depressed, seniors and the handicapped.

The petition urges us to vote against Bill C-384. I would also like to mention that this call for positive measures was highlighted by the presence of 2,000 people who participated in the March for Life this past spring.

*Government Orders*

● (1520)

[English]

## PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS COMPENSATION FUND

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions pursuant to Standing Order 36 and certified by the clerk of petitions.

The first petition has to do with public safety officers. I have presented this petition a number of times in the House on behalf of residents of Canada, particularly in my own riding.

The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the fact that police officers and firefighters are required to place their lives at risk in the execution of their duties on a daily basis and that the employment benefits of police officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty are often insufficient to take care of the families of those who are killed in the line of duty. The public mourns the loss of those killed in the line of duty and wish in some tangible way to assist the surviving families in their time of need.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to establish a public safety officers compensation fund for the benefit of families of public safety officers who are killed in the line of duty.

## INCOME TRUSTS

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is yet another petition on the income trust broken promise.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he boasted about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud is a promise not kept. They also remind the Prime Minister that he promised not to tax income trusts, but he recklessly broke that promise and imposed a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

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

\* \* \*

## QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 177, and the supplementary response to Question No. 202 originally tabled on September 14, 2009 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 177—**Mr. Malcolm Allen:**

What is the total amount of government funding, since fiscal year 2004-2005 up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated within the constituency of Welland, listing each department or agency, initiative, and amount?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 202—**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:**

With respect to the purchase, either by Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) for departments, agencies and Crown corporations, or by the individual departments, agencies and Crown corporations, in the fiscal years 2007-2008, and 2008-2009, namely, (i) media and public relations training, (ii) public opinion research, (iii) promotional materials related to press conferences only, (iv) hairstylists and estheticians, (v) spas and tanning salons, (vi) sporting events, (vii) dry cleaning, (viii) taxis, (ix) retreats at resorts or conference centres: (a) by department, agency or Crown corporation, how many items or services in each category were purchased; (b) what was the total cost spent by either PWGSC or another department, agency or Crown corporation on each category; and (c) with respect to media training, what was the date and cost of each contract and who was the recipient of the training?

(Return tabled)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** Before question period, there were three minutes remaining for questions and comments on the speech by the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to first congratulate the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé on his speech and for making it clear that we will be voting against this bill.

This bill is full of measures to prevent even more people from getting employment insurance. I would like my colleague to describe once more the situations in his riding where people who lose their job would no longer be eligible for benefits under Bill C-50, despite what the government claims. I would like to hear what he has to say about that.

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

*Government Orders*

Of course, we will vote against Bill C-50 on employment insurance. Why? In my riding, for example, the tourism industry is very important. As we know, there are a number of seasonal jobs in this industry. People who have these jobs have no stability and are unemployed for a period each year. Therefore, they are not able to benefit from the employment insurance program and the benefits provided for in Bill C-50.

Jobs in the manufacturing sector are also very important in my riding. We know that the manufacturing industry has been experiencing difficulties for several years. Since 2001, workers from this sector have regularly been laid off. These people have had to claim employment insurance several times and would not benefit from the measures of Bill C-50. And how about the forestry industry? In my riding, there are many forestry workers. We know that this industry is in crisis, and we know that the Liberals at the time refused to provide loan guarantees to businesses in this industry. Now, the Conservatives have decided to invest in Ontario to support the automotive industry.

These forestry workers have lost their jobs many times, and have been experiencing periods of unemployment for years. So they would not be able to benefit from Bill C-50.

This is why my colleague and I, along with the other Bloc Québécois members, will vote against Bill C-50.

• (1525)

[English]

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in favour of Bill C-50, our government's most recent measure to improve the EI system, this time to increase the duration of benefits to long-tenured workers. This afternoon I will use my time to cover the recent economic history that has led us to these measures.

As we all know, about one year ago there was a swift, largely unexpected and severe economic meltdown throughout the world. This was precipitated not by any actions of our government or conditions in our country, but largely by the subprime mortgage and debt crisis that occurred south of the border. Many countries around the world reeled from the effects of that crisis. Some smaller economies almost collapsed. Across the developed world many banks did collapse.

Due to the good sense of Canadians, Canadian banks and their governments, Canada is one of the few western economies that did not have to bail out any of its banks. We have the strongest banking system in the world. I think we all know that, and we should be proud of it. The strength of our banking system and the prudence with which our banks acted over recent years was a major contributor to our economy's relatively late fall into recession and our relatively early recovery out of the recession.

The recession affected every single country that we do business with. All of our trading partners were affected and consumer demand plummeted. It was natural for many of our large exporting industries to be hit especially hard and for workers in those industries to be hit with layoffs.

One of the many things this government did once the severe and widespread effects of the economic downturn were realized was to start making plans to improve the EI program.

Many hard-working Canadians lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Demand for wood and wood products, cars and all sorts of consumer goods fell in the U.S. and around the world. Workers in our manufacturing industries were laid off. Many workers in the auto sector saw their companies collapse around them and saw their jobs disappear. Workers in the forestry sector were losing their jobs because companies were going bankrupt. We acted to help those workers as they tried to recover and transition from the effects of this economic downturn.

What did our government do? We consulted with Canadians and we were told, most important, to extend the length of EI benefits. Many Canadians who had worked full time for many years had suddenly lost their jobs. They were left wondering how long it would take for them to get back into the workforce. So, as part of Canada's economic action plan, we extended the EI benefit period by five weeks.

We also took other actions to help Canadians. We significantly increased the government's investment in skills, training and upgrading so that workers who were laid off could get the necessary training to transition to find work in different industries. We put more money into training programs so that people who did and did not qualify for EI could access them. But that is not all. We expanded the work-sharing program. We raised the number of weeks that employers could access the work-sharing program by 14 weeks to a full 52 weeks. Those actions by our government are protecting almost 165,000 jobs of Canadian workers through over 5,800 agreements. Again, that is something Canadians told us they wanted, and we delivered.

We did even more. We froze EI premiums for 2009 and for next year, 2010, because we understood that employers and employees needed to keep more of their money in their pockets to help them through these troubled times.

We were also clear that more may be needed and that we would monitor the economy and the EI system to ensure needs were being met with appropriate actions. While we heard these good, affordable and responsible ideas for EI improvements from Canadians, we heard different things from the veritable coalition of opposition parties and from the usual suspects.

• (1530)

What we heard consistently, first from the NDP and then the Liberals and the Bloc, was that they felt the solution, the silver bullet, was a number, and they kept repeating that same number.

*Government Orders*

That special number was 360. They suggested we lower the threshold to access EI benefits to a flat 360 hours across the country. What that is, quite plainly, is a proposal for a 45 day work year. They want folks to be able to work for 45 days and then collect months of benefits for those 45 days of work.

What good does that proposal, the one we have heard the most noise about from the opposition, for a 45 day work year do for the hard-working Canadians who have worked for many years in the automotive industry who have found themselves out of a job? The answer is nothing.

Would it help Canadian forestry workers in B.C., Quebec and elsewhere who have worked for 10, 15, 20 years in the forestry industry, who put in literally thousands of hours in full-time employment year after year? No, not really.

It certainly would do nothing to help Canadians who have been in the workforce for their entire adult life, working 35, 40, 50 hour weeks, month after month, year after year. It would do nothing for them.

That has been the opposition's big plan for Canadians who have worked hard and paid their dues for years, even decades. Nothing.

This government, on the other hand, saw what was needed and took responsible action to increase the help we were providing to hard-working, long-tenured workers.

We saw that many tens of thousands of Canadians, in fact close to 200,000 Canadians, could make use of additional weeks of benefits to bridge them further and to give them more time for the economy to recover and for them to get back into the workforce.

That is why we took the actions that we did and why we have introduced Bill C-50.

The measures in Bill C-50 would help ensure that long-tenured workers who have paid into the EI system for years are provided with the help they need while they search for new employment and while the economy begins to recover.

This legislation is an important step for Canadian workers who have worked hard and paid their taxes their whole lives and have found themselves in economic hardship, and it is the right thing to do. We are not the only ones to say so either.

Two weeks ago when we announced the bill, the premier of Ontario said that it was a step in the right direction. The president of the Canadian Labour Congress said that he was pleased about it.

The president of the Canadian Auto Workers said:

In the months ahead tens of thousands of unemployed workers are going to join the growing ranks of Canadians who have exhausted their EI benefits. They need action, not political posturing.

Unfortunately, all Canadians have received from the Liberals on this legislation is exactly what Canadian auto workers do not need and that is political posturing. From this government they are getting action.

My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst made some prudent remarks on September 16 in the *Telegraph-Journal*. He said:

But if we say no to this [help for long-tenured workers], we're saying no to thousands and thousands of people who would then go on welfare.

He is right. His comments illustrate the reckless and selfish political posturing being exhibited right now by the other two opposition parties, the Liberals and the Bloc.

The Liberals especially only seem interested in forcing an unnecessary election. Here on the government benches, the economy is still our number one priority. We need to continue to implement our economic action plan in order to create and maintain jobs.

We are concerned about fighting the recession. The Liberals just want to fight the recovery. Our government will remain focused on the economy and helping those hardest hit by the economic downturn.

I encourage my colleagues to help us do that by supporting this legislation.

• (1535)

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague talk about how difficult it is for Canadians who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. That is certainly something that I can relate to and something the people I represent can relate to as well.

The irony is that many people will not be able to avail themselves of this latest measure because it does not apply to people who have availed themselves of EI. It is only for people who have worked for a long time and have not accessed EI.

There is nothing wrong with individuals being able to access EI, certainly those who have worked forever and have not been able to do so, but we should not penalize those who through no fault of their own have had to access the system from time to time.

Fishers, forestry workers and young people will not be able to benefit from this latest measure. Is it possible that this measure was put in place to help those in the oil industry, those who we all know form the largest base of support for the Conservative Party?

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Madam Speaker, I believe the question was what are we doing for those in cyclical industries that sometimes face downturns? I know this government introduced a program a couple of years ago that looked at taking the best 14 weeks for those who are in those industries that are hardest hit. I believe it is a program like this that helps. Just recently we expanded that program. Therefore, there are methods that we continue to look at as needed to help the situation we are facing right now in this country.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question, but I want him to keep something in mind. When he promotes Bill C-50, he says that the bill will help 190,000 unemployed workers with a \$935 million budget. To get that number, 85% of unemployed workers would have to collect benefits for the full period to which they are entitled. But only 25% of them do, which, instead of the numbers he has given us, adds up to a budget of, at most, \$300 million for 60,000 unemployed workers. We asked senior officials and the parliamentary secretary for the numbers and how they calculated them.

Can the chair of the Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and Status of Persons with Disabilities tell us how he came up with these numbers?

[English]

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Madam Speaker, my colleague is part of the human resources committee and is very dedicated. I know he cares a great deal about this issue. I want to state again that it is important to understand that this bill is not the answer to everything. This is one part.

As we consulted with people, this is one of the things that people suggested. There are a number of people who have been working for many years, never collected EI and have not had an opportunity to.

Therefore, we do not believe that this is one size fits all. We have introduced programs for older workers. We have introduced programs for cyclical industries. This is just one more in the suite of programs that we believe are helpful and will be able to help those who need it most.

• (1540)

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Madam Speaker, there are approximately 1.6 million people who are unemployed right now. The bill will help tens of thousands of them and I am very pleased to support it.

I do not understand what some members of the House feel would be steps in the right direction. They may be small steps, they may be baby steps, but they are still moving forward and helping Canadians in this country. I for one in all good conscience support that.

I heard people in my riding very clearly all through the summer say, “\$1 billion for unemployment or a \$300 million election, take your pick”. It was pretty clear which direction we should go in.

Why does the member think there are members of the House who are not interested in making those baby steps, eventually becoming large steps, in the right direction?

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Madam Speaker, it has become very apparent to me and to the members on this side of the House that there are those in the opposition who are not going to support anything that happens. Therefore, I would also echo his concerns which are my concerns. Why would we spend money on a costly election right now when so much help is needed for people in this economy and in this country?

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-50. When we talk about the employment insurance system, I am not sure that there is

any part of the country where the people have a better understanding of the importance of this system than the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and certainly the people I represent in Random—Burin—St. George's.

The difficulty we have is when we see a measure come forward that does not take into account the impact that the recession has had on people who, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs or people who work in a seasonal industry. That in fact is what is happening throughout our country. We are finding that people who work in the forestry industry, in the fishery, in the tourism industry, all of those people, are invaluable to our economy and to ensuring that we work well as a country.

Yet, when it comes to ensuring that they are taken care of, they need to know that in fact they can avail themselves of a system that they themselves put in place. Let us not forget that when we talk about the EI system, we are talking about a system that has been funded by the very people who work throughout our country who will from time to time find themselves unemployed and have to avail themselves of this particular system.

When we hear of a measure that is being put in place for long-tenured workers, we can appreciate that. The problem we have is that there are so many other individuals in the country who need to avail themselves of EI, that in fact this particular measure would do nothing for our young people, who work for a period of time, and it would do nothing for people who are seasonal workers. That is why we have a great deal of concern about this one particular measure. It does not recognize that the country is in a sorry state of affairs when we talk about the jobless rate in our country.

In fact, what we are talking about today, when people talk about the country coming out of the recession, is a jobless recovery. That is a sad reflection on what is happening in our country. Because when we realize that people want to work, provide for their families, put food on the table, buy medications, pay their bills, whether it is their mortgage, their heat or their light bill, they need to be gainfully employed, and gainfully employed does not mean being employed on a part-time basis. That is what we are hearing is happening in Canada. We are hearing that even those jobs that are returning are part-time jobs. So, we have so many people who not only need to avail themselves of an EI system but we now have people who can only work on a part-time basis. In some cases, if they were making \$20.00 an hour, they are now being asked to accept \$10.00 an hour because their job is for half the length of time.

We are finding that people really do not know where to turn. We are asking the government to recognize that this is a serious situation for Canadians. I know that the people I represent are finding it very difficult, particularly in a rural community. We have many communities in our country that are rural by nature. When we talk about a rural community, we are talking about a small number of people, yes, in some of those communities, but what we are also finding is that there really are not any opportunities for them other than to work on a seasonal basis.

*Government Orders*

So, this type of measure does not take into account the young. It does not take into account those who work on a seasonal basis. It does not take into account at all what has happened to our country as a result of the recession. It does not take into account that we are now in what is called a jobless recovery. It does not take into account that the jobs that are coming back are part-time jobs, not the full-time jobs that people were used to, particularly people who worked in other industries other than the fishery, other than in forestry. I know that in Newfoundland and Labrador, certainly, many in the forestry industry have been on a seasonal basis.

When I look at those who earn their living from the sea, these are people who work very hard, whether they are out in the boats, on the ocean, fishing, or whether they work in the fish plants. I do not know if there is a job that is any more difficult than working in a fish plant. Many people, we are finding now, are of an age when they should be able to retire but they cannot because they do not have a pension. So what they have to do is work until they are 65, until they can avail themselves of the Canada pension plan.

• (1545)

The problem we have is those people are not being looked after. Those people work on a seasonal basis. They have to avail of EI because the fishery itself is a seasonal industry. We are finding a lot of people who are not being taken care of, a lot of people who really need a government that understands their situation. They need a government that recognizes that while we may be on the road somewhat to a recovery, that recovery is not being felt by those who really need to get on with their lives. Again, particularly in rural Canada, people have to turn to neighbours, to other family members and to friends just to make ends meet.

When we talk about our EI system, we need to look at measures to reform a system that responds to the situation in which we find ourselves today. That is why, as the official opposition, we brought up the whole idea of EI reform. That is why we proposed measures that would respond to the situation in which people find themselves today. What response did we get from the government when we tried to sit down with members, when we tried to get them to look at the seriousness of the situation that Canadians faced? All we had were roadblocks put in our way. In fact, the Conservatives did not come forward with either proposal to address any of the issues that Canadians face today, Canadians who find themselves out of the workforce through no fault of their own.

Unfortunately, the government has ignored what is happening to Canadians. My two colleagues from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine represented the official opposition on the group that was put together to look at EI reform. They had great difficulty trying to get any answers out of the government. In fact, the minister herself refused to participate in the way that it was intended she would, or that we were led to believe she would. We ended up having to say that nothing was happening. The government was not interested in doing anything for the majority of Canadians who found themselves out of work. We know there are a lot of them. We are talking about 486,000 Canadians who are unemployed and are not going to find work. If what we are being told by economists, professionals in business, by any number of people that the recovery we are seeing is a jobless recovery, what is being proposed will do

nothing to help the majority of those Canadians who find themselves unemployed.

We depend on those people. We depend on our fishers. We depend on those who service us in the tourism industry. We depend on our loggers. These are Canadians. We are there to represent their interests. We are there to ensure that at the end of the day when they find it difficult, we are here to represent them, to try to deal with that difficulty, to try to help them make ends meet. However, the reality of the situation is the government is not doing that. While Conservatives pay lip service and say that they have done this and done that and increased the number of hours and number of weeks, they have done absolutely nothing to deal with the majority of those Canadians who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own.

There is work to be done and that is why as the official opposition we are telling the government and the NDP that what is being proposed is not good enough. When we talk about Bill C-50, we are telling the government loud and clear that this is not acceptable, not only to us, but it is not acceptable to the majority of Canadians who need a government to understand that this recession has taken its toll on them. The recession has put them in an untenable position where they cannot provide for their families, where they cannot make ends meet and where they really need a government that understands and is sympathetic to the situation in which they find themselves.

• (1550)

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I listened with interest. The member has concerns about rural Canada, as do I, and I certainly agree with some of her points about the hardships people are facing right now.

However, I have a little trouble listening to a speaker from the party that clearly, over the years, picked the pockets of employers and employees to the tune of \$50-some billion and gutted the insurance system.

Would the member not now be interested in taking some small steps toward improving the EI system instead of looking for a \$300 million election?

**Ms. Judy Foote:** Madam Speaker, that is an interesting question from my colleague. The reality is we want to take measures that will make a difference. We want to take measures that will see the majority of Canadians who need support and help from the government, and from any government, get through a difficult time.

One small measure, whether it is a small step, is just not good enough, and that is our point. There are so many other initiatives that could have been taken to reform the EI system and the Conservatives have failed to do it. How the NDP can possibly support this one small measure when there are so many other things that can be done is beyond belief.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, shame on the Conservatives and their NDP supporters for telling workers in the construction, forestry, tourism and agriculture sectors, and seasonal workers in general, that they are not long-tenured workers.

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Many of these workers have held the same job for 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, 25 years, even 30 years. But because of the seasons, nobody cuts trees when the forest is buried in 10 feet of snow, and nobody goes fishing when the ocean is covered in ice.

The Conservatives and the New Democrats say that even though all of these people have worked for decades and decades, they cannot collect one red cent from this program.

I am not surprised that the Conservatives are doing this, but the NDP should be ashamed of themselves. They should be ashamed because they claimed that they would stand up for society's most vulnerable seasonal workers.

Can my colleague, who delivered a very nice speech earlier, tell us whether the Conservative government and, worse yet, the New Democratic Party, have completely forgotten seasonal workers' predicament?

• (1555)

[English]

**Ms. Judy Foote:** Madam Speaker, that is exactly the point. When we look at individuals throughout Canada, who comprises the largest portion of our workforce? Our forestry workers, our fishers, our agricultural workers, workers from all those sectors have to avail themselves of EI from time to time. They are seasonal but they have worked in those industries for a long time. Some of them have been working for 20 years in a particular occupation, but because it is seasonal, they have to avail themselves of the system.

It is obvious to anyone who looks at Bill C-50 that the Conservatives, with the support of the NDP, have forgotten about the majority of Canadians who need them at this most crucial time in their lives.

**Mrs. Alice Wong (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Madam Speaker, why did the Liberals walk away from the discussions in the summer if they care about those who are unemployed?

**Ms. Judy Foote:** Madam Speaker, has my colleague been following what has been happening in the House and the debate that has been going on? Everyone knows the Liberals did not walk away from the table. In fact, the two Liberals who sat at that table were left with no choice because there were absolutely no proposals from the Conservatives, not one thing, and finally, out of frustration, they had to say, "We cannot do this any longer".

**Mrs. Alice Wong (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to join in the debate today on our government's latest steps to help Canadians facing difficulties.

Our government has been working hard since we formed government to help Canadians. Over the past year, we have been working even harder.

The global economic recession hit Canada hard. Many tens of thousands of Canadians lost their jobs, many of them quite suddenly. This sort of thing is incredibly shocking and stressful on these workers and their families.

This Conservative government has taken strong action to help these Canadians. In January we introduced Canada's economic

action plan, which was a plan for economic stimulus to maintain and create jobs, to help our economy recover and to help Canadians get the new skills they needed to succeed in the new jobs of the future as Canada's economy recovered and moved forward.

I would like to talk about these measures for a few moments. These measures include providing five extra weeks of EI regular benefits across the country, including increasing the maximum duration of benefits from 45 to 50 weeks in regions of high unemployment.

Under Canada's economic action plan, we have also made changes to the work-sharing program to help workers stay in the labour force, maintain their skills and protect their jobs. Work sharing allows employers to keep their skilled and experienced employees on, while their business endures a slowdown due to the recession. This program offers EI income support to workers who are willing to work a reduced work week while their employer pursues the company's economic recovery plan.

The changes we have made extend the work-sharing agreements by an additional 14 weeks to maximize the benefits for workers and employers during the recovery period. Work-sharing agreements are not available for 52 weeks. This is an enormous help to Canadian employers and employees alike. As of today, there are close 5,800 active work-sharing agreements across the country, protecting the jobs and skills of over 165,000 Canadians.

I also want to mention the additional \$60 million over three years that Canada's economic action plan is investing in the targeted initiative for older workers. This initiative enables people 55 to 64 years of age to get the skills upgrading and work experience they need to make the transition to new jobs.

Let me add that we are expanding this initiative's reach so that communities with populations of fewer than 250,000 are now eligible for funding. This will ensure that many more Canadians are able to benefit from this valuable initiative.

Under Canada's economic action plan, workers will also benefit through the increase of funding of \$1 billion over two years for skills training under the existing labour market development agreements with the provinces and territories. This additional investment will help people receiving EI benefits to get the skills training they need in our changed economy.

The action plan also has an initiative in place to assist individuals who are ineligible for employment insurance so they too can benefit from training and other support measures.

Through our strategic training and transition fund, we are investing to assist these unemployed Canadians. Because we recognize that the provinces and territories know local needs best, the training programs part of this fund are being delivered at that level.

As well, to support young people entering the trades, the action plan introduced an additional \$2,000 apprenticeship completion grant to apprentices who successfully completed an apprenticeship program in a Red Seal trade. This new measure builds on the existing apprenticeship incentive grant.



In addition, through a two year \$1 billion community adjustment fund, our government is protecting jobs and supporting businesses in key sectors of our economy that are in difficulty, and this includes forestry, farming and mining.

•(1600)

The fund will support economic diversification in communities affected by the decline in their local industries.

Moreover, as a direct result of Canada's economic action plan, up to 1,000 young people can gain work experience through internships with not for profit and community service organizations under an agreement with the YMCA and YWCA and its new grants for the youth internship program.

As I said, our government recognizes the crucial role that the EI program plays in assisting unemployed Canadians while the economy recovers. This year alone, the government will spend \$5.5 billion more on EI benefits for Canadians. I believe this amount speaks volumes about our government's commitment to helping Canadians through the difficulties and the difficult period of this economic recession.

Since coming to office, we have worked diligently to make fair and timely changes to the EI program in keeping with the real needs of Canadians. This is why we have expanded the eligibility for EI compassionate care benefits by enlarging the definition of family members to include a wider range of individuals and it is why we are improving the management and governance of the EI account by establishing the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board.

Some of my colleagues have mentioned this change and I want to mention it as well. It is important for Canadians. The Employment Insurance Financing Board will ensure that EI premiums paid by hard-working Canadians do not go into general revenues and are not available for future governments to use on their pet political projects or to fudge deficit numbers.

Previous Liberal governments did just that and the money they used to shine their own image is no longer there to help Canadians who need it, the very same Canadians who paid those premiums and expected their money to be there for them. Our Conservative government is ensuring that will not happen again.

As for this bill, Bill C-50 is an important and timely initiative that builds on measures our Conservative government has introduced through Canada's economic action plan to assist Canadians who find themselves unemployed in these difficult times. The changes proposed by Bill C-50 are in keeping with our commitment to have an EI program that Canadians can rely on as their first line of defence when they lose their jobs.

When long-tenured workers lose their jobs, we want measures in place that are as fair and responsive as they possibly can be, measures that reflect and respect their own long contributions to the health of their industries or sectors, their communities and our nation.

As I explained, this legislation proposes a temporary measure that will provide some much needed assistance to long-tenured workers throughout the country. The passage of Bill C-50 will make a difference in their lives and the lives of their families. It will also be

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proof positive that we support and stand behind them in their efforts to seek and find new jobs. They have striven long and hard to support their industry. Now let us assist them in their time of need.

I call especially on members from the Liberal Party and the Bloc. Whatever their other desires or their other goals, they should see just as clearly as members on this side of the House and other members of the House who are supporting this bill that these measures are important to tens of thousands of Canadians.

The Liberal leader's wish to drive Canadians into an unnecessary election to fulfill his personal goals or to feed his personal vanity should not stand in the way of tens of thousands of unemployed Canadians getting the help they need and deserve.

I, therefore, ask all members of the House to join in supporting Bill C-50.

•(1605)

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I first would like to point out that it is unfortunate in a debate like this that members resort to personal attacks. This is such an important issue that we really need to focus on Canadians and the situation in which they find themselves.

I wonder if the hon. member could tell me what the status is of the financing board.

**Mrs. Alice Wong:** Madam Speaker, the financing board will be fully responsible for handling EI premiums and how they will be used. Money collected from people who pay their premiums will be kept by the board in a separate pot and be managed by the board independently.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member talking about EI and I would like some clarification from her.

For many years, we have been denouncing the pillaging of the employment insurance fund, which has continued under the Conservatives. There is currently a bill before the House, Bill C-50, which will allow a few unemployed to receive extended benefits, while none of the forestry workers and seasonal workers, who have experienced problems with EI in recent years, will be able to benefit from any of these measures. And the pillaging of the EI fund is continuing.

Should steps not be taken to stop the pillaging of the EI fund and to provide assistance not only to those workers who have done without EI these past few years, but all those who are losing their jobs because of the recession that is still ongoing, especially since the OECD predicts that it will last for another few years?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Alice Wong:** Madam Speaker, I might suggest that the opposition do some research and some calculations. We have already given out an additional \$5.5 billion for EI, which is exactly what people need.

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I am asking the opposition to support Bill C-50 in order to help those who have paid premiums their whole life. This is the right time for them to get what they deserve, the extension of five to twenty weeks to those people who really deserve it. That is why we are asking opposition parties to support unemployed Canadians and not block them.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member of the Conservative government who just spoke how her party came up with the figure of 190,000 regarding the number of workers who will see their EI benefits extended under this bill.

We know that, if there are 190,000, the assumption is likely that 85% receive regular benefits up until the end of their qualifying period, when in fact 25% receive the full benefits they are entitled to. Therefore, this is not—at least we do not think so—a meaningful figure. We should be talking instead of \$300 million benefiting approximately 60,000 people.

I would like her to explain how that number was calculated. We have asked questions of some members of the Conservative Party, but have been unable to get an answer, either orally or in writing.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Alice Wong:** Madam Speaker, we have stated clearly that the five week extension would apply to all Canadians who are unemployed and qualify. This extension of five weeks to twenty weeks would actually apply to long-tenured workers who have paid premiums their whole life. They deserve these five to twenty weeks of benefits, and the Bloc is blocking them.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Madam Speaker, we can clearly see the Conservative Party's bad faith with regard to Bill C-50, which is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. Upon further study of this bill, we see that because of the eligibility criteria involved it will not help all workers in the construction industry, for instance, seasonal workers or people working in tourism who receive employment insurance benefits intermittently.

This bill introduces another set of criteria that make it more difficult to access employment insurance benefits. It creates another category of workers who will not qualify as EI claimants. Consider young people and seasonal workers in the construction industry or the forestry sector, for example.

The Conservatives need to wake up. Maybe they want to help them, but they are not going about it the right way. The forestry industry has been facing a crisis for five years and nothing has been done. The Conservatives have shown us again that they do not want to help the forestry sector. They set up phoney committees that might produce a little tidbit in two or three months, but right now, many people are asking for help and may well fall into poverty because they do not have access to employment insurance.

The Bloc Québécois cannot support this bill because it ignores everyone's needs, especially the needs of Quebeckers. The government helped the auto industry by investing \$10 billion and now they have introduced Bill C-50. If they really wanted, in good

faith, to help unemployed workers, they would not have introduced this bill, which will take some time to be adopted, and they would have accelerated the process by accepting the Bloc's proposal. If they had accepted it, we would already be doing the clause by clause examination of the bill in committee. We would have heard from many groups from Quebec and perhaps elsewhere, who would have come to tell us that this bill does not correspond to their situation. Once again we can see the Conservatives' bad faith when it comes to improving the employment insurance system.

In 1993 I sat on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, and people will remember how the Liberals gutted eligibility for employment insurance. This time, the Conservatives could put things right, because there is a surplus in the EI fund. It is workers and employers who pay for this insurance against job loss, not the government. The government's action is very restrictive. Instead of introducing a bill, the Conservatives could have put in place a pilot project, which would already be up and running.

Plants close and people are laid off temporarily. There have been quite a few temporary layoffs in Quebec in the past five years. I said that another category of people would be excluded from EI benefits. They are workers who do not qualify because they received more than seven weeks of EI a year in recent years, when the average in Quebec is 10 weeks. This bill allows that sort of exclusion. It excludes a portion of the population.

We know that this bill will help sectors where employability has been much more stable over the years and where workers have not taken advantage of employment insurance. This measure is designed to help people who lose their jobs regularly. There are fairly specific employment situations. Young people do not have seven years' experience, which is what is required. The bill applies to long-tenured workers. That is another irritant. The bill does not take into account women who work part-time and receive EI intermittently because they do not have long-term jobs.

It is clear that the Conservative government does not want to help workers who lose their jobs. It does not respect them, and it is not in tune with what they need.

• (1615)

That is clear in this bill. When we look at how we ended up with this bill, it was in very bad faith. From the time it was introduced, the Bloc Québécois asked that the bill be referred to committee before second reading in order to let the government know that some changes were necessary. We were prepared to look at this bill and make some changes to open it up a bit.

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In the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, a report was presented which recommended improving accessibility and reviewing the number of hours. The Conservatives wanted nothing to do with it. To be entitled to up to 20 additional weeks, an individual has to run out of regular benefits. Only 25% of people run out of regular benefits and that is why the number is misleading. Again, it is smoke and mirrors. We are told this represents 190,000 workers, but that is not possible because 85% of those workers would have to run out of benefits and that is not the case.

I would like the Conservatives to look at what is happening in Quebec. We have some very serious problems in the forestry and the forestry industry. Some tens of millions of dollars in assistance have been paid out, but keeping jobs in the forestry industry is an even bigger challenge than it is in the automobile industry. The automobile industry received help and I am not criticizing that. I am criticizing the fact that not all industries in Quebec and Canada are being given enough assistance. I do not understand why the NDP, who made employment insurance their pet issue, is now burying its head in the sand to maybe save its own skin. It is agreeing with the government in order to keep it afloat. If it is not the NDP, then it is the Liberals, who voted in favour of the last budget and abandoned workers.

The Bloc Québécois introduced several economic proposals precisely to help the workers, as many as possible, to get through this crisis. EI reform was among the Bloc Québécois' goals. Not only did the Bloc want to better assist industries and all workers with specific measures to get through this crisis, but so did the OECD. We might see unemployment rates approaching 10%. That represents many unemployed people. This will make the number of EI claimants skyrocket. We will recall that, during the campaign, as far as the government was concerned, there was no economic crisis, there was no problem, and all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Now we can see the government running up a huge deficit. Who will pay for that? Members will recall who footed the deficit under the Liberals, a deficit that the Conservatives may have also created. It was the people who lost their jobs. The restrictions on EI hit those who lost their jobs very hard.

Personally, I would like any member of that government who puts a question to me to try and explain how they came up with a figure of 190,000 workers. There are even political analysts who say that this bill was designed for Ontario, where employment tends to be long term, and not for businesses that have had to lay people off over the years, particularly in the forestry industry.

The government is crowing over this bill today. It should really make it better. Then, the Bloc Québécois will be able to tell the unemployed that it kept its word and tell the forestry industry that it stood up for them in this House. That is why I am actively advocating for this issue today.

• (1620)

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I listened with fascination to my colleague's dissertation, and many of her complaints are absolutely fair. Our role as

opposition is to show when there are problems with bills. That is what we are here to do.

Clearly, this bill does not go far enough in addressing the outstanding crisis that we are seeing across this country. However, the question is what we do with the bill before us. I see what the Bloc is doing. It is attempting to divert attention by saying that this is an attempt to treat Quebec unfairly.

We know the mendacity of that argument. I am not even going to respond to it. Does it address all the workers? No, it does not, but does it address some workers? Yes, it does. What should the opposition do at that point? We must continue to fight for fair EI.

I will put this question to the member. Is the Bloc Québécois the trained poodle of the Liberal Party? When the Liberal Party says that it wants an election and that it does not matter that there is \$1 billion on the table, does the Bloc run behind it and say, "Me too, me too"?

That is not opposition. Under the Liberals for the last two years, nothing was being put on the table for EI. Now, we have \$1 billion. It is certainly not enough. There are other bills that have to be addressed. We have to continue to fight for that.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague a valid question here. Is she running after the Liberal Party leader, or is she going to stay here in the House and make sure that this money gets out to people?

[Translation]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Madam Speaker, I am very happy to respond to the NDP member's question.

I am not the only one who thinks this way. I never claimed that. Unions, business leaders in the forestry industry, workers, unemployed workers and associations see things the same way I do. They feel that this bill does not address what is really going on in Quebec.

I am sorry, but it is not petty politics to say that the NDP is burying its head in the sand once again and that it is making a mistake. I have heard some noises outside Quebec from associations of unemployed workers who are also calling on an NDP colleague to step up and respond to the government. All the opposition parties could have pressured the government to amend this bill. But the opposition was divided. That works well for the Conservatives.

But we know that the Conservatives will end up without any respect.

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[English]

**Mrs. Alice Wong (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is ridiculous to hear the word “united”. The Bloc and opposition are suggesting that they need to reunite again to take the government down in an unnecessary election, which is exactly what a lot of Canadians are thinking. I am glad the NDP is looking very seriously at this real problem of helping unemployed Canadians.

I do not know why the Bloc would say this. One hundred and ninety thousand EI premium payers have worked very hard for their whole lives, and now they are in difficult times. We are extending their benefits by between five weeks and 20 weeks. At the same time, we are also providing them with training opportunities. All those initiatives include the whole nation, all the provinces including Quebec, unless the Bloc wants its province to be exempt from that.

That is not what the people of Quebec want. They want a government that is responsible and that will help in times of need. They want us to let them know that the government does care. These 190,000 unemployed people will now get extra help because of that.

•(1625)

[Translation]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Madam Speaker, once again, a Conservative member is talking about the 190,000 workers who have lost their jobs and will have access to the measures in Bill C-50. We must also see when this bill will be passed. They are buying time. But they have not been able to show us how they got to that figure of 190,000. In fact, according to our calculations and the calculations of a number of analysts who have examined the situation, that number would be closer to 60,000.

Long-tenured workers are a different category of unemployed workers. There are long-tenured workers, young workers, female workers, seasonal workers, those who work in construction, those who have paid into EI but unfortunately, during an economic crisis, are left without a job. What is being done? We are making more demands, but in order to make a difference, we need employment insurance.

What is this government doing? It does not care about the unemployed.

[English]

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak in favour of Bill C-50, our government's latest step to help Canada's unemployed.

Our government has taken action throughout the past year to help Canadians. As part of Canada's economic action plan, we have made changes and improvements to the EI system to help those Canadians who have become unemployed through no fault of their own.

We have made timely improvements, providing five extra weeks of EI benefits; making the EI application process easier, faster and better for businesses and workers; and increasing opportunities for unemployed Canadians to upgrade their skills and get back to work.

Canada's economic action plan also announced the freezing of the EI premium rate for this year, 2009, and for next year as well, 2010. I would point out that the EI premiums are at their lowest levels in a

quarter century. Keeping the EI premium rate at the same level in 2009 and 2010 is achieving additional stimulus, as this measure therefore keeps premium rates lower than they would otherwise be. This helps leave more money for employers to hire and retain workers and more money in the pockets of those working Canadians.

We are assisting businesses and their workers through improved and more accessible work-sharing agreements. More than 165,000 Canadian jobs are being protected with work-sharing agreements that are in place with more than 5,800 employers across Canada.

These improvements are helping these Canadians stay at work and maintain their skills so that these companies can come out of this recession even stronger, with their skills and employee base maintained.

Career transition assistance is a new initiative that will help an estimated 40,000 long-term workers who need additional support for retraining to find a new job. Through this initiative, we have extended the duration of EI regular income benefits to up to two years for eligible workers who choose to participate in longer-term training. We are also allowing earlier access to EI for eligible workers who invest all or part of their severance in training that takes longer than 20 weeks.

By working with the provinces and the territories through this and other programs, we are providing Canadians easier access to training that is tailored to the workers in our country's different regions. This new legislation we are introducing is part of those efforts.

Bill C-50 is about extending EI regular benefits to workers who have lost their jobs after working a long time and who have never or have rarely collected employment insurance or EI regular benefits. These Canadians have paid their taxes for many years, and of course they have paid EI premiums. It is only fair and right that we support them and their families in their time of need.

For the purpose of this new measure, the definition of long-tenured workers applies to workers from all sectors of the economy. It is estimated that about two-thirds of EI contributors meet this definition of long-tenured workers.

More than one-third of those who have lost their jobs across Canada since the end of January and who have established an EI claim are long-tenured workers. Many of these workers have worked at the same job or in the same industry all of their lives. They may have poor prospects for finding the same kind of job when the recession is over, and many face the prospect of starting all over again. We can either see that as a defeat or see that as an opportunity.

Canadians are resilient people. We have shown over and over again that we can cope with adversity and come out stronger. While losing a job is difficult on workers and their families, we can still see these difficulties as opportunities for the future.

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We are constantly reinventing ourselves. I see it happening in communities, and I see it happening among individuals, but it takes effort and it takes time, and that is why this government wants to give long-tenured workers who lose their jobs the time they need. That is why we propose to make temporary changes to the EI program.

Bill C-50 would extend, on a national basis, EI regular benefits for long-tenured workers by between five and twenty weeks, depending upon the number of years they have worked and paid EI premiums. They are eligible if they have paid at least a minimum amount of EI premiums for at least seven out of ten calendar years and have received EI regular benefits for no more than 35 weeks in the last five years.

This new measure would apply equally to long-tenured workers everywhere in the country. This new measure has a measure of retroactivity, so that we can reach back and cover workers who lost their jobs during the ramp-up and peak of the recession.

•(1630)

Benefits would continue until the fall of 2011 for those who needed them. This temporary measure supplements other measures that we are taking under the economic action plan to help workers.

We are helping Canadian workers in all different walks of life and in various circumstances, including those at risk of being laid off, those who have been laid off, younger people trying to get into the job market, older workers, newcomers to Canada and Aboriginal Canadians.

I want to get back to the long-tenured workers. We already have a special program to assist them called the career transition assistance initiative. Its aim is to help those workers retrain for new jobs even if they need to move to an entirely different industry.

The career transition assistance initiative is based on two important measures. The first extends EI regular benefits for long-tenured workers up to a maximum of two years while they participate in longer term training. The other measure gives long-tenured workers earlier access to EI if they invest in their training using all or part of their severance package. I mentioned this earlier in my remarks.

Thousands of long-tenured workers will benefit from career transition assistance. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of training in both our short-term and long-term plans.

As I have said, we want to help Canadian workers adjust to the changes brought by the recession. We also want to prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. To this end, we are giving Canadians all over the country opportunities to upgrade their skills or retrain for a new career.

Through our economic action plan, we are investing an additional \$1.5 billion in provincial and territorial training programs. Close to 150,000 workers across the country will benefit from these initiatives and they will have access to them whether they are eligible for EI or not.

Furthermore, the targeted initiative for older workers will receive an additional \$60 million over three years to enable more older

workers aged 55 to 64 to get skills upgrading and work experience to help them make the transition to new jobs.

The program's reach has been expanded so that communities with a population fewer than 250,000 are now eligible for funding. With this change, an additional 250 communities could be included in the program, depending on provincial and territorial participation.

This government does not want to see any category of workers shut out of the labour market indefinitely or consigned to obsolescence. That is why we are making huge investments in training and retraining workers of all ages, because we cannot spare any of them. We will need them all in the years to come. We will need their skills, experience, energy and creativity to meet the challenges to come.

Our government is focused on what matters to Canadians, finding solutions to help long-tenured workers who have worked hard and paid into the system for years but are having trouble finding employment through no fault of their own, extending benefits to self-employed Canadians and getting Canadians back to work through historic investments in infrastructure and skills training.

It is clear from these and other measures introduced in Canada's economic action plan that our government is stepping up to the plate to provide real results for all Canadians. That is why I would like members of this House to support a bill that would say to proven workers that we stand behind them, that we will help them get through this recession, that there are better times ahead and that we want them to be part of that.

I ask members to support Bill C-50 and to support Canadians who want to get back to work.

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to talk about Bill C-50. The Conservatives devised this bill to save face or to give people the impression that it is working for the most vulnerable members of society, but that is all the bill does: give an impression. I think that Canadians, the people in every one of our ridings, need to have a clear understanding of what is in this bill and what it gives to workers and their families.

The government is trying to predict how many workers will lose their jobs. Worse yet, it is trying to predict exactly when they are going to lose their jobs. Bill C-50 imposes so many restrictions and criteria, restrictions and criteria—I could say it over and over—that it is very hard to tell who the Conservatives and the NDP will choose to be eligible for extra weeks of employment insurance benefits. I wonder if the government, that is, the Conservatives, are playing a kind of “Where's Waldo” game because we are trying to unearth people in our ridings who would be entitled to one red cent, let alone an extra week of benefits, under Bill C-50.

*Government Orders*

None of our seasonal workers in construction, highways, tourism, fisheries and forestry will be entitled to an extra week or even a single red cent under this bill. It leaves all of these workers out. The Conservatives have just dropped these workers, forgotten them. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that they simply dropped them because they cannot possibly have forgotten comments the Prime Minister made in the past about how people in the region I represent—the Atlantic—are defeatist. I do not think that he has forgotten us. Once again, he is looking for a way to make sure that people in rural communities do not get their hands on one red cent under this bill.

How can the Conservatives and the NDP look those workers in the eye, just as I am looking at the members of the Conservative government right now, and be able to tell them that they are about to lose their jobs, that they know people will lose their jobs, and guarantee them one thing, that is, that they will not give them another red cent. Indeed, the criteria for access to increased benefits simply do not apply to people from rural areas, to seasonal workers, or to workers in the construction, forestry, fishery or tourism sectors, or people working on our roads. I must stop the list there. A few days ago, I was giving a comprehensive list of the businesses in my riding, of the people who work in my riding, to try to determine who will have access to this program. I soon realized that the Conservatives were playing “Where’s Waldo?”. That must be what they are doing if they can identify 190,000 people, as they are claiming. First of all, we cannot predict who will lose their jobs. It is impossible to know who will lose their jobs. It is even more difficult to know who will qualify for increased benefits once the additional rules and criteria, which the Conservatives included in their bill, are applied, or to predict who will not be eligible to receive assistance.

It is not only the workers we must think about, but also their families, those who need our help most every day. Winter is coming. People will need to top up their home heating oil to stay warm. They will need to pay their electricity bill to keep the heat on. They will need to continuing buying food to feed their children.

• (1640)

Instead, the Conservatives are telling seasonal workers that, in their opinion, even if they have worked for 10, 15, 20, 25 or 30 years, not just for the same industry but for the same company, they are not long-tenured workers.

Have they forgotten that loggers make it possible for houses to be built? Have they forgotten that farmers who harvest potatoes, fruits, vegetables and all other agricultural products stock Canada’s cupboards? Have they forgotten our fishers and our tourism workers? Have they forgotten the people who cut trees and thin our forests to ensure an adequate supply of wood? They simply tell all these people that they are not eligible but that it does not matter because they are of no importance to us. That is exactly what the Conservatives are saying. And what is shameful is that the NDP is supporting a bill that is so disrespectful of the people we represent.

I would like to repeat what I said earlier. Why are seasonal workers who have worked in the same industry and for the same employer not considered long-tenured workers? Just now, the Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism made some comments. She seemed to say that some people deserve to qualify while others

do not. I am sorry, but if the Conservatives believe that some Canadian workers deserve employment insurance and others do not, they are going to be taught a lesson rather quickly. They say that an election costs \$300 million and that it is a bad thing for Canadians, but they have just racked up a \$56 million deficit. I am not talking about the Liberals but about the Conservatives. However, when they are told we must help the workers that need it, the most vulnerable and their families, they pick and choose who will have access to their help.

This exceeds my wildest expectations of a government. A good parent is supposed to be there for the children. The same goes for a government. Like a good parent, it has to help its citizens when they need it. All we see today is that the government has abandoned seasonal workers and workers in rural areas. It has simply abandoned workers living in rural areas.

What the Conservatives do not realize, and the NDP has followed suit, is how many people and how much territory rural Canada represents. It represents a very large proportion of the population and a very large portion of Canadian territory.

I dare hope that the Conservatives will listen to reason, but they are not exactly in the habit of helping the most vulnerable. I am sure they will continue down their own road.

I hope the NDP will wake up and realize that those who need employment insurance need to have access to it. We are talking about long tenured workers, but let us not forget seasonal workers, certain types of industry and all the types of workers I mentioned earlier. Contrary to what the Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism said, they too deserve to collect EI. These people work and they help other Canadians put food on the table, build houses and create some wealth in this country.

I hope that what I am saying will resonate with the NDP and that it will finally understand that the only solution is to change the government to give Canadians a reason to be proud again.

• (1645)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. member for Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Madam Speaker is halfway there. If you travel 250 kilometres to the north and west, you reach the Gaspé. The fact of the matter is that I represent the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

I would like to address two issues. I fully agree with part of what the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche said in his speech. There was another part, however, where I had a hard time following him. He seems to be very sensitive to the NDP, and what it does or does not do in any given circumstances, but how quickly he forgets the Liberal involvement in the employment insurance issue. If there is more than \$50 billion in the EI fund today, it is due in large part to the Liberals. When in government, the Liberals made regions like the member’s and mine suffer. Instead of being sensitive to what is happening on the NDP side, he should pay closer attention to his own party’s record.

*Government Orders*

I do agree that Bill C-50 tends to divide the unemployed into two categories: the good and the bad. The good have never, or hardly ever, for 35 weeks over 5 years, had dealings with EI or received EI benefits. Otherwise, one falls into the other category. The reality of seasonal work is such that workers find themselves, sadly, with no choice but to collect benefits. EI is a social and economic safety net for regions like ours.

Therefore, I would like the member of the Liberal Party to be careful when throwing stones at others because they could be thrown right back at him. There is some kind of boomerang effect. I think he better not forget the involvement of his own party in the employment insurance issue. At the same time, I support his statement to the effect that Bill C-50 is disrespectful and, I might add, creates two categories of unemployed people.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Madam Speaker, I am glad to see that my colleague and riding neighbour agrees with my comments about what Bill C-50 will not do for the people we represent.

We represent people who work for industries that are relatively similar, although different in some respects. Still, these people are going through the same things. The Conservatives have always had contempt for people in rural areas. Living in a rural area does not make someone a second-class citizen. Living in a rural area or in Atlantic Canada does not mean that one deserves to be insulted by the former opposition leader, who is now the Prime Minister of Canada. Living in a rural area does not mean that one should not be entitled to the same thing as others.

For many years and still today, Atlantic Canada and rural regions have provided Canadians with the natural resources and the goods they need to live. The Conservatives, with the NDP's support, are telling these people that rural dwellers, seasonal workers and people who work in a seasonal industry will not have access to employment insurance.

This bears repeating, not only so that parliamentarians understand, but also so that the people watching today understand that all these people will be left out. The government is simply ignoring these people and saying that they will not get any additional help.

People in rural areas are facing the same problems. Times are just as tough for seasonal workers. People are losing their jobs, many of them permanently. Forestry and factory workers in our ridings did not ask to lose their jobs, even though many of them work in seasonal industries. What is happening today is not their fault. The country is going through a crisis under the Conservatives.

Meanwhile, people in rural areas and seasonal workers are being told that it is not important, because they are not going through the same thing as people elsewhere. But that is not true. They are going through the same thing. The time has come for people to understand that everyone must be treated equally. Dividing people, something the Conservatives and their Prime Minister are good at doing, is not an option.

• (1650)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon.

member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Health; the hon. member for Québec, Agri-food Industry.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Edmonton East.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to speak today to Bill C-50, and I encourage all hon. members to support the bill. The bill is about helping Canadian workers and their families. We are extending the duration of EI benefits to these workers who have worked a long time and have never or rarely collected EI benefits. Many of these workers have lost their jobs through no fault of their own because of the global economic downturn. These Canadians have paid their dues. They have worked hard, paid their taxes for many years and have paid their EI premiums. It is fair and responsible that we support them and their families in their time of need.

Many of these workers have worked at the same job or the same industry all their lives and face the prospect of having to start all over again. In most cases, they simply need some more time. The economy is on the cusp of recovery and our Conservative government is working to help Canada begin a strong recovery. New job creation will probably lag behind the main economic indicators, so our government is taking this action to ensure that these long time workers have the bridge they need so they can get back into the workforce.

These measures will help to ensure that long-tenured workers who have paid into the EI system for years are provided the help they need while they search for new employment. These are temporary changes to the EI program to help workers when they need it most. The bill would extend national regular EI benefits for long-tenured workers by between five and twenty weeks, depending on the number of years workers have worked and paid EI premiums.

As proposed, the new temporary measure would cover all new claims established from early 2009 through to those established until early September 2010. Payments would then gradually phase out by fall of 2011. This temporary measure is designed to help long-tenured workers find work as our economy recovers. The additional weeks of EI regular benefits would help those workers by providing support for a longer period while they look for work during the economic downturn.

*Government Orders*

The bill is part and parcel of our government's economic action plan and works together with another initiative in that action plan, namely, career transition assistance. This measure extends EI benefits for up to two years for workers who are in longer term training. This initiative is also available to long-tenured workers and the eligibility criteria for this initiative and for Bill C-50 are the same. Through the bill, in concert with our economic action plan, we are taking action to help hard-working Canadians.

Our government is concerned about fighting this recession. This is in contrast to the official opposition, which is more intent on fighting the recovery. The government believes it is important to fight for working Canadians than fighting an unnecessary election.

Very notable organizations that support this bill and encourage party support to help workers through these tough economic times include Bill Ferguson, president of United Steel Workers Local 8782, "It's going to be quite good and give workers a little more time...This is a good thing to extend benefits to people like that".

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty called this measure "a step in the right direction".

Ken Lewenza, president Canadian Auto Workers said, "In the months ahead tens of thousands of unemployed workers are going to join the growing ranks of Canadians who have exhausted their EI benefits. They need action, not political posturing".

Ken Georgetti, president, Canadian Labour Congress said, "The government's proposed changes...we're pleased about that".

Don Drummond, TD Bank Chief Economist said, "I think time is going to prove that the debate we're having on the employment insurance system is focusing on the wrong thing. I think this recession will prove it has been less about an access problem than a duration problem".

These and many more people from the great leaders of industry across the country have stepped forward to give their support for this. It certainly encourages all members in the House to join together to the benefit of these unemployed workers and to give them temporary benefits they so dearly need. They have worked for so many years to pay for EI benefits.

•(1655)

I encourage all my colleagues in the House to support the bill because it is the right thing to do and it is the fair thing to do.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to what my hon. colleague had to say. I was particularly interested that he referred to some of the Canadian labour leaders who had spoken about the bill.

Many of the people whom I have spoken with in labour have been very clear. They say that what has been proposed goes a certain amount of the way, but it does not obviously address the overarching problems of EI. They understand it and we understand it. I would like to think the government understands it. I guess what does not seem to be understood is the position of the Liberal Party at this point.

We are in an economic crisis and we now have \$1 billion on the table that will help some workers but not every worker. However, the

role of the opposition is to continue to push the government to improve, to change, to address the shortcomings of the system that we have in this time of crisis.

When I hear the support we are getting from across the country from labour, they are saying that there is a bigger project for labour out there that has to be addressed, but the solution is not taking \$1 billion off the table so the Liberal Party can call an election.

What does my hon. colleague of the role of the House of Commons? We do not have to agree with each other. We do not have to like each other. However, Canadians sent us here. Canadians dealt the cards that put all of us in the House and told us to get something done.

Now we see something that can be done. It goes part of the way. It does not go all the way. We hear the Bloc members saying that they do not want to have anything to do with it because it does not give them everything they want in a perfect universe.

However, the Liberal members are saying something more insidious. They are saying that they do not want this on the table because they want the Liberal Party leader to get his chance at running for the leadership of the country. I think it is absolutely bizarre and delusional. I am sort of worried for his mental health if he thinks the cards are in his favour right now.

Would the member tell us why he thinks the Liberal Party members are putting their own personal interest above the interests of hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers who are calling on us to get some action on unemployment?

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's comments. I too am rather perplexed. We on this side of the House are trying to work with an economic action plan and trying to work through this recessionary time, which is a global issue. There are only so many things we can do, but we must work with the parties in the House.

I appreciate the interest of my colleague from the NDP in at least working to see what we can develop together, with our limited resources, that will help some reported 190,000 people. That is a considerable effort to work together on.

On the other hand, I find that it is not just perplexing, it is rather shameful that we have another party in the House, the official opposition, that is not interested in trying to discuss, trying to debate on some improvements for the 190,000 hard-working people.

I find it absolutely shameful that the Liberals are seemingly more interested in pulling the plug, going into an election early, an election the country does not want, a \$300 million election that we cannot frankly afford, than working together with all parties in the House to help those 190,000 people. That is worthy of working together.

•(1700)

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate on Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits.

As we have heard a number of times, this is a very specific bill that would address a particular group of workers in this country who have been in difficulty because of the economic downturn.



*Government Orders*

Specifically, the bill would address the needs of claimants whose benefits would begin after January 4, 2009 and who have claimed less than 35 weeks over the past five years. They would get from 5 to 20 extra weeks of benefits depending on how long they have been paying into the EI system.

The maximum additional weeks for those who have been paying at least 30% of their maximum annual premium in seven of the last 10 years is five weeks. To get more than that, an individual needs to have been paying that 30% for a longer period of time. To get the full 20 weeks, an individual needs to have paid in for 12 to 15 years. This is a very specific proposal that has come from the government in this regard.

We have heard different estimates of how many workers this would actually help during this recessionary period. The government has estimated that 190,000 workers would be able to take advantage of it. Others have suggested that the number is lower. It is a significant group of people nonetheless.

Thousands and thousands of Canadian workers would be able to extend their EI benefits because of their long attachment to the workforce. That is important to remember as we talk about this particular piece of legislation.

Almost \$1 billion is on the table to help these workers. That is a significant change from the attitude of the government in recent months. The government was not prepared to extend more money to help workers who had lost their jobs and were suffering through the recession. To put \$1 billion on the table to help workers is a significant concession by the Conservative government. We need to take that seriously because people need our assistance. To not accept the possibility of that assistance at this time is not a responsible position for a member of Parliament to take.

The particular group of workers that this legislation would help are older workers, workers who have been in their positions for a long period of time and have been paying into EI over a long period of time.

From years of experience we know that older workers who lose their jobs often have great difficulty getting back into the workforce. People in their mid to late fifties and sixties who lose their jobs face incredible challenges in finding work based on their age, based on their lack of training and lack of up to date training. That group of workers is often difficult to help retrain, to help get back into the workforce. That is why this legislation is particularly important. It would probably help older workers the most. We also need to pay particular attention to that when we are considering this legislation.

Older workers have been of particular concern to New Democrats and to people in the labour movement. Finding some help for them in this period of crisis would be a significant step forward.

Does this legislation address the 1.6 million Canadians who are out of a job? No, it does not address that incredibly high number. Does it address the 800,000 people who have lost their jobs and do not have access to EI at all? No, it does not do that. This is a very specific measure.

How do we say no to those older workers, to those workers who have lost their jobs after a long period of attachment to the

workforce? How do we tell them that they do not deserve the particular help that is being offered to them now? I am not in a position to say that they should not have this assistance.

I suspect that many of the workers who are not covered by this legislation, who still are not getting the kind of EI benefits that they deserve, are not going to say that older workers should not get the help that is proposed for them either. Workers will understand it is important that people who need help get it and that we will keep working to ensure that is broadened and other workers are brought in to programs that will give them assistance in this time of economic downturn.

I do not think this legislation pretends to be a comprehensive reform of the EI system, far from it, but we could use that.

● (1705)

New Democrats have proposed for a long time that we need to get back to the basics of what the unemployment insurance program was all about and recover some of the ground that we have lost over a number of decades, lost primarily, I have to say, under Liberal governments that gutted the unemployment insurance program.

The Liberals started that back in the 1970s. In fact, they lost their minister responsible for unemployment insurance when they first decided to gut the program back in the 1970s. The minister resigned over those changes that were imposed on Canadians back then. We saw them gut it again through the 1990s so that it is now a shadow of what it once was.

We saw the Liberals squander the money that they collected from employers and workers in Canada through their contributions for EI. That 54 billion, 55 billion, 56 billion, 57 billion dollars of money that was taken in over and above what was paid out in EI programs was applied to the deficit and the debt when it should have been applied to the needs of Canadians, when it should have been applied to ensure that the EI program was there when workers needed it.

If that \$57 billion were still there and available in the EI fund for workers today, we could do something significant about the situation of the unemployed in Canada. We could do something significant to stimulate the Canadian economy, because we know that employment insurance is one of the best ways to stimulate the economy. We know that EI targets people who need money, families who need the money the most. It targets communities that have often been hit the hardest by an economic downturn. We know that every dollar that goes into an EI program when people are unemployed gets spent by those workers, by those families in those communities. It is a very efficient way of delivering assistance to individuals, to families and to communities that need it most.

We still need that kind of program. We still need that kind of reform. Sadly, that is not what is before us today. What has been offered is a specific program that looks to assist older workers with a long-term attachment to the workforce, and I do not think we can turn our backs on that.

*Government Orders*

New Democrats have been very clear what we think needs to be done instead. New Democrats have, I believe, 12 private members' bills on the order paper that would amend the Employment Insurance Act to improve it, to improve accessibility, to improve benefits, to improve EI maternity benefits for women, to do all of those things that would make it a better program, that would make it the kind of program we in this corner could be proud of and that workers across Canada could be proud of.

We are not backing off from those ideas. They are going forward. We look forward to debating them in this House and seeing if we can get the support of other parties to make those important changes to the Employment Insurance Act.

We have also worked hard to push our ideas through this House. Back in the spring on our opposition day, when we get a chance to put forward our ideas, we put forward ideas about what needs to be done about employment insurance. We said that the two-week waiting period needed to be eliminated. We said that we should reduce the number of hours required to qualify for employment insurance down to 360 hours. We said that self-employed workers should be included, finally, in this program. We also said that the benefit rate needed to be raised to reflect the needs of folks who lose their jobs here in Canada. We put that forward in an opposition day motion. We debated it for a day here in the House of Commons. When it came to a vote, a majority of members of the House of Commons supported those recommendations.

Now, if the government took this place seriously, if the government took the will of the elected representatives of Canadians seriously, I would expect it would move on those ideas, on that broader reform of the EI system, so that we could restore it to a place that would make us proud and would offer Canadians the kind of assistance they need in this very difficult time. We have not seen that kind of movement yet.

What we do have on the table today is Bill C-50, with this specific program to assist up to 190,000 Canadian workers, to put a billion dollars into expanding the EI program. Those workers need help. I do not think we can turn our backs on them. It is not what we would have done. In this corner of the House, we will keep pushing the government to make other important changes, to do the right thing on EI. However, for now, we support this particular option that is before the House of Commons.

● (1710)

We are not giving the government a blank cheque. We are going to judge each proposal that comes forward to this House on a case by case basis. We are not going to turn our backs on this kind of assistance for workers in Canada.

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the member opposite raised a particular concern about long-tenured employees, and that is on the training. I had a personal experience in Edmonton with the closure of a major plant, and it was during a relatively buoyant economic period. The Maple Leaf plant put some 700 people out of work. Many of those people had been there 15 to 18 years. They had known no other life than that type of factory work. They had had regular income for a long period of time and then all of a sudden, they were out on the street.

It took years for them to find and eventually get employment. One of the most crucial factors for them to get employment was to go through some form of retraining. There were no jobs of the type they were used to.

This program affects so many people, so many workers in such a time of such great need. I ask my colleague, what is his impression on how the other two parties on that side could turn their backs on these workers? How could they want to take the stance for an election, which nobody across the country wants, based on the backs of the hundreds of thousands of workers who will not get these benefits if we go into an election?

I want to thank the member across the way for his comments, but maybe he could help to direct some of the public at large watching this to some type of rationale, some type of thinking on what would make two parties think they could turn their backs on all these workers and go into an election causing the workers not to get these types of benefits.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Madam Speaker, it is interesting. This is a difficult debate on this particular piece of legislation.

The choice before us is to assist a certain group of workers and not proceed with the kinds of changes that many of us in this place believe are necessary to the employment insurance program.

I can understand that members from a region where seasonal work is very important would be very concerned that seasonal workers are not helped by this particular piece of legislation.

I do not think the Conservative government is behaving appropriately in addressing the needs of seasonal workers. Those workers need help during this economic downturn, like other workers, like older workers, workers who have had a long attachment to the workforce. That is a very important group that needs the attention of this place and of the government.

Younger workers are also losing their jobs at this time. It is not easy for them either. I can understand when members of Parliament who feel that is a very important group believe that this legislation does not go far enough and does not address the concerns of younger workers at all, people who have not had the opportunity to build up that attachment to the labour force that allows them to take advantage of these proposals. The government should be addressing the needs of younger workers.

Women are also having a difficult time during this economic recession. We know that women need particular attention in our EI system, and they are not getting it from the government.

What about the people in high unemployment regions? Many forestry workers in British Columbia are not going to qualify for this because they lost their jobs long before this proposal was put on the table.

This is not the best proposal in the world. We need to pay attention to other groups of workers. There is lots of room to criticize the government's approach on employment insurance, but at the same time, in this corner of the House, we have looked at this bill and said that we cannot turn our backs on those workers who are offered this assistance at this moment in time.

*Government Orders*

Judging the piece of legislation that we have before us and the willingness of the government to move in that direction, we have decided to support that to make sure that those workers, up to 190,000 older workers with long attachment to the workforce, get some assistance. We are going to keep pushing for those other workers, seasonal workers, workers in high unemployment areas, workers where industries collapsed before the recession, women and young workers to see that they get the kind of assistance they need.

The EI program that we have is a shadow of what we need. The EI program we have should have been supported by that \$54 billion to \$57 billion, money that was collected from workers and employers in this country. In this corner, we are going to keep pushing to see that those improvements come along for those people as well.

● (1715)

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to start the wind-down to the second-reading debate today on Bill C-50. This is part and parcel of our government's efforts to help hard-working Canadians through these difficult economic times. Our government is focused on what matters to Canadians: finding solutions to help long-term workers who have worked hard and paid into the system for years but who are having trouble finding employment through no fault of their own, extending benefits to self-employed Canadians, and getting Canadians back to work through historic investments in infrastructure and skills training.

In my riding alone there is over \$50 million in projects that are ongoing, sewer- and water-related projects that were actually badly needed. Our government, through its economic action plan, has been providing these communities with moneys to go ahead with a lot of these projects and has been employing people in my riding. We are providing support to Canadians when they need it. The evidence of this is in our economic action plan, on which the latest report was announced and tabled this afternoon.

The best way to help unemployed Canadians, their families and the economy is to help Canadians get back to work. That is our number one priority. That is why our economic action plan included unprecedented investments in training for Canadians, whether or not they qualify for EI benefits, and an additional \$1.5 billion, which is helping over 150,000 Canadians.

We provided an additional five weeks of EI benefits across the country. We have improved and expanded work-sharing programs. We are protecting the jobs of over 165,000 Canadians through this agreement, and almost 5,800 businesses across Canada.

We have frozen EI premiums for two years, this year and next year, so that employers can keep more money and create more jobs, and Canadian workers can keep more of their hard-earned money during these tough economic times.

We have provided an additional \$60 million to help older workers because they have invaluable knowledge and experience and lots of potential left.

In our latest efforts, Bill C-50, we are supporting long-tenured workers, Canadians who have worked hard and paid their taxes and premiums for years and who are having difficulty finding new jobs. We are providing between five and 20 extra weeks of EI to help

approximately 190,000 long-tenured workers while they seek new employment. It is fair. It is the right thing to do.

As the minister has also said, we are moving forward with our campaign promise to provide maternity and paternity benefits to the self-employed. We are working hard fighting the recession. We applaud those members who are helping us. Other members want an unnecessary election that will hurt the economy and unemployed Canadians. We should be working together to help Canadians who need help, and this bill does just that. I encourage all colleagues to support Bill C-50.

It is interesting to be in Saskatchewan, because it has not faced the downturn as other provinces have. In my riding we are actually looking for people. I was just talking to a gentleman who owns an automotive workshop. He is actually trying to find mechanics.

I can understand that in regions of the country where people have been working for years and years, when they get laid off and they are unemployed, there is stress that goes with that and stress in the family. I can understand how having that extra time, that longer relief to receive those benefits would be important to them. That is what the government is doing.

I cannot understand why anybody would want to oppose that. It is the right thing to do. If a person has paid premiums for 19 or 20 years, do they not deserve a little bit of extra time to help get a job? It is one thing that our minister recognized and it is the one thing that a lot of our pundits and scrutineers have said we should be doing. It is giving a wider window to those people to find new jobs and take advantage of all their benefits and experience.

As I close, I say this is a good bill. It is good for Canada. It is good for the riding of Prince Albert, and I support it.

● (1720)

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member boast about what an excellent bill this is. As members know, however, the Bloc Québécois, people of my riding and every riding in Quebec, as well as Mouvement Action Chômage and labour do not necessarily find it all that good.

First, it does not benefit all the unemployed. Second, it creates a new category of unemployed workers. Some have lost their jobs several times these past few years, be it in the forestry or the manufacturing industry. These workers have had to apply for EI repeatedly, and there is nothing in this bill to allow them to qualify for EI.

*Government Orders*

I cannot understand. With all the money it has, with more than \$55 billion accumulated in the EI fund over the past few years, why does the government not implement something that would benefit all the workers who have lost their jobs and are going through really tough times?

[*English*]

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Madam Speaker, as I said, it is hard to come from Saskatchewan and talk about employment insurance, because our province is doing so well. Maybe we should be looking at the differences between Saskatchewan and Quebec and his region.

Look at my region, for example. We had a pulp mill that was shut down. People were laid off. They lost their jobs. It was serious. The city of Prince Albert was devastated. They thought that it would never recover, yet I go back to that city and it is growing. The people are employed. The pulp mill is still shut down. The folks have found work. The families are still there. Things evolve.

Our responsibility as a government is to help those people change when there is a structural change going on in the economy, and that is what we are doing. We are trying to provide proper training. We are trying to give them a hand up. That is what we have done in Prince Albert, and it is really exciting. In my riding, a couple of sawmills were sold. They are talking about reopening them, but doing something different.

The other exciting thing in my riding is wood chips. They are not looking at it for pulp anymore, but for use in biofuels, biodiesel and ethanol. In fact, my riding is proposing to have the world's first cellulose-based ethanol plant built in it, possibly at the old pulp mill location.

There are alternatives to the forestry industry that we all have to look at, and I would encourage the member to do that. If I could help him with that, I would enjoy doing that.

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am really delighted to have an opportunity to speak on this bill today, because it is an issue that affects many of my friends and neighbours and it is an issue that I think all members in the House agree is important.

It is important to debate. It is important to deal with it, and right from the start, I would like to say that this is why I find it so offensive that at least two opposition parties are more concerned about having an unnecessary and opportunistic election than they are with actually dealing with the problem of helping those who are unemployed, or with preventing some people from becoming unemployed if they are in a situation where they could maybe go into a job-sharing program instead of becoming unemployed.

These are the types of things that our government has offered and I really do find it offensive, and that is not a casually chosen word, that we have those who are more focused on having this unnecessary and opportunistic election than on dealing with the issues.

I hope that the members of the Liberal Party, and the Bloc in particular, will reconsider. They have both said they are not going to support this bill, and I hope they will reconsider, and stay away from an election that Canadians simply do not want, and deal with the issues at hand.

Our government takes the approach that the best way to deal with an issue like this is to prevent people from becoming unemployed. In cases where people do lose jobs, getting them back to work as quickly as possible is far better than focusing so much on the unemployed and employment insurance. We need to focus more on preventing that from happening and on retraining in cases where that does happen.

Retraining is very important, particularly in areas where a town depends so much upon one industry that disappears, with the forestry sector as an example, and there are simply not the jobs that there were in that industry. Our government is focused on what happens with these people and particularly if they are long-tenured workers.

I think of friends and neighbours who are in the 45- to 55-year age bracket. Not only for that age group but particularly for people in that age group, if they have been working at one job for a long period of time and they lose that job, and there is really no opportunity to get a new job in the same sector, what do they do?

It is critical to do what our government has done, which is to do things that will help them through this really difficult time. One thing is to retrain and to offer help in retraining. We are talking about retraining that will actually lead to another good job for these people. It has been proven in the past that it can be very effective. That is why we are focusing on that rather than on going to another election. It is just simply not what Canadians want.

Over this past week in my constituency, I know that people were not calling for an election. It was just the opposite. They were saying that it would be irresponsible to go to an election now. They want all parties to actually work together to make this Parliament work, and that is certainly what we intend to do.

Our government, as members know, has been focusing on the economy. That is what people want. They do not want us out campaigning. They do not want us involved in an unnecessary and opportunistic election. They want us out focusing on the economy. That is what we are doing and that is what we are going to continue to do until we get through this campaign—or through this recession, I meant to say.

It does seem like a campaign. That was a bit of a slip, but I have heard so much talk about it from the opposition that I was thinking to myself that that is where we are headed. I hope I am wrong. We are focusing on the economy and on getting jobs for Canadians, and that is what we are going to continue to do.

● (1725)

I will now talk about some of the things that our government has done. As I have said, this is an extremely important issue.

The member said that I should talk about the work sharing program. That is an ideal way to keep people working and to keep them from having to go on employment insurance as their only source of income. It gives them a little help along the way so that we can have people job sharing with other people still working.

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In this recession, if there is one thing that is more difficult than anything else for people to deal with it is losing a job and no longer being able to provide for their family. That affects not only the person who has lost the job but it also affects the whole family, friends and the community. What we are trying to do is to deal with that and the job sharing program that my colleague mentioned is one of the ways to do that.

As well, the additional five weeks that we have added to the amount of time that unemployed workers can collect unemployment insurance is extremely important. About 300,000 families are continuing to get income as they prepare themselves to get back into the workforce because of the change that our government has made. The five additional weeks is just one of the things that we are talking about.

We know that jobs are not created out of thin air. They are created by people who start, grow and continue to operate businesses, which, obviously, is where the jobs come from.

We know as well that high taxes kill jobs. Since our government came to office in 2006, we have been reducing taxes to individuals and to corporations. Some members across the way say that we should not be decreasing corporate taxes. However, where do most of our jobs come from? They come from small businesses that are often incorporated. They are the ones that create jobs, so we have reduced corporate taxes.

Also, we have frozen EI premiums, which is something I have not heard the opposition members talking about. We have frozen EI premiums which, in effect, is keeping taxes down below what they would be through the formula that was put in place by the former Liberal government. If that formula had been allowed to continue to operate, EI premiums would be going up which is a higher tax. These things certainly would hurt job creation and we do not want to do anything that would hurt job creation.

I will close by encouraging members of the opposition to take this focus away from a completely unnecessary and opportunistic election and get the focus back to running this country and working on behalf of those who are unemployed or otherwise would be unemployed. This would benefit us all and would certainly make life easier for those families who are directly involved.

• (1730)

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought forward some very important points on how we as members of Parliament can support what this government is doing and actually benefit Canadians instead of harm them with an unnecessary election.

Would my colleague comment further on the job training programs that we have offered? I think that in many of the industries that may be experiencing difficulties there are new opportunities for these workers and the training that can be provided will help them.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, that is certainly part of the whole package that we are putting forward. It is important to provide training programs, particularly to those long-tenured workers who otherwise would find it very difficult to get back into the workplace. We have put forth a package of programs. We have done things in the past and in this legislation we have put forth a training package

that will help people get back to work when they lose a job that they have had for many years.

• (1735)

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the member for his speech and the hard work he has done over the years.

I note that our government brought forward additional benefits this year of about \$5.8 billion. We have had more than 300,000 workers receive an additional five weeks of EI benefits. We have the enhanced EI work-sharing agreements supporting more than 164,000 workers and have extended EI benefits for long-tenured workers.

I know the member has spent many years here in the House and I wonder if he has ever seen a government that has moved so rapidly and quickly to address a problem and in such a substantive way.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question from the minister and the member for Provencher. I have been in the House for 16 years and I saw the former government, which people decided to replace about three and a half years ago, overtax people year after year with extra employment insurance premiums that simply were an additional tax. The money went into general revenues and was spent. I am talking about tens of billions of dollars. The employment insurance program simply moved away from being a true insurance program to being an additional tax and that simply—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not think it is right for the member to provide misinformation to the House. The previous government lowered the employment insurance payment 14 times, brought down the rates—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. I am not sure that is a point of order. The member has a short time to complete his answer.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, I understand why the member for Malpeque is a little bit unhappy about his former government's record on this issue. I can understand why he is touchy because in fact their record killed jobs and hurt the economy in this country. We have gone in another direction. We are helping the economy. We are helping people keep jobs and find new jobs. That is the difference.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** **The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Call in the members.

*And the bells having rung:*

**Mr. Joe Preston:** I wish to defer the vote until the end of government orders tomorrow.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The vote will be deferred until tomorrow.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT  
IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

The House resumed from September 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The member for Berthier—Maskinongé has five minutes for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

• (1740)

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to listen to my colleague's speech more than 10 days ago. He reminded us how bad the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement was for Canada and for Quebec.

This was 10 days ago, and not all of our honourable colleagues heard the speech. I would like the member for Berthier—Maskinongé to tell us again why he opposes this bill.

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for her question.

Of course we are opposed to this agreement for many reasons. First, we know very well that it is not a free trade agreement that targets trade. It focuses more on protecting investments. Therefore it is an investment-protection agreement.

Furthermore, I am a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade, which travelled to Colombia to meet with unions, management and all kinds of social groups. They all told us outright that Colombia is a corrupt country. Last week Ingrid Betancourt was in Quebec and she told us that there are major problems in Colombia at present.

A free trade agreement that protects investments—especially one that protects mining companies—will not solve the problems and improve the lot of thousands of Colombians who have been displaced by these large companies.

Supporting a free trade agreement will not improve protection for union workers who are the targets of paramilitary assassins. For these reasons, my colleague and I, as well as the entire Bloc Québécois, are opposed to the signing of this agreement with Colombia.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague because he hit the nail right on the head with this issue. On this bill, the Liberals and the Conservatives are only interested in protecting the ability of capital to move wherever it wants.

However, when we raise the numerous human rights violations, the 28 or 29 workers who have been killed this year alone, not by drug cartels or violence and street gangs, but people who are organizing in their workplace, the response we have received from the Liberals and the Conservatives is that every country has problems, even Canada, but that the best way to help the country is to ignore the problems. Their response seems to be to ignore people who are being killed working in the very plants in which we are looking to invest. They tell us that as long as we allow capital to do whatever it wants without any obligations, somehow conditions will improve in Colombia.

Given the member's experience with the people he has spoken with, why does he think the Liberals and the Conservatives are showing no interest whatsoever in the killings that have taken place this year while this thing was being debated under their watch?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy André:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

Why is that the case? When it comes to free trade agreements—and we know that the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement does not address any real issues—both the Liberals and the Conservatives have basically said that if we do more business with a particular country and that country generates more income, there will automatically be better redistribution of the collective wealth to support society's poor.

But it is not automatic at all. Quite the contrary. For example, the Americans have a lot of money in circulation, but they are still fighting for a public health system.

So it is not true that, if a country amasses more dividends and income, things will be better for people with problems and high crime rates like Colombia's will come down. That is what we keep hearing in the House, but I disagree completely.

• (1745)

[*English*]

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is great to rise in the House today and speak on behalf of this bill; in support of my colleague the Minister of International Trade, who is doing an absolutely fantastic job on this file; and on behalf of our Prime Minister, who is espousing the virtues of trade around the world and doing a great job on the international stage.

I want to touch on something that is near and dear to my heart and near and dear to the hearts of my constituents: the agricultural sector. That is the part I will be focusing on in my remarks today with regard to Bill C-23. Our government is pulling out all the stops to help ensure that Canadian farmers succeed and to build a strong future for the agricultural sector as a whole.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is a strong example of how the government is working to maintain and expand markets for our agricultural exports. Our Conservative government has been working very hard to build new opportunities in global markets for our producers. Our government has negotiated free trade agreements with key markets including: Colombia; Jordan; Panama; the European Free Trade Association, including the countries of Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein; and also Peru.

During the constituency break that we all had just recently, farmers and producers, particularly in my riding of Wetaskiwin, told me how happy they were with our progress on market access and the initiatives that we put forward. We produce so much more beef, pork, grains and oilseeds than we could possibly use here in Canada. Because we are an exporting nation, it is absolutely critical and fundamental to our producers that we have market access and a level playing field for our producers to trade and compete on. That is absolutely vital to the producers that I represent. I am proud to represent them and I am proud of the work our government has done on this file.

The government signed the Canada-Colombia bilateral free trade agreement on November 21, 2008. This free trade agreement will strengthen our existing trade relationship with Colombia. It will provide Canadian exporters and producers with improved access to this very important market.

Colombia has been an important partner in agricultural trade. In 2008, Canada exported agrifood products worth \$212 million and imported \$297 million worth of products, mainly coffee, bananas, flowers and sugar. In fact, Colombia is the second-largest market for Canadian agricultural exports to South America. It is a very important trading partner indeed.

Canadian producers will benefit from the elimination of tariffs on exports into Colombia. Many agricultural exports such as wheat, barley, lentils and peas will receive immediate duty-free status. That is very important. Commodities such as beef and beans will also benefit from immediate duty-free access within specified volumes. Canada is not alone in pursuing an ambitious bilateral free trade agreement agenda. Colombia has concluded similar agreements with the United States and is negotiating another one with the European Union.

Allowing Canadian agricultural exporters to remain competitive with other preferential suppliers to Colombia is key to maintaining a competitive sector. This free trade agreement will ensure that Canadian exports compete on par with exports from the United States to the Colombian market for products such as beef, beans, whisky, vodka and maple syrup.

To the benefit of our processors and consumers, Canada will immediately eliminate tariffs on nearly all agricultural imports from Colombia. Signing a free trade agreement with Colombia has also

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provided momentum for Canada to engage the Colombian government in substantive technical discussions toward lifting Colombia's ban on Canadian beef and cattle.

Step by step, our government is reopening markets to Canadian producers. This strategy is sending a strong message to the rest of the global community that it is time that their consumers once again enjoy our top quality Canadian products.

Our government looks forward to exploring new and expanded opportunities for Canadian agricultural exporters and farmers. As we move forward, the government will continue to consult closely with the entire agricultural industry regarding how best to advance Canada's interests. We are working with our trading partners to establish bilateral and regional agreements and we are working with industry, all with the common goal of building our agricultural trade and opening up new opportunities for our farmers and processors.

Opening and expanding markets around the world creates opportunities for our producers to drive the Canadian economy. During this time of global economic uncertainty, we have to maximize trade opportunities on the world stage. As our Prime Minister has said:

Canada will be watching how the United States implements the "Buy American" clause in its stimulus package, because it could quickly send the world economy from recession into depression.

● (1750)

That is how serious the threat of protectionism is at this time. That is why it is so important that our country engages other trading partners around the world. It is good for Canada. It is good for the partners that we trade with and it is good for their respective citizens.

Furthermore, protectionism does not help farmers or Canadian businesses, but our government's trade initiatives do. They help all farmers and all Canadians by creating jobs and long-term prosperity.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite a question.

We know that trade between Canada and Colombia is minimal compared to our overall trade with the Americas. Yet Canada has a great deal of money invested in Colombia, especially in the mining sector.

What is the real reason for signing this treaty? It is called a free trade treaty, which gives the impression that it is primarily about trade. But is it not true that it is designed to protect Canadian investments and that the goal is to create conditions that unfairly favour Canadian investments?

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In fact, clauses in the treaty provide that, as in many other treaties signed by Canada with southern nations, investors whose profits decrease as a result of the adoption of progressive labour and environmental protection policies can sue the Colombian government and prevent Colombia from making social and environmental progress.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's question. He is asking me a question about mining after my speech primarily focused on agriculture. He wants to talk about mining and I would like to talk about wheat, but that is okay. I will answer his question anyway.

The free trade agreement that we are signing with Colombia is progressive. I always ask myself: Who do I have the most influence with? Do I have influence with somebody who is my friend, or do I have influence with somebody who I do not have a relationship with? When it comes to creating relationships with our friends, I like to think that Canada has much more influence with its friends than it does with people with whom it does not have a relationship.

Colombia is emerging. It is doing the right things. Yes, there are some troubles but these things have been overcome. Crime and killings are on the decrease. The government is getting focused on providing security and a safe environment for its workers and its citizens.

Canada is a model in the way we do business, in the way we conduct ourselves around the world. It will be great when Canada's influence in Colombia is extended through this agreement because it will bring further prosperity, further harmony, and produce great benefits not only for the people of Canada but for the people of Colombia as well.

Helping to bring people up creates more human rights and a better quality of life for all citizens involved on both sides of this agreement.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the member for Burnaby—New Westminster who has been tireless in raising the important issues around this free trade agreement.

I would like the member for Wetaskiwin to specifically comment on the fact that in 2008 the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that no agreement be signed with Colombia until the human rights situation there had improved. As well, the committee recommended that a human rights impact assessment be undertaken to determine the real impact of a trade agreement.

This is in the context of the fact that indigenous people in Colombia are going to be affected by any free trade agreement. Appropriate consultation is consistently called for in Canada when first nations are going to be impacted by any kind of potential development.

I wonder if the member could specifically comment as to his views on this human rights impact assessment on the indigenous people in Colombia.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, my comments in my speech were mainly regarding agriculture but if nobody in the New Democratic Party or the Bloc Québécois wants to talk about agriculture I am fine with that as well.

The reality is that there have been some issues. Absolutely. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster has been asking many questions in the House with the precision of a frisbee thrown in a hurricane.

The labour agreement that is covered is a side agreement. There is an environmental agreement, a labour agreement and the right to freedom of association. That is a great improvement for the citizens of Colombia. The labour agreement would ensure collective bargaining agreements and that is a great thing. One would think the NDP would be solidly behind collective bargaining. For some reason those members are going to vote against collective bargaining.

The abolition of child labour is another great thing in this agreement and that is consistent with the United Nations declaration. Other great things include: the elimination of discrimination, providing protections for occupational safety and health and employment standards such as minimum wages and overtime pay. I have no idea why the Bloc Québécois and the NDP are so outraged by these things.

•(1755)

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make some comments on the former speaker's remarks, but maybe I will try to include those in the points that I am going to make today.

I would like to speak about four particularly egregious parts of this free trade agreement, and then I would like to talk a little bit about the difference between free trade and fair trade, which I think is an argument and a discussion that we need to have.

This free trade agreement really is a failure regarding labour rights protection. It does not include tough labour standards, and by putting it into a side agreement, outside of the main text without any vigorous enforcement mechanism, it is destined to do absolutely nothing. There are problems with that.

The second egregious aspect of this free trade agreement is a failure regarding environmental protection. The environmental issue is also addressed as a side agreement. It has no enforcement mechanism to force Canada or Colombia to respect environmental rights. It is as simple as that.

The third egregious part of this free trade agreement is the investor chapter. I have been out on this and my party has been out on this for a number of free trade agreements, including NAFTA. This investor chapter is almost copied directly from NAFTA's chapter 11 on investor rights. The bottom line is that it allows companies to sue governments. That is dangerous. It involves the sovereignty of nations.



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The fourth egregious part, and this is what the previous speaker was talking about, is agriculture and agricultural tariffs. Colombia's poverty is directly linked to agricultural development in a country where 22% of the workforce is agricultural. Now an end to tariffs on a number of Canadian goods could very well flood the market with cheap goods and could lead to the loss of thousands of jobs in the agricultural sector of Colombia.

Those are the four aspects of this agreement that really cause me some grief, and I think cause the rest of the NDP some grief.

Let me talk about free trade and fair trade. What do I mean when I talk about fair trade? We hear this expression all the time. Fair trade is really trade rules and agreements that promote sustainable practices, domestic job creation and healthy working conditions, while allowing us to manage the supply of goods, promoting democratic rights abroad and maintaining democratic sovereignty at home. All of those are elements of fair trade.

Free trade agreements that we have entered into, and I have spoken back in my riding and in this House about NAFTA and softwood lumber and other agreements, really fall quite short of being considered fair trade.

The question remains, how do we promote fair trade? When we make agreements, we can have new agreements which encourage improvement in social, environmental and labour conditions rather than just minimizing the damage of unrestricted trade. Federal and provincial procurement policies should stimulate Canadian industries by allowing governments to favour suppliers here at home.

How else can we promote fair trade? Supply management boards and single-desk marketers, like the Canadian Wheat Board, can help to replace imports with domestic products and materials. Lastly, we can promote fair trade with local, community and individual initiatives to buy fair trade imports and locally-produced goods.

Why fair trade and not free trade? Fair trade policies protect the environment by encouraging the use of domestically and locally-produced goods. We hear all about the 100 mile diet and all sorts of things going on in this country. I have a large agricultural sector in my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

What using locally-produced goods basically means for the environment is less freight, less fuel and less carbon. By promoting environmentally-conscience methods for producers who ship to Canada, we can make a positive environmental impact.

● (1800)

By contrast, free trade policies, even those created with the environment in mind, do little to impede multinational corporations from polluting with abandon. The environmental side agreement of NAFTA, for example, has proven largely unenforceable, particularly when compared with other protections for industries and investors.

A system of fair trade that encourages the growth of Canadian jobs, both in quality and in quantity, fair competition rules and tougher labour standards will put Canadian industries on a level playing field with our trading partners and slow the international race to the bottom. That has resulted in the loss of thousands of Canadian manufacturing jobs.

Free trade rules, on the other hand, have hurt Canadian job quality. Since 1989, most Canadian families have seen a decline in real incomes. Fair trade can also protect labour rights by fostering the growth of workers' co-operatives and labour unions.

Like the environmental side accord, NAFTA's labour agreement has gone mostly unenforced, giving industries that are willing to violate workers' rights incentives to relocate Canadian jobs. Fair trade policies which favour co-ops, unions and equitable pricing will protect workers in the developing world who might otherwise be exploited and take away reasons for Canadian producers to export jobs.

Fair trade rules would also protect societies and human rights right around the globe. Although some predicted a human rights benefit from unrestricted free trade, this has yet to be seen. In contrast, conflicts between locals and multinational corporations in such places as Peru have become violent. A fair trade policy that aims for benefits for all parties can protect the most vulnerable from human rights abuse.

Here are some facts about Colombia.

Colombia is not, in the grand scheme of things, a very significant trading partner for Canada. It is our fifth largest trading partner in Latin America.

We have heard before in this debate, from various quarters, about the problems and the violence that goes on in Colombia. I have been to Colombia recently and while things have improved in the last six years in terms of numbers, it is still a country where three people a day on average are killed by land mines. That is the highest in the world. It is a dangerous place to live and it is a dangerous place to work.

What we can do with a trade agreement is help to promote a country that is healthy and respects human rights. Maybe that should be one of the most important things about a trade agreement, certainly a fair trade agreement.

If we think about the environment, nearly 200,000 hectares of natural forest are lost in Colombia every year due to agriculture, logging, mining, energy development and construction. The rights of indigenous peoples are trampled upon. Many people do not know that the very southern border actually runs along the Amazon River, where many of the indigenous peoples in Colombia live. It is a very important spot environmentally and a very important spot for indigenous people and indigenous rights.

Almost four million people in Colombia are internally displaced, and 60% of this displacement is really in regions of mineral activity, agricultural and other economic activities.

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I do not believe that this free trade agreement is very well thought out. I do believe that improvements could have been made. We could end up with, rather than a free trade agreement, a fair trade agreement, if only the government had the will to do so.

• (1805)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague. I keep coming back to a fundamental question that I have not heard answered by the Liberals and Conservatives, who are supporting the bill. In the very year when the bill was being negotiated, 28 or 29 union activists were taken out and murdered in Colombia. That is a staggering number.

We are told that there are always problems anywhere. There are not problems like this in many places that we deal with as equal partners. The Conservatives and the Liberals tell us that the crime rate is dropping. We still see an increase in murders. However, overall crime rate is not the issue. The issue is a fundamental lack of human rights respect so that international capital can exploit certain resources.

My colleague mentioned four million displaced persons. We are not talking about a country that is at war, unless we are talking about a country that is at war internally. Of all the questions we have asked, I have never heard one answer from the Conservatives or the Liberals as to what they have done to raise these issues. They talk about side agreements, but what does my hon. colleague think about the difference it would make if the Conservative government said to the government of Colombia that it wanted to know what steps it would take to investigate the murders of union activists by paramilitaries? That would make a real difference for a change rather than simply rubber-stamping an agreement that has no teeth?

**Mr. John Rafferty:** Mr. Speaker, one of the big problems with this free trade agreement is that environment and labour rights are side agreements. When we have side agreement and we do not put them in the actual text of the agreement, they become largely unenforceable. We know that from experience. We know that through NAFTA. We know that through softwood lumber. We know trade agreements need to be strong on those elements. They need to ensure that human rights are not abused.

This agreement should present Canadians with an opportunity to help Colombia improve its record and to work toward a goal where we can work together and where human rights are not abused.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague and I have a question for him.

We know that the Conservatives and the Liberals believe that unionized workers in Colombia will be better off if this agreement is signed. However, I have looked at some statistics. In 2007, 39 unionists were murdered in Colombia. In 2008, 49 were murdered. There has been a 25% increase in the number of murdered unionists since negotiations on the agreement between Canada and Colombia began. Colombia does not seem to be putting a stop to this reign of terror against unionists.

I would like the hon. member to give me his take on the situation.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Rafferty:** Mr. Speaker, I have a further statistic that 27 trade unionists have been murdered since January to last month. The carnage continues. It is difficult in a country where there are approximately 1,800 murders a year. That is not including people who are killed by landmines and other things. It is a problem Colombia has dealt with for decades and decades and indeed centuries.

I had an opportunity to speak to some government officials some months ago in Colombia. They said that this was a problem that had gone on for 2,000 years. I have been told that it is the oldest democracy in that part of the world, and this is nothing new in that country.

I stand and talk about fair trade and human rights to make the point that we can make a difference as a country when we enter into trade agreements with other countries.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, no one in this House will be surprised to hear that the Bloc Québécois is opposed to Bill C-23.

I am proud of my party's position. I am particularly disappointed, however, in my colleagues from the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. To them, a free trade agreement has become a panacea to allow globalization to take form and evolve. What they do not seem to realize is that if the agreement does not include provisions on workers' rights, the right to a safe environment and human rights, then we are in serious trouble.

Having examined the provisions in this agreement, I see that it is not actually a free trade agreement. I can say this to my colleague who spoke earlier and who is doing an excellent job on this file. We hear a lot of talk from the other side of the House, and on this side from the Liberal Party, about trade. It is very important. However, this is more of an investment agreement. When it comes to investments, we really want to protect Canadian investors and make sure that they do not become victims, for example, of nationalization. For instance, after they have invested their money, from one day to the next, the government could decide that the investments belong to the government from now on. We therefore understand the importance of reciprocity treaties between two economies to ensure that these things do not happen.

However, when it is associated only with doing business to the detriment of the environment, the workers and human rights in that country, we must put a stop to it. And that is the case with Bill C-23 before us.

*Government Orders*

When a government in a developed country, a western government like Canada or the United States, signs this type of treaty, it must ensure that it is able to put pressure on a government that does not respect human rights, workers or the environment. However, this treaty does not contain such provisions. The economy is given free rein. We are told that it will work itself out, and a side agreement or additional agreement will be added for the rest. Yet past experience shows us that this never works. It never happens like that. The free trade agreement is signed with a promise to add an agreement on the environment or on human rights later, but as time goes on any agreement is seen as so minor that it is not worth the trouble.

The Canadian government is therefore renouncing the carrot and stick approach. Such an approach would allow us to tell a government that we will withdraw whatever it was we were offering if it does act responsibly, and if things improve, we can tell that government that other things will be added. That goes hand in hand with Canada's vision, or the vision of any forward thinking society.

We therefore do not believe the argument that the agreement can be signed now, and the side agreements on the environment and human rights will follow at a later date.

There have been some problems. For example, chapter 11 of NAFTA is rather explicit. It covers a lot. I remind members that the free trade agreement we are negotiating is fairly similar to what is in that chapter.

The problems with chapter 11 of NAFTA have been pointed out; for instance, foreign investors could proceed directly to the courts without going through the government. When a government has a social conscience, it acts as a filter. It tries to ensure that any developments are fair and just. But in the agreements, the investors are able to go directly to the courts, regarding present or future investments, to dispute the fact that a government did not do its job and that the investor was harmed.

• (1815)

Suppose that there are children working in Columbia and we do not agree with this, but the investors claim that they earn more when they hire children, or when they ravage the environment, and that those things are not important because they want to increase profits. That is what it could come to.

There are also amounts for legal action that are not necessarily related to current investments, but that could be related to future ones. It will be a free-for-all. From then on, as soon as there are social or environmental measures that go against the interests of investors, they could take legal action. This was a problem contested and criticized by many people, and the previous government stopped including chapters that let the investors run the show.

Allow me to explain what I mean when I say that this is not a trade agreement. Usually, two countries that sign an agreement are on a par financially. But Colombia's GDP was \$256 billion in 2007. Canada's was \$1,610 billion. This is not the same level. Colombia is not in the same league as Canada. I believe that what the government wants is not necessarily a trade agreement, but an agreement on investments. Colombia has attractive mines. Investors want to invest in these mines. Therein lies the problem. Investors will be able to challenge more progressive social policies and environmental

protection measures that the government wants to put in place. They will be able to challenge such measures in court.

Colombia's per capita GDP is \$5,314, while Canada's is \$48,000. What is in this sort of agreement for Quebeckers and Canadians? Nothing. It is not a trade agreement. It is an agreement on investors. Investors have a major stake in this type of treaty. That is why we are opposed to this agreement.

Colombia is a poor country where 47% of the population lives below the poverty line. Will this agreement improve the lives of Colombians? Will it lead to greater respect for the environment?

No, it will not. It will have a negative impact on our companies, because they have standards to comply with in the areas of human rights, workers' rights and the environment. And will we allow these countries to do whatever they want? They will make children work for 15¢ or 20¢ an hour. How will our companies stay competitive in the face of such measures and such lax standards? This is a negative step. I call on my colleagues to come to their senses.

In addition, there is an incestuous relationship between the famous paramilitary groups and the government. It is said that Colombia has become a narco-state. I believe it is true. Last week, I read that 30 members of the Colombian Congress had been arrested and that 60 others were under investigation. There is an incestuous relationship between the paramilitaries and the government of this narco-state. We need to wake up.

I call on my Liberal and Conservative colleagues to amend Bill C-23 and not pass it as is. We say yes to investors and trade, but not at the expense of workers, the environment and human rights.

I hope that our colleagues will take their lead from the Bloc Québécois, which has a very enlightened position on this bill, in my opinion.

• (1820)

[English]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague, and I could not believe some of things he was saying.

Are we more likely to help Colombia or anybody else progress in their human rights record or their economies by working with them or ignoring them?

I have to point out something that the hon. member said. He seemed to give the impression that because the GDP in Canada is \$48,000 and the GDP in Colombia is \$5,000 that somehow it is unworthy of Canada to work with and help Colombia. I cannot believe he actually said that. The GDP in Afghanistan is about \$500. By extension, does that mean we should ignore Afghanistan and all the things it needs and the help that Canada can bring it just because it is not up to our standard of GDP?

For heaven's sake, I cannot believe the member would say that.

*Government Orders*

I ask the member, generally speaking, whether it is Colombia or Afghanistan, can we help people better by working with them in helping to bring their standards up by entering into these kinds of agreements, or do we just ignore them and say, "To heck with you. You're not up to our standard. Why should we work with you?" That is ridiculous.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, I would note that this is not the first time I have opposed the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. We often cross swords in Standing Committee on National Defence meetings because he tends to grandstand a lot.

That is not what I said. All I did was compare our two economies. If the parliamentary secretary really wants to help Colombians, he should make sure that the agreement includes clauses that cover the environment, union rights, workers' rights and respect for human rights. That does not exist in Colombia. That is the right way to help them, not by putting on blinkers and saying that it is all about trade, that it is good for investors, that everything is good, and that the investors and big companies investing there are like some kind of panacea.

The people I am worried about are Canadian workers and the workers and people of Colombia whose lives will not get better under this agreement. This is not the first time I have disagreed with the parliamentary secretary, and I could go on about that at length. Have things improved in Afghanistan in the last 10 years? I think not. This is neither the first nor the last time the parliamentary secretary and I will have differing opinions.

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague from Saint-Jean's remarks. I am always surprised at how both Liberals and Conservatives always share the same perspective on a bill.

I would like my colleague to explain why the Conservatives and the Liberals are once again supporting the same approach, the same idea, and why they are protecting investors.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. They have the same view. This sounds familiar to me. I often say they are in bed together.

When this government started introducing right-wing measures, the Liberal Party followed it. These two parties have the same position on a whole host of issues concerning Quebec. What is more, they adopt the same positions, but not just when it comes to Quebec. The first time I noticed this was on Afghanistan. I heard this party say for a year that it would not maintain our presence in Afghanistan and that position changed from one day to the next.

The same is true with politics. When they feel like they are about to gain power, they do not want to move too quickly, they want to protect themselves. Today, in this matter, as with Afghanistan and many other issues, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party have the same view. They are in bed together.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between

Canada and the Republic of Colombia, and the two side agreements to that trade agreement: the side agreement on environment and the side agreement on labour co-operation. We know this as the Canada-Colombia free trade implementation act.

I think it has been said many times in this corner of the House that there is absolutely no way New Democrats can stand by and allow this kind of arrangement between Canada and Colombia to go ahead. This is a despicable international agreement to be proceeding with at this time, given the excesses of the government in Colombia.

We do not need to go any further than to look at the record of the Government of Colombia when it comes to trade unionism. The number of trade unionists who have died in Colombia in recent years is in the thousands. Even in this very year, 2009, so far we know that about 27 trade union activists have been murdered in Colombia. That is an incredible record of oppression and violence.

As we are debating strengthening our ties with Colombia and opening more opportunities for doing business with Colombia, I wonder how we can explain that to the families of people like Adolfo Tique, who was murdered in January, or more recently, Mauricio Antonio Monsalve Vásquez, who was murdered just last month in Colombia. What do we say to their families, as Canadians, when we are proposing to enter into this kind of agreement, establishing this kind of relationship with the Republic of Colombia when these kinds of excesses are being perpetrated against workers, families, the people of Colombia?

I do not think there is any way we can possibly justify proceeding with this kind of agreement with Colombia at this time.

There are some very serious problems with this legislation. I have already mentioned the failure on labour rights protection. It is without a doubt that Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries on the planet for trade unionists. They are victims of violence, intimidation and assassination by paramilitary groups, some of which are said to have links to the Colombian president himself.

There are no tough labour standards in this agreement. The labour agreement is a side agreement to the main trade agreement. We know that these side agreements are the least effective parts of such international agreements.

There is nothing in this trade agreement that would enforce human rights protection for trade unionists, for instance, in Colombia. In fact there is a penalty clause, which amounts to the ability for Colombia to actually pay for ongoing human rights violations. There is nothing that says Colombia has to stop the violations; it can pay a fine and those violations can continue. It is not a particularly effective mechanism for improving the human rights situation in the country.

There is also a side agreement on the environment that is related to this. Again, side agreements are lesser agreements. They are not effective. They have been proven ineffective. There is no serious enforcement mechanism that would force either Canada or Colombia to respect environmental rights. Some people have called this a smokescreen in the agreement, that it is not a serious part of what was undertaken in terms of the development of this accord between Colombia and Canada. It is something that leaves an awful lot to be desired before we would enter into this kind of agreement.

This agreement also includes the same investor chapter we have seen in NAFTA's chapter 11, investor rights, which gives powerful rights to private companies to sue governments. The private companies' interests are enforceable through investor state arbitration panels. We have seen this used to override the democratic interests of Canadians, for instance, when it comes to enforcing our democratic interests in our agreements in trading relationships with the United States. Now we are proposing to enter into a similar kind of agreement with Colombia, with all the extra problems an agreement with that particular country involves.

There is also a serious problem with agricultural tariffs in this bill as well. We know that Colombia has severe poverty and that poverty is directly linked to the agricultural development sector in Colombia.

• (1825)

If tariffs are removed, what will that do to the Canadian agricultural sector, especially to cereals, pork and beef? I—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. I must interrupt. The member for Burnaby—Douglas will have five minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1830)

[English]

### HEALTH

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to once again question the government on an issue of lack of transparency and lack of truthfulness on the part of the government.

During question period on April 21, my colleague for Malpeque and I asked the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to clarify some information in a report that he had tabled on April 17. In the report that he tabled, he claimed that on July 18, 2008, the National Microbiology Laboratory had informed the Ontario Minister of Health that it discovered matching genetic fingerprints in two separate human cases of listeria.

Everyone knows that when the listeriosis crisis hit, 22 Canadian lives were lost. However, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health contradicted the report of the government and said that the information was in fact received on July 30 and not July 18 as the minister's report contended. We asked the minister to please clarify whether it was on the 18th or the 30th.

### Adjournment Proceedings

At that time, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture claimed that the matters and issues had all been dealt with in committee. He said:

Mr. Speaker, all of these questions were answered in the subcommittee last night. We heard from both Mr. McCain of Maple Leaf Foods and from the CFIA itself...I would recommend that he review the transcripts.

I reviewed the transcripts, and there is no clarification there. I ask the government once again when, in fact, was the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health informed that the National Microbiology Laboratory had discovered matching genetic fingerprints in two separate human cases of listeria? Was it on July 18 as the minister claimed in the report tabled in the House on Friday, April 17, or was it July 30, as the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health mentions in his report of April 2009?

It is a simple question. Which is it?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate the member opposite has not followed the hearings of the special committee on this very subject. If she had, the member would have a clear understanding of the timelines which were gone over at the committee.

We have seen some of the leadership of the opposition party on the other side failing to even follow what is going on in the House of Commons. I guess I should point out that the House of Commons agriculture committee has declined to support a public inquiry, so we believe the matter has been discussed at length.

I thank the member for the opportunity to speak to all of the positive action that the government has taken since the report of the independent investigator, which came out this summer. These investments that we have made improve our ability to protect Canadians from outbreaks related to food-borne illness. That is something the previous Liberal government failed to do as the Liberals continuously gutted food safety funding during their tenure.

Indeed, to restore trust in our food safety system, our government has studied and is acting upon all of the recommendations made in the reports of the independent investigator and the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, as well as the respective lessons learned by PHAC, Health Canada and the CFIA.

The government has reviewed Canada's food safety systems and emergency response operations in the context of the outbreak and each of the lessons learned reports. The reports are detailed and frank assessments of what worked and what did not and demonstrate our government's commitment to a robust and effective food safety system.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Our Conservative government is responding quickly, professionally, tirelessly and effectively and has worked co-operatively with its partners during the outbreak investigation and the subsequent recall process. However, we recognize there are areas where we can improve, and we are acting on these. We are also moving ahead on all 57 recommendations made by the independent investigator, Sheila Weatherill, who was commended by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food for her excellent indepth investigation.

Seventy-five million dollars is being invested over the next three years to immediately begin implementing these recommendations. Action will focus on prevention, surveillance, a detection and better response, including the hiring of 166 food safety staff, which includes the training of 70 new front line inspectors of ready-to-eat meats. It also includes providing 24/7 availability of health risk assessment teams to support food safety investigations, and implementing a national public health surveillance tool to improve detection, recording and analysis.

Already our Conservative government has made significant changes to Canada's listeria management strategy, including making environmental testing and reporting mandatory at ready-to-eat meat plants and reinstating end-product testing by government inspectors.

Food safety is a number one priority of our Conservative government, and we now have tougher food safety regulations than ever before. That is why it is this government and not the Liberal Party that Canadians can trust.

• (1835)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about how it is unfortunate that I have not followed the committee meetings and the hearings on listeriosis.

In fact, I have followed them. I have read the transcripts. The transcripts make very clear that the National Microbiology Laboratory discovered the human genetic code of listeriosis on July 18. I have also read the Ontario chief medical officer's report of April 2009 in which he clearly states that he only received the notification on July 30. I have also read the report that the minister tabled on April 17 in which he claimed that the National Microbiology Laboratory informed Ontario's chief medical officer on July 18.

I would suggest that the member go back and do his homework. It is typical of the Conservatives to obfuscate the facts and then turn around and attack other people. I suggest he does his homework. Maybe he and his government might want to tell the truth for once. Which was it, the 18th or the 30th?

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, we see the excesses from the other side one more time. What we do is that the previous Liberal government took every measure possible to gut our food safety system.

Unlike the Liberals, our government has increased funding and inspectors to food safety. We originally added 200 new inspectors and put \$113 million into the food safety and consumer action plan. We have just announced an additional \$75 million for food safety and another 160 food safety staff to address the Weatherill report.

Contrast that to the Liberals. Food safety was cut by the Liberals in 1994, again in 1995. If that was not enough, they did it again in

2005. To justify his cuts, former Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin said:

Surely we can all agree that it is simply silly for a food-processing plant to have a federal meat inspector, a federal health inspector, a federal fish inspector, not to mention a provincial health inspector and a provincial food inspector tripping over themselves on the same day, in the same plant...

The record is clear. The Liberals gutted our food safety system.

[Translation]

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the agri-food industry and food processors have a dilemma, and they do not know what to do about it. For example, according to the standard, for an item to be labelled "made in Canada", 98% of the ingredients must be produced in Canada, which is totally unrealistic.

The Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State for Agriculture, the member for Jonquière—Alma, insisted on the 98% standard for labelling items as "Made in Canada".

We know that even as he was insisting on that, the committee was discussing the matter with the processing industry, which said that the standard was completely unrealistic because it is virtually impossible for products like cookies, blueberry jam from Lac-Saint-Jean and ice wine from Ontario to have less than 2% foreign ingredients. We know that many sweets, such as cookies, contain a lot of sugar. No industry can achieve the 2% goal, so nobody will be able to use the "made in Canada" label.

From April to June, while the committee was doing its job and meeting with different processing industries, they went ahead with a bill. Last April, I addressed the first questions to the minister. He wanted to proceed with a 98% standard, everything was all right and he had consulted the industry. But that was not the case. The industry told us that it did not make sense. For example, the Leclerc company in Quebec told us its cookies could no longer comply with the ridiculous legislation put in place by this government and this minister's stubbornness.

Last July, the industry made many presentations to the minister. He stated that he had listened to the complaints and that he wanted to correct the situation. He says that he wants to correct the situation but then he says that he will write to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board to keep him informed.

What is the Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture) doing to correct a situation that is untenable for many food processing industries?

It also means that the committee's work was ignored. We told him. We warned him and told him it was untenable. And yet, in committee, everyone had agreed on 85% as an acceptable standard. Once again, as is the case with the employment insurance bill, they are ignoring the people's concerns and want to move forward with a bill that does not take reality into account.

I have raised this in the adjournment debate today to make the minister understand that it is time to act and that it is not difficult for him to meet with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board because he is his colleague. He should immediately change the 98% rule and lower it to a percentage that is realistic for the agri-food industry and food processors.

We will come back to the House. We raised concerns last week but the government does not seem to understand the urgency of the situation.

• (1840)

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while the member opposite as a member of the Bloc can only criticize the government, our ministers and Quebec MPs continue to represent very strongly the people of Quebec.

I want to thank the House for giving me the opportunity to respond in greater detail to this question regarding the product of Canada labelling guidelines.

For years Canadians have wanted food labels that clearly reflect Canadian content of products. That is why the Government of Canada implemented new product of Canada guidelines on December 31, 2008.

I will provide a bit of history.

The Government of Canada launched the food and consumer safety action plan in December 2007. This initiated our consultations on the product of Canada labelling.

On May 21, 2008 the Prime Minister launched consultations to solicit the views of Canadians on the use of product of Canada and made in Canada claims on food products and in advertising.

This government consulted more than 1,500 people who completed an online survey; others wrote or called in their comments. Canadians overwhelmingly supported the revised product of Canada guidelines.

Our government listened. We undertook a thorough review of the current guideline on voluntary product of Canada and made in Canada claims on food products. Now the Bloc wants to revisit the issue even though Canadians have already spoken.

Under the revised guidelines, manufacturers in Canada have choices on how they label their products. They can use the label "product of Canada" or they can use the label "made in Canada" as long as they tell Canadians where the ingredients come from.

If "product of Canada" appears on the product label, all or virtually all of the ingredients and processing must be Canadian.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

The "made in Canada" label will be used when the food product is manufactured or processed in Canada regardless of whether the ingredients are imported or domestic.

Under these new guidelines, Canadian consumers can be confident that the current labelling requirements provide accurate and informative labelling information on prepackaged food products.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary's response suggests that nothing is going to change.

Even government officials warned the Minister of National Revenue and the Minister of State for Agriculture that it would be very difficult to meet his criteria. I understand that the guidelines were an attempt to change labelling regulations and that people have the right to know where products come from, but we do not produce sugar cane. That is why the 98% standard is totally unrealistic. I really think that it is unreasonable to tell food processors that they can label their products as "Made in Canada" only if 98% of the ingredients are made in Canada. If I understand correctly, we are being told that there will be no effort to educate the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and that the policy will not be reconsidered. Maybe people should be told that this standard is unrealistic and that an 85% requirement is sufficient to tell people where ingredients in a product come from.

• (1845)

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, despite what the member may say, the fact is that these labels, "made in Canada" and "product of Canada", are needed by industry, are wanted by Canadians, and are needed and wanted by Canadian producers. Lee Townsend of Wild Rose Agricultural Producers said recently at committee that this will "most definitely" help farmers.

Canadians are concerned about the safety of imported food. When Canadians pick up a food labelled "product of Canada", they expect it to be Canadian inside and out.

According to an Angus Reid survey, over 90% of Canadians agree with the direction of these new guidelines.

Furthermore, Canadians know it is unpalatable to hide foreign ingredients under a "product of Canada" label.

Canadians want to know what was in their food and our Conservative government has delivered.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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