



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 7, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 7, 2009

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION LADIES AUXILIARIES

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today and pay tribute to the Winnipeg Beach Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 61 Ladies Auxiliary and the Selkirk Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 42 Ladies Auxiliary.

The Winnipeg Beach Legion Ladies Auxiliary just celebrated its 80th anniversary on Saturday, October 3, and the Selkirk Ladies Auxiliary will celebrate its 75th anniversary on October 17.

The Ladies Auxiliaries of the Royal Canadian Legions in Winnipeg, Selkirk and indeed across the country have provided a great service in their support for our veterans. These ladies have generously volunteered their time, given charitably and been ambassadors for the legion. They have raised money, doing everything from holding bake sales to catering in support of the legions' activities.

They have donated their time and money to ensure their communities and veterans were supported. They have also played a leading role in the act of remembrance at every memorial event across the country.

We salute these ladies for their volunteerism and support which have helped to make the Royal Canadian Legion one of Canada's top service organizations, and congratulate them on a job well done.

2009 CANADA GAMES

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to report to you and my colleagues that the 2009 Canada Games, which took place in Prince Edward Island last August, were a tremendous success.

First I would like to extend my sincere congratulations and thanks to everyone involved with these games. All the athletes put forth their very best effort. We are especially proud of our island athletes, and special congratulations go out to every one of them, and to our four island medal winners: Veronica Keefe, Jillian Durant, Matthew Caseley and Kurt McCormack.

The success of the games was largely due to the efforts of the organizing committee and the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers. The games president, Joe Spriet, and his team did an excellent job from start to finish, as did the 6,000 volunteers who worked so hard to make these games happen.

Everyone I spoke to was impressed with the organization of the games, the athletic and housing facilities, and the wonderful hospitality they were offered. It was a great two weeks, and it was a true testament to all those involved.

In closing, I would like to again extend my sincere congratulations to all athletes, coaches, organizers and volunteers on—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rivière-des-Milles-Îles.

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[*Translation*]

WORLD DAY FOR DECENT WORK

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, October 7, marks World Day for Decent Work. The International Labour Organization created this day in 1999 to highlight the fact that everyone, men and women alike, should have access to a job and a fair wage.

This day is at the heart of efforts to eradicate poverty, because not only is globalization eliminating or jeopardizing many jobs, but the economic crisis has also led to the loss of a number of quality jobs, and the notion of decent work has been largely ignored.

On this of all days, it is important that the government reaffirm its intention to respect the Global Jobs Pact, which views access to work as the key to the economic recovery. Furthermore, the government must understand that the recovery cannot target only certain sectors in Canada, but must also include Quebec workers affected by the forestry crisis.

Statements by Members

[English]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last spring, Roohi Tabassum came very close to being deported to Pakistan. Her ex-husband has threatened to kill her if she returns to Pakistan. Her only crime is that as a hairdresser in Canada, she cut men's hair.

She has filed a refugee claim and a permanent resident application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, but to no avail. The courts have granted her temporary permission to stay here in Canada but her case is still not resolved.

I have requested that the minister intervene and help Roohi. His only response has been to promise information that has never been delivered. I am saddened that this woman's life remains in limbo and that the minister seems uninterested in protecting Ms. Tabassum.

Perhaps the Minister of Foreign Affairs, like his colleague, the Minister of State for the Status of Women, is afraid to admit that violence against women still exists in this world and that many women remain vulnerable.

This month is Women's History Month. We need to remember the important things in this world, such as the value of a woman's life.

* * *

● (1410)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with Canada's economic action plan, our government is taking immediate action to stimulate the economy, create jobs and assist Canadians. We are putting shovels in the ground to get Canadians working and to build the infrastructure our communities need.

Since February, in B.C., 480 projects worth \$3.4 billion have been announced. This will create an estimated 21,000 jobs in communities across the province. In Surrey, there is money for the South Fraser Perimeter Road, a new city library, the Newton Recreation Centre, and area schools and parks.

There is millions more for low-income senior housing, for employment programs, homelessness projects and youth crime prevention. These investments are benefiting local residents in Surrey by creating jobs, boosting the local economy and building long-lasting local infrastructure.

That is what happens when we have a government that is listening to our local needs and getting things done for B.C.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the UN General Assembly has designated October 1 as the International Day of Older Persons. This day has been celebrated worldwide since 1991.

By designating a special day for older persons, the UN wanted to recognize their contribution to development and draw attention to the demographic phenomenon of the aging population.

The LaSalle—Émard community really cares about its seniors. Once again this year, the Centre du Vieux Moulin, the seniors' round table and the LaSalle CLSC have come up with an innovative way to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons.

On October 1, 2009, they opened an information centre at the Place LaSalle mall, where seniors—people aged 50 and over—can find out more about government programs and other options available to them.

The seniors' information centre is a brilliant idea, and I would like to congratulate these organizations for their initiative and the excellent service they provide to our community.

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[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I volunteered for the aboriginal affairs committee because I felt compelled to be part of the committee's discussion on ending violence against aboriginal women.

I spent much of my policing career and my life fighting violence against women, especially against aboriginal women. I have seen first-hand the brutal violence inflicted on many of them, and as a Métis woman I was honoured to have the opportunity to share my personal and professional experiences with the new president of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

To my great unpleasant surprise, the member for Labrador, the Liberal aboriginal affairs critic, swore at me several times in succession when I spoke. He is a seasoned parliamentarian who understands that we are held to a higher standard and we must act accordingly.

A Conservative member called for an apology. However, the member for Labrador refused and stated, "I'll stand by my comments".

How can the member for Labrador remain the Liberal critic for aboriginal affairs when he displays such aggression and bad judgment toward aboriginal women?

* * *

[Translation]

MENTAL ILLNESS

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one person in six in Quebec will suffer from a mental illness during their lifetime. Too often, people with mental illness are stigmatized and socially excluded. Because of their impact, mental illnesses have significant economic and social consequences.

Statements by Members

To break down the barriers, shatter the myths and eliminate the prejudice around mental illness, we mark Mental Illness Awareness Week from October 4 to 10. The purpose of this week is to raise awareness of the level of mental illness, reduce negative stigma and promote the positive effects of prevention, diagnosis and medical treatment.

I want to reiterate my support for the organizations in my riding that work tirelessly to help people with mental illness: the Maison alternative de développement humain, Trait d'Union Montérégien, L'Élan-Demain, Le Phare, the Collectif de défense des droits de la Montérégie, Ateliers Transition, the Société de schizophrénie de la Montérégie and the Richelieu-Yamaska CSSS.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

SITUATION IN DARFUR

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is deeply troubled by the situation in Darfur. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and many more displaced.

Our government has made Canada an international leader in supporting efforts to establish peace in Darfur. We are committed to strengthening the capacity of the African Union-United Nations hybrid peace operation in Darfur, called UNAMID, to help achieve these goals.

Today I am pleased to announce the delivery of Canadian-supplied, state-of-the-art armoured personnel carriers to peace-keepers who will be working in UNAMID. This is the second shipment, with more on the way.

Our government is also providing support, including training, as part of a package valued at over \$35 million. Since 2006 our government has provided \$646 million in support of sustainable peace and stability in Sudan.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 16 years ago the clarion call at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna was that women's rights are human rights, and human rights mean nothing if they do not include the rights of women.

Sixteen years later, not only are women's rights still not respected as human rights, but discrimination against women remains a form of gender apartheid, where vast numbers of people around the world are humiliated, tortured, mutilated and even murdered just because they are women.

Accordingly, I was pleased to participate in the first ever G8 conference on violence against women in Rome, which determined that violence against women is bound up with women's inequality; that combatting such violence must be a priority on our domestic and international justice agenda; that law on the books must be translated into law in action.

As Canada assumes the leadership of the G8, we must heed the Rome conference call of, "Respect women, respect the world".

There is no better place to begin than a national inquiry into the disappeared and murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that the era of the member for Bourassa has come to an end. We also learned that Toronto staff of the Liberal leader have nominated a Liberal candidate for Quebec as well as a caucus chair.

This will not give the Liberal leader more vision or leadership because he only wants to trigger an election. Who wants to follow someone who cannot find his way?

And let us face it, a leader who needs to state that he is the leader is not a true leader.

Our Quebec caucus is a cohesive team that is putting all its energy into combatting the economic crisis and making Quebec one of the most prosperous provinces.

Under the leadership of our Prime Minister we are holding steady with our economic action plan because it is working and Canada is headed in the right direction.

* * *

[English]

SALMON FISHERY

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to one of the most profound issues facing British Columbia today: the endangerment and potential extinction of our wild salmon. There is no way to overstate the critical importance of wild salmon to B.C.'s economy, society, culture and indeed civilization.

Salmon is a linchpin species upon which our bears, orcas, eagles and wolves depend. It is the natural fertilizer for our great coastal rainforest, contributing to biodiversity and oxygen production. Salmon feed our first nations, commercial fishers, wilderness tourism industry and recreational fishery. Salmon feed our spirit.

Under the federal government's watch, we have seen the slow extinction of wild salmon species because of misguided policies, inept management, and a refusal to respect fundamental principles of sound science. I call for an emergency summit on salmon, an increase in funding for salmon enhancement programs, and an immediate ban on open net fish farms.

It is the federal government's constitutional duty to protect our wild salmon and indeed all of our fish. I call on the government to do exactly that.

*Oral Questions***AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS**

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride to rise in the House today to speak about ALS, otherwise known as Lou Gehrig's disease. This is a devastating neurological disease. Currently, there are approximately 2,500 to 3,000 people in Canada living with ALS and 80% of the people diagnosed with ALS tragically die within two to five years of diagnosis.

One of the national advocates for ALS lives in Barrie. My good friend Derek "Braveheart" Walton has worked tirelessly raising funds for ALS research. Most recently, despite being in a wheelchair and seven years into this devastating disease, he conducted a skydive. Derek's jump raised \$100,000, all going toward ALS research. His courage has made him a symbol of bravery in Simcoe County. The ALS Society of Canada, under the leadership of David Cameron, does incredible work because of volunteers like Derek.

I would like to ask the House to join with me today at the ALS reception in room 602 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. to learn more about ALS and how to support this very worthy cause.

* * *

• (1420)

[Translation]

WORKERS AT THE PRATT & WHITNEY PLANT

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the workers at the Pratt & Whitney plant in Longueuil are in mourning: the plant on Auvergne Street will shut down in 2010, ending an era in the labour movement. That is why the employees of this aerospace leader on the South Shore will be attending a funeral march at 3:30 p.m. today.

This is sad news and undoubtedly tough to take for the hundreds of workers and their families who are affected by this. Some of them have given their best years to the company.

And yet, Pratt & Whitney could have avoided the worst if the aerospace industry, which is concentrated in Quebec, had received as much support as the automobile industry in Ontario.

Although I cannot walk alongside these men and women today, I want them to know that my colleagues and I in the Bloc Québécois, particularly those from the South Shore whose constituents are also affected, offer them our complete solidarity.

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AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is amyotrophic lateral sclerosis awareness day here on the Hill.

[English]

Today is ALS awareness day here on the Hill. ALS is a terrible disease, as members in the House know all too well.

[Translation]

Many people are still not very familiar with this disease and have not experienced the pain of watching the life of one of their loved ones being turned upside down by such a diagnosis.

[English]

Like all serious diseases, a lot more research must be done on ALS to keep hope alive. We need to know that one day we will overcome that frightening diagnosis.

[Translation]

In order to advance research, money is needed. To get that money, the general public has to be aware of the impact of this disease. That is why I invite all my colleagues to wear a cornflower and join us on Parliament Hill this evening from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

[English]

Together we can make a difference.

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FISHERIES

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party's perilous slide in the polls has Liberals scrambling to shore up even the previously safest Liberal seats.

In a note left behind in a Liberal meeting room, obtained by the Saint John *Telegraph-Journal*, the Liberal member for Sydney—Victoria worries that his leader has no vision for Atlantic Canada. He makes clear that his party sees fearmongering about the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization as just political opportunity. "If we don't carry the ball on this, the NDP will", the note warns.

Instead of using opposition time to raise their concerns, the Liberals resort to intentionally misleading Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to distract them from their leader's determination to force an unwanted opportunistic election.

After years of sitting on its hands, Canada is now the leader at the NAFO table while the Liberals played games and sat on the shore for 13 long years.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to leading economists, the Prime Minister's decision to increase EI premiums will discourage employers from hiring new employees. Dale Orr said that under this Conservative plan, companies will see their taxes rise by \$884 per employee.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he is going to raise taxes and that these tax hikes will kill jobs?

Oral Questions

•(1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this government has frozen EI premiums for this year and next year. In the long term, these rates are set by an independent commission. Unlike the previous Liberal government, we do not intend to raise premiums and use the money for other government spending. These premiums are for the unemployed and workers.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that means yes, the government is going to raise taxes.

[*English*]

This is about the credibility of the government. A year ago the Prime Minister promised we would never run a deficit. Now we are in the largest one in history and it began before the recession even began. Yesterday, Dale Orr said that the Conservative increase in EI premiums, a whopping \$15.5 billion, is a tax on workers and employers.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his way out of his own deficit is to raise taxes and to do so in such a way that it kills jobs?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question in the sense that it gives me the opportunity to recognize the Minister of Finance in front of his colleagues. He just received an award yesterday.

During this very difficult past year, he has been recognized for running one of the largest economic stimulus programs in the world with one of the smallest deficits, a program that has been both effective and leaves us in a strong, long-term fiscal position.

I know we all want to congratulate the Minister of Finance on behalf—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the same economist says, and I quote, “The EI premiums fall disproportionately on lower-paid workers, so it's perverse in that equity sense as well”. This will kill jobs and we still do not see any way out of this deficit.

If the Prime Minister is so sure that he is right and most economists are wrong, will he at least allow the Parliamentary Budget Officer to get to the bottom of this question and find out where our public finances are and whether this plan will help or hurt the unemployment situation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Leader of the Opposition was, and has been for some time, calling on this government to engage in employment insurance reforms which would permanently add \$4 billion to the bottom line of that program. This week he claims to be concerned about how EI premiums could increase in the future.

That is why when we undertake decisions on employment insurance, we make sure they are short-term, we make sure they are affordable in the long-term, and we make sure we have a plan. I would urge the Leader of the Opposition, rather than jumping back and forth, to have a plan and give us some—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are going to have to tighten their belts, because the Conservatives are getting ready to pick their pockets again and lighten their wallets with a new tax. Workers will have to pay \$632 more with the increases in EI premiums. I do not know whether the minister knows how much this additional tax represents in groceries.

Why will the Conservatives not admit that this is a new tax they are imposing on workers and that it will cause new job losses?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done something the Liberals never did: we have created a commission to administer EI premiums.

[*English*]

We have established a commission that will set premiums on a break-even basis over time for EI so that we do not have what the Liberals had, which was a huge surplus so they could pay off their political friends.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, starting in 2012, employers' premiums will ramp up to an extra \$884 per worker.

In the words of Dale Orr, the Conservatives' own economist, “this is a tax”. This tax increase is economically harmful, it is perverse and it will kill jobs.

How can the government justify imposing a payroll tax that it knows will kill jobs?

•(1430)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we did freeze EI premiums during this economic crisis and, thankfully, the Liberals supported it at that point in time because they realized that was good for the economy.

This is what an Alberta director of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said:

...after years of abuse.... The creation of the CEIFB is a good thing and should serve to protect the EI fund from the sticky fingers of future governments.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CINAR

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister asked us to bring in new information in the Cinar case. Well, here it is. A case of documents concerning the production of *Robinson Sucroe* has disappeared from Telefilm Canada offices. Cinar admitted to committing fraud, by using only 10% of the funds, and a former RCMP investigator claimed that the Cinar investigation was going well until a memo was received from the justice minister, asking the RCMP not to press charges. Not to mention everything that is being kept hidden.

Will the Prime Minister finally abandon his opaque transparency and launch a public inquiry into the Cinar situation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc leader is still talking about things that happened under the previous government. If the Bloc leader has real accusations to make against his centralist allies in this House, he can give that information to the authorities.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is funny; it would be very much in his interest to uncover what the opposition is up to. Is he refusing to do so because some Conservatives were also involved? Why is he refusing? Two parties, one attitude: a lack of transparency. If he is as transparent as he claims, he would release the memo he is hiding from us. He is the one in power now. He can easily ask for this memo to be released, so we know what the justice minister said to prevent the truth from coming out. He is in power. He needs to take action, or else he is just as guilty.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc leader is accusing me of covering up a Liberal scandal. Honestly. Our accountability reforms include a system for carrying out these kinds of independent investigations. If the Bloc leader, who has an alliance with the Liberals, is now claiming that they are corrupt, if he truly has accusations to make, he can pass that information on to the authorities.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Telefilm dragged its feet for a number of years by failing to disclose documents, by informing Cinar of the RCMP investigation and by dismissing suspicions about Cinar as an urban legend. Only Louse Pelletier held fast and made it possible for the truth about Cinar to come to light. The new administration of Telefilm seems more combative and wants to recover from Cinar the money that Cinar clearly stole.

Does the Minister of National Revenue intend to show the same determination as Telefilm and have Cinar charged with fraud?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those are all events that took place under the previous Liberal administration.

I appreciate that the Bloc members are new to the justice file, but I would point out to them that now we have a director of public prosecutions to ensure there is absolutely no political interference with the investigations of any allegations. If they have any evidence, they should turn it over to the appropriate authorities.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has been asking questions about this for years. Telefilm is not the only victim. There are a number of small investors who were also cheated by Cinar's fraudulent moves. Telefilm has decided to take action and wants to recover the money stolen from it by Cinar. The government must do the same by having fraud charges laid against Cinar and attempting to recover the fraudulently obtained money.

If the government refuses to take action, it will be a sign that, like the Liberals, it has friends to protect.

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is imploring the government to start laying charges. Again, there is a process in place in this country and it has been in place for the last couple of years, but again the Bloc has missed this. It is the office of the director of public prosecutions.

If Bloc members have any evidence about their former friends or present friends, they should turn that information over to that office or the appropriate office.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government has caused the written testimony of Canadian diplomat Richard Colvin to be sealed. That letter describes what he knows about Afghan prisoners. It describes what the government knew about the torture of those prisoners.

The Conservatives do not want people to hear what Mr. Colvin has to say. They are doing everything they can to suppress, censor, delay and conceal that information.

Will the Prime Minister tell us exactly what he is afraid of?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government fully respects the commission's jurisdiction in this matter. We also respect the decisions made by the courts.

We are cooperating with the tribunal based on its decisions and its jurisdiction, and we will continue to do so.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Some co-operation, Mr. Speaker. The government is now trying to shut down the entire inquiry. It has threatened Richard Colvin with legal consequences if he co-operates with the commission.

Mr. Colvin is a career diplomat who currently serves as head of intelligence at our embassy in Washington. He is the only diplomat who worked with the provincial reconstruction team and has first-hand knowledge of what was going on in Afghan prisons at the time. The commission lawyer believes that Mr. Colvin has vital information.

Oral Questions

What does the government know about what was going on in the Afghan prisons that it does not want to be presented to the commission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the government has been very clear in its intention to co-operate at every stage with this commission, according to decisions made by the court regarding the commission's jurisdiction. These are important rules. We follow all the rules and, obviously, will ensure all documents, to which the commission has a right, are seen and all witnesses are heard by the commission.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the ruling of the Federal Court was very clear. The Military Police Complaints Commission has the power to investigate. The government is flouting the law and the Federal Court by suppressing witnesses and documents.

The Conservatives are not serious about allowing the commission to do its work, despite what the Prime Minister says, because they keep challenging its jurisdiction. They are trying to suppress the testimony of Mr. Colvin. They are also trying to suppress the testimony of the former Canadian Forces provost marshal, Captain Moore, who was the chief of law enforcement for the Canadian Forces.

Why is his testimony being challenged, as well?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the opposition has just said, there was a matter before the Federal Court in which the Federal Court itself defined the mandate of the Military Police Complaints Commission.

We are complying with that finding. We are complying with the mandate where it applies to the military police within the mandate. We are co-operating fully.

Now the leader of the opposition may think he will have a Matlock moment on the floor of the House of Commons but he ought to respect the rules of evidence of the commission. He ought to respect the individuals who were involved in this important investigation and leave it at that.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ATIP documents show that on June 3 consular officials were already back-tracking on their decision to invalidate Suaad Hagi's identity.

Responding to demands from the Kenyan court that someone appear as a witness to back up charges levelled against Suaad, otherwise case closed, reluctant officials fretted, "is this still the CBSA official position", and "we could open ourselves up for prosecution".

Why did the Minister of Foreign Affairs insist that his officials continue the prosecution and persecution of Suaad Hagi?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have told this House before, the role of the Canada Border Services Agency is, in part, to ensure the integrity of our immigration system and the integrity of our citizenship.

In fact, in the first eight months of this year the agency prevented over 4,000 people attempting to come into our country using false passports or other people's passports. It is a difficult job that it does, but it set out in an affidavit filed in the Federal Court in this particular case the reasons it took the actions and made the decisions it made. It is there for everyone to see.

• (1440)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the position has changed. Yesterday they said, "oh no, it doesn't reach a political level". Even though I spoke to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the parliamentary secretary, wrote them both letters and wrote the minister letters, today he calls up an affidavit signed by an individual whose report was already discredited by DNA testing. The minister continues to talk about persecuting a Canadian citizen abroad after she had provided various pieces of information regarding her identity.

Why does he insist on making the Canadian government—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we asked our public officials, including our Canada Border Services Agency personnel, around the world to do very important and very difficult, challenging work, making thousands of decisions every day. They do that to the best of their abilities, asking questions, looking for answers and trying to determine what they need to determine to protect the integrity of our country's immigration system and our citizenship.

In the particular case in question, anyone can see what questions were asked, what answers were given and then make their own decision as to whether the border services officers were acting reasonably in the circumstances.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of National Defence is with respect to Mr. Colvin.

Today the government invoked national security as the reason for not allowing anyone to review his evidence and his affidavit. I would like to ask the minister, if there is no cover up, who will review, in an independent fashion, the evidence and testimony of Mr. Colvin?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member should know, and I know he is aware, this is an arm's length, quasi-judicial inquiry. The individual in question who has evidence to give is given the opportunity to do so. The commission itself is not politically influenced. It is not under the direction of the government. This is a matter that is very serious, as the member knows.

However, this is basically, at the end of the day, governed by the Federal Court and by the National Defence Act. It is governed by legislation that was put in place in 2001 by the party of which he is a member.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows very well that it was lawyers for the federal government who invoked national security in order to prevent anyone else from reviewing this affidavit.

We have Gary Filmon at SIRC and we have lots of precedents with respect to other judges who have been able to look at national security information. Why does the government not create some opportunity for an independent party to review this critical evidence about possible torture?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, surely the hon. member, with his own experience and having worked on a quasi-judicial board, is not suggesting that we now insert ourselves as a government, that we now start to interfere in a process that is under way. National security implications are involved. Legislation is involved and, obviously, a court ruling from the Federal Court. Now we hear that there may be a further appeal.

This is all about letting this important process get to the bottom of the investigation, not political interference and not to have the member suggest some other process now intervene.

* * *

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously passed a second motion urging the federal government to abandon its plan to reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons.

Will the minister responsible for this bill tell us whether he plans to comply with the National Assembly of Quebec's request?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that representation in the House of Commons is fair. We are committed to ensuring that the number of seats in Quebec is protected. I would like to point out to the House that if the Bloc ever achieved its number one objective, Quebec would have no seats in the House of Commons.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as long as Quebecers keep sending their tax dollars to Ottawa, our representation here will be as legitimate as that of any other person in the House.

However, neither the government nor the House can pretend to recognize the Quebec nation one moment and then reduce that same nation's political weight the next. If the government's bill goes through, Quebec's representation will fall from 25% to 21% of members. That is what is at stake here.

If the government truly recognizes the Quebec nation, why is it so determined to marginalize Quebec in federal institutions?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is pulling numbers out of thin air. The government has not brought forward any numbers.

In regard to Quebec's representation in the House of Commons, all federalist parties would guarantee that Quebec would be well represented in the House of Commons. The only party that does not want Quebec represented in the House of Commons is the Bloc.

All federal members agree that our country is the greatest country in the world, united.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for two weeks now the government has been unable to justify its figures on the number of workers affected by Bill C-50. Again yesterday, senior officials were unable to explain the government's calculation, which confirms the fears of the Bloc Québécois and several agencies in Quebec that the Conservatives' figures are grossly exaggerated. We see to what extent Bill C-50 is nothing more than a band-aid solution to a serious problem.

Will the government finally accept that it will take a complete overhaul of the employment insurance system to satisfy the needs of the unemployed and the needs of Quebec?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the fourth measure we have introduced to help the unemployed while the country and the world are going through economic difficulties and a recession.

We began by adding five weeks for the unemployed. The Bloc voted against that. We proposed adding things for work sharing and training. Now, we want to provide 5 to 20 additional weeks for long-tenured workers, those who have been working for a long time, who have paid employment insurance premiums and have never had a chance to benefit from them in the long term. We want to help those workers by giving them an additional 5 to 20 weeks. The Bloc seems to be against that as well.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only are officials unable to justify the government's inflated figures on the number of unemployed people affected by Bill C-50, but they are also unable to specify which regions will benefit.

Will the government admit that it does not want to elaborate on this because Bill C-50 favours Ontario's automobile workers and excludes Quebec's forestry workers?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, with this measure to help long-tenured workers, 189,000 people could benefit from 5 to 20 additional weeks of employment insurance. Instead of making those people wait, instead of depriving them of additional weeks of EI, the members opposite should support the government and rush to ensure that the bill is enacted as soon as possible to help people in difficulty.

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government refuses to listen to concerns that amendments to NAFO would weaken Canada's ability to protect fish stocks. A distinguished group of former DFO senior executives recently took the unusual action of speaking out, calling the amendments a sellout of Canadian interests.

Why is the minister ignoring the concerns of her former employees who are experts in the field? Does she not understand the implications of the amendments, or does she not care about Canadian sovereignty?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do understand the implications of the amendments and that is why we support them.

I want to remind the hon. member that these amendments came into being with the blessing of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was at the table and agreed with them. Since that time, Newfoundland and Labrador has done a 180° turn on its position.

It is very disappointing that Newfoundland and Labrador has changed its mind on these amendments. On the word of the bureaucrats who were in charge of NAFO, when it was failing Newfoundlanders and—

• (1450)

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the minister is admitting that the Newfoundland and Labrador government is vigorously opposing these amendments.

If the government insists on continuing with the proposed NAFO amendments, Canada could lose the ability to enforce fishing quotas. This threatens the livelihood of thousands of people in the fishing industry, yet the minister refuses to have a full and open debate on the amendments.

Why will the minister not allow a full debate on the NAFO amendments? Is she afraid that Canadians will once again see how incompetent the government really is?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out for the hon. member that the mandate for these amendments was the result of the work of an international ministerial conference on the governance of high seas and fisheries, which took place in May of 2005. We all know the party that was in government at that time.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the government's mismanagement on the other coast.

British Columbia is witnessing one of the worst fishing crises since the Atlantic cod stocks collapsed in the 1990s. Eleven million sockeye were supposed to return to the Fraser. Less than two million did.

Oral Questions

British Columbians are asking this one simple question: Why is the minister refusing to urgently convene an independent scientific assessment on why these sockeye failed to return?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if it is urgent, why is this the first time the hon. member has raised the issue in the House?

I have talked to many British Columbians. I have heard requests for a summit on salmon. I have also heard requests for other measures to address the issue of the low sockeye returns.

Planning is currently under way, as I have said, and a government response is forthcoming. This is a very serious matter and it warrants a very serious response.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the record, I personally called the minister when she was in Victoria and she failed to respond to our phone calls.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca has the floor. With all this yelling, it is going to be very difficult for the minister to hear the question.

The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, fish stocks cannot be rehabilitated unless their habitats are protected. Canada committed to 25% protection of our marine protected areas, yet a measly 0.5% is protected right now.

When will the fisheries minister implement a plan to expand our marine protected areas in British Columbia to safeguard our crucial marine ecosystem?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has invested \$61.4 million in the health of the oceans, government-wide. Additionally, we have invested \$170 million over five years to the Pacific commercial integrated fisheries initiative. We have initiated a climate change science initiative by reallocating \$400,000 per year to study the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

We are looking after the oceans.

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HONDURAS

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Americas have been identified as a top foreign policy priority for our government under the leadership of Prime Minister Harper. As neighbours—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for London West I know was here the other day when the Prime Minister used somebody's name and I had to say something. I am sure he will not want to repeat that mistake. "Under the leadership of the current Prime Minister" I think are the words he wanted.

• (1455)

Mr. Ed Holder: With my apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

As neighbours in the hemisphere, our current and future interests are interdependent. As a country of the Americas, Canada has a responsibility and an obligation to ensure that Honduras is able to get back on the democratic path.

During the serious crisis in Honduras, would the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs advise the House how Canada is working to assist in resolving this crisis?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset of this crisis, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas has taken a lead role in discussions through the OAS, the Organization of American States, to initiate a national dialogue between the parties.

The government supports the plan put forward by Costa Rican President Arias as a means to come to a peaceful and negotiated settlement.

The minister is currently, as a key member, participating in a mission to bring long-lasting peace to Honduras and to bring back a legitimate democracy.

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TAX HARMONIZATION

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during this recession the Conservatives have abandoned seniors. With the help of the B.C. and Ontario Liberals, the government is showing contempt for Canada's elderly with an unfair tax shift.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons made it clear today that its members are very worried about the HST. They see through the spin. They know that with HST, big businesses save and ordinary people pay.

Why is the federal government siding with big business again, instead of the people who built our country?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the decision by a particular province whether to harmonize its sales tax with the federal sales tax is a decision of that province. Some have chosen to do so in past years, and more recently, Ontario and British Columbia.

The same proposal is available to any province that wants to harmonize in terms of federal participation. There are some provinces that have not yet chosen to harmonize.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know it is the minister who is spending \$6 billion of our tax money and signed an agreement for the HST tax hike. We know he refuses to properly fund seniors' pensions. What we do not know is why he is adding a new tax that would take a big bite out of the retirement savings of people across the country.

Mutual fund fees will be subjected to an 8% tax grab. Why are the Conservatives making life harder, more difficult and less affordable for Canadians?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, implementation issues are for the decision-making provinces. For Ontario and British Columbia, they choose how to implement harmonized sales taxes.

I do not need any lectures from the NDP about taxes. NDP members have voted against every tax reduction, and there have been many, that we have brought into the House the past several years, including reducing the GST by two full percentage points.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec wants to be able to speak for itself on the international stage regarding its own areas of jurisdiction and thus protect its own economic interests. While a carbon tax to penalize the exports of countries that are negligent when it comes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the subject of international discussions, Quebec's environment minister is worried that Quebec could be penalized based on Canada's disappointing record.

Why does this government want to prevent Quebec from speaking for itself in Copenhagen, when its economic interests will be directly affected?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we disagree with the Bloc Québécois. I consulted all the ministers and premiers this summer and this fall. Unlike the Liberals, we take their point of views into account in developing our policies and plans. The provinces are invited to join the Canadian delegation in Copenhagen. However, Canada will speak with a single voice during negotiations. The Bloc should support our efforts.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to climate change, Canada is becoming increasingly isolated on the international stage. Even China is denouncing the attempts to sabotage Kyoto. Quebec can no longer tolerate being represented on the international stage by a government that is on the oil companies' payroll.

Why does the government want to silence Quebec? Would our presence in Copenhagen be too disturbing for the economic interests of big oil? Is that the real reason?

● (1500)

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Canada's target is a 20% reduction in our GHG by 2020. Just last week the United States Senate adopted, in effect, the same targets we now have in effect, North American targets.

Canada must continue to work on these North American targets with our allies. That is why we are making progress on tailpipe emission standards, aviation standards, carbon capture and storage, a North American integrated approach to cap and trade. These are all things on which the government will proceed.

By contrast, the Bloc, the Liberals and the NDP would have us divert from this continental approach—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada's deputy minister just released his report on the body bags delivered to Wasagamack. We accept the claim that this did not result from deliberate action on the part of the government, but the damage has not been repaired.

In our parliamentary system, the last word goes to the Minister of Health. Out of compassion, I would simply ask her to apologize publicly to the community of Wasagamack today.

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked my deputy minister to look into the situation and found that the order was disproportionately high compared with other orders in first nations communities.

It was a clear over-estimation but there was no evidence of ill will. Health Canada will introduce stricter controls in the procurement process.

I have been working with Grand Chief Evans of Manitoba on this issue. He and I agree that it is time to move on and focus on the real issues. That is to deal with H1N1 and pandemic planning.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my fellow Canadians and I know that our neighbours to the south have begun vaccinating all at-risk individuals with FluMist, a nasal aerosol produced by AstraZeneca.

Can the minister explain why this company, which also operates in Canada, is still waiting for the government to give the green light for production of this vaccine? If not, can she tell me why my granddaughter who lives in the United States can be protected, but not my granddaughter who lives in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the story the member is referring to is false. The vaccine that is available in the United States is only available to individuals who are perfectly healthy, and not the vulnerable.

We are on schedule. The Chief Public Health Officer has stated the vaccine for Canada will be available the first week of November. He has been saying this for the past three months.

We rely on the medical experts and we will continue to work with them, as well as the provinces and territories, in the development of the vaccine.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that our major pension plans in this country are facing an unprecedented crisis.

In its most recent study on the issue, the Conference Board of Canada stated that the number of seniors living in poverty has doubled since 1995. The minister must publicly acknowledge this crisis in order to begin the search for solutions.

Will the finance minister acknowledge here and now the severe pension crisis in Canada? Will he support the New Democrats' call for an emergency national summit on pensions?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been aware of the pension difficulties and challenges for many months.

That is why we went ahead with some pension reforms, some regulatory reforms, already this year. In addition, the finance ministers agreed when we met in May that we would have a special research working group which is now happening. We will meet again and review its findings in December in Whitehorse.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in June, this House, including the entire Conservative caucus, voted unanimously in support of the NDP opposition day motion calling for major reforms to pensions. Was that just a cynical move?

The will of Parliament is clear. With two-thirds of households unable to put together enough resources for the bare necessities in retirement, the time for real pension reform is now.

A road map is already in place. Will the minister commit today to work with Parliament to move forward with real and comprehensive pension reform?

● (1505)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): We are already doing that, Mr. Speaker. In particular, my parliamentary secretary has been listening to Canadians broadly and around the country as part of this process, working with the provinces and the territories to arrive at necessary pension reform in Canada.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian cattle and hog farmers have been facing hard times due to country of origin labelling restrictions imposed on them by the U.S. government.

While our farmers have been hurt by this regressive policy, the Liberal Party and its agriculture critic, the member for Malpeque, have done nothing of consequence to help our producers. It seems that the Liberals just do not understand or care about farmers.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food inform the House of all the positive steps the Conservative government has taken to fight COOL on behalf of our farmers?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Brandon—Souris for his continued hard work on this file.

Our message to the United States has always been very clear. This government stands with our farmers against that issue.

Oral Questions

In fact, as you well know, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has raised it with the President of the United States. The Minister of International Trade and I have raised it constantly with our counterparts in the United States. I am pleased to report today that we have asked the WTO to strike a panel in this regard.

Let me quote Brad Wildeman, the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association. He said, "We have no doubt the federal government will continue to deliver strong action to oppose any unfair implementation of COOL". We certainly will.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, aboriginal women have called for a national investigation into the more than 520 cases involving their murdered or missing sisters, mothers and daughters. Aboriginal organizations, the women's movement and groups like Amnesty International have repeated the call. Liberals support that call. The Conservative member for Simcoe North agrees, saying that what is needed is an investigation of the disappearances.

A research project alone cannot lay criminal charges and offer families closure. Will the Minister of Justice launch a national federal investigation?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue of concern to all parliamentarians and all Canadians. That is why the Minister of State for the Status of Women has been working busily with NWAC and other stakeholders on the Sisters in Spirit initiative not only with respect to research but also to raise public awareness.

If the member wants to do something about abuse toward aboriginal women, he could stand in his place and apologize to the member for Saint Boniface for the abusive language he used toward her yesterday in committee.

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[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during his testimony in committee, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism indicated that he intended to make legislative improvements to the current system for processing refugee claims, supposedly to expedite the process. However, what the minister is not saying is that by taking so long to appoint immigration board members, his government is responsible for the backlog in the system.

If the government really wants to act quickly to improve the system, why does it not start by implementing the appeal division, which the act already provides for?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have very serious problems with the refugee system in Canada. We have a waiting list of more than 60,000 cases. It takes 18 months for a refugee claimant to have an initial hearing. The system does not work for real

refugees, and it attracts bogus claimants. It must be fixed. We need a much more efficient system, not another level of appeal. There are already several levels of appeal in place. We are complying with the act. With the refugee system, with the greatest legal guarantees—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP in British Columbia is closing all detachments in communities with a population under 5,000 that are currently served by one officer. In places like Tahsis, this means that the closest police station will be an hour and a half away. The mayor says that her community will be less safe as a result.

We need to improve officer safety by having two members respond to calls involving violence. Instead of closing detachments and making communities unsafe, the right answer is to add an officer to single-member detachments.

Will the minister stop this regressive move and provide the resources to keep our rural communities safe?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the decisions on policing at the local level are in the hands of the provinces. The RCMP provides services through the provincial government through a contracting arrangement.

Of course, we have done our share to try and assist the provinces by providing funding for additional police officers. Significant funds were transferred to the provinces, including British Columbia, to do that. We have also committed to having 1,000 new RCMP officers added. We have already added over 1,500 and we are doing more.

* * *

● (1510)

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, provincial attorneys general have urged the government to restrict the ridiculous awarding of double credit for the time criminals spend in pretrial custody.

We introduced Bill C-25 to limit the amount of credit given at a ratio of 1:1 for each day served in pretrial custody. Despite that fact, Bill C-25 passed the House unamended. Liberal senators are threatening to amend this bill.

I ask the Minister of Justice, if this bill is amended, what message would this send to Canadians?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have told us loud and clear that they want to see more truth in sentencing.

Routine Proceedings

For weeks I have been hearing reports that the Liberal senators are planning to gut this important piece of legislation. I am calling on the Leader of the Opposition to get hold of his senators down the hall and make sure that they pass this bill unamended.

He should tell his colleagues that this bill has the support of the House of Commons and provincial attorneys general. Most important, it has the support of the Canadian people. He should tell them to get this bill passed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in question period today the Prime Minister referred to the recent Liberal EI proposals as adding \$4 billion annually to the deficit. That is a fabrication that has been acknowledged as such on several occasions.

That \$4 billion figure was manufactured and leaked by the Conservatives in August. Everybody who looked at the plan, economists and everybody else, said that was not the case. We asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer to look at that. He indicated the cost was \$1.2 billion. He said not only was the figure wrong but the calculation was flawed.

I know the Prime Minister would not want to be spreading fabrications and he might want to take the chance to retract that comment.

The Speaker: The hon. member knows the Chair does not rule on the accuracy of statements made in the House. That is a matter for debate and not a matter for a point of order. Accordingly, there is no point of order in this case.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[Translation]***OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2008-09 annual report on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

[English]

This document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109 I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the response of the Government of Canada to the second report of the Standing Committee on National Defence entitled "Doing Well and Doing Better: Health Services provided to Canadian Forces with an Emphasis on Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" tabled in the House of Commons on June 17, 2009.

*[Translation]***HONDURAS**

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is concerned about the increasing tensions in Honduras after the sudden and unexpected return of President Zelaya on September 21, 2009.

In spite of the provocation from both sides, we still hope that it will be possible to peacefully resolve the situation, using the San Jose accord as a starting point. The President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, introduced the San Jose accord in July of this year as a way to help reach a peaceful and mediated resolution to the current political crisis. Canada has expressed its strong support for this peace plan.

From the beginning, my colleague, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), has played an active role in ongoing discussions at the Organization of American States to find a solution to this crisis. He represented Canada at the special session of the OAS's general assembly on July 4, where it was decided to suspend Honduras. The Minister of State remains in contact with various people involved, including the Organization's secretary general, José Miguel Insulza, as well as President Zelaya and President Roberto Micheletti.

The minister of state and I lobbied hard in favour of President Arias' efforts to mediate. Canada is ready to help in any way it can. In addition, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas) participated in the special mission with OAS foreign affairs ministers on August 24 and 25 to promote the signing of the San José accord. Unfortunately, an agreement could not be finalized under the existing circumstances. A second mission of the Organization of American States was therefore scheduled for October 7 and 8 to promote dialogue and the restoration of democracy in Honduras.

The minister of state will participate in the mission together with representatives from Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, Ecuador, Jamaica, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Argentina and Brazil. Canada takes its role in the Organization of American States very seriously. Our participation demonstrates our unwavering commitment to defending the organization's democratic values and principles.

As American states, we are responsible for ensuring that democracy is restored to Honduras. This is also in our best interest. With its clear vision and strategy for the Americas and its coordinated approach, Canada is known for its contribution to building a more prosperous, safer and, above all, more democratic Central America.

The Secretary General of the OAS expressed his gratitude to Canada for its commitment to the process, emphasizing that Canada's constructive participation in the debate is of critical importance to all parties involved. Under the Prime Minister, Canada has begun renewing its involvement in the Americas, and we are determined to play a greater role in this hemisphere in the long term.

Routine Proceedings

• (1515)

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister having given us notice of the statement and also having made the statement today. It is important that the House have an opportunity to consider the events in Honduras. They have been a major preoccupation for not only the citizens of that country but also for the entire region around Honduras, as well as the Organization of American States.

This is not an editorial comment on the minister's statement, but the only thing I would have liked to have heard from the government would have been a clearer statement from the minister, and today was an opportunity to do so, to indicate that the removal from office of the president in what effectively became a coup d'état was itself a deplorable act.

I know the Government of Canada has joined with the OAS in making the condemnation of that original event, but I still think it would have been timely for the minister to have repeated it today because it is important for us to recall how all these events unfolded.

[Translation]

We are well aware that the events in Honduras have divided the country. We are well aware that a few initiatives by President Zelaya created a political crisis and even constitutional problems.

Still, we have to say that as a democratic country and a member of the OAS, we remain convinced that replacing a president in a non-constitutional manner is not the way to change governments, especially considering the history of the region and the problems it has had, with coups d'état, military coups and a lack of respect for civil authority.

All of us are very sad that President Zelaya was expelled from the country. This is a real problem. Honduras is still in crisis and is going through a difficult time.

• (1520)

[English]

I just want to say, on behalf of my colleagues in the Liberal Party, that we value very strongly our relationship with the people of Honduras, and indeed with the people of the entire region.

We all recognize that Canada, in addition to all of its other identities, is a country of the Americas. We are a country which shares this part of the world with the people of Latin America, the people of South America, and the people of the Caribbean. We attach a great deal of importance to that relationship.

Above all, and this is something which I think unites the House and it is important for us to remember the extent to which we are united, we are a democratic country. We are a federal country. We are a country which values human rights. We believe very strongly that our foreign policy should reflect, at one and the same time, our interests and our values.

I can only say, and this perhaps adds a decidedly non-partisan note to the occasion, that we wish the minister of state well in the mission that he is undertaking on behalf of Canada, as well as all the other countries that are engaged. It is extremely important that we try to

reach a peaceful conclusion to the conflict and to the crisis in Honduras.

It is critically important that constitutional authority be installed clearly and emphatically, and that those who would carry out their political activity in a non-constitutional way should be made very clear by all the countries of the Americas that this kind of behaviour is no longer the way to go in the Americas, that we expect the democratic processes of the country to be fully respected.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the coup d'état carried out in Honduras by President Zelaya's adversaries was in strict violation of the Constitution. This coup d'état has also had disastrous consequences for the people of Honduras. It has prevented the introduction of important, necessary reforms, such as the planned increase of the minimum wage, in a country plagued by serious economic and social inequalities where all the power is concentrated in the hands of a dominant oligarchy.

The people support the legitimate president, Mr. Zelaya, who has made some notable improvements, despite Honduras' disastrous economic situation. Honduras was ranked the third poorest among South American countries. The situation there right now is extremely worrisome, not to say explosive. Repressions are becoming increasingly violent, while human rights and constitutional violations are becoming more and more frequent. Freedom of the press has been suspended, and the presence of paramilitaries from Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala leaves us fearing the worst. It is crucial that the situation return to normal in this usually peaceful country.

The Bloc Québécois supports the federal government's initiative to act as a mediator in an attempt to resolve the political crisis. We must at all costs prevent the conflict from becoming mired in violence. It is the responsibility of the Canadian government to do its part to prevent the situation from deteriorating further. Canada can and must do more than just intervene at the Organization of American States (OAS) and show support for the San Jose accord.

First, it must show firm and resolute support for the legitimate government of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya. The minister must consider that no country has given *de facto* recognition to the government of Honduras and clearly reiterate Canada's support for the legitimate government of President Manuel Zelaya as well as applying pressure for the quick return of democracy in Honduras.

We learned last week that Canada, the United States, Peru and Costa Rica were opposed, at the OAS, to the return of Zelaya as a condition for new elections. That is totally unacceptable.

In addition, just like the European Union and the United States, the Canadian government must agree to freeze aid to the Honduran government until Zelaya returns as president. This demand is particularly pertinent in light of the fact that Canada currently holds the presidency of the G-16 group of donors in Honduras and that it contributes \$17 million per year to Honduras.

The Government of Canada must take immediate action to defend democracy in this country given that elections are planned for November.

Routine Proceedings

●(1525)

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are deeply concerned about the sharp rise in violence in Honduras. We of course denounce the activities of the Honduran authorities and the undermining of the fundamental rights of their citizens and the rule of law in the Central American nation.

Honduran troops have besieged the Brazilian embassy where President Zelaya has taken refuge. The crisis echoes the horrors of previous military rule in Latin America and risks internationalizing the conflict. It is setting a dangerous precedent that undermines the democratic stability of the region as a whole.

Despite the worsening situation, the authorities have yet to sign on to the San José plan to solve the standoff. Basic rights and freedoms of the Honduran people are being threatened by the authorities. The United Nations General Assembly has already condemned the *coup d'état* in Honduras and called for the restoration of the democratically elected president and constitutional government.

As the crisis deepens, the United Nations Security Council must be called upon to hold an emergency meeting on the crisis and find an immediate solution that will return Honduras to constitutional normalcy and protect the human rights of the Honduran people.

In such a context Canada must take more decisive diplomatic action. The statement we heard from the minister is simply a report on the efforts that have been made by the government to date. Nothing new was in his statement. This is something that we have to be stronger on. This is not mission accomplished. Canadians and observers abroad would have hoped that the minister would take the opportunity to announce new Canadian initiatives that would increase diplomatic pressure on the Honduran authorities and get them to accept the San José proposal.

New Democrats call for the suspension of all military cooperation with Honduras immediately. Canada must put in place targeted sanctions and diplomatic sanctions against the coup perpetrators. Canada's support for the San José plan, which we welcome and applaud, needs to be backed up with more concrete action. It needs more diplomatic measures, not fewer, not the same number of them. The government has to make it crystal clear for the Honduran authorities that delaying action on the San José plan will carry diplomatic and economic consequences for them.

We hope that the minister of state will be carrying with him not just the same words that we heard from the minister, but in fact dedicated, directed, targeted sanctions so that the perpetrators of this *coup d'état* will get a message from Canada. We must speak out more strongly. We must act more strongly. To do less would be to abandon democracy in Honduras, would be to abandon the Honduran people.

Finally, as someone who has worked and travelled and spent time in Honduras, I say we do not want to go back to the dark days of the 1980s when dictators had their way with the people. We must stand strong. We must act strong. We must be there for the Honduran people.

●(1530)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, and order of the House made March 4, 2009, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 21st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees in the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 21st report later this day.

* * *

LEIF ERICKSON DAY ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-456, An Act to establish Leif Erickson Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being seconded by the member for Edmonton—Strathcona who of course is the hardest working member of Parliament from Alberta in the House of Commons. The bill would create a Leif Erickson Day in Canada. In the United States those Americans of Scandinavian origin are already honoured every October 9 with a Leif Erickson Day and that day has existed since 1964. But in Canada we have not in a formal way honoured the many Canadians of Scandinavian origin who have contributed to our country. There are dozens of organizations across the country that support Scandinavians, those of Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish and Finnish origin, and those organizations are supportive of the bill. There are more than 1.1 million Canadians of Scandinavian origin who have come to enrich our country, enrich our land, including my family, the Moum family, from Fredrikstad, Norway. I hope the bill will receive the support of the House of Commons.

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

* * *

AN ACT RESPECTING THE INSURANCE BUSINESS
(BANKS AND BANK HOLDING COMPANIES)
REGULATIONS

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-457, An Act respecting the Insurance Business (Banks and Bank Holding Companies) Regulations.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table this bill, seconded by my hon. colleague from Scarborough Southwest, that takes aim at making significant changes to the insurance business regulations for banks and bank holding companies in order to ensure that small and medium insurance brokers have a level playing field.

[Translation]

The bill amends four key provisions in the regulations in order to prevent Canadian banks from having an unfair advantage over independent insurance companies, agents or brokers. It clarifies, among other things, the term “telecommunications” to include the Internet. This change alone shows how outdated the regulations are.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

This bill is a wake-up call to this House. There is a need to think of ways of modernizing the Bank Act and its regulations immediately.

I call upon all members of this House to support the intentions of the bill.

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

* * *

CANADA SHIPPING ACT, 2001

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-458, An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 (prohibition against oil tankers in Dixon Entrance, Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that would ban oil tanker traffic in ecologically sensitive waters, and I appreciate the seconding of this bill by the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, who does so much for the environment.

Just two weeks ago, a freighter lost its steering and ran aground in Douglas Channel in northern British Columbia. Thankfully no one was injured, but the ship was seriously damaged, foreshadowing the disaster that would occur if an oil tanker were to spill into this fragile environment.

This bill would ban oil tankers from navigating Dixon Entrance, the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound. This is a very critical area where the *Queen of the North* ferry sank. It includes waters that are very important to orcas which would be devastated, almost certainly irreparably, by any oil spill.

This bill also provides the authority for the government to ban tankers from other areas deemed to be ecologically sensitive.

British Columbia's pristine coastlines are a priceless natural resource. First nations, local communities and environmentalists have joined together to be responsible stewards of this shared resource by opposing the presence of oil tankers in these delicate waters.

I am proud to join them in these efforts and I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

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

* * *

● (1535)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 21st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to this House earlier this day, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

PETITIONS

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I would like to present a petition signed by 190 constituents who are very concerned about the violation of animals rights.

Animals are treated cruelly and often left abandoned during relief efforts and emergency planning, despite the fact that it has been scientifically proven that animals can feel pain and suffering.

Over one billion people around the world rely upon animals for their livelihoods, millions of others for their companionship.

As a result, the petitioners urge the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

FRASER RIVER SECONDARY CHANNELS

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of concerned residents of British Columbia. Their concern is with the infilling of the secondary channels of the Fraser River.

In the mid-1990s, the previous government stepped away from dredging these secondary channels. They have been filling up, causing a hazard for navigation, a reduction in habitat for fish and additional costs for people who live on the river. People who live in float homes in those channels are therefore actually put at risk.

They are calling upon the government to provide sufficient funding for adequate dredging of these channels, and to undertake an ongoing maintenance program to ensure that this problem is dealt with once and for all.

FUEL PRICES

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, a petition to the government from hundreds of Canadians from Brampton to New Market to Mississauga to Oshawa, Whitby, Maple, Peterborough, Port Perry and Kingston, Ontario, and even Saskatoon.

The petitioners are concerned about a serious lack of competition and transparency in the energy industry that has hampered the free market to the detriment of all Canadians. The petitioners are concerned that the price of fuel inflates the price of everything we purchase.

They, therefore, call upon the Canadian government to finally acknowledge that the price of fuel at these kinds of levels is damaging to the Canadian economy. They ask that the government move quickly and rapidly to reinstate the office of petroleum price information, which was abolished by the government in 2006, as an energy market information service, which is very much like the U.S. energy information agency. It would produce weekly reports, including all Canadian energy supply, demand, inventory and storage information.

The petitioners further call upon the government to begin hearings into the energy sector to determine how the government can foster competition and provide transparency to the market and eliminate the monopolistic efficiencies defence clause of the Competition Act.

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. 277 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 277—**Hon. Judy Sgro:**

What is the total amount of government funding, since fiscal year 1998-1999 up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated within the constituency of York West, listing each department or agency, initiative, and amount?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that the notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

Mr. Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

NAFO CONVENTION

The Speaker: The chair has received a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte. I will hear from the hon. member now.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, late yesterday, I transmitted to you, pursuant to Standing Order 52(2), a request for an emergency debate on an amendment to the Convention on Future Multilateral Cooperation in the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries, otherwise known as the revised NAFO Convention.

The revised NAFO Convention was tabled in the House of Commons by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on June 12. The revised convention is a very serious matter for Canada, with serious implications both in terms of economic and political. I could get into a very substantive debate or discussion about this but I what I will discuss right now is that I am hoping to establish that debate.

The government announced to the House that it would invoke a procedure for House consultation on international treaties and conventions. Under the government's adopted policy, which it announced to the House, it would provide just 21 sitting days for the

Speaker's Ruling

House to pronounce itself or debate or discuss matters that are tabled before the House regarding international treaties or conventions.

This particular treaty does not require enabling legislation, so there is no actual indication of any procedure by the government to establish that debate. It is up to us as opposition parties to call upon the government to invoke that debate. We have done so. My House leader has asked the government on several occasions for a take note debate but that has not been adopted.

Twenty-one sitting days provide the House up until October 19 for the House to inform the government on its position, after which the government can simply invoke what is a Governor in Council ratification of the treaty.

The House is trying to establish a means to pronounce itself on this particular issue. Right now, the only means to be able to do so within that government imposed deadline of October 19 is to ask for permission from you, Mr. Speaker, to allow that debate to occur.

This is a very serious issue. Literally billions of dollars annually are on the line regarding resources that are shared not only by Canada but by international players as well. This is a serious economic issue and, of course, it is a serious political issue as well dealing with sovereignty.

I would like to make those points more clearly to the House through a debate but the only mechanism I have at this point in time, within that October 19 deadline imposed by the government, is to have you, Mr. Speaker, allow an emergency debate, and I am hoping that will happen.

● (1540)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte for his intervention in this matter. I have examined the case with some interest given the fact that he is requesting a debate on a document that was made available to the House according to a procedure that was announced by the government in 2008.

I have here the news release of January 25, 2008 from the then minister of foreign affairs and international trade in which he announced that following the commitment made in the Speech from the Throne in 2006, international treaties would be brought “before the House of Commons to give Parliament a role in reviewing international agreements”.

The document states:

The government will observe a waiting period of 21 sitting days from the date of the tabling before taking any action to bring the treaty into effect. When treaties require legislative amendment, the government is committed to delaying the legislation until this 21-sitting-day period has passed.

The House may debate the agreement, if it chooses to do so. The government offers the House the opportunity to discuss treaties that it judges important.

There is no mechanism in the Standing Orders of the House to allow for debate on a treaty that has been tabled in the House within that 21 day period by any arrangement. Obviously, it is a matter of unanimous consent between the parties if there is going to be such a discussion. Alternatively, a motion could be moved and then, if it comes up for debate, it could be debated in the House on such an issue. However, at the moment there is nothing of that sort before us.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte has now asked the Speaker to intervene in this matter and, despite apparent requests, grant an emergency debate in order to allow this to happen within the 21 day period because the expiry of the 21 day period will convert this into an emergency because there is no time for the discussion if it does not happen before the end of the 21 day period.

I am afraid that is the part of the argument that I find a little difficult. I do not think it is for the Chair to decide which treaty constitutes an emergency or which treaty requiring debate might constitute an emergency. I urge the hon. member to have a look at Standing Order 52, specifically 52(6). I will read the Standing Order:

The right to move the adjournment of the House for the above purposes is subject to the following conditions:

- (a) the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration;...

I am not sure that the implementation of a treaty constitutes a genuine emergency. I agree that it may be that given the expiration of the 21 day period there may be a need for urgent consideration because of the number of sitting days between now and the expiry of the period, but I do not think it converts the coming into force or the ratification of the treaty as a genuine emergency. It is that part of the issue that I have concern about.

Accordingly, in my view, the request for the emergency debate does not meet the exigencies of the Standing Order at this time.

* * *

• (1545)

POINTS OF ORDER

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on June 2, 2009, you made a statement with respect to the management of private members' business and indicated that three bills appear to impinge on the financial prerogative of the Crown and invited the comments of members.

One of the bills you mentioned was Bill C-395, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (labour dispute). Without commenting on the merits of the bill, I submit Bill C-395 contains provisions that would change the purposes of the Employment Insurance Act, thereby requiring new spending and a royal recommendation.

Currently, the Employment Insurance Act allows for a qualifying period up to 104 weeks in situations where individuals are unable to work, including sickness, incarceration and quarantine. Bill C-395 would add another provision such that individuals could extend their qualifying period for an undefined period of time in the event of a work stoppage as the result of a labour dispute.

By changing the way in which the qualifying period is calculated, in the case of a work stoppage attributable to a labour dispute, Bill C-395 would change the conditions that must be met in order to receive employment insurance benefits, and that would require an increase in government spending on employment insurance.

Precedents demonstrate that changes to the conditions for eligibility of employment insurance benefits require a royal recommendation.

On March 23, 2007, the Speaker ruled, in the case of Bill C-265 respecting changes to the employment insurance qualifying period, that:

...the changes to the employment insurance program envisioned by this bill include...removing the distinctions made to the qualifying period on the basis of the regional unemployment rate.

[This] would have the effect of authorizing increased expenditures from the consolidated revenue fund in a manner and for purposes not currently authorized.

On January 29, 2009, the Speaker of the other place ruled, in the case of Bill S-207 respecting changes to the qualifying period, that:

...Bill [S-207] would relax the conditions that must be met in order to receive employment insurance benefits...by allowing [certain individuals] to extend their qualifying period...

The proposal in Bill S-207 to extend access to a benefit enlarges the scheme of entitlements in the Employment Insurance Act, and, consequently, it requires a Royal Recommendation.

These precedents apply to Bill C-395. The bill would increase government spending and, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I submit, must be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his submissions on this point and I will return to the House in due course.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord on the same point of order.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois would like to reserve its right to respond to the hon. member's point of order.

We are surprised, but he is entitled to his opinion. We are asking for a chance to be heard on this another time.

The Speaker: Yes, certainly. I will not make my ruling on this point of order immediately. I will wait for comments by the hon. member or by one of his colleagues.

[*English*]

I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement government orders will be extended by 15 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT (STIMULUS)

The House resumed from October 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-51, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and to implement other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this bill. It is a bill that is central to the lives of Canadians.

Government Orders

One of the great responsibilities of the government is to deal with the needs of our citizens, with poverty, with access to health care, and with the problems of our citizens who fall through the cracks of life. It must put forward a plan for our nation in a way that ensures that Canada and Canadians are going to be at the forefront of what happens in the world, that we are able to be economically sufficient and sound, and that our social programs are going to be stable.

I would argue that the government has failed on all of these counts. Bill C-51 is an act to implement certain provisions of budget 2009. Here is a little bit of history. Earlier this year, we worked with the government to pass this bill. The bill had many things that we wanted to support, in particular, a stimulus package that we knew our nation needed because of the economic tsunami, which had been going around the world and hit our country.

There were also things in it that we vehemently opposed. The government added things to the budget bill, including a provision to tear up the arbitrated wage agreement that took place between the government and our dockyard workers. In doing this, it violated a sacred trust that it had from these workers, who worked so hard day in and day out to ensure that our men and women in the navy would be able to have the naval ships and equipment that they need to do their jobs effectively and safely.

In a slap to the face of these hard workers on the dockyard, the government arbitrarily tore up this wage agreement. We opposed this. It also put in provisions and changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act. Neither of these things had anything to do with the economy. However, the government chose to put it in and told us that if we tried to change any part of the bill, we would invoke an election because the government would collapse.

We in the Liberal Party felt that that would be irresponsible. For the sake of our citizens, our economy, and the jobs that we need in our country, we passed this bill with the understanding that the government would work with us to implement its provisions, particularly the stimulus package, in an effective manner.

What has happened is quite the contrary and I am going to get to that. On the management of the larger economy, a year ago the government was maintaining a mythology and frankly not telling the truth to the public. It said that we were not going to have a deficit or be in a recession when everybody knew that that was not the case at all.

Progressing forward to the end of last year, the government again claimed that we would have a balanced budget. In December the government admitted for the first time that it would run a deficit of \$20 billion to \$30 billion. In January budget 2009 showed a \$34 billion deficit. In June it had ballooned to \$50 billion. In September the Minister of Finance came out to Victoria, one of the furthest reaches of our country, to announce that the deficit had ballooned to \$56 billion and that the government did not have a plan to deal with it.

That was what the Minister of Finance of Canada did when he came to Victoria. That is not leadership because it also means that the government has lost control over the public purse. In doing so, it has failed in one of its primary obligations as a government, which is to be a good steward of public money.

The government cannot tell Canadians that it does not have a plan to pay down the deficit and get the country's finances in order. That is not leadership. Frankly, it is a violation of its duty to the Canadians of today and their children, who will be paying off this growing debt long into the future.

The government must come up with a deficit reduction plan to get the country's finances in order. We have been asking for it and we will work with the government. The mythology exists out there that somehow the Conservatives are good stewards and the Liberals are not. However, history bears out a very different story.

If one looks back to the 1990s, the country was embroiled in massive deficits and a ballooning debt. The country's bond rating was declining and we were going the way of Argentina.

• (1550)

The then Liberal finance minister, Paul Martin, and the then Prime Minister, Mr. Chrétien, got together to put forth some tough medicine to pursue a balanced budget, which took place in the later part of the 1990s and then we had surplus budgets after that.

A contingency plan was put in place for rainy days, but the government spent right through that contingency plan when things were good. Why did it do that? Why did the Prime Minister do two things that were reminiscent of another leader, George Bush. President Bush lowered taxes and increased spending. Remarkably, our Prime Minister has done the same thing. When times were good, he lowered taxes and increased spending, wiping out the contingency fund and putting us right to the brink of a deficit budget during the good times. When things turned bad, we were pushed into the massive deficits we have today. That is merely a statement of the facts.

I have to point out the failure of the government to introduce a deficit reduction plan, which is one of the most pressing needs of our country today. There is also an issue of how do we plan the future? How do we ensure that Canada will be economically competitive for the next two decades? This is a challenge and a responsibility, regardless of who happens to be in government. Here are some of the challenges: investments; tax changes; reducing the tax burden on the poor and the middle class; investing in education; investing in infrastructure; investing in reducing trade barriers, particularly the interprovincial trade barriers that are a larger burden than those we have with our major trading partner south of the border; expanding trade opportunities with the BRIC countries, particularly India, and we have a large diaspora here in Canada.

Government Orders

There is no vision whatsoever in this area. Why is that so? Because the government has a small vision. The Prime Minister operates his government with an iron fist over his members of Parliament, his cabinet and the public service. It demoralizes the public service and the control that he has over his MPs means that they are not being allowed to exercise their abilities to the fullest. The people of our country pay the price for this. This is one of the grave problems we have, and that leads to the democratic deficit we have in our country today. The problem is that it chokes off innovation, and without innovation we cannot grow our country and we cannot ensure that our country will be competitive.

Let me put forth some of the challenges that the government is failing to face, and it must: first, the long-term economic plan for our country; second, dealing with the demographic time bomb that will threaten everything from our economy to our social programs; third, child care, a national head start program. Our party put forth a national head start child care program for our country that was supported by all of the provinces. The government burnt that. Fourth, defence, we need a long-term procurement process to deal with rust out; fifth, the environment, we are going to Copenhagen at the end of this year. Is there a plan from the government? No, there is not. We need to have a credible plan from Canada to deal with climate change.

Sixth, what plan does the government have with respect to Canada's role in the world? There is a responsibility to protect in times of crisis, but there is no obligation to act. We have a judicial framework with no enforcement mechanism. Canada led on the responsibility to protect when the Liberals were in power. The government needs to see that Canada has a larger role to play and must stop choking off the funds for our foreign affairs department. Foreign affairs has had the stuffing beaten out of it by the government and frankly does not believe that it has much of a role to play.

Seventh, infrastructure, for heaven's sake, put the infrastructure where it is needed, based on merit. In my province of British Columbia the government has put four times the amount of money for infrastructure in their own ridings versus those which are not government-held ridings. It has also neglected to get the moneys out the door and 50% of the moneys so far have been spent.

The government has a challenge on its hands. We are ready to take over to provide that leadership. The Conservatives should just give up and let us have that chance.

•(1600)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca with a lot of interest because we have, of course, this budget implementation act coming forward in the House, but we also have the Liberal vote on the previous budget implementation act. That particular budget bill included implementation of the big bribe, the \$2 million bribe, for the HST in British Columbia.

The Liberals supported that attempt by the Conservatives to push through tax legislation that is inherently unfair. What it would do is lower corporate taxes and those corporate CEOs would have more money in their pockets. However, each and every British Columbian is going to have to pay \$500 more. For a family of four, that is

\$2,000 more that British Colombian families are going to have to pay for this essential tax shift, so that corporate CEOs get off tax free. It is absolutely absurd, but the Liberals voted for it.

I want to ask the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca this very simple question. Did he understand that the HST was part of the package and does he support it? Or does he regret that foolish move that the Liberals made?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether or not the member wants to invoke an election at this time, but I know most Canadians do not want that.

However, on the issue of the HST, on the \$1.6 billion carrot that the federal government has put in front of the face of Premier Campbell, this is the silent hand that is driving the HST issue.

What I have said in my province is that the federal government, the Prime Minister, must say to the premier of British Columbia that the government is going to keep that \$1.6 billion on the table until the premier has had a chance to consult with both consumers and producers to ensure that the negative parts of the HST have been mitigated, including an assurance that it only applies to that which the PST applies to, that there is proper consultation, and that there is a streamlining of the process. The status quo cannot exist because it is going to hurt vulnerable British Columbians

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous question was a curious misdirection of questioning in that the Harper sales tax is not clearly a tax whereby the Prime Minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member knows that he cannot use the given names of members.

Hon. John McKay: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, but of course it was not a reference to any particular member in this particular House; it is better known as “the Harper sales tax”, but of course —

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the last part of the member's speech. Maybe I was fortunate in that I was not in the House for the first part.

He talked about the bitter pill that his government needed to swallow in order to balance the budget. What he needs to acknowledge is that bitter pill involved cutting transfers to the provinces and municipalities for health care, education, and many of the things that we on this side feel are essential and we would never take action like that.

Government Orders

However, the question I would have for the member opposite is this. How could he and his entire caucus stand in the House a few days ago, when their leader made a comment that on this side of the House we are trying to starve the beast? On one hand, the Liberals accuse us of spending too much and on the other hand he is suggesting that we are not spending enough to keep government programs operating in terms such as starving the beast. How can he square that circle?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague to actually look at the history of what his government did. When times were good, his government took a contingency fund that the Liberals had in place when they were in government and burned through it.

The fact of the matter is that the Conservative government, in good times, actually spent at a rate that was two and a half times larger than the rate of increase in GDP, the largest spending increase by any government in Canadian history. It combined this with a reduction in taxes, causing a massive imbalance and putting us to the brink of the precipice of a deficit budget during good times.

So, when times turn sour, this absolutely irresponsible misuse of the economic levers of our country has caused us to be plunged into a deficit that is much larger than we would ever have had and the Prime Minister has put a large burden on the children of our country.

• (1605)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about various items that relate to the north, most of which are not in the budget. I have spoken with people across the north, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. They have said they would like to see them in future budgets.

Mining and tourism are the two biggest sectors in my riding, unlike any other riding in the country. Therefore, I will first talk about the exploration tax credit. A tax credit could be expanded to help mining companies cover new expenses that have come into play in the last couple of decades, such as the consultation process with aboriginal peoples and first nation governments, which the courts have deemed to be mandatory. This process should take place, but there are expenses associated with it. Another expense involves in environmental assessments.

An additional idea for a tax credit is with regard to expenses that could occur on new drilling done close to existing mines. That way mining companies would not necessarily have to go into pristine wilderness areas to look for new finds. They would have some motivation to do more work in their area, where infrastructure already exists.

Tourism is the biggest private sector employer in my riding. However, I want to speak about it nationally. Tourism is mentioned far too little in the House so I would like to talk about the recent priorities of the national tourism organization. It suggests the federal government needs to recognize that air travel is an enabler and driver of the economic prosperity of Canada, that a strategy should be developed that would advance the competitiveness of Canada's aviation and tourism industries and that the federal government should be proactive and diligent in negotiating liberalized bilateral air transport agreements, as per the Blue Sky policy.

This is not coming just from me. People can talk to TIAC, the Canadian Airports Council, the Canadian Association of Tour Operators, the Hotel Association of Canada, the International Air Transport Association, the National Airlines Council of Canada and the Tourism Industry Association of Canada.

People would like to see more money to help at risk youth. The government cut funds at least in my riding and probably cut back on funds for work projects for at risk youth nationally.

It has been brought up many times in the House that for the first time in a long time students ran out of work this summer. A lot of them will run out of money through this school year. In a recession that program should have been dramatically expanded.

On the missing aboriginal women, when the Conservative government came to power, there was a process to deal with this very sad and unfortunate problem. It was hard to get government to the table, but conferences were held across the country, resulting in a number of recommendations to deal with this. Aboriginal people were involved in these meetings and came up with good ideas. Unfortunately, the action we would like to have seen has not happened.

We want the government to keep up its lobbying, through the embassy in Washington, to continue the Shawkak project. It continues to do excellent and needed work on the Alaska Highway, especially in the area of the heaving permafrost between Burwash and Beaver Creek.

There is some concern about border crossings in Yukon not being open long enough and the possibility of the hours being cut back. That would cut back on tourism.

We were disappointed that the artist programs for overseas were cut, and we would like to see more investment in those, including the travelling exhibits program. The north is farthest in the country and that is the only way people would get to see these national historic exhibits.

Like the rest of northern and rural Canada, the cancelling of \$10 billion for both the Kelowna accord and the national child care program was a dramatic disappointment to the people in my riding. Those people depended on that. In fact, we heard witnesses yesterday from major aboriginal organizations that listed a number of priorities with which they wanted dealt. Those priorities were in the Kelowna accord.

• (1610)

As the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca just said, I, too, would like to see the head start program expanded because it is so successful.

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There is a program called building communities, which is funded through arts and heritage. A great winter carnival is held in Whitehorse called “Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous”. It has been taking place since time immemorial. It is a great way to get rid of the winter blues. It is a local festival that highlights local artists. We would like the festival to continue to receive funding through the building communities program. Hopefully the government will do that.

When the government came into power, it talked about the two major pipelines in my area, the Mackenzie Valley pipeline and the Alaska Highway pipeline. These are possibly the largest projects in the history of Canada, yet not much progress has been made on them.

The biggest problem relating to first nations people in my riding, at least 11 of the 14 first nations, is the insufficient effort being made with respect to implementing land claims. This requires some financial commitments and some goodwill and reasonable negotiation to move forward.

One particular component of that is the Teslin Tlingit Council's aboriginal justice agreement, which is close to going to cabinet. I hope cabinet will be supportive of it. Ministers have said they would support it. This will be great leadership for all of Canada, in fact, the world.

Resource revenue sharing is a huge concern in the Northwest Territories. The people would like to have access to the revenue that comes from the resources to help them become independent of the large transfer payments from the federal government.

Unlike the south, where there is a lot of preparation to reduce climate change, it is already happening in all three territories in the north. It is a growing problem. Ice bridges are melting and roads and sewer lines are heaving because of climate change. These are expensive to repair so we need those adaptation projects.

Road and harbour infrastructure is instrumental in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. They do not have road access like the rest of the country.

Investment in oil spillage clean up is needed. The government is intent on development in the Arctic Ocean, but there is no known technology to clean up an oil spill under the ice. I encourage investment in research there so those projects could go ahead.

There is big emphasis on social investment in Nunavut. Nunavut has the biggest housing crisis in the country. It needs more social investment, more training and more education. Nunavut was promised a port in its capital city of Iqaluit to reduce the cost of goods, but that never came through.

People in Nunavut would like a drug treatment centre because there is no local one. They would also like to have a convention centre. The contracting agreement in their land claim would provide funds to get energy from diesel fuel. They would like to ensure their fishing quota is protected.

I have a piece of wooden pipe in my office, which is part of a water and sewer pipe from the north. People are aghast at the fact that the pipes are still made from wood. It is not acceptable that the infrastructure in the north is that far behind. Municipalities have told

me they have not received any of the stimulus infrastructure funding yet.

• (1615)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the long shopping list of items that the member for Yukon would like to have in the bill, but I wonder if he, or anybody in his party, has read anything of the action plan report that just came out.

At the top of page 71, there are improvements to the Freegold Road in Yukon, improvements to the water treatment plant in Fort Simpson in the Northwest Territories, and I could go on.

In addition to that, is he aware of the improvements we have made for ordinary Canadians, such as the home renovation tax credit, or the improvements we have made to implement the first-time home buyers' tax credit? All these advances are important for ordinary Canadians across the country.

Could the member tell the House why he and his party intend to vote against these great moves that will help all Canadians across the country?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, as the member said, I gave a huge list of reasons why.

Actually he just made my point. He pointed out the infrastructure and the funding in the north and he read out projects. He did not read out a single project in my riding that went to a municipality, which is the exact point I made, that a majority of our municipalities have not received any of that funding yet.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I spent a few terrific days up in Yukon in the first part of September, meeting with the people who run Air North, a fantastic airline.

I want to point out to the member, though, that we are dealing with Bill C-51. I did not hear any comments from him about some of the points of the bill, which include drought relief for livestock owners and a revenue-sharing agreement with Nova Scotia, which includes a \$175 million payment. I did not hear him talk about the first-time homebuyers' tax credit. Nor did I hear him talk about the renovation tax credit.

I am sure he was about to get to those subjects when he ran out of time, but he has a few more minutes in which he could perhaps deal with those issues.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about bills, we can talk about what is in them or what is not in them. I talked about what was not in the bill and suggested that in future budgets, hopefully Canadians and members of Parliament would consider those items. It cannot be done all at once, but those are the types of things we would like to see.

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It is true that my constituents were not really waiting to hear from me about the revenue-sharing agreement in Nova Scotia, so I did not have time to get to that into my speech. The member was right that I did not get through the things for the north, let alone go across the rest of the country.

However, I would like to commend him for raising Air North. As he said, it is an excellent airline. It is a local airline. It is great when all members of Parliament support our northern airlines. There are Air North, First Air, Canadian North, Alkan Air and a number of other airlines in the north. They certainly need our support.

I did talk about airlines. The tourism industry needs more access into the country for other airlines. Once the tourists are in the country, then our local airlines can fly them around.

In my particular part of the north, I would hope that all airlines would interline. Some airlines right now refuse to interline with northern carriers, which causes a problem. People go into the airport, check their luggage and as soon as they get to the next Canadian city, they have to collect their luggage, go back through security and check in again. That costs taxpayers a bunch of money. That is a needless burden on our tourism industry and on the expenses of the federal government.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-51, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and to implement other measures.

I am going to briefly talk about why the NDP will be supporting the bill and then I will go on to talk about some of the other aspects of government policy.

Our support for the bill in no way implies any sort of endorsement of overall government policy. In particular, we do not endorse the Liberal-Conservative HST on which Conservatives and Liberals have banded together to try to impose on British Columbians and also on people from Ontario.

Let us be very clear from the outset. This is not an endorsement of government policy and I will actually be condemning government economic policy because it certainly has not been in the interests of most Canadians.

I will say that Bill C-51 does a number of things that we do support. First off, one element that we did support in tax policy is the home renovation tax credit, which most Canadians will be surprised to learn the government forgot to put in the original budget bill. Now the government is bringing it forward this fall retroactively.

If the NDP was not supporting the bill to get it through the House, those well-meaning Canadians who were told by the Conservatives last spring that they would have a home renovation tax credit and could renovate their homes would essentially have found that there was no home renovation tax credit in place because the Conservatives, I guess, just forgot to put it in last spring.

It is the same with the first-time home buyers tax credit. It is a tax credit that the government announced and then, I guess, simply forgot to put it forward in the budget bill that was passed last spring.

Those two measures we have supported. It would be retroactive punishment to say that the government simply did not put together the budget bill in the spring the way it should have, so now we are going to penalize the government. The NDP will be supporting the bill to get that through so that Canadians who in good faith invested thinking that the tax credit was coming will not be disadvantaged.

We are also supporting it because of the drought relief for livestock owners, the income deferral. That is a measure we do support.

Finally, there is the long-standing revenue sharing agreement with Nova Scotia, the agreement that was reneged on by the Prime Minister and the government. Obviously, since the election of an NDP government in Nova Scotia, the Conservatives realize they cannot run roughshod over the provincial government any more. Nova Scotia has a very strong premier and a majority NDP government. The Conservatives are finally rectifying their error and we support that. I do not think Nova Scotians are going to forget what the government did to Nova Scotians, but certainly it is important that that revenue sharing agreement be respected.

For those reasons we will be supporting the bill.

However, that does not imply an endorsement of overall Conservative economic policy. It certainly is not an endorsement of what anyone could call an effective Conservative public administration. In fact, I think effective Conservative public administration is an oxymoron. What we have seen from the government over the last few years is quite simply the opposite.

The impact on Canadians of the former Liberal government and the current Conservative government is very clear. Statistics Canada has just released these figures. Since 1989, under the Conservatives, and then the Liberals and then the Conservatives, most Canadian families have actually seen their real income decline. What we have under Conservatives and Liberals is essentially an economic policy that is for the few. They love corporate tax handouts, corporate tax cuts, but most Canadians have been left further and further behind.

As Statistics Canada says so clearly, the wealthiest 20%, the corporate CEOs and the corporate lawyers, now make more than half of all income in this country. Their real income has grown dramatically over the past 20 years. For all the rest, middle class families have seen their market income decline considerably, and the poorest Canadians have seen their total income decline considerably. What we have seen is essentially a shift under Liberals and Conservatives that puts money in a few hands in the hope that somehow the trickle down will magically create conditions for prosperity. That simply has not happened, which is why in this corner of the House the number of New Democrats continues to grow after each election.

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● (1620)

More and more Canadians are realizing that these economic policies that are oriented toward corporate CEOs and corporate lawyers are not economic policies that bring prosperity to the community at large.

This brings me to the HST, the Liberal-Conservative harmonized sales tax. The Liberals and Conservatives were working together on the budget bill last spring to inflict on British Columbians and Ontarians the hated, I think it is fair to say, HST.

I am going to restrict my comments to the impact on ordinary British Columbians, because in my province the HST is particularly hated. According to most public domain polls, over 80% of British Columbians say that this is just a dumb idea. It follows along the lines of what Conservatives really believe, the trickle-down theory, shovelling lots of money, tens of billions of dollars, to the corporate sector.

The HST is a tax shift. What the Conservatives wanted to get the B.C. Liberals to do, Liberals and Conservatives working together, is essentially offer up a bribe to cut corporate taxes for the largest companies in British Columbia. They cut their taxes even further. They are now far below what exists in the United States. When we take into consideration the important subsidy to business which is our medicare system put in place by the NDP, as we know, which provides a subsidy of \$3,000 per employee, according to most studies by KPMG and PriceWaterhouse, we have a lower corporate income tax than even in the United States that does not have a public health care system.

What we are doing is bringing corporate taxes for the big companies, the big banks, the big energy companies to levels that cannot sustain an effective public administration and the kinds of services that Canadians need.

The HST is another example of that. I will say that what they are trying to do in a diabolical way is have ordinary British Columbians cough up the money for this massive corporate tax cut.

This tax shift means that CEOs of the major companies, the softwood companies for example that are busy buying mills and creating jobs in Washington State and South Carolina, are getting their taxes cut, but the average British Columbian will be paying \$500 a year more.

There is a corporate tax rate on the one hand and on the other, increased taxes in a whole range of other areas. If people want to take care of their health, they are going to pay more for vitamins, a 7% tax increase. Far from trying to encourage literacy and information flow, the Conservatives are imposing a 7% tax on newspapers and magazines. For movie and theatre tickets, in their ongoing attack on culture, they are increasing taxes there. Haircuts will cost more. One needs a haircut to go to work.

The Liberal-Conservative HST will have people pay 7% more for clothing, food, and meals in restaurants. I am getting lots of letters from restaurants in my riding saying to top this HST because it is going to hurt their clients. It is going to hurt their communities.

On housing, bicycles, safety equipment, transportation tickets, thanks to the Conservatives, we will be paying 7% more. For health

care things like massages, children's diapers, people will have pay more. Parents who buy diapers for their kids will be paying more because of the Conservative HST.

The Liberals and the Conservatives are working together to raise taxes in over 200 different areas. The cost will be \$500 more for a single British Columbian, and \$2,000 more for a family of four, thanks to the Liberal-Conservative HST. It is absolutely absurd.

This is where we differ from the government. We might support this budget bill because we think it is important to bring in some of those elements, but to say that we support the government agenda in bringing in the HST, well, we very clearly do not.

This corner of the House will be fighting tooth and nail to stop this horrendous HST, this horrendous boondoggle, which essentially makes ordinary British Columbians pay hundreds of dollars a year more so the corporate cat sector can get another corporate tax break. We say no, and we are going to be voting against the HST when it comes to the House.

● (1625)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House has been treated to a real rant from the member opposite. He was really on a roll. We might have called him on relevance on a whole bunch of what he had to say.

The member has been here for a while. He has sat through a few budgets. He would know that passing a budget is always followed by ways and means motions and budget implementation bills that actually follow through with the details. That is a normal procedure that we are following in the House, even at this time.

When the member rails on one of his favourite topics, which is corporate tax cuts, he always likes to refer to banks. The member would know that in our part of the world we have a lot of corporations that are forest companies, such as Catalyst in my riding and Harmac in Nanaimo. They are struggling. Does the member support increased taxes for forest companies and auto companies that are struggling at this time?

Furthermore, this is the federal Parliament. If the member wants to debate the harmonized sales tax, he should quit his seat in this House and go to the provincial legislature, if he could get himself elected, where he could debate it where the decision is being made.

● (1630)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nanaimo—Alberni is not going to get off that easily. The NDP is not going to leave the House. We are not going to turn our backs on ordinary British Columbians. We are not going to stop our attack against the HST. It was simply bad public policy. It is a tax shift.

I do have to answer a couple of the points he made. First, of course it is ridiculous to be debating implementation legislation at this time for a budget that was adopted last spring. The Conservatives are going to have to justify why it took them so long to bring those components forward.

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Second, and this is the most important, because he is talking about the forestry industry. The softwood lumber industry has absolutely been gutted by bad Conservative policy. The softwood lumber sellout, which essentially gave away half a billion dollars of British Columbian money, has led to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs.

Why did the member support the softwood lumber sellout when he knew it was going to cost hundreds of jobs in his riding? Why did he not stand up for the people in Nanaimo—Alberni?

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the excellent speech by my hon. colleague and I want to follow up on his comments about the HST.

I know that the HST was first brought into this country in 1997 by the previous Liberal government, which signed HST agreements with maritime provinces. I know that the Liberals also supported the budget in January of this year, which contained several billions of dollars from the federal government to the provinces in exchange for their agreement to harmonize the taxes.

When the members opposite say that this is a provincial decision, I wonder why, if that is the case, they saw fit to provide almost \$6 billion in federal transfer payments to the provinces as enticement for them to enter into the HST.

I would be interested to hear my hon. colleague's comments on that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver Kingsway is one of the best of the class of 2008 in the House. He is a very dedicated member of Parliament and works very hard, very effectively and very diligently. When he speaks, members of the House listen to him because of the intelligence he brings to the debate.

He is absolutely right. British Columbians see this as a federal issue. They were essentially misled during the provincial election campaign. The B.C. Liberals support the HST with the inducement from the federal Conservatives supported by the federal Liberals. British Columbians were not told. In fact, they were told the opposite. They were told that the HST would not be coming in.

British Columbians who are very angry about this issue will certainly get a chance to vote on it with the upcoming byelection in New Westminster—Coquitlam. I think we will see that many people in that area see it as a federal issue.

We will certainly see it in an upcoming federal campaign. If the government continues its provocation and we go into a federal campaign, British Columbia Conservatives and British Columbia Liberals are going to have to defend their vote and support for this awful HST, which attacks ordinary working families in British Columbia. They will have to defend themselves.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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, Afghanistan; the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Employment Insurance.

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, as we debate the implementation of the budget, it is important for us to remember that in speaking about budgets it is all too easy to be caught up in numbers, balance sheets and bottom lines. In reality, however, we are really speaking about people, people like the seniors in my riding of Davenport and in communities across Canada who find it more difficult to manage than ever before, or families that have faced financial pressures in simply making good lives for themselves and their children or those who seek only to improve the knowledge and build careers for themselves.

We are also speaking about the financial challenges that face my city of Toronto and other cities and communities as they try to provide service and living space worthy of all Canadians.

Some months ago, the government called on members of the House to support the budget. We agreed but with reservation and concern. However, we wanted to make Parliament work and so we trusted the government. Others, without having seen the proposals, were quick to vote no.

Sadly, we find ourselves, as the leaves begin to fall, with very little being delivered for what was promised to the people of Canada last winter. We, in the Liberal caucus, have worked hard to make Parliament work. We know that Canadians sent us here on their behalf and we never forget that.

The fact that we have lost confidence in the government speaks more to our disappointment in the government's ability to deliver on promises than anything else. We want to work for Canadians but we must also stand up when we see their interests being undermined.

It was Robert Service who once said that a promise made is a debt unpaid. The government has simply failed to honour the debt of the promise to the Canadian people.

For millions of Canadians, the current financial situation is the most significant economic challenge they have ever seen in their lifetime. Our question today in debating this budget is simply this: Has the government provided the assistance it promised to Canadians? The answer is, no. Our cities are struggling and their call to action remains, for the most part, unanswered.

My colleague, the member for Parkdale—High Park, recently presented evidence indicating that the stimulus promised to cities and communities across the country remain unfulfilled. Indeed, his figures and the partisan nature of how funds have been allocated should be alarming to us all.

Many municipal leaders will recall fondly the previous Liberal government's new deal for cities, which greatly assisted my home city of Toronto. At the time, it was a historic invitation to cities to come to the table. Today, instead of new deals for cities, we see from the government no deals for cities.

The previous Liberal government committed \$5 billion to assist cities like Toronto and other communities across Canada. Today we see no initiatives with such resolve from the government.

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In budget 2005, we saw a \$5 billion commitment in collaboration with the provinces for early learning and child care. Today we see no such commitment to our children and to families from the government.

The previous Liberal government committed over \$2 billion under the guaranteed income supplement for low income seniors. Today we see more words than action from the government when it comes to the needs of older Canadians.

I make these comparisons because so much has changed. In the days under the stewardship of former Prime Ministers Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin and the current member for Wascana, finance ministers championed progressive policies and programming within the framework of fiscally responsible budgeting.

Today we see budget deficits go from \$36 billion to over \$50 billion and we simply cannot be sure that tomorrow or next week that figure will change again. This is happening when so little is actually being done for Canadians in need.

I must also confess confusion when it comes to the recent epiphany on the road to Damascus experienced by the leader of the NDP and his caucus. It certainly seems to have much more to do with the poll numbers than high ideals, and this is regrettable.

I would remind members of the words spoken in December 2008 and what was said of the Prime Minister and his government:

He simply cannot be trusted. It is not real. What he did do was fail to put forward a plan for the economy and he failed the families of our country. That is the failure. He would not work with other parties to deliver a plan for the families of our country, who are suffering in the economic circumstances in which we are.

How can Canadians have any confidence in the Conservative government?

• (1635)

I will give credit where credit is due. Those words are not mine. Those words were spoken by the leader of the New Democratic Party. What could possibly have changed for the NDP to now support the government when it has delivered so little to the people of Canada?

The government is also quick to manipulate the numbers in terms of jobs and job creation. The sad reality is that people are losing their jobs or being forced to take jobs that do not cover their expenses. Indeed, youth unemployment in Canada is now at a staggering 16.3%, up from 10.7%. We hear now that the Royal Bank of Canada is predicting that a further 200,000 jobs may be lost next year. Who could describe that as an economic recovery?

What are we building in our youth if we cannot give them at least the kind of decent jobs that will help them live their lives with dignity?

What about the commitment to address issues of poverty in this country? The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recently released a report detailing the standings of nations in terms of quality of life. A summary noted, "...driving down Canada's score is the alarming numbers of children living in poverty...".

We are a nation rich in resources, rich in talent and blessed with limitless potential. How can it be that our quality of living is being undermined by the "alarming number of children living in poverty"?

More important, what effect is this poverty having on the potential of these children, our future and our nation's greatest blessing? We need to do better, and clearly the government has no plans to do so.

I am proud of the Liberal record which has consistently comprised of concrete action to address poverty, particularly child poverty. In this economic crisis, we should be doing more to protect those who are less vulnerable, not less.

Each year I join with agencies in my community to try to secure assistance from the government so that they might hire summer students. This year, more than any other in recent memory, would have been the year for the government to step up to the challenge with more help. However, once again, we were disappointed.

What about affordable housing or public transit, to name just two other areas that continue to be neglected by the government?

We all recall the previous Liberal government's commitment to public transit, which helped to modernize and expand systems across the country. We were also the first in a generation to return to the table with federal support for public housing.

Simply put, we need to return to more progressive and sound public policy that continues to be fiscally responsible.

It is absolutely true to say that we can do better.

• (1640)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member states that he will vote against this bill and yet he voted for the budget.

In the city of Edmonton right now and in the surrounding area, the farmers are suffering severe drought conditions.

The government has refused to act expeditiously on climate change. Its own Department of Natural Resources has issued a major report identifying impending significant threats to Canadian agriculture from climate change and serious ramifications, including the mental health of farmers.

I am pleased that this bill actually includes some limited redress for farmers suffering from drought. It is unfortunate, however, that it has not been expanded beyond those raising livestock. It should be extended to all farmers, including the valuable market gardeners in our area.

Does the member not think it is important that we expedite this aid for farmers suffering under the climate change created drought?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I do not know the new NDP member well but I must say that her statement is full of contradictions. I am sure that if she were to analyze her statement she would actually find out that there are several contradictions in her statement.

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We had put forward a proposal of non-confidence in the government and she decided not to vote. In fact, her whole caucus decided not to vote and stand up for Canadians and for climate change.

If the NDP members are really concerned about climate change and the lack of an action plan by the government, they had an opportunity to pronounce themselves and they chose not to vote.

The issue of climate change is extremely important but to think that somehow this budget implementation would address climate change is quite regrettable. It does nothing to address the serious issue of climate change. I am quite baffled by her party's stand. I think most Canadians are also extremely disheartened by the fact that the NDP members talk about these issues but when they had an opportunity and saw the polls they changed their mind and changed their tune. I think there is a lot of hypocrisy on the part of the NDP.

• (1645)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his always cogent comments on important issues of the day. I know he has worked very hard on a number of issues, but he did mention public transit and the need for efficient systems. It all links into a strategy that the government has not put forward as to what kinds of things we can do to protect and save current jobs, as well as to invest where we can in fact create new jobs.

I wonder if the member would care to comment a bit on some of the infrastructure implications of either public transit projects or those kinds of projects that will help the unemployment situation.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, we all know that our cities are facing serious crises. As a former Toronto city councillor and also former vice-chair of the Toronto Transit Commission, I know the infrastructure needs of our city and they are in the billions of dollars.

One of the great things that was done during the past government, when Paul Martin was the prime minister, was to engage the cities. We had a minister responsible for the cities. We were not just putting in infrastructure dollars. We were also providing assistance with operational costs through the gas tax, for example.

There is not only a need to build the infrastructures and improve the infrastructures in our cities, as most of it is very ancient and badly in need of repair, but they also need continual funding. One thing the government has not talked about is how the public transit system in the largest city in Canada gets the dollars they need to operate it on a regular basis. This is a major issue that needs to be addressed and the only way it can be done is in collaboration.

We need to have respect for the municipalities and bring them to the table. Too much fighting between the cities has gone on back and forth and that needs to be put to an end because we all need to look after the taxpayers, our citizens, and provide better services to them. The only way we can do that is by collaborating and bringing them to the table with mutual respect.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this very important debate on Bill C-51 today. I say that because this particular bill would put in place many of the measures that have been in the budget but will also return Canada to a shameful history of deficit financing.

It is an important bill and all Canadians should be fully aware of its implications. A shameful history of spending beyond our means will leave our children and our grandchildren still trying to pay down the debt that is being incurred today.

I want to give a bit of history. In 1993 Brian Mulroney's Conservatives had grown Canada's deficit to more than \$40 billion, a trend that exploded the national debt to more than \$400 billion. In the election of 1993, Conservative fiscal mismanagement was the key issue of that election. Unemployment was very high. Inflation was rampant. Interest rates were out of control. Many of the viewers and certainly the people in York West remember 19% and 20% interest rates. The International Monetary Fund would signal big trouble for Canada.

Canadians were rightly concerned that the careless and free-spending policies of Mr. Mulroney and the Conservatives were putting our social safety nets in jeopardy as well as our entire country. Canadians responded by sending 177 Liberal MPs to Ottawa with a strong mandate to bring spending under control once and for all. After years of empty Conservative promises to get serious about budgetary prudence and restraint, Paul Martin took hold of the finance department and set Canada down a new and brighter path.

By the time the Liberals left office in 2006, we had eliminated the deficit, paid down billions of dollars of debt, reduced taxes by more than \$100 billion, reinvested the surplus to bolster social programs and transfer payments, placed the CPP on a secure fiscal footing, and generated and maintained an annual budgetary surplus that the current government always complained was too high. But that was then, and this is now.

Despite inheriting a \$13 billion surplus in 2006, in just three very short years the Conservative government has squandered that and returned Canada to deficit once again. Sure enough, Tory times are always troubled times. This is no small accomplishment for the members across the way. In their drive to become the largest spenders, or should I say overspenders as a better description, in our history, they had to first eliminate the massive surplus that they inherited.

I am going to put this in simple terms: a \$13 billion surplus the Conservatives inherited just under three years ago, plus the \$56 billion we are talking about now which already may be much higher but we are talking \$56 billion because that is the amount the finance minister is referring to, makes a total overspending tab of \$69 billion, that is \$69 billion of Conservative mismanagement. That number must make Mr. Mulroney green with envy. At least the Mulroney government acted like it was trying to bring spending under control, contrary to the current government.

Government Orders

We know what the Conservatives are proposing to do with \$69 billion, but I wonder what Canadians would have used \$69 billion for. Here are a couple of things that we could have done. We could have more than quadrupled all federal spending on health care and other vital social programs such as our Canada pension plan. We could have given a hefty increase to old age security and helped our seniors. We could have increased the amount of money being spent from all sources on homelessness by more than 700%, or we could have reduced the national infrastructure deficit by more than 55%. Those would have been interesting things to have done with all of that money, but that was not what was done.

Let me put it in terms as clearly as I can for people to understand who are watching. For example, in 1993, 38¢ of every dollar collected by the federal government was needed to pay the annual interest on our federal debt. Thanks to the work of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, that number plunged to just 14¢ by the time we left office.

• (1650)

Today, Conservatives are again increasing our debt by living off our credit cards and having the bill sent to our children and grandchildren. If they continue to overspend at the current rate, never mind the possible increase, just at the current rate today, they will have reversed all of the progress made during the 10 years of national debt repaying before the end of their current mandate. Canadians remember today all the difficulties when they were dealing with the last deficit. That is right, the federal debt is again growing, and at this moment stands at more than \$493 billion. The Conservatives are planning for a deficit that is the highest in our history.

Mr. Speaker, you should also know that we divided it up so that we could figure out what your share would be. Your share of that debt, the \$493 billion, would be \$15,000. That is \$15,000 for every man, woman and child in the country, regardless of age or income. My husband and I have three married children, and combined they have five children. That makes my family's share of the debt \$195,000. That is a lot of money. That \$195,000 worth of debt could have nearly paid for a new home in many parts of Canada. Instead, the government is squandering it, hand over fist.

The Conservatives will say that the Liberals supported the budget, and they are right. We voted to allow them the time to get past the current recession. We have held them up for almost four years in order to move the country along. We voted many times we did not want to, but it was important to work on behalf of Canadians. We now realize that will not be possible.

Less than a year ago the Conservatives were pretending they were running a surplus. Then suddenly it was a \$34 billion deficit within six months. That so-called temporary deficit became a \$50 billion deficit and now they admit to a \$56 billion deficit. We will see what it is next week. When will it stop? No one can believe their numbers any more and no one knows how high the balance of Conservative overspending will be. Either they are not being up front with their budgetary facts, or they are not capable of managing our nation's finances. Maybe it is a bit of both, incompetency at both levels. Either way, the current situation is unacceptable, and I will be voting to return control and prudence to our national budgetary process.

As the official opposition, we were prepared to work with the Conservatives, as I indicated earlier, but they have squandered that trust, just like they have squandered billions of hard earned tax dollars, and continue to mislead, twist and turn all of the truth that is necessary when it comes to being a responsible government. I used the word "squandered" intentionally because the Conservatives promised many things like infrastructure and job stimulus, but they have failed to deliver 88% of that money, and the little that has got out there has not got to where unemployment is the highest and the needs are the biggest but to Conservative ridings. Not Bloc, NDP or Liberal ridings, it has to be a Conservative riding first.

The Conservatives promised never to raise taxes. They brag about that all the time, but they have implemented a payroll tax of \$13 billion. That is a \$13 billion tax on jobs, which will clearly be a job killer, not a job implementer. This measure alone amounts to \$632 in annual payroll taxes, an increase on Canadian workers, no matter how much they try to deny it. They will be forcing small businesses, that are already struggling, to pay \$884 more for employees per year. And they say they do not raise taxes.

I do not think that is being responsible at all. It seems the government has forgotten the basic rules, and the Prime Minister and the finance minister have failed to be up front and honest with Canadians. They have failed to grasp even the basic fundamentals of recessionary budget management. They have failed to effectively manage a looming unemployment crisis with 459,000 people currently unemployed. The OECD is predicting another 200,000 people who will be unemployed. The Conservatives have failed to keep spending under control.

I thank the House for the opportunity to speak, to get my points on the record, and I welcome any comments. I suspect there will be a few.

• (1655)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear my colleague's comments. However, I was amazed at her selective memory and the things she chose to leave out of her speech.

She failed to mention that this practice that she calls shameful deficit financing actually began under former Prime Minister Trudeau. Certainly, the Conservative government that followed had to continue on to keep the social programs running. Yet, when the Chrétien and Martin years came along, they just cut all of that funding to the social programs. Health received a \$25 billion cut.

I have three questions. How can the hon. member refer to paying down almost \$40 billion of debt as squandering money? Second, where is the \$50 billion surplus that was targeted to employment insurance funds? We do not know where it is. Third, where is the \$40 million still not accounted for from the former sponsorship program? I would like answers to those three questions, please.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, it is always amazing how we have these different perceptions of what went on.

Government Orders

The problem with the members across the chamber, which is the current government, is that they know how to talk about lowering taxes, but they do not have the courage to make difficult decisions when it comes to what they are going to be cutting.

Clearly, when Mr. Mulroney and the previous Conservative government were in power, they just kept right on spending and kept saying that they had to get this under control. Then they never had the courage to make the cuts that were necessary.

When we got into power in 1993, by that time our great country of Canada was almost bankrupt. We had the courage as Liberals to engage Canadians and make the cuts that were necessary to balance that budget.

I have yet to see a plan for just how the government is going to plan to deal with this \$60 billion deficit that is continuing to grow. How is it going to deal with that? Is it going to just sit back and keep on spending?

Spending is really easy. What is really tough about being in government is figuring out how to pay for everything that is important and how to balance the budget. That is what is important. It is about time the Conservatives stopped doing the spending and started to say how they are going to deal with that issue.

• (1700)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. One of the areas on which the member has worked a great deal is the whole issue of cities and the importance of having a healthy infrastructure.

The member knows that the government allowed some \$3 billion worth of infrastructure approved funding to lapse in the last fiscal year. It promised shovel ready projects and yet it has only got 12% of the money out so far, cash in hand. The unemployment rate has gone up almost 10%.

These are the kinds of things that demonstrate the irresponsibility of a government and I am going to give the member an opportunity to comment on why the government has failed to deliver jobs for people.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, it is because clearly it is out of touch and does not understand how important it is to be investing money all across the country.

The city of Toronto has an unemployment rate of 20%. We have massive youth unemployment. Rather than focusing on where it is putting the infrastructure dollars that are important, there are certain projects that were approved back when Paul Martin was in power that are just going through the process now.

Had the Conservatives used the gas tax, which was something that we introduced, it would have been a very fast way of getting money for infrastructure throughout all of our cities in Canada, which have an aging infrastructure.

If we speak to FCM, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, it will tell us there is a \$500 billion infrastructure deficit in this country. These are not community centres. We are talking about sewers and streets that are caving in.

Those are the issues that needed money immediately which could have been out the door and been done six months ago.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Harbour Village Resident Association started a home energy retrofit project. The project offered residents an opportunity to lower heating bills, reduce their carbon footprint, and make their homes more comfortable.

This is made possible through the home renovation tax credit and the ecoenergy program. People are getting a home energy audit for \$131.75 and receiving information on where to make the biggest difference with the least investment.

Why will the member not support home energy upgrades, so people can get a grant back from the government which will make a big difference in energy bills?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, Liberals do not sell themselves off for nothing more than a home renovation grant.

For almost four years we have supported the government, tried to work with it, and tried to move it forward for this country. At this point we no longer have confidence. The infrastructure money that is being spent, the so-called stimulus money that is being spent, clearly is just going to drive up a huge debt. It is not going to help the people who are currently unemployed.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think I heard the member say that the unemployment rate in Toronto was 20%. For those listening, we should clarify that this is probably not accurate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I am not sure that is a point of order.

[*Translation*]

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.

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.
[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The vote stands deferred until 5:30 p.m. today

* * *

• (1705)

**CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT
IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

The House resumed from October 5 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, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

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 subamendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the subamendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The vote stands deferred until 5:30 p.m. today.

* * *

CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

Hon. Rob Merrifield (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to share my thoughts with regard to this legislation. The Canada Post Corporation Act needs to be amended. It is not the first time it has been tried. We have tried to bring this forward previously. I am excited about bringing

this forward because the legislation will give the official opposition an opportunity to stand and support us as a government. We look forward to that because I know it actually will happen.

The members have encouraged me to bring forward the legislation because they see it as good thing. It is the second time it has been introduced. It died last fall, so we are reintroducing it now. It is a very simple legislation, which I will describe for the House so we understand full well what will happen.

It would amend the Canada Post Corporation Act, which we need to do because it is the only way we can change the legislation. It has gone to court. The courts did not rule on whether they agree with outboard or international mailing. What they did was interpret the act as saying that Canada Post had the exclusive right to outboard and international mailing.

The legislation would make outboard international remailing legal, which in the law today is the exclusive privilege of Canada Post. The industry is worth millions of dollars and employs thousands of Canadians right now. Those individuals need to know that in Canada we agree with competition. We agree that this exclusive privilege is not in the best interests of the country. Canada Post would perhaps argue the other way.

Things have changed over a number of years. I would like to explain why it is not needed at this time. This is not unique to Canada. It has changed in Europe. Most of Europe's international remailers have the opportunity to exercise international remailing. It has also changed in the United States. When one sees exactly what has happened internationally, we are just trying to catch up with other countries.

There are two kinds of outboard international remails. We need to describe those so members who will vote on the legislation understand the two ways that it can happen.

First, a piece of mail going to another country can go to a country with a lower regime cost. Bulk pieces of mail will go to foreign developing countries, such as Jamaica, that have a cheaper rate because of their costs of doing business in those areas. Then the mail moves on to a third country where the mail is actually distributed. It is not exercised that way as often, but that is one way that it can and would be allowed. This actually goes back to the ratification of the 1999 Beijing congress on the Universal Postal Union. That is one way that it can be done.

The other way, which is the way more commonly done in Canada, is when an outboard international remail occurs with remailers that collect the outboard international mail from their consumers. Usually it is sorted and bagged by a country of destination and then directly deposited in that foreign country.

That is most likely what would happen. It is most common with us because of our proximity to the United States. These bags are taken to the United States and distributed domestically. Domestic rates are always much cheaper than international rates and that is the reality of the situation. With the way the act is written and the way that the monopoly is given to Canada Post, that is illegal in the country.

Government Orders

• (1710)

It is important that we stay competitive with the United States. We do a tremendous amount of business with our neighbour. I do not know of two other countries that are more closely connected by business, by heritage, by relationships than the United States and Canada.

I have had the privilege of serving as the chair of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Association over the last two years. I work closely with both the U.S. Congress and the Senate. The United States is a great friend and a great ally on many fronts. It is important for us to ensure that we are not at a disadvantage when we do business across the border. We are in the same marketplace and it is important that we understand that.

The world is changing. Eighty-five per cent of our exports used to go to the United States. That figure went down to about 75% and then 70%. Last year it was 66%. We are seeing a trend where our exports are not going directly to the United States and that is because we are capitalizing on international markets.

That is why this legislation is so important. It would allow us to have a competitive edge internationally. One thing that the economic slowdown has shown us is how interconnected we are with the rest of the world and how we have to compete. The only way Canada will really win is by competing and by being better, smarter, stronger than our international competitors. That will give Canadians a competitive edge.

Becoming protectionist would be a recipe for disaster. That promotes lack of productivity not better productivity. As we move forward in the 21st century, only by creating better productivity will Canada reach its full potential.

Canada is a wonderful country. Our population is only 33 million. With the amount of natural resources we have per capita, I know of no other country that can compete with us. If our legislation is right, if our ability to compete internationally is right, we will out-compete any country in the world. Now it is important to make the right investments.

I listened to the opposition speaker before me talk about how, as a government, we have lessened the opportunity for Canadians by going into debt. It is important to understand that it was our government that paid down \$40 billion of debt. It is important for that individual to understand that in the fall of 2007 we gave back \$200 billion in taxes by dropping the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. We also gave Canadians a choice in child care. We provided them with \$100 for every child under the age of six. Our government dropped corporate tax, personal tax, small business tax, giving Canadians a competitive edge. At the end of five years, Canada will have the most competitive G7 tax regime of any of our major competitors.

That is a competitive edge. That is the greatest stimulus that we could provide for our country. Our economic action plan provides a wonderful stimulus of \$12 billion. It was wonderful to do that.

We are capitalizing on the opportunity to use public dollars in a competitive way because of the bidding process that is going on.

I am directly responsible for the stimulus package going into Alberta and Saskatchewan. In Alberta competitive bidding is

working extremely well. Projects that were projected to cost \$9 million are coming in at \$6 million. A project for an overpass that was projected to cost \$300 million came in at \$168 million. We are using taxpayer dollars to the advantage of Canadians.

It is important not only to get taxpayer dollars working to create jobs now and in a competitive way, but it is also important that we build the infrastructure that allows us to compete internationally in the 21st century. I am talking about solid water and sewer projects, good roads, good facilities that will allow us that competitive edge as we go forward.

Why am I bringing that into a speech on legislation on Canada Post? We have to understand what this legislation would allow us to do. It would allow us to push for productivity in the long run. It does not take away the rights of Canada Post to enter into this business, but it does not give it an exclusive right.

• (1715)

There is a competitive opportunity for all people to push Canada Post into better productivity, as well as to allow these international remailers who employ thousands of people, thousands of Canadians the opportunity to do it in a legal way.

A lot has changed in the last few years. Actually since 1986, profound changes have happened. Up until then the remailing industry was very small, but that is when the United States decided that they had to compete as well. At that time the United States actually handled half of the world's volume of mail. They decided that they would allow international remailers to start, and the industry began to grow in leaps and bounds, and that is what has happened over a number of years.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the European Union sought a consolidation of the market into a larger one, and the pan-European market allowed this to happen in Europe as well.

We are seeing what has happened in Europe and what has happened in the United States. This piece of legislation would allow us to be able to catch up and get into this in a great way.

I want to talk a little bit about how this came about and why we are introducing it. Canada Post is one of the Crown corporations under my watch. There was a panel struck that did a review of Canada Post and what should or should not happen in order to be able to revitalize it and put Canada Post in a very positive light in the 21st century.

There were 60 recommendations, many of which we are following through on. One is that they are recommending we remove the exclusive privilege of Canada Post in international mail and remailers. This is something that comes from a very close study.

Some people may argue that we have rushed on this piece of legislation. This group of three who are very astute and who have worked very hard for over a year heard from thousands and thousands of Canadians on the recommendations for Canada Post. This is very well researched, well thought out and very well supported with regard to where we are going with this piece of legislation.

Government Orders

CUPW, the Canada Post union, does not really like this, but it is actually going to be good for them. It allows them to actually compete. It allows them to be able to test themselves, as to whether they actually can be competitive as they move forward with regard to this.

We are not compromising Canada Post's universality in Canada. We want Canada Post. We demand Canada Post. In fact we have a charter and will have a contractual arrangement between the people of Canada and Canada Post that will insist they deliver mail in an appropriate time period from one side of this country to another.

We know they have committed to local delivery within two days, regional delivery within three days, and national delivery within four days. That is a standard that is set out in the charter that we announced earlier, in mid-September, between our government and Canada Post on behalf of the people of Canada.

No one needs to worry that Canada Post is going anywhere on their mandate or that we are going to compromise in any way the Canada Post Corporation Act. This is the only change that we are looking at or are considering.

I am looking forward to the support of members from all parties in this House because this is what will hold us in good stead as we move forward, long after this vote is taken, because it will allow for many Canadians to be employed; it will allow for competition and it will allow us to be able to enter the world in a way that we can be proud of as Canadians because we will compete with anyone, given the right tools. This allows us the tools to do that.

With that, I would entertain any questions the House might have with regard to this piece of legislation.

• (1720)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for sharing his views on the bill, among other things. I too will speak to this bill, but I wonder if the House would indulge me for a moment or two to address the other issues that the minister put on the table.

I noted that he spoke about the bill for but a few short minutes. However, he took some time to talk about the economy and our competitiveness on external trade. I found that his understanding of that or at least what he projected to us is kind of a shocking revelation, especially in the context of his closing remarks which addressed the business of employment and job creation.

I noted that in one breath he wanted us to agree with him that there has been a diversification of our export component to the GDP, but I think he said initially when the Conservatives became government that trade with the United States accounted for some 85% of total trade, and now it is down to 60%.

That is a shocking number. It really is a shocking number, because it means that there has been a diminution of economic activity to the tune of \$148 billion annually. It is the first time that the government has admitted that under its watch we have lost another \$148 billion in trade with the United States.

Where has that been replaced? Could he tell us who is giving us that \$148 billion—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The minister of state.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is a little delusional. If he examines what I said, it is that we are not as dependent on the United States for our international trade as we once were. The reason for that is that we are competing internationally. We have China, India, South America, the Caribbean and many other countries around the world. We are competing and developing those markets in a much more aggressive way than ever before, particularly under the watch of the past government that did virtually very little on that side of it.

What we are actually seeing is free trade deals now with Colombia, Panama, Peru, EFTA and others that are coming along. In fact, a piece of legislation we are going to be voting on very shortly will facilitate international trade.

International trade is where we need to go. As I said, and what I tried to explain, although maybe my hon. colleague was not here or was not listening closely enough, was that we can compete with any nation, given the right tools to do it. This piece of legislation allows us to go one step further in getting the tools to be able to compete.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State (Transport) himself told us earlier that this would push Canada Post into better productivity. That is what he said. He also said that it would give us a competitive edge.

But Canada Post is a corporation that has a specific role, which is not the same role held by the companies it is competing against. Furthermore, it has a universal responsibility.

Could the Minister of State (Transport) tell us how this will increase competitiveness and productivity at Canada Post?

[English]

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, when I addressed this piece of legislation, I explained and I pointed to the charter that we have just brought in. Through that charter, the people of Canada, who actually own Canada Post, give Canada Post the mandate to have an effective universal system that is going to be run as efficiently as possible.

When we say “as efficiently as possible”, we are not taking away the opportunity for Canada Post to deal with remailing. All we are saying is that it does not have an exclusive right. That will keep it sharper and more aggressive. It is going to compete in that business and will have the opportunity to do so.

We encourage Canada Post to capitalize on the remailing business as much as it possibly can. There is no monopoly by the private sector on this. We are saying we should see if it can do it.

Canada Post's mandate does not really necessarily give it an exclusive right to international remailers. The world has changed. It has an exclusive right and a responsibility to provide mail for Canadians from coast to coast to coast in an appropriate time, in an appropriate way and at an appropriate cost.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member indicated that the bill was going to be good for CUPW, yet he admits that CUPW is against the bill. So how does he feel that it is going to be good for the CUPW workers?

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, any time that people become more competitive at whatever they do in this country, they are putting themselves on a more solid footing, in a better spot. This will allow CUPW and Canada Post to gauge themselves against competitors that are doing this business as well. It is not taking it away from Canada Post. It is saying if it is going to be in the business then go ahead and be in it, but it will have to compete. That will make CUPW stronger. It will make the union strong. It will make Canada Post strong. It will make the country stronger and that is what I believe we should be doing.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little bit surprised that we find ourselves here debating the bill. The bill is 21 words long, and if the government were convinced that this was an important initiative that was going to improve our competitiveness and help Canadians find jobs because of these things, the bill would have been referred to committee before second reading, where we could hear from those experts who would bring some of the details.

We are going to go through a lot of debate here and it just does not seem to be an efficient way. The member dismisses the loss of \$148 billion worth of trade with the U.S. as not a big deal because we are going to deal with Colombia, which is presupposing that we will have the deal with Colombia, based on the debate we have had in the House. I do not think he should take it for granted.

Why does the member believe that our relationship with the United States is not still significantly the driver in terms of overall competitiveness, and in fact the future recovery of Canada, which it is so inextricably linked with? Why does he dismiss it just because we are looking at Peru and Colombia to make up some differences?

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has it all wrong. I do not believe for a minute that we are ever going to divorce ourselves from being competitive and working with our friends to the south. As I said, I have worked very closely with them over the last number of years and that will continue. All I have done is stated some facts on international trade, and that is not bad.

We are always going to be trading with our friends to the south, and we will capitalize on that even more through this piece of legislation, because we will not destroy the competitive advantage that our businesses working here in Canada will have in being able to get their mail to those international markets, particularly into the United States, in an effective and efficient way. Actually, just the contrary to what the member was suggesting, I believe this piece of legislation will help us be competitive and will actually enhance trade with the United States.

Government Orders

● (1730)

[Translation]

ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT (STIMULUS)

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-51, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and to implement other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-51.

Call in the members.

● (1755)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 111)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Angus
Ashfield	Ashton
Asselin	Atamanenko
Baird	Beaudin
Bellavance	Benoit
Bemier	Bevington
Bezan	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Boughen
Bourgeois	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Casson
Charlton	Chong
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Comartin
Crowder	Cullen
Cummins	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Devolin	Dewar
Dorion	Dreeshen
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dykstra	Faillie
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Freeman	Galipeau
Gallant	Gaudet
Glover	Godin
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harper	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hill
Hoback	Hoepfner
Hughes	Hyer
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)

Government Orders

Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise	Lake
Lauzon	Lavallée
Layton	Lebel
Lemay	Lemieux
Leslie	Lessard
Lévesque	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malo
Maloway	Mark
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Ménard	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Nadeau
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Ouellet	Paquette
Paradis	Payne
Petit	Plamondon
Poillievre	Pomerleau
Prentice	Preston
Rafferty	Raït
Rathgeber	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Roy	Savoie
Saxton	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Siksay	Smith
Sorenson	St-Cyr
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thi Lac
Thibeault	Thompson
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Wasylcia-Leis
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young— 207	

NAYS

Members

Andrews	Bagnell
Bains	Bélangier
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Byrne	Cannis
Coady	Cotler
Crombie	Cuzner
D'Amours	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Dryden	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Footo
Fry	Garneau
Goodale	Jennings
Kania	Karygiannis
Kennedy	LeBlanc
Lee	Malhi
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Mendes
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Neville	Patry
Rae	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Savage

Scarpaleggia	Sgro
Silva	Simms
Simson	Szabo
Tonks	Trudeau
Valeriote	Volpe
Wilfert	Wrzesnewskyj
Zarac— 63	

PAIRED

Members

Bachand	Bigas
Block	Dechert
Gagnon	Goldring
Holder	Laforest
Lalonde	Paillet
Rajotte	Tilson— 12

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[*English*]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed 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, and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the subamendment of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan on the amendment to the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-23.

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 112*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Angus	Ashton
Asselin	Atamanenko
Beaudin	Bellavance
Bevington	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Cardin	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dorion	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Faïlle	Freeman
Gaudet	Godin
Gravelle	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	
Hughes	Hyer

Julian
Lavallée
Lemay
Lessard
Malo
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
Mourani
Ouellet
Plamondon
Rafferty
Savoie
St-Cyr
Thi Lac
Vincent

Laframboise
Layton
Leslie
Lévesque
Maloway
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Ménard
Nadeau
Paquette
Pomerleau
Roy
Siksay
Stoffer
Thibeault
Wasylycia-Leis— 74

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Bains
Bélanger
Benoit
Bevilacqua
Blackburn
Boucher
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Byrne
Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Cotler
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Devolin
Dhalla
Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Finley
Fletcher
Foote
Galipeau
Garneau
Goodale
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hill
Hoepfner
Jennings
Kania
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lemieux
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mark
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Andrews
Bagnell
Baird
Bennett
Bernier
Bezan
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Cadman
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Chong
Coady
Crombie
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dryden
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fast
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Gallant
Glover
Goodyear
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lee
Lobb
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum
McGuinity
McLeod
Mendes
Merrifield
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)

Murray
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Paradis
Payne
Poilievre
Preston
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Rota
Saxton
Scheer
Sgro
Shiple
Simms
Smith
Stanton
Strahl
Szabo
Tonks
Trudeau
Uppal
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilfert
Woodworth
Yelich
Zarac— 193

Points of Order

Neville
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Patry
Petit
Prentice
Rae
Ratansi
Regan
Richards
Rickford
Rodriguez
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Simson
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Volpe
Warawa
Watson
Wong
Wrzesnewskyj
Young

PAIRED

Members

Bachand
Block
Gagnon
Holder
Lalonde
Rajotte
Bigras
Dechert
Goldring
Laforest
Paillet
Tilson— 12

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.

* * *

● (1810)

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to clarify. There was a misstatement made in question period where I referred to the leader of the NDP as the leader of the opposition.

I want to assure the House that there has been no coup d'etat in the opposition. In fact, the leader of the NDP is still the leader of the NDP and I misspoke in question period.

The Deputy Speaker: I am sure the House appreciates that.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ) moved that Bill C-395, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (labour dispute), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and proud to introduce at second reading Bill C-395, which aims to amend the Employment Insurance Act so that people who have lost their jobs because of a labour dispute, be it a lockout or a lengthy strike, can qualify for EI.

Because of the changes the Liberals made to EI in the 1990s, it has become ineffective, because it is not very accessible to thousands of workers in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

In fact, according to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada figures quoted here in the House, more than half of unemployed workers do not have access to the plan they have paid into.

Given the current, ongoing economic crisis and the thousands of jobs that have been lost all across Quebec, the Bloc Québécois maintains that the current Employment Insurance Act is not meeting its objectives and needs comprehensive reform.

Clearly, the bill before us today does not dramatically change the employment insurance plan. That is not the aim of Bill C-395. Its purpose is to correct a major gap in the act that penalizes workers when a company closes because of a labour dispute.

Currently, the Employment Insurance Act establishes benefits based on a given salary over a given qualifying period. The qualifying period is defined in section 8 of the Employment Insurance Act. Only hours of insurable employment included in the qualifying period are used in calculating the claimant's benefit period.

Although the qualifying period can be extended to a maximum of 104 weeks if a claimant is ill, in prison, in training or on preventive withdrawal, the standard qualifying period is one year, and it is based on the claimant's insurable income. Two criteria are used to determine the benefit period and level: the number of weeks worked in the previous year and the contributions made to the plan based on employment income.

Consequently, an individual who does not work during the qualifying period obviously does not contribute to the employment insurance plan and is not covered by EI, unless he or she is ill, in prison, in training or on preventive withdrawal.

But what happens if there is a labour dispute? "Labour dispute" is defined in subsection 2(1) of the Employment Insurance Act as follows:

any dispute between employers and employees, or between employees and employees, that is connected with the employment or nonemployment, or the terms or conditions of employment, of any persons.

That is the definition set out in the act. This definition serves to justify, in section 27, the fact that if a worker is unemployed following a labour dispute, he or she cannot access the system, which is not right.

So a striking or locked out worker cannot receive employment insurance benefits.

● (1815)

In other words, employment insurance benefits will not be paid to a striking worker or the victim of a lockout. So, what happens when the company closes the day after a labour dispute?

Obviously, if the labour dispute is short, less than 52 weeks, the worker could receive employment insurance benefits. However, what happens to that employee if the labour dispute lasts a long time, that is, longer than the qualifying period set out in the act? Even if he or she has paid into the fund for many years, that worker will simply be forced to turn to social assistance, because he or she would not receive employment insurance benefits.

According to the Quebec department of labour, from 1995 to 2004, there were 966 labour disputes, of which 39 were considered long-term, that is, disputes that lasted between 361 and 721 days. What is interesting is that when we compare that data with the numbers from 1985 to 1994, we note that the number of labour disputes dropped by nearly half, from 1838 to 966 for all disputes, and from 52 to 39 for long-term disputes. Thus, the number of long-term disputes has gone down.

In Quebec, on average, we have just under four long-term labour disputes per year. In most cases, these disputes are resolved without job losses, as was the case with the *Journal de Québec* after more than 14 months. But as I was saying, that is not always the case. The employment insurance system does not cover long-term labour disputes that end with a company going out of business.

One case in Quebec involved Domtar workers in Lebel-sur-Quévillon who were laid off and denied employment insurance even though they had contributed for years. In December 2008, the 425 Domtar workers at the Lebel-sur-Quévillon plant found out that they were going to lose their jobs and collect no employment insurance benefits. They had been locked out since November 24, 2005, and on December 19, 2008, Domtar finally announced that it was closing its Lebel-sur-Quévillon plant permanently.

Because the lockout lasted longer than 104 weeks and workers had accumulated no hours of work during that period, they were not eligible for employment insurance. After that long labour dispute, they received no financial assistance, so they had to resort to social assistance and welfare even though they had contributed to the fund for so many years.

To summarize, although the Domtar workers were locked out for over three years, they were still considered employees, but they were no longer contributing because they were collecting money from a strike fund. Under section 27, they were therefore not eligible for employment insurance. As soon as the plant closed, they were no longer considered employed and would have been eligible for benefits had they contributed during the reference period, which of course they had not because the dispute lasted longer than 52 weeks.

I am looking at my NDP colleague because I believe he asked some questions about this yesterday. This bill requires further explanation. It is an exceptional situation, but this is a major shortcoming in the Employment Insurance Act that must be corrected as soon as possible.

● (1820)

We must do something to help these workers who have been abandoned by the federal government. I want to thank the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for having initiated this bill and wanting to support the workers affected by this lengthy labour dispute in his riding.

In light of this situation that has to be corrected, Bill C-395 proposes excluding from the qualifying period the period covered by a labour dispute. It is as simple as that. It is not complicated.

That way, a worker who loses their job when a company closes following a lockout or a strike would have their benefits calculated based on the 52-week period preceding the dispute. It is simple. These people have paid premiums for a long time and then gone through a lockout or a closure following a labour dispute. If the company closes following such a dispute and the workers cannot go back to their jobs, they will be entitled to employment insurance instead of having to go on social assistance, which is all too often the case.

I think this is a quick and effective way to resolve what seems to us to be a simple omission in the legislation for a problem, let us not forget, that is quite rare, but immensely unfair to these men and women.

As I was saying at the beginning of my presentation, this bill is one measure being proposed by the Bloc Québécois to change the program.

We need to completely reform employment insurance—many questions have been asked in this House to that effect and various bills have been introduced by the Bloc—in order to ensure that the program can fulfill its main mandate of providing benefits in a fair manner to all and for a period of time that allows people to live with dignity.

We must not forget that there is a relationship between poverty and adequate government support in the form of an employment insurance program.

I would like to point out that 19% of Canadian citizens live in poverty, compared to 11.4% in Sweden, 14.1% in France, 16.2% in Belgium, 17% in the United Kingdom, 17.2% in Germany and, at the bottom, 23.9% in the U.S. With a rate of 19%, we have some work to do. Improving the employment insurance program is one way of helping.

It is quite simple. The lowest rates of poverty are found in countries that do more for their population. That is why it is vital that the federal government adopt a true policy for supporting its citizens who often find themselves in need and unemployed.

For that reason, the Bloc Québécois is proposing a complete overhaul of the employment insurance program, including improving accessibility and eliminating the waiting period. I presented to

Private Members' Business

the House a petition signed by almost 4,000 people from Berthier—Maskinongé who also want the waiting period to be eliminated.

Bill C-395 does not make sweeping changes to the employment insurance program. However, as I already mentioned, that is not the objective of Bill C-395. This bill will correct a major shortcoming of the Act, one that is immensely unfair to certain workers who lose their jobs because of a work stoppage caused by a long labour dispute.

Therefore, in the interest of justice and fairness, I invite all members of this House to vote for this bill, including the New Democrats, Conservatives, Liberals and Bloc Québécois, who will support it because it is one of its initiatives. I urge them to think about those people who have worked for so many years and who, because of a lockout or shutdown, can only turn to social assistance.

● (1825)

They find themselves in poverty.

We would like the House to support this Bloc Québécois initiative, which is one of many.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé for agreeing to introduce this bill, which was sorely needed by 425 workers in Lebel-sur-Quévillon who lost their jobs. The shut down of the Domtar paper mill led to the closure of a number of surrounding sawmills.

Lebel-sur-Quévillon is a single industry town, and the closure of this company has caused the population to decline. Now, when workers learn that their plant is closing after a strike or lockout, they have no choice but to abandon their town.

I would like my colleague to tell us whether it is possible for someone in a single industry town to qualify once again for EI benefits.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, the member asked an excellent question. In rural and remote regions, as in the case the member mentioned, when a town relies on a single industry, these jobs often represent a livelihood for many families. It is a very difficult situation.

For example, when the 425 workers at the Domtar plant in Lebel-sur-Quévillon learned, just before the holidays, that they would lose their jobs and that they would not be eligible for any EI at all, they were shocked and frustrated. They had worked, and paid premiums for many years.

They were told that although they had paid their premiums, since the plant was closing down in their town, they would have no other source of income other than social assistance. That is shameful. I think this House can rectify the situation by overwhelmingly supporting this bill.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the member on having introduced Bill C-395 to extend the qualifying period in the case of a labour dispute.

Private Members' Business

I would like to ask the member to clarify. Consider a labour dispute between employees and an employer, whether it is a lockout or a strike that lasts a year, two years or six months. Suppose that the day after the dispute ends, the company decides to close down only part of its operation, keeping 50% of its workers and laying off the other 50%.

In such a case, would this bill protect those workers who do not return to work?

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

This situation arises from time to time. Following a long labour dispute or a partial closure, a company rehires half of its workers, and the other half are left with nothing to fall back on. Workers in the latter group are not entitled to employment insurance benefits.

In answer to the member's question, I would say that, yes, such workers would benefit from this bill and would have some recourse under the proposed measure. They would be entitled to employment insurance benefits based on the new qualifying period, the 52 weeks preceding the labour dispute or lockout.

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can understand the member speaking about this particular incident, but I would ask why he would go against a measure that would help about 190,000 long-tenured workers who would receive between 5 to 20 additional weeks of benefits? Why would he be against a measure like that?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a situation that has happened in Quebec and in other companies that have experienced long labour disputes or strikes.

With regard to the bill the government introduced in this House and to which my colleague is referring, we noted and we have stated that it does not address the situation currently facing workers in the forestry and manufacturing sectors, many of whom have lost their jobs, as well as seasonal workers.

This bill does not meet all of the demands made by Quebeckers. We find this bill unfair to other workers, because it establishes a new category—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Unfortunately, the time allowed for questions and comments has expired.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take it the hon. member has no valid reason for taking that position.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the employment insurance program and examine the particular issue of

the calculation of the qualifying period for benefits during labour disputes, as proposed in this bill.

I think it is important to note, first, that EI is an insurance-based program. It is supported by premiums paid by both workers and employers. It is important to remember that. Its purpose is to provide benefits to workers when they are unable to work because they are temporarily unemployed through no fault of their own, are sick or ill, pregnant, caring for a newborn or adopted child or providing care or support to a gravely ill family member. For one to be eligible for these benefits, a qualifying period must be established.

Let me examine how this works.

A qualifying period is the length of time for which a claimant must accumulate sufficient hours of insurable employment to establish a claim for benefits. This period is generally 52 weeks, or one year, preceding the commencement of the claim. In some circumstances, it can be shorter, specifically when there is a prior claim.

The current provisions do, however, allow for the extension of the qualifying period to up to 104 weeks, or two years. This provision is to cover individuals who are unable to work because of illness or quarantine. It does not, however, cover labour dispute situations, and there are several good reasons why that is so.

One very important reason is that the EI program should remain neutral during a labour dispute.

Bill C-395 would be contrary to this fundamental principle.

An hon. member: I learned something.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, the member learned something.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, the EI system is an insurance-based system, supported by both employers and workers who pay premiums. We have to be careful about compromising the neutrality of the EI program in any labour dispute. Allowing the provision of benefits to workers, paid for in part by employers, during a labour dispute would disrupt the system's balanced treatment, tilting the system in favour of workers in a situation where they are negotiating with management. This would be a very awkward situation. The negotiating position of union workers would be unfairly improved at the cost of employers, who pay 58% of the EI premiums.

Another important reason for not extending indefinitely the qualifying period during labour disputes, as proposed in this bill, is that it would create inconsistencies compared to the limited time extension for those who are sick or quarantined.

Bill C-395 would also deviate from the EI system's basic insurance principle that there must be a reasonable proximity of timing and a fair value balance between the payment of the premiums and the disbursement of the benefits.

An indefinite qualifying period would make a mockery of this principle and would do so for workers who are not technically unemployed and who are available for work but are simply in a labour dispute and, therefore, not attending work.

Private Members' Business

The point about being available for work must be remembered.

It must also be remembered that under the current Employment Insurance Act, workers are able to accept other employment during the labour dispute so they can accumulate the required number of hours needed to establish an EI claim.

With the variable interest requirement, the number of insurable hours needed to qualify for regular benefits varies between 420 hours and 700 hours, depending on the unemployment rate in the region where the individual lives.

When changes are made to EI, especially in this rather turbulent economic period, it is essential that they be based on sound analysis of evidence. Their effects on the labour market, the costs that they would incur and the effects they would have on the system as a whole must be measured.

When we look at the need to extend the length of a qualifying period during labour disputes, we say in the vast majority of cases that doing so would not affect workers qualifying for EI benefits in any event if the firm should close shortly after the resolution of a dispute.

In the last six years, the average duration of a strike and a firm's closure was 110 days. For lockouts, it was 116 days. Together, they averaged about 16 weeks. In both cases, the duration was well below the current 52-week qualifying period. As well, in less than 4% of closures did strikes or lockouts last more than 52 weeks.

We also have no clear understanding of this bill's financial implications, though we know there would be, indeed, financial implications. Much research analysis would need to be done to determine its costs.

It was upon just such research and careful analysis that our government based Canada's economic action plan. As a result, Canadians are now benefiting from a host of measures.

We have improved the EI program by providing nationally an extra five weeks of EI regular benefits in areas of high unemployment.

• (1835)

The maximum duration of benefits has been extended from 45 weeks to 50 weeks. We have made it easier for employers to participate in work-sharing agreements. In fact, there are presently over 5,800 active work-sharing agreements that are helping to protect the jobs of almost 167,000 Canadians. We have helped young people get certified in skilled trades and have helped older workers make the transition to new careers.

Through our economic action plan, our Conservative government has increased funding for skills training under the existing labour market agreements with the provinces and territories. This additional investment will help EI clients receive the skills training needed in a scaled-down economy. With our strategic training and transition fund, we are assisting individuals who are ineligible for employment insurance to benefit from training and other support measures.

Just recently the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development announced a temporary measure to support long-tenured workers who have lost jobs because of the recent downturn.

Long-tenured workers are people who have worked, paid EI premiums for a significant period of time, and have made limited use of the program. This new measure will provide between 5 and 20 weeks of additional benefits to long-tenured workers, depending on how long they have been working and paying EI premiums.

We made improvements to the program before our economic action plan. Through the establishment of the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board, we are improving the management and governance of the EI account. We took that step to 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, like the previous Liberal governments did.

Our government's action on that issue is a good thing for working Canadians. We also froze the EI premiums for this year, 2009 and for next year, 2010. Keeping the EI premium at this level, its lowest in almost a quarter century 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 just when it is needed most.

This measure therefore keeps premium rates lower than they would otherwise be. From an employer perspective, the measure provides an incentive to create and retain jobs. At the same time, it leaves more earnings in the hands of employees which impacts on consumer spending.

Under the economic action plan, we introduced career transition assistance. This initiative extends EI benefits to a maximum of two years for long-tenured workers participating in longer training. Up to three months of benefits following the completion of training could be available so that the claimant would have more time to search for re-employment.

Overall, with the measures that we have taken, the EI program is meeting the needs of Canadians. For this reason and the points I have outlined, I cannot support Bill C-395.

I can say, however, that this government will bear in mind the issue raised in this bill and continue to be informed in our policy decisions by close monitoring of the EI program. One must take all of this in the context of what we have already done and what we are proposing to do.

We are looking after those Canadians who need our help most, those who have been affected and hardest hit, those who have contributed to the system by working for many years, contributing premiums and not utilizing the system, and who unfortunately now find themselves out of work through no fault of their own. Those are the people we are helping.

• (1840)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to speak tonight to Bill C-395, which is an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act addressing eligibility as a result of a labour dispute.

Private Members' Business

This country has been and is going through a major economic crisis. While there is talk of a rebounding economy, the reality is that it is a jobless recovery. The reality is that there are still people who are continuing to lose their jobs.

We know that at this moment there are over 700,000 Canadians receiving employment insurance, with over 1.5 million unemployed, so we can do the math in terms of who is receiving employment insurance at this point and who is not able to receive it.

Inaccessibility of course has been a major issue throughout this crisis. Many Canadians have not been able to access employment insurance at all, and many others of course have now exhausted their benefits and are not part of the small group that the government has chosen to be the deserving group to receive extensions on their EI benefits. I have no problem with extending it, except that it should be a much broader initiative to cover all of those people who are now in dire straits.

To come back to this bill, we all know that currently the act does not specify what happens after a work stoppage. It is not clear and this is important to clarify. How does the qualifying period impact people who have been on strike for awhile and then are laid off shortly after going back to work? The act is not very clear in that context. This bill actually clarifies that and certainly ensures that people are not left in the cold.

The qualifying period, as we know, is 52 weeks immediately before the start date of a claim or the period since the start of a previous EI claim, if that claim started during the 52 week period. While that part of it is clear, there is still the issue of what happens to people who find themselves out of work because of a strike. We do have coverage in other ways for other groups, such as sickness, but this is not something that is captured very clearly. This bill aims to clarify what happens to that qualifying period and I welcome that clarification.

Workers should not be penalized because they are out for a week, two weeks, ten weeks or however long it is, for a strike, because they do not have the choice to strike or not to strike. Obviously, if there is a lockout or a strike, the workers are affected very directly.

At the same time, they have not been laid off. None of these workers have actually received a pink slip that says they are no longer employees so that they can go and apply for EI during that process. They cannot. They are deemed to still be employees of that company and they are deemed to be workers receiving benefits and so on until such time as they are no longer employees.

However, if they are laid off through no fault of their own after the dispute is over; that is, shortly thereafter, and sometimes it can happen very soon after, this whole area is not clear as to whether that whole period can qualify them for coverage or not. In many cases, of course, it does not.

This bill takes care of that problem and it extends the qualifying period for the length of the work stoppage. That is a very valuable thing to do and I support that. As I said before, I do not believe that any worker who is either on strike or has been locked out should have to lose financial support.

I know that on the government's side, the hon. members have said that these two things need to be connected because it favours the employee over the employer and this is a problem that causes inconsistencies and conflicts.

• (1845)

I do not see that at all because whether or not there is a strike or a lockout, it is not always very clear. It should not affect the workers. As I said, the workers have not been laid off. They have not received layoff slips. The workers are still employees of the company. Therefore, they should be looked after. A lockout or strike should not impact whether workers qualify for EI if they are laid off after the work stoppage comes to an end.

The EI Act is quite convoluted and complex in many ways as it has been amended over the years in many different ways. If there is a work stoppage during an EI claim, it could be contentious if it is not specifically described in the act.

As I said, the act can be very difficult to interpret and it has a lot of different aspects. This is an area which to some degree has been left open and needs to be clarified. This is the right way to do it so that we do not continue to have the same kinds of tensions that exist now. The bill makes the process simpler and clearly defines how a claim can proceed if the worker was part of a work stoppage in the 52-week period prior to being laid off.

If people lost their jobs because of a long labour dispute, it prevented them from accumulating the required hours in the 52 preceding weeks. This is the impact of the current situation. This bill would make them eligible for EI, which makes a difference. It allows people to receive what is their right, in essence.

I do not see this as giving the workers an advantage over the company, as the hon. member on the government side said. The workers and the company both contribute to EI. I do not think people would stay on strike longer simply because they know that period is still covered. I do not believe that would be a defining factor in any way whatsoever. Therefore, I do not see that it gives a benefit to one over the other.

With this bill, benefits can be calculated based on the weeks worked prior to the labour dispute despite the length of the dispute. In my view, this tells workers that they are still employees of the company and during a lockout or labour dispute they will not be penalized with respect to employment insurance should they lose their jobs shortly after going back to work.

The hon. member across the way said that this would give advantage to the workers. However, the employer may also choose to let people go once they return to work for reasons that are not necessarily legitimate in order to punish or cut back the labour force. One could go in that direction as well and argue the other side. I do not believe that either one should be argued.

Private Members' Business

For me, quite frankly, the bottom line is whether the workers are still employees of a company, yes or no. If they are still employees of the company and they are not working because of a situation over which they have no control, then they should be able to continue to qualify for EI benefits for that period if they lose their jobs shortly after they go back to work.

I will be supporting this bill. It is going in the right direction. I would like members of the House to look at it from that perspective and support it.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate the member for Berthier—Maskinongé on introducing Bill C-395, which amends the Employment Insurance Act to change the way in which the qualifying period is calculated in the case of a stoppage of work attributable to a labour dispute.

I do not claim to be an expert on employment insurance, but the qualifying period is the period of time during which a person normally worked, for example, from October last year to October this year. The person worked the required number of hours to qualify for employment insurance during this 52-week period. If this person is laid off, he is ordinarily entitled to employment insurance for a certain number of weeks, depending on the region he comes from.

This bill refers to a strike or lockout occurring during the qualifying period, which would prevent the person from working. If the strike or lockout lasts 52 weeks, the person will not have paid EI premiums during that time and therefore will not qualify for extended EI benefits.

It is interesting to listen to what the parliamentary secretary from Souris—Moose Mountain said. He said that the Bloc Québécois bill did not make sense. Workers contribute to an employment insurance program in order to be entitled to employment insurance if there is a shortage of work. That is what the parliamentary secretary said.

In this case, I do not understand where the \$57 billion stolen from the EI fund went. Workers paid EI premiums that wound up in the general fund and were used to pay down the debt. The parliamentary secretary says that we can pay down the debt. The Liberals and the Conservatives have been saying that for years. We can pay down the debt with that money, but we cannot help workers who have lost their jobs. The parliamentary secretary said that it would not be fair to the employer, who also pays into the plan, if an employee who decided to go on strike were then entitled to employment insurance.

The speech earlier by the parliamentary secretary from Souris—Moose Mountain was more in defence of the employer. However, is the employee who has given 20 or 30 years of service to the company not entitled to some help?

We are not saying that employment insurance should be paid because of a strike or a lockout. There is a strike fund for that. We are saying that during a dispute, time goes by and the market changes. The company says, for example, that it can no longer keep 100% of its workforce because of the economic crisis and it will keep only 75%. Why should the other 25% have to go on social assistance? The company paid its premiums but so did the employee.

The employee also paid premiums for 25 or 30 years. Why should he be denied employment insurance? He should not be entitled to EI because of the strike or the lockout, but because the company no longer requires his services. There is nothing wrong with that. It is not a sin to help workers. It seems that previous and current governments think it is a sin to give money to workers.

There is already a window in the legislation that would give someone on strike or locked out the chance to get EI. I will explain.

Take the example of someone who works for a company and ends up on strike or locked out. The company decides to hire scabs and resumes 85% of its production. All the employees who are locked out or on strike can stop using their strike fund and go on EI. The Act is clear: if 85% of production is resumed, the employee is entitled to employment insurance despite the strike or lockout. It is in the Act.

• (1855)

I see the parliamentary secretary shaking his head as if to say it does not make sense to give employment insurance to workers. That must be what he is thinking. I cannot really say what he is thinking. The way he is shaking his head is certainly not a sign that this makes sense. It is as though it does not make sense to him. The parliamentary secretary is here, he is listening closely and he has had his say.

[*English*]

I agree with the parliamentary secretary. He said that the premiums are paid by workers and by companies for when people lose their jobs, and he went on and on. I agree with him. If I had had a chance to ask him a question, I would have asked him why the government took all those premiums and put the money into the consolidated revenue fund and used it to pay the debt, continuing what the Liberals did. The Liberals started it, but the Conservative members have been in power since 2006 and they did it too. The Conservatives did it and they will not disagree with me. They have big smiles on their faces right now. They put a new organization in place and said that they would move \$2 billion of the \$57 billion into it and they would legalize what the Liberals had done. They said that they would keep it. They would put it in the consolidated revenue fund and that would be done and over with.

However, the worker has paid into employment insurance for 20 or 25 years. It is not a sin if there is a conflict or a lockout or strike, and when it is all over, the worker either returns to work or collects employment insurance. If there is a shortage of work and the employer terminates a worker because there is not enough production to keep everybody employed, it is not a sin.

Private Members' Business

The parliamentary secretary, the member for Souris—Moose Mountain, said that money belongs to them. It is theirs. Why would the government stop a person from getting that money? Why would the government say it is a sin to get money from employment insurance, but the person is allowed to go on welfare? That is where the person will have to go. Why hurt the person's family? It is not a sin to go on strike or to be locked out. It is not a sin if that happens. If the mechanisms are in place through the union, people have the right to do that and to be in the union. The mechanisms are in place to try to have some negotiation. If a contract cannot be negotiated, the mechanisms are in place to try to find a contract at the end of the day. It is not unbalanced, because the employees have the right to go on strike and the employer has the right to lock them out. Both have the same power. I have never heard of a government yet, federal or provincial, go down on any company that has a lock out.

[*Translation*]

It is like saying it is a sin to go on strike; however, a lockout means that the company is doing something good.

The amount of money in the employment insurance fund—even though they have taken all of it—is still recorded in the banking documents. Although they took it, it is still borrowed money. Besides the \$57 billion, no one ever talks about the interest owing on that amount, because, according to the law, they owe interest on that money.

That is why I am saying that this bill is a good bill that will help workers if they lose their jobs. They should not be punished when they go on strike or are locked out. That is in the legislation. Striking is not illegal. Having a lockout is not illegal. If there had never been any strikes or lockouts in Canada, people would still be making 50¢ an hour, because no one pooled their money together. That is part of the act. It is that part that some want to amend, but many other amendments could also help people, such as eliminating the two-week waiting period. There is also the issue of 360 hours, among others. We must help workers because, as it stands, only 50% or even less than 50% of workers qualify for employment insurance. In Canada, people receive only 55% of EI benefits, while in France, that proportion is 80%. My Bloc Québécois colleague was there with me and heard when I asked the question.

We can only hope that the government will change its mind on this matter and support this good bill, which is what the NDP will be doing.

● (1900)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavut—Eeyou.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us call it Nunavik instead of Nunavut. Nunavut is too far away for me.

I would like to respond to the member for Souris—Moose Mountain who earlier claimed that he would not support such a measure before the costs were determined. I think that is the problem, because before costs can be calculated, income will have to be calculated. We are talking about workers who have 35, 40 or, in certain cases, 43 years of service, and who have never once filed a claim for employment insurance or unemployment insurance, as it used to be, and certainly not for 52 weeks of EI. The current

legislation does not even make it possible to claim 52 weeks. We are nowhere near where we should be.

I am talking about a town that I know very well, that was founded in 1966. It was a single industry town. In 2005, it had a population of 3,500. Today, the population is 2,300. All the young couples have left the community because there were no more jobs for them.

We must not forget that because of the changing economy and changing labour laws, EI legislation must also be overhauled as quickly as possible, otherwise the effects of the current crisis will be painful and unfair for most workers in this country, except those in Ontario, of course.

The parliamentary secretary asked my colleague just now why we are not in favour of the government's reform. It is because it does not affect Quebec's forestry workers at all. The legislation only helps Ontario auto workers. These measures are in addition to the \$10 billion that the government has already given to the auto industry in Ontario and that will do absolutely nothing for Quebec workers. To look at him you would say that the parliamentary secretary is a good man, but he is a bean counter. He does not think about the well-being of this country's workers.

This bill will quickly address an obvious problem brought to the forefront by this crisis. The effects of this crisis have been felt suddenly, as in the case of Lebel-sur-Quévillon, my riding, where 425 workers were locked out for 37 months before they were fired. The act states that an employee who is locked out or on strike has not severed the employee-employer relationship. Consequently, he is not entitled to employment insurance benefits. For that reason we are saying that we must not do this to workers who have worked honestly for so long. It would be the same thing even if they had only worked for five years. However, most of these workers, whom I first met in 1966 or in 1967, were just leaving the plant, on December 19, 2008, one week before Christmas. Imagine someone who has been locked out for 37 months and then, on December 19, finds out that the plant is closing.

I will probably be told that the company has the right to manage its affairs. No, that is an abuse of power and a step taken, during a crisis, to save money on salaries while restructuring. Furthermore, the \$6.5 million specified in their collective agreement has not yet been paid. This company is still trying to save money at the expense of its employees and its overdue municipal taxes are still outstanding.

EI reform is necessary because of everything that has been done by companies and white-collar criminals. In fact, their actions make them no better than the white-collar criminals.

● (1905)

Worker protection legislation must evolve with a country's economic situation. All legislation must ensure justice for all segments of the population. It must respect not only the economic system but also the people.

Adjournment Proceedings

For three years, the workers had no ties to an employer, ties that would establish a qualifying period. The company was able to use three years worth of salaries in its attempt to restructure, and did so deliberately, depriving the employees of their eligibility for employment insurance, after 25, 30, 35 or even 42 years of uninterrupted service for the same company. This situation was made obvious only because the employees kept demonstrating and maintaining their very reasonable claims, I should say. They made a number of concessions to their employer in the hopes of keeping the plant open.

Our bill is simple. We are proposing eliminating the duration of a labour dispute from the qualifying period. This does not apply only in Quebec or Lebel-sur-Quévillon, but it applies to the entire country. I see my colleagues from the Maritime provinces, who are no strangers to the problems of unemployment and lack of jobs. In that part of the country, which I have had the pleasure of visiting, work is often seasonal.

Workers who lose their jobs when their employers go out of business following a lockout or strike would have their benefits calculated based on the 52-week period preceding the dispute, as though they had been laid off the day the employer locked them out or they voted to strike. It would be calculated from that point on.

This is a simple way to correct what we feel is a simple oversight in the act with respect to a very rare but deeply unjust problem.

If the member for Souris—Moose Mountain still has concerns, here are some statistics from Quebec's ministry of labour. In Quebec, from 1995 to 2004, there were 966 disputes, of which 39 lasted a very long time and 8 lasted over 721 days. The Lebel-sur-Quévillon dispute lasted 1,129 days. All of the Domtar jobs were lost; 565 people were laid off. That is the equivalent of 55,000 people losing their jobs in Montreal. Imagine the impact of that closure on a small, single-industry town.

In 2005, the population of Quévillon was 3,500. Now there are only 2,300 people to support a modern infrastructure that was very attractive. Imagine the effort that went into starting the business up again after nearly all of the young workers left town, except for those in high-level positions. Now there is a shortage of skilled workers, which has a very negative impact on efforts to get the business going again.

If only both levels of government had cooperated to help the Lebel-sur-Quévillon workers as much as they helped Ontario's auto sector, then the town would be in very good shape now. It is important to keep people in these towns. History has shown that this can be done at a relatively low cost.

The Deputy Speaker: 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.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently asked the Minister of National Defence a question about the government's decision to challenge the authority of the Military Police Complaints Commission tribunal. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence responded to my question, and at one point he said that the allegations were completely ridiculous and that I should be ashamed of myself.

[*English*]

The Military Police Complaints Commission was established in 1999. I was in the House of Commons when that legislation came through. Prior to coming into politics, I was a member of the Quebec Police Commission. Then when the whole system was hauled through an innovative legislation adopted by the Quebec government in 1989, which came into effect in 1990, I was deputy commissioner for police ethics. I actually presided over public complaints into allegations of alleged police misconduct.

I know what it means for a commission to have a mandate. I know what the federal court stipulated when the government challenged the mandate of the commission. The federal court very clearly said that the commission's mandate was restricted to military police and their investigations.

The complaints are that members of the military police transferred Afghan prisoners to Afghan authorities, knowing that they would be subject or that there was a reasonable possibility of them being subject to torture. To protect the credibility of our military, of our wonderful, brave men and women in the Canadian armed forces, we need to have independent governance when complaints come through. In order for the commission to properly do its work to determine whether the military police knowingly transferred Afghan prisoners to torture, it needs to hear what the military police would have known about whether there was torture taking place in the prisons.

A Canadian diplomat, Richard Colvin, wants to testify as to what he knows and the government has issued an order that he is not to testify. It has issued an order under section 38 of the Canada Evidence Act. Everyone knows that section has to do with terrorists. I am not sure if the parliamentary secretary was here when that legislation was adopted, the Anti-terrorism Act, in 2001, but I was here. It was not adopted in order to prohibit government public servants from testifying to what they know in an independent tribunal's public inquiry into serious allegations.

If the commission cannot do its work properly, then whatever its conclusion is has no validity, has no credibility and therefore the allegations, as serious as they are, remain. That is one of the reasons why Quebec brought in an independent system with real authority.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have another chance to clarify the record on this particular issue.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would like to begin by reminding my hon. colleague that the Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that prisoners are treated and transferred in accordance with our obligations under international law. In fact, a board of inquiry was convened by the Canadian Forces to investigate the treatment and processing of persons detained by the CF in April 2006, as well as to conduct a detailed examination of the orders, directives and procedures governing prisoner treatment at the time.

The board concluded that Canadian Forces members, without exception, treated prisoners professionally and humanely, and that all actions taken by CF members in dealing with prisoners complied with direction in place at the time of capture and were consistently above reproach.

The board did identify a number of areas for improvement and over the course of the board's deliberations, the majority of these shortcomings were rectified through the Canadian Forces' regular review of operations. With respect to the MPCC, the Government of Canada remains committed to cooperating with the commission in the conduct of its investigations to the fullest extent possible, consistent with the mandate given the MPCC by the National Defence Act.

As the MPCC itself has confirmed, the Department of National Defence has provided the commission with access to hundreds of documents and produced dozens of witnesses with respect to the MPCC matters relating to prisoners. However, it is important to remember that there is a mandatory obligation for public officials and participants to take appropriate steps under section 38 of the Canada Evidence Act to protect information that is potentially sensitive or injurious within the meaning of section 38 of the act.

The inadvertent release of this type of information in the MPCC's proceedings is a serious matter and could endanger the lives of civilians and members of the Canadian Forces serving in Afghanistan. The Government of Canada, therefore, continues to take reasonable precautions to prevent this from happening. Since February 2008 the Government of Canada has sought dialogue with the MPCC to the most effective means of dealing with this issue, initially in relation to the investigation of the complaints and later in advance of the commencement of the hearings.

With respect to individual witnesses, none have been prohibited from testifying. The MPCC list of witnesses was compiled before the Federal Court ruled in favour of the government's application to limit the scope of its investigation to matters of policing. Witnesses can testify as long as the MPCC establishes that the testimony is relevant. Government officials are required by law to protect sensitive information relating to international relations, national defence or national security, whether in written or oral form.

There are some matters that witnesses will not be able to speak to if they do appear because they are subject to legal protection or because their disclosure may have an adverse effect on national security or other matters contemplated under the Canada Evidence Act. Department of Justice lawyers continue to be prepared to work with the MPCC to find a way to proceed with the upcoming public interest hearing while protecting sensitive information.

I can assure my hon. colleagues that the Government of Canada will continue to cooperate with the MPCC in the conduct of its investigations to the fullest extent possible, consistent with the mandate given to the MPCC by the National Defence Act and, as explained, by the Federal Court of Canada.

We will continue, as we have done from the beginning, to operate under the rule of law. Perhaps that may not satisfy my hon. colleague, which would surprise me, given that she is a lawyer. However, that is how we are operating and we will continue to do that.

● (1915)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I really do not appreciate the kind of snide snipes and comments that this parliamentary secretary makes. We can have a disagreement on the interpretation of the law without that member calling into question my integrity, honesty, competence and ability.

I sat on public inquiries into serious complaints. In some cases, there were people who had been condemned for a murder and were sentenced to life in prison. There were allegations that the police had not done their work.

I stipulate that if the government was really interested in protecting the honour, integrity and credibility of our brave men and women who serve in the armed forces, including in the military police, it would not be trying to stymie witnesses through threats and the misuse of legislation like article 38 of the anti-terrorism bill.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague and I will continue to disagree. She will not believe me, but maybe she will believe the hon. Mr. Justice Harrington. This was part of his decision. He said:

Although the Attorney General's position may be somewhat overstated, and although the detention of insurgents in Afghanistan and their subsequent release to the Afghan authorities may possibly be described as policing duties or functions which were performed by members of the Military Police in Afghanistan as pertaining to the arrest or custody of persons, those duties or functions, policing or not, relate to military operations that resulted from established military custom or practice and, therefore, are beyond the jurisdiction of the Commission.

He further stated:

However, as the National Defence Act makes clear, the Commission is limited to considering the conduct of members of the Military Police in the performance of their policing duties or functions. It has no jurisdiction to inquire into the conduct of the military at large, much less the conduct of persons who are not members of the military.

We are conducting this in accordance with the rule of law and in the best interests of Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1920)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked a question in the House of Commons about the following situation. In the early 1990s, the fisheries industry was in crisis in the Atlantic provinces and in Quebec. At that time, the Liberals found nothing better to do than to cut employment insurance, thus abandoning workers. Today they are trying to pass themselves off as the champions of employment insurance. My question was this: Will the government show more respect for unemployed workers than the Liberals did?

The House has voted in favour of changes to employment insurance. When will the Conservatives abolish the waiting period and reduce eligibility to 360 hours as the NDP has called for?

The reason I put the question like that is that we are going through an economic crisis right now. We agree on that even though, during the 2008 election, the Conservative government refused to acknowledge that there was an economic crisis. Now, changes are being made to employment insurance—a few changes anyway. The minister answered my question about the 360-hour eligibility criteria and eliminating the waiting period by saying that they had added five weeks at the end. As though five weeks was somehow better than the two-week waiting period. We have been hearing that from the Conservative government in the House of Commons for a long time now.

First, the difference is that the employee who works and loses his job faces a qualifying period, what some call the two-week waiting period. I do not call it the two-week waiting period. I do not agree with that expression. It is two weeks of punishment because when someone loses their job, they are not entitled to the first two weeks of employment insurance. It is not a two-week waiting period. People have to wait 28 days before getting employment insurance benefits. It is two weeks of punishment with no income. In addition to that punishment, they end up with 55% of their salary. For example, if they earn \$700 a week, they receive only 55% of \$700. If the person earns minimum wage, let us say \$8 an hour, they receive \$4 and change, which is less than social assistance. The punishment is twofold.

As for the five weeks added at the end, that does not help people any more than the two weeks, because people who have lost their jobs have to wait 28 days before they receive EI and, in addition, they lose the first two weeks. They get a cheque for one week. That is the difference. That is why we called on the government to act and why, in the spring, a majority of members adopted our motion in the House of Commons to change the waiting period. The motion concerning the 360-hour eligibility criterion was adopted by the majority. Here again, what was behind this motion was the fact that less than 50% of workers in Canada are eligible for EI.

I cannot wait to hear what the parliamentary secretary will say, because earlier, he said that employees pay a premium so that they will have income when they lose their job. The current formula prevents workers from qualifying for EI. The formula must change so that workers can supposedly receive benefits. As the parliamentary secretary said earlier, this program belongs to workers, who

need to be given the chance to qualify for benefits. At this point, we are really talking about people who have lost their jobs, period. If someone has lost his job, is he entitled to employment insurance? Because of the number of hours, this person does not qualify.

After the government's response, I will talk about the economic crisis and what happened in the fishery in the 1990s.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was quite interesting that the member for Acadie—Bathurst asked a question in question period about the fishing industry but it had nothing to do with that, and in the four minutes allocated to him proceeded to deal with another matter.

The member pretends to be a helper for those who are unemployed. However, when workers in our manufacturing industry were laid off, where was the NDP when we put measures forward to help them? Those members voted against that provision. They voted against all the provisions in the budget and the economic action plan whether they were beneficial to workers or not. One has to wonder about that.

Where was the NDP when the auto sector collapsed and jobs disappeared? Where was the NDP with respect to the forestry industry? They voted against the actions we took in the economic action plan.

Those members are not here to help. For reasons of their own, they have chosen not to be concerned about those who are unemployed. They are only concerned about their own employment.

The member is asking questions tonight about other programs under EI. Why did he not support the additional five weeks of benefits that we put across nationally? What was wrong with that? Why was he not prepared to help?

Billions of dollars were in the budget for skills training and upgrading to ensure people received the skills they needed for new jobs. Where was the member and his party at that time? Why would they oppose something like that?

Why did the member not support our work sharing program that would help 168,000 people maintain their jobs? The member opposed the billions of dollars of assistance that we put forward to help thousands of people in one fashion or another. The member opposed each and every one of them.

Where was he when we froze EI premiums so that employees and employers would not need to pay more? Where was that particular member and his party? In fact, NDP members said that they would not even bother reading how the measures would help unemployed workers. They did not even bother to see from a positive perspective what was in the action plan. They did not care how much was being spent or how many people would be helped by that package. They said that they would vote against it.

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How can the member, in good conscience, stand in the House and say that he is a defender of those who are unemployed and those who need help the most? Our government put those packages together but the NDP did not support us.

They came up with irresponsible provisions, like the 45 day work year. They would have people work for 45 days in a year and then get benefits. How would that help those in the auto industry or the forestry industry who have worked for many years, paid premiums for many years but have never collected benefits? That is morally irresponsible because it would allow billions of dollars to be charged to the EI account. The member does not take that into consideration.

The NDP did not support us in those measures and did not even bother to read our plan.

We have some other programs that we want to put in place that will cost billions of dollars. Is it responsible to oppose all of the programs that we put in place that most Canadians want? Is it being responsible to ignore all of that? Is it being responsible to ask us to support something the NDP want? That is irresponsible and certainly not affordable given everything we have put into the system.

• (1925)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary asked where I was. I was here voting against those provisions because there was not enough for the working people. It is not a shame to have people working 45 days, which is the figure he used. The government says that if people work 360 hours they want to be on EI for a year. However, they do not go on EI for a year. Where was the government when we told it that less than 50% of people who lose their jobs get employment insurance?

We did not agree with the government's formula. We want to bring it down and have another election in the hope that Canadians will put in a party that will help the working people in this country. We are

not ashamed of that. This country was built by men and women who get up in the morning, take their lunch pail and go to work. When they lose their job, the whole family suffers. Five weeks was not enough.

Where was the government when we asked it to get rid of the two week waiting period? The government refused. Where was that government member at that time?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, the member says that he is not ashamed of voting no to all our proposals, but he and his party should be ashamed for voting against proposals that would help 165,000 people keep their jobs. They voted against that for some ideological reason. They voted against billions of dollars going into extended training and skills upgrading. He should be ashamed of voting against that.

We have helped about 190,000 people in one fashion or another to maintain their jobs so they can buy food for their families and keep their homes, but the member voted against that.

How can he stand up in good conscience and say that he is not ashamed of voting against proposals that would help hard-working Canadians who have paid into the system, who have worked hard and now find themselves in an unfortunate situation? Why would the member turn his back on those particular workers by voting against our proposals and then say that he is not ashamed of it?

• (1930)

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:30 p.m.)

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