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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, November 2, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 2, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (coming into force of sections 110, 111 and 171), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Speaker: The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber is not present to move the order as announced in today's notice paper. Accordingly, the bill will be dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper. The sitting will therefore be suspended until noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:02 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

• (1200)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-50. Motions Nos. 1 to 3 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1 to 3 to the House.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-50, in Clause 1, be amended by replacing lines 9 to 25 on page 1 with the following:

“(a) the number of weeks of benefits set out in the table in Schedule I that applies in respect of a claimant is increased as a result of the application of any of subsections 12(2.1) to (2.4), in which case

(i) in respect of a benefit period established for the claimant on or after January 4, 2009 that has not ended on the day on which this subsection is deemed to have come into force, the length of the claimant's benefit period is increased by the number of weeks by which the number of weeks of benefits set out in the table in Schedule I that applies in respect of the claimant is increased as a result of the application of any of subsections 12(2.1) to (2.4), and

ii) in respect of a benefit period established for the claimant during the period that begins on the day on which this subsection is deemed to have come into force and ends on September 11, 2010, if the maximum number of weeks during which benefits may be paid to the claimant under subsection 12(2) is equal to or greater than 51 weeks as a result of the application of any of subsections 12(2.1) to (2.4), the length of the claimant's benefit period is that maximum number of weeks increased by two weeks; or

(b) the number of weeks of benefits set out in Schedule 10 to the Budget Implementation Act, 2009 that applies in respect of a claimant is increased as a result of the application of any of sections 3 to 6 of An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, introduced in the second session of the fortieth Parliament as Bill C-50, in which case

(i) in respect of a benefit period established for the claimant on or after January 4, 2009 that has not ended on the day on which this subsection is deemed to have come into force, the length of the claimant's benefit period is increased by the number of weeks by which the number of weeks of benefits set out in that Schedule 10 that applies in respect of the claimant is increased as a result of the application of any of those sections 3 to 6, and

ii) in respect of a benefit period established for the claimant during the period that begins on the day on which this subsection is deemed to have come into force and ends on September 11, 2010, if the maximum number of weeks during which benefits may be paid to the claimant under that Schedule 10 is equal to or greater than 51 weeks as a result of the application of any of those sections 3 to 6, the length of the claimant's benefit period is that maximum number of weeks increased by two weeks.”

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-50, in Clause 2, be amended by replacing lines 23 to 26 on page 2 with the following:

“during the period that begins on January 4, 2009”

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-50, in Clause 3, be amended by replacing lines 9 to 12 on page 6 with the following:

“begins on January 4, 2009 and ends”

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about Bill C-50 and the technical amendments that are being made to it.

Government Orders

Bill C-50 is our government's proposed legislation to temporarily extend employment insurance regular benefits for unemployed long-tenured workers. For the purpose of this legislation, long-tenured workers are defined as Canadians who have paid EI premiums for years but have made limited use of EI regular benefits.

Of the Canadians who have lost their jobs since the end of January 2009 and made an EI claim, about one-third are long-tenured workers. Many of these people have worked in the same industry and even at the same job for most of their adult lives. However, now, because of the recession, they find themselves unemployed. Bill C-50 would give these workers additional weeks of employment insurance while they look for new jobs.

Specifically, this measure would provide from five to twenty additional weeks of EI regular benefits depending on how long a long-tenured worker has been employed and paying EI premiums. We estimate about 190,000 workers would benefit from this.

These people have worked hard, have paid their taxes and, of course, have paid their EI premiums. It is only fair and right that we should help them during this temporary downturn.

Bill C-50 is a temporary measure. It is designed to give long-tenured workers the short-term support they need to rebuild their lives. Our hope is that their fortunes will improve as the economy rebounds. However, in the meantime, we want to make sure these extra weeks of benefits available to eligible workers are available as soon as possible.

That brings me back to the amendment. Originally, the start date for eligibility was linked to the coming into force of this bill. However, we want to allow time for a full debate. At the same time, we want to ensure that all eligible long-tenured workers have full access to the extended benefits, even if royal assent is delayed.

That is why we are proposing a technical amendment to establish a fixed date of January 4, 2009 for eligibility. This would ensure that all long-tenured workers who have lost their jobs in 2009 will be eligible for additional weeks of benefits regardless of how long it takes for the bill to be approved.

The establishment of a fixed date would not affect long-tenured workers' ability to claim extended benefits until September 11, 2010, nor would it affect the payment of these extended benefits into the fall of 2011.

As I have said, Bill C-50 is a temporary measure. Long-tenured workers receiving extended benefits can expect a gradual transition back to normal terms and conditions. To that end, beginning in June of 2011, the level of additional benefits would be reduced in five-week increments. We believe that Bill C-50 would come as great comfort to long-tenured workers who may be worried about exhausting their benefits before they can find a new job.

As we have been looking at this bill over the last couple of weeks in the HUMA committee, some concerns have been raised. People wondered why there is the cutoff, how we can protect the greatest number of jobs, et cetera. It is great that NDP members have been willing to support this part. They realize that there would be almost 190,000 people who would benefit from and have access to this.

People have asked us why this would be in effect for 2009. That is clearly when a lot of the unemployment occurred. We realize there was unemployment before then, and that is why we have extended benefits by up to five weeks, and over 300,000 people have benefited. We have expanded our work-sharing program and protected over 165,000 jobs. Work-sharing programs are something that probably a lot of Canadians are not familiar with, but I think they have been very practical and they make a lot of sense.

● (1205)

We have companies that may be struggling and do not need all of their workers at this point in time because of the economy. EI has been able to go in and work with these companies and have them work-share, so that employees may only work three or four days a week and are able to collect some EI. I think that is a very practical measure.

As we heard from some of our witnesses last week, people are concerned about who would have a chance to claim these benefits. I think 190,000 people speaks volumes in terms of who can receive this benefit at this particular time.

The other thing I want to make note of, and we have talked about it before in previous debates, is the fact that this government has frozen EI premiums. This is a particularly difficult time right now for business. I know that freezing EI premiums has been a good thing, not only for business people and businesses but also for those Canadians who would have to pay those EI premiums.

I know there are a number of things we have been looking at, what we have been delivering and what we have been able to deliver on. We believe that some of the money that has been set aside, over \$0.5 billion, for training for long-tenured workers could help up to 40,000 Canadians. We realize we have an additional \$1.5 billion for training for those who are on EI and who do not necessarily qualify. We are helping about 150,000 people on top of the \$2.5 billion that we already spend annually on training. I think these are important things.

We realize that as the economy shifts sometimes we lose some of these industries in towns that have been dependent on some of these jobs, certain companies and industries over time. One of the ways we believe we can help these workers is by training them for the jobs of the future. That is why this government has been very committed to continually spending money on training.

We have also looked at \$60 million for helping older workers. We realize the kind of invaluable knowledge and experience they have. We realize the kind of potential they have. I think this is something that is so important, that we continue to deal with these challenging times.

I just want to talk about some of the comments that we have heard from individuals.

This is from Mr. Lazar, president of the Forest Products Association of Canada:

The investments in worker training through EI, the extension of the EI work-sharing program...are welcome initiatives that will help more Canadians keep their jobs and employers hold onto talented workers.

Government Orders

We have the Michelin company where 500 employees are benefiting from work-sharing. The company spokesperson, Karen Gordon, said:

The work-share program has allowed us to avoid lay-offs and maintain our workforce...The program is a win-win-win for the company, our employees and the government and positions us well to rebound quickly when market demand returns.

I want to say that obviously if some of these employees had to go and find other work in these situations, that when the economy does turn around and I do believe the economy will turn around, we would end up with companies that are not ready to hit the ground running. They would have lost valuable talent and valuable employees who were trained specifically in their jobs for these companies. It would make it difficult for some of these companies to rebound and be able to move quickly when the economy turns around.

I have some other quotes that I think are worth talking about, as well. I know that as we look at some of the challenges we have had to deal with, some of these initiatives have made a whole lot of sense in terms of being able to keep the continuity going for these companies.

I know that the NDP leader from Toronto—Danforth has said:

—without extended benefits, tens of thousands of Canadians will slide off EI and onto welfare...My party cannot, in good conscience, vote down legislation that is a step in the right direction.

I want to finish by asking the members of this House to back this amendment here and now because it is the fair and right thing to do, so that unemployed long-tenured workers can get the benefits they deserve as soon as possible and with no penalty for the time it takes this place to pass the bill.

• (1210)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as chair of our committee, my colleague has heard testimony from people about Bill C-50.

I want to ask him a question about one of the real concerns that has been raised about this bill, which is its clearly discriminatory nature in terms of picking winners and losers, indicating that some people should be entitled to extended benefits and some should not. I am quoting now from the 2009-10 estimates where the minister herself, in touting the extra five weeks that was provided to all EI beneficiaries, says:

—including extending five extra weeks of benefits, which is now only available in some regions, to all Canadians.

She is saying this is a good thing because it goes to all Canadians regardless of their circumstances and what industry they come from. That is a good point. There is some sense to everybody getting benefits equally.

However, this bill goes in the other direction. This is now saying that some people should be entitled to benefits and some should not.

I wonder if my colleague could address the discrepancy between those two positions taken by the same minister.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of different options on the table and obviously one was to eliminate the waiting period. We have tried to affect the most amount of people as possible.

We heard that a number of people have been working in these industries for many years and have always paid into the system but never collected. Now that the economy has turned around on them they have not been able to collect some of these benefits for the length of time that they feel might be helpful.

We are hopeful that the economy will turn around. If we could add extra weeks for the people who have been paying into EI for many years, then they would have the opportunity to find work or hope for the economy to turn around so they could go back to the places they had been working before.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague mentioned the fact that this bill is basically aimed at so-called long-tenured workers. What he did not say is that these workers have all been working for more than seven years. Other conditions also apply. They must have paid at least 30% of the annual maximum EI premiums for a number of years and they must not have received regular EI benefits for more than 35 weeks.

First of all, my colleague should recognize that, as it stands now, this bill targets only 6% of unemployed workers and that the amendment proposed today will make these new measures even less accessible. I want my colleague to consider this. He may refer to Motion No. 1 that proposes new subparagraph 1(a)(i), which reads as follows:

in respect of a benefit period established for the claimant on or after January 4, 2009 that has not ended on the day on which this subsection is deemed to have come into force—

This means that, right now, two large regions of Quebec are already totally excluded, namely Quebec City and Hull, and that as early as next week, four more regions will be excluded.

Is my colleague willing to admit this?

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the way works hard and works well on our committee.

One of the things that was of a concern when we looked at the economic action plan was the fact that maybe more EI benefits needed to be added. That is why we looked at an additional five weeks for everyone.

This government has taken a number of initiatives. Work-sharing was one of those, as was freezing EI premiums. There are a bunch of other issues and things that we have done.

People have worked 7, 10, 15, 20 years in some of these industries and these industries have been strong. They have done great things for their communities. Here they are in this position, through no fault of their own, because of what has happened in the economy.

It was decided that because some of these industries are the staple of their communities, they needed extra help. That is why we looked at extending from 5 to 20 extra weeks for some of these long-tenured workers.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are here today discussing Bill C-50, which has now come back from committee.

Government Orders

The position of the Liberal Party has not changed on the bill. We think that there are numerous problems with this bill in terms of what it does to impact people who were the victims of a very difficult recession in this country.

It was a very interesting process at committee. Normally, at a committee, when somebody comes with a bill, particularly a government bill, we have a number of witnesses who say, "I like it. Go ahead", and others who say, "I do not like it. Stop it". What we had this time, and I am sure the member for Chambly—Borduas would concur with this as well as other members of the HR committee, were largely two groups of people who came to the committee.

We had people who came and said, "This is not a good bill. This is a discriminatory bill. It does not help enough people. It does not go back far enough. It does not do enough to cushion the blow of this recession. You should vote it down".

We had others who came to the committee and said, "We do not like it. It is not our priority for employment insurance. We know that there are further changes that are necessary, but with these guys, we better take what we can get. In light of that, perhaps you should support it and try to get something else".

We have been talking about employment insurance in this House, as Canadians have in the country, for the better part of the last year. Before that, it was an issue, but particularly in the last year with this recession, people have been very concerned. What have people been asking about? What have people called for in terms of EI?

For a number of years, we have had public sector unions, policy think tanks and a host of people who have looked at this issue. They have said that there are ways in which we can adjust EI. I think we can all understand that. They have said, "There were changes made in the 1990s as a result of the economic circumstance that this country was in. Maybe we should look at what we did then. Maybe it is time to have some new reforms. What would you do?"

There are people who have been talking for a long time about changes: a national standard of 360 hours or some such variation on that national standard; eliminating the two week waiting period, as our colleague from Brome—Missisquoi has in a private member's bill that will be coming back to this House; increasing the rate of benefits from 55% to 60%; looking at the divisor rule; and looking at how we calculate benefits and perhaps going to the best 12 weeks.

There are all kinds of ways that we can change employment insurance. I would not say that we should do all of those things. I am an advocate for employment insurance reform. I do not know exactly what I would do, but I know I would not let it go the way it is now. I know that I would invest in employment insurance so that people who need the benefit can get it.

I do not think people are fully aware in Canada that our EI system is not as robust as most nations to which we want to compare ourselves. We think we are very generous in terms of employment insurance. We should keep in mind that this is the money that employers and employees have put aside for difficult times, but our system does not fare well compared to some others.

In the 1990s, when the economy was good and it was strong and we had surpluses, we reduced EI premiums for both the employers and employees for 12 years in a row. That was one period of time. We could argue about what should have been done then, but in a recession, in a difficult time, this is when we should invest in EI.

We have had the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Caledon Institute, the CLC and the CAW telling us what things they would like to see, but it is not just them. *TD Economics* is urging the government to immediately ease the VER and extend EI. VER is the variable entrance requirements. We need to ensure that people get access to EI across the board.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce gave advice to the government last year, when it suggested that the federal government could consider temporary measures to ease access to EI during the recession, reducing the number of weeks required to qualify for benefits and suspending the two week waiting period.

That was the Chamber of Commerce in December saying we should look at the two week waiting period. The CSN referred to the waiting period, the universal entitlement of 360 hours, and increasing the benefit level.

The wife of the Minister of Finance gave him very good advice earlier this year when she suggested, in her complaints:

—many people who lose a job cannot qualify for EI under current rules. Ideally, the federal government will quickly reform EI to better meet Ontario's needs.

She was talking about a standard for employment insurance that would better meet the needs of Canadians, and in her case, of Ontarians.

We had all the premiers, it seems, in the country, all the western premiers, suggesting that we needed to do something about a national standard. We had the premier of B.C. saying that if people fell off EI, then they were going to go onto the provincial welfare rolls.

● (1220)

We had premier after premier saying that something needed to be done to reform EI but Bill C-50 does not do that. It is clearly not enough.

Members of the House have put forward private member's bills. In March, the New Democrats put forward an opposition day that called for the elimination of the two week waiting period, a national standard of 360 hours going to 60% of insurable earnings, going to a best 12 weeks divisor and referring to some kind of a self-employment piece. Those are the priorities of the New Democrats, which I think reflect the priorities of many Canadians. Bill C-50 is woefully short on that measure.

Government Orders

The head of the CAW, in referring to Bill C-50, said that Canadians “need a full loaf of bread”. He suggested that it was just crumbs.

Armine Yalnizyan of CCPA indicated that the program's restrictions act against the nature of much of Canada's industry.

Laurel Ritchie of the CAW said that it was only handfuls.

The bill has not received any kind of universal enthusiastic support. Some people have said that perhaps we need to take what we can get and move on, but we need to look at this seriously and ask whether this is good legislation and whether we can seriously adopt a piece of social infrastructure that discriminates against so many Canadians.

The government's own estimates are that 190,000 people will benefit. I do not know if that is true. I asked people at committee if it was true but they could not tell me because they did not have access to the kind of information that HRSDC does. What does the government do with that information?

In the summer, I remember the Conservatives suggesting that a 360 hour national standard would cost \$4.4 billion. The next week they apologized and said that it would be \$2.5 billion. It turns out that it would be less than \$1.3 billion. Therefore, we do not have a lot to work with on this.

Pierre Céré came to committee on Bill C-50 and said:

First, we disagree with the approach taken. The government has chosen to use legislation to play a political trick...when [on September 14] it could simply have announced a pilot project...

He suggested that it did not even have to be in legislation. He also said “the problems with the employment insurance system have not been addressed at all, including the pressing problem of eligibility”.

At the end of July this past summer, the 10 premiers of the 10 provinces called on the Prime Minister to resolve this problem. Most Quebec municipalities signed a declaration demanding that the eligibility question be solved at the federal level. The FCM, as well as many economists, observers, associations, unions and even the churches called on the government to resolve the eligibility problem.

We have a bill that is a discriminatory. As I referenced earlier in a question for my colleague, the chair of our committee, the minister herself, in touting the five week extension, said that extending five extra weeks of benefits which was then only available in some regions to all Canadians. So she is saying that what we are doing is giving a benefit that some Canadians have to pilot projects and we are giving it to all Canadians. What could be more fair?

Now we have a circumstance where the government has introduced a bill that picks winners and losers. It does not cushion the blow of what is called the early shock troops of the recession, those who lost their jobs a year ago now and are not eligible for any of the benefit no matter how long they have been on EI. We do not think that is fair.

The conundrum that we have as a party is what to do in this circumstance. We do not want to see people further disenfranchised. For example, when the bill came to committee it would have come into force in a way that meant if we gave it suitable study it would

mean people who were laid off after January 4 might not get benefits. We indicated at committee that while we did not support the bill, one of the reasons we did not support it was that it did not affect enough workers. We certainly did not want to disenfranchise any more.

In our view, Bill C-50 is not a suitable response to the recession. It decides that some people are worthy of employment insurance and some are not. We do not think that is the way Canadians look at our social infrastructure system. We do not think that would be done with medicare or with any other social infrastructure. We think it is the wrong way to go about it. It is not a suitable response and we will be voting against the bill when it comes back.

•(1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, for shedding some light on this debate.

This bill is not worthy of being passed. I think that the member was absolutely right. It is a Conservative bill or, more accurately, an NDP bill. The NDP leader said that he asked for it himself. He gave himself a pat on the back. I do not know if he will be doing the same today.

The member also spoke about the fact that this is a discriminatory bill. It also appears as though he had some doubts about the number of unemployed workers who would be affected by this bill. He is not the first to question that. The government is claiming that it will cost \$1 billion, and we have asked senior departmental and NDP officials how they reached this figure. We never got an answer.

Did the Liberals get one? If so, can they tell us how this figure was arrived at, and whether it is correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises a good point. He expressed his view at committee in terms of the affront that this was to Parliament and particularly to our committee.

On October 6, the minister came to talk to us about this bill. One question raised was how she came up with 190,000 people affected and \$935 million total benefit. She said that she would get back to us. In fact, we did not get an answer until we went into clause by clause. It was either my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst or my colleague from Chambly—Borduas who actually asked for those answers to the questions we asked at the first meeting, and then we got an answer. That is totally unacceptable.

Government Orders

A member of the Conservatives said that we did not keep asking. When we ask for information at a parliamentary committee and we are told that we will receive the information from the minister and her officials and we do not get it, that is indicative of how the government goes about its business, particularly on EI. I think it is shameful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

He said that workers need help. We are experiencing an economic crisis and more. My Liberal colleague was at the meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The president of the Canadian Labour Congress, like the other witnesses, said that he was not enthusiastic about the bill. He thought it did not go far enough, and that more changes needed to be made to EI. The Liberals' cuts in 1996 took a toll on workers. However, at the end, he asked the committee and all the parties to vote in favour of the bill, because he did not want workers to be denied what little they have been offered.

How can the official opposition vote against something, when it is clear that the organization representing the largest number of workers in Canada is asking them to support it? One woman said that her EI was running out, and she asked members to pass the bill. How can the Liberals vote against this bill, when they were the ones who made the cuts to EI in 1996?

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, a number of people said that they did not like it, that they did not think it was a priority but that it was all they would get from the government. That is hardly a ringing endorsement.

However, in terms of supporting this, in January, the government's inadequate response was an extra five weeks for everybody and more money for employment and training. That was much more than Bill C-50 but members of the NDP voted against it. In their defence, they had indicated that before they saw it, so they have a certain defence in that case, but that was for everybody. They voted against it and they condemn us because we stand up against a discriminatory bill that hurts some people. I do not think that is consistent.

Bill C-50 is not the right response to the current economic conditions and we are opposed to it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in the House on my party's behalf about this important bill, Bill C-50.

I think it is important because it shows the Conservative government and the NDP's true colours when it comes to employment insurance. It is quite disturbing. This is a bad bill, and we do not support it.

We are not the only ones in Quebec who do not support this bill. People are pretty much unanimous. Unions are unanimous, and they represent 1.2 million workers. If we consider the families of those

workers as well, over 2.5 million of the 8 million people in our province are against it. So are all unemployed workers' organizations.

The people most affected by this bill will be unemployed workers, and their organizations do not like it. I will go on to explain why they do not like it. The forestry industry is unanimous in its opposition as well.

The Canadian Federation of Woodlot Owners has spoken out in favour of this bill, but when asked if people in Quebec felt the same way, they said no. We came to the same conclusion. The reason such unanimity exists in Quebec is that the Conservatives are turning their backs on Quebec, and so is the NDP.

Why does everyone agree on this? My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour explained why earlier: this bill is discriminatory because it introduces the utterly distasteful and unjustified principle that unemployed workers fall into two camps: good ones and bad ones. This bill is also mean because it is designed to exclude as many people as possible.

Earlier, my Conservative colleague said that this bill targets long-tenured workers. It is arbitrary because it excludes workers who have worked fewer than seven years. Nobody who has worked fewer than seven years will be affected by this measure or benefit from it.

In addition, all workers who have worked for more than seven years but who did not contribute 30% of the employee's premium for 10, 12 or 15 years, for example, depending on their situation, will also be excluded.

And individuals who have been unfortunate enough to receive employment insurance for more than 35 weeks will be excluded, even if they have worked for more than seven years. Who is left? Not very many people, considering that everyone with a precarious job is also excluded. When we do the math based on the government's approach, we reach the conclusion that only 6% of EI recipients can hope to benefit from this bill. That is a far cry from 190,000 unemployed. We are talking about roughly 47,900 people.

When officials come to talk to us about 190,000 unemployed, they say that this will extend over three years and so we have to multiply by the number of generations of unemployed. At that rate, we could say that instead of spending \$21 billion a year on national defence, our government will spend \$420 billion because the spending is spread over 20 years. You can take that sort of logic to extremes. But, in a budget debate, the government is used to quoting figures based on a snapshot of the economy at a given point.

How many workers are unemployed at present? Between 1.7 million and 1.8 million. How many people are receiving benefits? There are 765,000. If we take that figure and multiply it by 6%, we get 45,900.

Government Orders

•(1235)

Why is the government misleading the House and the public? By inflating the figures, it is trying to make people accept the unacceptable, namely principles that are completely disgraceful and totally discriminatory. That is what the NDP is doing. The government is making entitlement contingent on hours of employment, how much the claimant has paid in premiums and how many weeks of benefits he or she has already received.

The Conservative member said that long-tenured workers are people who have worked hard, as if everyone else had not worked hard. He said that they are people who have paid taxes, as if everyone else had not paid taxes.

We do not buy that. We cannot support that. Parliament is going to support discriminatory rules, but we are totally opposed to that. This bill is a symbolic political gesture that the government is trying to justify by dressing it up in lace and frills. It is also an insult to people's intelligence. It is important to say here that the government is not going to address the need for comprehensive EI reform with piecemeal measures like these, which create good and bad classes of unemployed workers.

The parties, including the Conservatives, have agreed on some measures in the past, measures that we in the opposition unanimously agree on here today, including for example, improving accessibility to employment insurance, since the majority of workers have been deliberately excluded from EI benefits. The previous government wanted to accumulate a surplus and use that money for other things. So unemployed workers and employers were relieved, not to say robbed, of \$57 billion. The government used that \$57 billion for other things.

These measures include the 360-hour eligibility criterion with, of course, the possibility of a 70-hour reduction, based on the number of unemployed workers per region. Instead of 45 weeks, 50 weeks of benefits are needed, as well as 60% of earnings. At present, people received 55% of their income. These are some of the measures on which we agreed. Our NDP friends have been fooled by the smoke and mirrors, and have forgotten these crucial measures, along with the notion of being entitled to benefits based on good faith. Furthermore, the two week waiting period must be eliminated.

Instead, we have a government that has locked up the employment insurance fund. It is making sure that premiums remain at their minimum, so there are not enough resources to improve the system, even though everyone agrees that the current problem is not related to premiums. People are willing to accept higher premiums in order to benefit from social measures that will allow people who unfortunately lose their jobs to continue to feed their families.

We are seeing the old Conservative theory of taking away every possible means, so they can later justify the fact that they do not want to improve conditions for our citizens. The Conservatives did this with the GST. They are doing it again with employment insurance premiums.

•(1240)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a way, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas is accusing the NDP of wanting to pass Bill C-50 with the Conservatives. I am in favour

of this bill. We have said that we will vote in favour of this bill. However, it is as though the hon. member from the Bloc is trying to tell us that no one in Quebec would benefit from this. As though no one has worked 12 months a year in the last seven to ten years and no one is affected by this economic crisis.

I agree with the hon. member from the Bloc when he says that we need more than this and that everyone should benefit from it. He is very familiar with our bills. We are familiar with theirs. We have worked together. It is true that we want better than this, but there is a bill currently on the table.

My question for him is the following: is he prepared to say that in Quebec no worker will benefit from this bill and that the workers he is saying no to will be pleased? People who have worked for 10 or 15 years and who are going through this economic crisis would lose the little bit that the House of Commons is giving them. We are not voting on a budget, but on a specific bill that could help certain workers. I am proud of that and I will say so in my speech. At least we will be helping, even if we are not in the government. A government is in place and it is offering something for workers. This is not the first discriminatory bill. I have seen the Bloc vote in favour of similar bills that were not good for all Canadians. I will talk about that later in my speech.

I would like to know whether the hon. member is prepared to say no to certain long-tenured workers who have lost their jobs in Quebec during the economic crisis.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the problem is to find them and then, when we do, they are represented by unions and associations representing the unemployed, which say that rather than putting in place a measure that discriminates against their colleagues, they prefer to continue fighting for a more equitable measure. That is why Quebec is unanimous.

I see that the NDP, like the Conservatives, has turned its back on Quebec. That is their decision, that is their right. However, I would like to ask my colleague a question. He is one of the members who told the minister that he would vote for the bill because the cut-off date had to be eliminated, meaning that we must quickly adopt the bill to ensure that people can benefit from it nevertheless. I do not know if he realizes it, but the amendment allows the government to do indirectly what it said it would not do directly. I refer him to clause 1(a)(i), which indicates that those who obtain benefits at a later date are not included.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Chambly—Borduas, who is passionate about this subject.

Would it make sense if we had a health care system and the government would decide that those who had not used this system should have more access to it because they were more deserving of health care than those who consistently used the system? There is a parallel between seasonal workers who need to use the system, who then get penalized under this bill and are told they are not as deserving as others. Does he see any parallels along that line?

Government Orders

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has given a very good example. It can be applied to health care. Say that you have already used the health care system. According to this principle, you would no longer be entitled to use it. You would have to come back in seven, ten or fifteen years. That is the yardstick. The same thing would apply, unfortunately, if you had a piece of furniture in your living room that burnt and you called your insurance agent. Six or seven years later, when something else burns, you want to file a claim with your insurance company. However, you are told that you will have to wait another year. It is the same principle, except more serious because we are not talking about goods but about real life and the quality of peoples' lives.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-50 and, at the same time, to see the Bloc Québécois, which accuses us of siding with the Conservatives, siding so strongly with the Liberals, the grandmasters of EI cuts. I was listening to the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour talk about how discriminatory this bill was, how it does not help all people, all workers. He was wondering how the government could be doing so little in a piece of legislation put forward during times of economic crisis.

I do not want to speak only of the Liberals in my speech, but I recall that, in 1996, there was a crisis in the fisheries industry in the Gaspé, in New Brunswick and throughout Atlantic Canada. This industry was going through a crisis, and that was when we experienced the worse cuts to employment insurance. Strangely enough, at the time, the Liberals were not concerned about discrimination. In some places, 700 hours of work were required, and in others, 420 hours. Claimants were all workers, good hard-working people. Yet, there were different classes of workers. In some regions, in spite of having worked more hours, workers did not qualify for EI. It is funny how we did not hear anything about discrimination at that time. This morning, however, all we are hearing about is discrimination.

Ask me the following questions and ask them of the NDP. Does the bill go far enough? Absolutely not, not at all. This is not an NDP bill. It is a government bill. We have looked at the bill. Are we happy with it? Absolutely not. We are not happy with it. Is the employment insurance system the same for everyone? Did the Liberals vote with us on the 360 hour standard of eligibility? They never did when in power. Did the Liberals approve the 12 best weeks formula when in power? Of course not. We have seen people suffer in our region because of the cuts to EI. Who has made EI what it is today? They should not come and suggest today that the current economic crisis is to blame. We had an economic crisis in our region at those days, and the human resources minister was from Atlantic Canada. It was one of our own who, as a minister, made cuts to EI. If we want to talk about discrimination, there has been discrimination in the past and there is still discrimination today.

But can we say no to a particular group? I know the Bloc Québécois is pressing the question of whether it is \$1 billion and 190,000 people. I hope we will never reach that number. I hope that people will not lose their jobs. I hope they will not need to claim employment insurance benefits. But what am I going to tell people

back home, when last week, Aliant said it was closing its doors in Bathurst and Shippagan? What am I going to tell people back home, when TNS Canadian Facts, another call centre company, has announced this morning that it is closing down in Bathurst? These are people who have worked there a long time and are not eligible for employment insurance. If we do this, at least, people will be entitled to benefits. Their benefits will be extended.

I am certain that Quebec is not exempt from this. There is an economic crisis in Quebec as much as anywhere else. When the Bloc Québécois member says that Quebec and Quebecers are being ignored, that is not true. This is not a bill put forward by the NDP. We are not ignoring them. There is a bill and there are people in Quebec who are going to have the chance to receive benefits. The fewer unemployed, the better it will be, just as it is where I come from.

How can we say no to these people? Some will say that we have opposed certain employment insurance measures at certain times. Yes, we said no to certain changes to employment insurance when they were part of budgets, when the government wanted to freeze public service salaries, freeze RCMP salaries, when they told women they would not be able to go to court if they wanted pay equity. When we looked at the budget, yes, we voted against it because it was a bad budget that was going to harm other people. In this case, yes, there are people who are not receiving benefits and we would like them to receive benefits. Yes, I would like the people back home, the seasonal workers, to be able to receive employment insurance. Yes, they have been working for years.

Last week I spoke with a woman from Prince Rupert who is a union representative. She explained that the same thing is happening where she comes from as where I come from. There are closings in the fish plants and closings in the fishery. It is the same problem.

• (1250)

How many times have we voted on bills in this House when they were not for the benefit of all Canadians? For the five additional weeks we voted on three or four years ago, that was only because the unemployment rate was at a certain level. Not everyone was entitled to the five additional weeks. When we went for the 14 best weeks, not all Canadians, and not all Quebecers, received that. At that time, the Bloc Québécois voted for the measure. It was discriminatory, everyone should have known that.

Government Orders

Today, we have a bill that can help a group of people. This is what we must vote on, and the decision we must make is whether or not we will grant that help. The Bloc Québécois has decided to vote against the bill. That is their right, and I respect that. The Liberals have decided not to help long-tenured workers, people who have worked for whatever number of years is required in the bill. They will not support it. That is right. The NDP has decided that even if there is not much money, we can still take it out of the EI fund to give to these workers. I would prefer to give the workers this money than to leave it in the consolidated revenue fund, where the EI fund's \$57 billion surplus is found. That is what the vote will be on. Do we want this money to be taken out of the consolidated revenue fund, where it went in the big Ottawa theft from the EI fund, and given to certain workers?

The Canadian Labour Congress appeared before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and made it very clear. The president, Ken Georgetti, very clearly said that he was not happy, but that he still wanted us to vote in favour of the bill. He said that his members across the country are in need, and that is why he does not want us to vote against the bill.

The Quebec labour unions also appeared. The FTQ representative said that instead of a bill, it could have been a pilot project. He was not very happy it was a bill and was not in favour of it. A pilot project would have been just as discriminatory as a bill. I fail to see the difference. People can go and read the blues, the record of the discussions. He said it very clearly. He said it should have been a pilot project. I asked him what that would change. He told me he would not have had to come here and argue about something that was not going to happen anyway. He was not really opposed to working people getting it. When he said it could have been a pilot project, I inferred that would have been acceptable. The government certainly could have decided to have a pilot project. That would have been faster. It would have been done and finished, as they have with other bills. But we do not have a pilot project today, we have a bill. We are stuck with saying yes or no. The Liberals took a \$57 billion surplus from the employment insurance fund in 1996. They are the ones who made this change during an economic crisis in the Atlantic region. There was then and still is an economic crisis there. When someone asks whether we have been affected by the economic crisis, we say we have been in it for 100 years. We know all about it. This is not the first time we have been mistreated by the Liberals or the Conservatives.

The biggest mistake in the employment insurance system was back in 1986 when the government decided to take the EI money and put it into the consolidated revenue fund. Employment insurance has been the government's cash cow ever since. Who is dependent on employment insurance? It is not working people any more, it is the government, because there are big surpluses in it.

Is the NDP ashamed to vote in favour of this bill? Not at all. It will not do anyone any harm and will help some people in Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario and British Columbia. Does it go far enough? No, it does not. The NDP has bills calling for 360 hours, the best 12 weeks, getting rid of the two week waiting period, and giving employees 60% of their salaries. These are bills that have been tabled by the NDP and we have more of them. We have 12 of them,

while the Bloc Québécois has only 6. Does Bill C-50 go far enough? No. Will it help working people? Yes, and the NDP is proud to vote in favour of this bill.

• (1255)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right to say that they are stuck with this bill.

However, his leader did not say he was stuck with this bill. On the contrary, as soon as the bill was introduced, he rushed to the lobby to tell people that he had called for these measures and that this was a victory for the NDP. It is \$1 billion. We are therefore stuck with this bill today.

I do not doubt my colleague's passion, and I greatly admire the way he defends the unemployed. But I find it incredible that he is defending the indefensible measures the Conservatives have put forward. He is doing the work of the Conservatives. It is unimaginable. The CLC told us half-heartedly that it was in favour of this bill, but it has also abandoned Quebec. The FTQ is fundamentally opposed to the bill.

There is one question my colleague did not answer, so I will ask it again. I know that he feels very strongly about this amendment, because he said that there should be no deadline that would delay its adoption. But paragraph (a)(i) of Motion No. 1 reads as follows:

in respect of a benefit period established...on the day on which this subsection is deemed to have come into force—

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

Order, please. The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I am proud that my leader pointed out that we called for changes to employment insurance and that now we are seeing changes.

The Bloc Québécois leader is not in a position to stand up and say that he called for changes to employment insurance and got them. I do not think that the Bloc has anything to boast about. Maybe the Bloc feels sad that it did not get anything for Quebec workers. Maybe it feels jealous that the NDP did. Maybe that is what they find so disheartening. Maybe that is why my Bloc colleague is feeling so discouraged.

But maybe he doesn't feel that way because he is glad that the NDP will be voting for this bill. Maybe he would be upset if the NDP voted against it. He would be terribly upset if the NDP said no to all those Quebec workers. That is why he is glad that he can hide behind the NDP and not vote for the bill because the NDP will vote for it. That way, his party can keep up its NDP-bashing.

Government Orders

Maybe it would be better if, instead of talking to unions, the Bloc talked to workers who have no money and whose benefits are about to run out. We want to give these people up to 20 extra weeks of employment insurance benefits. Maybe the Bloc should talk to workers. Maybe it should talk to a single mother who has lost her job and has no money for her kids. Maybe it should ask her if she thinks that Bill C-50 is a good idea. I am sure that she would tell my colleague that he is making a terrible mistake.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you do such a wonderful job in this House cooling the passions.

I had a phone call last week from a worker who is going to lose his house this winter. He exists. He is not a phantom. He is not against Quebec as the Bloc members try to say. That worker called me and asked how quickly this was going to come through because he is in the January cutoff. He asked why this is being debated and I told him that I did not know. This is an issue about one piece of EI legislation that needs to get out.

I long ago realized with the Bloc members that I do not know how they rattle the I Ching bones in their tent on how they vote on an issue, but the Liberals voted to kill pay equity for women and did not lose an ounce of sleep. They voted to get rid of environmental protection on our riverways and did not lose an ounce of sleep. They voted to deep-six Kyoto and did not lose an ounce of sleep.

Now the Liberals come into the House and say that they cannot support any change to EI unless it is a change of everything. I am amazed at the cynicism of the Liberal Party. I gave up on the Bloc ages ago.

There is \$1 billion on the table that is going to help workers. It is helping workers in my riding and ridings across Canada.

Why does my colleague think that the Liberals are putting the political aspirations of their leader who could be on EI at any time ahead of average working Canadians?

• (1300)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, if I see Liberals on EI, I will not be sorry because I saw how many people they put on EI and how many people they took off EI when people were still in need.

This is about a billion dollars or half a billion dollars. I hope it is \$100,000. I hope people do not lose their jobs, but if they lose their jobs, we need to have something in place to help them.

Does Bill C-50 go far enough? No. That is not what we are asking for. We have been asking for more than that for the workers. In France, people are looked after. Even the United States brought its EI up to help the workers who had lost their jobs.

This does not go far enough. The Liberals and the Bloc say no to the workers all across the country, including in Quebec.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the House about a technical amendment we would like to make to Bill C-50. We are seeking to establish a fixed date of January 4, 2009 for eligibility.

This is our government's proposed legislation to temporarily extend employment insurance regular benefits for unemployed long-

term workers. Bill C-50 would give these workers additional weeks of employment insurance while they look for jobs. In the original draft of the legislation, the start date for eligibility was tied to the date of royal assent. However, if royal assent is delayed for any reason, there could be a negative impact on employment insurance clients. That would be unfair.

To ensure that long-tenured workers can get all of their additional weeks of EI regular benefits regardless of timing of royal assent, we are proposing to establish January 4, 2009 as the only eligibility date. We would then remove the reference to an alternate timeframe of nine months prior to the coming into force of the legislation.

This would ensure that all long-tenured workers who lost their jobs in 2009 would be eligible for additional weeks of benefits, regardless of the length of time needed to approve the bill. We estimate that about 190,000 Canadian workers would benefit from these measures. The establishment of a fixed date would not affect the ability of long-tenured workers to claim extended benefits until September 11, 2010, nor would it affect the payment of these extended benefits into the fall of 2011.

Let me explain. For example, Jason has been working in a plant manufacturing cars for the past 15 years. At the beginning of 2009, there was a drastic reduction in demand and by January 9, he had lost his job. He applied for EI and was entitled to receive EI regular benefits until December 11. Because of the fixed date of January 4 eligibility, Jason would be eligible to receive additional weeks of anywhere from five to 20 weeks under Bill C-50.

Long-tenured workers have worked hard and paid taxes. They have paid their EI premiums. It is only right and fair that we should help them during this temporary downturn. Bill C-50 is a temporary measure designed to give those long-tenured workers the support they need to rebuild their lives. Our hope is that their fortunes will improve as the economy recovers. In the meantime, we want to make these extra weeks of benefits available to eligible workers as soon as possible.

There would be a gradual transition back to the normal terms and conditions. Beginning in June 2011, the level of additional benefits would be reduced in five-week increments.

We want to make these extended benefits available to as many unemployed long-term workers as possible and we want to get them access as soon as possible.

I ask members of the House to show their support for Canadian workers by backing these amendments. This is just an example of what the Conservative government has done to help unemployed workers. It shows that we are willing to get down to work and make the necessary changes that are required in this global downturn.

Government Orders

I go back to my riding of Prince Albert and look at the people there. When I come to Ottawa and represent them, I look at the things we have done as a government that have helped benefit those people. This amendment in Bill C-50 is an example of the work the Conservative government is doing.

In closing, I trust that members will quit playing politics with this legislation, will get down to work and will join us in passing Bill C-50.

• (1305)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought that the member was going to deal with the three report stage motions.

The most important question I have for the member has to do with credibility and integrity.

Members may recall that when all of this subject matter about helping people as a consequence of the financial crisis was raised, we were talking about the 360 hour threshold for being able to collect benefits. The government said that it was going to cost \$4.4 billion and then before we knew it, it went down to \$2.5 billion. Ultimately, it was shown to only be \$1.3 billion.

The minister herself has said time and time again that these benefits for these industries were supposed to be available for all Canadians, yet now it is very clear that they are not. The forestry industry, for example, is not going to be able to get a buy-in.

Could the member rationalize why the minister would say that these benefits would be available to all Canadians when in fact they are not?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. However, the reality is these benefits are available to all Canadians.

If someone has been working, let us say, in an auto plant or another industry for a number of years and for no reason of his or her own the plant shuts down, the amendment to the bill would allow that individual to access unemployment insurance for an extended period of time, to allow the person to go into workforce, to find a job that fits his or her needs and helps the family.

Look at what we are doing for Canadians. I am amazed by the economic action plan. The best way to help unemployed Canadians, their families and the economy is to help them get back to work. That is our number one priority and we are doing that. We are not playing politics or trying to force the government to fall for an unnecessary election like my Liberal colleagues are trying to do.

We have added an additional five weeks and 300,000 Canadians have benefited from that. Work-sharing projects have assisted 165,000 Canadians. These are examples of the things we are doing to help Canadians in this time of global recession.

We froze EI premiums for two years so employers and employees could keep their money. We provided an additional \$60 million to help older workers because they have invaluable knowledge and experience and lots of potential remaining. That is very true. In my riding, the breadth of the knowledge of some of the older workers in the farm community is phenomenal.

We are doing a lot of things for unemployed Canadians and we are going to continue to do that.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member.

In circumstances where Canadians have lost approximately 500,000 full-time jobs since last fall under the stewardship of the Conservative government, help is obviously needed in the economy for these workers. Blame is not the issue. People are unemployed and they need help.

My question is twofold.

First, why is it fair to distinguish between what the Conservatives would call good or long-tenured workers as opposed to people who do not fit in this category? The Conservatives are essentially rewarding long-tenured workers who are now unemployed and not helping everybody else. What does he think about that?

Second, as an example, there is no help whatsoever for seasonal workers, such as people in the fishery or forestry industries. Some of the most hard-hit industries are getting nothing from this legislation. I am sure, being a person of good conscience, he must agree this is simply wrong.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, those are two good questions.

One thing about being in government is that one wants to be responsible. When I speak to people in my riding, they want to ensure we treat unemployed people responsibly. They actually like the idea that if people have been paying EI premiums for 15 years, they should get a little more benefit.

I am sure the hon. member would agree. Why would he be treated the same if he has been paying premiums for 15 years as the guy who has been working for only a year? There has to be a little give and take in the system and that is what we are doing. We are allowing older workers to get jobs and giving them a bit more time to find proper jobs.

The member is sincere when he says we should not be playing politics, but in question period or any other time in the House, that is exactly what is going on. In the agriculture committee, all the member for Malpeque does is play politics. When the member talks about playing politics and the seriousness of it, he should quit playing politics, get serious and vote for Bill C-50.

• (1310)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-50 and the three report stage motions on today's order paper. Substantively, Motions Nos. 2 and 3 are fairly straightforward.

The first motion deals with a royal recommendation as well as a change to the number of weeks. The benefit period that determines the weeks required would be changed from what was originally debated by this place back at second reading before the bill went to committee.

Government Orders

I thought it would be useful to make a couple of comments about Bill C-50 itself. Its genesis was to take into account the fact that extraordinary things happened in certain industries across the country, some more different than others, for instance, the forestry sector.

The forestry sector, because it relies so heavily on seasonal work similar to the fisheries sector, relies on the EI system to complement its working availability. Similarly, the auto industry. If the auto industry needs to retool or rework the factory for new models or for changes in models or whatever, it relies on the employment insurance system to provide a continuity of income under the plan to fulfill its purposes.

The petroleum industry, though, is a bit different. It does not rely on a ready and available workforce because it has down times and up times. The petroleum industry, particularly in the west, has grown enormously. We can see that by the shift in population, the demand for housing, the rise in prices of housing and all kinds of other things that happen. It had a very the stable workforce.

When the crunch came and the price of oil went down, all of a sudden there was this exodus of people from the petroleum industry. These people are the ones who will benefit the most from Bill C-50. Most of them are long service employees. The bill will get them more benefits than they would have otherwise been entitled to receive.

Table 1 in the legislative briefing notes lays out the level of benefits that people could get. Someone in the seven to ten year group would get five weeks. The table goes right up to 12 to 15 years. Someone in that group would get an extension of benefits of about 20 weeks. That is pretty substantial. There are a number of categories but I will not go into them.

This was basically to look at employees who had served for a long period of time, were not regular claimants of EI, and for no reason of their own had been laid off. This would allow a super benefit, as it were, during a certain period. The amendments under report stage Motions Nos. 2 and 3 indicate that the benefit period would begin on January 4. The benefit period would be retroactive to that date rather than when the bill actually received royal assent.

I asked a question earlier of an hon. member about the whole EI discussion. A special task force was established between the official opposition and the government to look at some of these questions.

● (1315)

It really concerns me that there was a void of information coming from the government representatives to the task force as to the kinds of things at which we could look. The task force was looking at the 360 hour eligibility base. If people got 360 hours within the time prescribed, they would qualify for benefits. It also was looking at the costing. It was interesting to note that the 360 hour benefit period was summarily dismissed by the government members of the task force, the minister being one, because they said that the cost of implementing the benefit level was \$4.4 billion, and it was just too much.

We would think that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, who is responsible for the Employment Insurance Act and who has a full department of people who know much it costs for

a certain level, would have the tools and the resources to know approximately how much it would cost if we were to change one of the variables. That was not the case. Subsequently we had some different assumptions. In fact, the cost of it would only be \$2.5 billion. That is quite a bit different. That is \$1.9 billion less than the Conservatives had said when they summarily dismissed the whole discussion.

Then after we got other third parties involved and the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and that is a whole story in itself, the estimates for introducing that level benefit came down to \$1.3 billion compared to what the Conservatives initially said as being \$4.4 billion. How can they be more than 300% off the actual cost of introducing those changes, when they are the government, when she is the minister, when she has a whole department and she knows exactly all the variables and how they work?

It leads to a question of credibility, and I know a number of the other members who have been concerned about the bill have been concerned about the equity. We do not have unlimited dollars and we just cannot holus-bolus spread it around. However, the minister had said very clearly, and other members have affirmed this, that this benefit was to be provided for all Canadians. It was estimated that some 190,000 people would benefit.

When the members did their homework and when they started to look at the areas in which there was long service of employment but reliance on employment insurance benefits, some industries were more advantaged and others were not getting a fair share. This is the kind of thing that really concerns Canadians because they cannot trust the government to tell them the truth. It really comes down to that. This is exactly what the bill comes down to.

When I look at the charts and the various gradations, somebody has gone to a lot of work to make this more complicated than it should have been. If the real intent was to assist long-service workers who found themselves all of a sudden out of work for a protracted period of time and they had not been users of the system, there could have been a very simple approach to it, but there was not. It begs the question, why?

I know the premiers were on side to get these changes done, but the summer task force was totally shut down. The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who was on the committee, told me what was happening. He said that when the government was ready, it set up a meeting and it was agreed that any of the proposals, any of the information that any party wanted the group to consider would have to be circulated to the members in advance. Not once did not happen. Every time the government members had something to submit, what did they do? They brought it and tabled it when the meeting started. They did not give anybody a chance to really understand what was there.

It shows a lack of good faith, a failure to show that a person could be trusted. It is a sloppy bill that will not help all Canadians. It will only help some and I know who they are.

Government Orders

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to speak to Bill C-50.

I must admit that, when the minister and the Minister of National Revenue talked about it for the first time, in a press conference, I was rather shocked.

It smacked of improvisation on the part of the Conservative government. Why? Purely and simply because it could have proposed something concerning EI in the budget brought down earlier in the year. What did we get? Zilch, zero, nothing. Sadly, the Liberals did not put any proposals forward. They simply made their own what the Bloc Québécois had done. The NDP, too, made further proposals.

In its economic recovery plan, the Bloc Québécois put forth a vision and ideas for unemployment insurance. There are great problems with EI, besides what the Liberals did during the mid-1990s. The Liberal members will argue that they were dealing with a totally different problem and that their action was justified. Unfortunately, we cannot go back in time.

It was totally irresponsible to plunder \$57 billion from the employment insurance account. That \$57 billion did not belong to the government; it belonged to the workers and employers who contributed to it.

The government has never put a single penny into that fund. It was a form of insurance, which is why it is called employment insurance. It is a contract between workers who pay into it, and employers who also contribute. So that money was there just for the workers. Since the economy was much more prosperous at the time, a surplus accumulated.

What was the first thing the Liberals did to wipe out their deficit, apart from passing it on to the provinces, as only they know how to do? They also plundered the employment insurance fund in order to balance their budget. Whenever we try to clean up this mess created by the Conservatives and the Liberals, we are not helping matters any by trying to always add more. That does not make things any better.

What the Bloc Québécois wanted was a complete overhaul of the EI system. We must make sure the government does not have complete control over the fund and that it cannot plunder it whenever it likes. I said earlier that it smacked of improvisation. However, what is even more improvised is the NDP's response.

I listened carefully to what the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst was saying earlier. I do not doubt his genuine desire to defend workers. Throughout his speech, he explained the many flaws in Bill C-50. Why is he supporting such a bad bill? I understand that an additional \$1 billion is being spent on employment insurance, but when we look at the people who will be affected, we see that the NDP's response was sheer improvisation. It merely wants to prop up the government in order to stall for time for electoral reasons. Personally, I think that is the only reason. Why? Because when the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst was talking about it earlier, he was saying that there were some problems with seasonal workers,

especially in his riding. As we know, many people in his riding work in the fishing industry, and that is seasonal work. This bill does absolutely nothing for those people. It does not help unemployed seasonal workers. That is the main problem.

I do not understand why the NDP is supporting the Conservative government. In January, the Liberals were the Conservatives' new friends. Now we see that it is the NDP's turn. I find that sad. It sold its soul to the devil for peanuts. They could have at least tried to negotiate a little in order to get a bit more. They did nothing. The leader of the NDP is bragging that it is thanks to him that the unemployed got an additional \$1 billion. I have a big problem with that.

The reason the Bloc Québécois is against this bill is that it does not help seasonal workers. Take people in the forestry sector, for example. These are people who labour hard in Quebec's forests to try to earn a living.

• (1325)

They will not get any additional help from Bill C-50. The bill says that claimants cannot have received employment insurance benefits during roughly the past five years. This is extremely complicated for people in the forestry or fishery sectors. There are many fishers in Rimouski and Rivière-du-Loup. Theirs is seasonal employment.

We see that the Conservatives have done a lot of improvising and so has the NDP. It was a vaudeville act. It is unfortunate that the Conservatives never gave us any figures in terms of the unemployed who would benefit from this in Quebec. They are not even able to tell us how many unemployed people in Quebec will be affected by this bill. There is a reason for that and it is pure electioneering. This will help workers in the auto industry. It will help people in Ontario. It will help regions where the Conservatives want to make gains in the next election. We saw that they injected \$10 billion into the automobile industry. I do not have a problem with them injecting \$10 billion into the automobile industry. In fact, they are injecting an additional \$1 billion for unemployed people who are connected to the auto industry.

However, I have a problem with the fact that, in these times, there is absolutely nothing for Quebec. The unemployed in Quebec are given nothing. That is the problem. I often explain the main reasons why I am a sovereigntist. This is another good reason. The member for Prince Albert said that, when he returned to his riding, people were pleased. When I went back to my riding, people told me to vote against the bill because it does not help Quebec. That is why Quebec unions are against this bill. That is why the Sans-Chemise are against it. The reason is simple. Quebeckers quickly realized that this bill will not help any of our workers because it is tailor-made for the Ontario auto sector. That is the main problem with Bill C-50.

I was saying earlier that the NDP improvised on this one. What really makes me mad is that the NDP puts on such a show about being the great champions of the unemployed, those who do not have jobs, and yet we see that this will have no impact in Quebec. It will have very little impact in the Atlantic provinces because most jobs there are seasonal.

Government Orders

I am being told that I only have two minutes left but I could have gone on for hours having realized that this bill was just cobbled together. If the Conservatives really wanted to do something for the unemployed, they would have done it in the budget. They would have introduced bills well before this. They would have tried to speed up the process a little and introduced bills in January and February. We have known for months, even a year, that we are in a recession. The Conservatives have woken up one year later and, all of a sudden, introduced a bill that will not help anyone in our ridings. I do not believe anyone in my riding will be offended when I vote against this bill. On the contrary, as I took part in a great number of activities in my riding, my constituents have let me know that this is a bad bill that does not help Quebecers.

• (1330)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Repentigny on his remarks about Bill C-50.

He clearly stated that the Bloc Québécois is against this bill. There are a lot of reasons for this, but the most important reason is that basically, very few Canadians will benefit from these measures. Only 6% of unemployed workers can expect to benefit. The amendment in Motion No. 1 would reduce that number even further.

I asked around in my riding and other ridings too. Nobody would benefit from this bill. Apparently the same is true for his riding. Can he comment on that? Has anyone called him or visited his office to ask him to vote for this bill?

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer to that question is, of course, no.

However, it is clear that my colleague from Chambly—Borduas is very knowledgeable about this issue. That is not surprising because he worked in the labour sector for years, and nobody understands the needs of unemployed workers better than he does. For years, he has been doing great work with the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. He is truly amazing, because even the minister herself does not know her own department's numbers even though they are right there on the website. The member for Chambly—Borduas needs to explain them to her. Does she even know what she is talking about?

The problem is that the Conservatives are coming up with these feel-good bills that will not change a thing out in the real world. That is because they want to cut back on government interference, get rid of it. Of course they want to cut benefits. The problem with cutting benefits is that our people are the ones who end up suffering.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask my colleague from Repentigny the other question. Has anyone in his riding come to him and asked him to vote against this bill?

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, in fact, many people have told me to vote against the bill.

I have a very good relationship with the unions in my riding, and many union leaders have told me to vote against the bill. For example, the FTQ has told us not to vote for such a botched bill that will not help Quebecers. The people in my riding want me to

represent them, and that is a job I do humbly, but faithfully. I listen to them, and so far, they have supported me.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the NDP is all about defending the indefensible. We are here today talking about Bill C-50 for one reason: a very important vote was held. The Liberals and the Bloc voted against the bill, and the NDP voted for it, using the unemployed to avoid an election. From that moment on, the NDP became the standard bearer for the Conservatives and the self-styled saviour of the people. But we can see that that is not really true.

I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks of the statement that the NDP is using the unemployed to try to look good in people's eyes?

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, I will answer quickly. First, I have never seen such a heated debate in the House of Commons. It is good to see people get worked up occasionally.

I have to admit that the NDP is doing the work of the Conservatives. It is trying to save the government's skin and pass a bill that is not in the interests of the unemployed. I find that extremely regrettable. As I said earlier, the NDP sold its soul to the devil for peanuts.

• (1335)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-50 at report stage. This is the Conservative government's bill that will amend the Employment Insurance Act to increase employment insurance benefits for long-tenured employees.

[*English*]

In particular, I will be talking about the technical amendment. The amendment ensures that long-tenured workers, already receiving EI regular benefits when royal assent is obtained, have sufficient room in their benefit period to receive all of their additional benefits. We have added this amendment because we want to ensure that all long-tenured workers benefit from the additional weeks provided by the bill.

Bill C-50 was brought on by a particularly severe global recession that led to serious cutbacks in production and workers losing their jobs. In particular, it has tended to affect workers who have held down jobs for many years, often in a single industry or who face difficult prospects of getting back into the workforce. These long-tenured workers have done their jobs and they have done them well. They have paid their taxes and EI premiums, and they have not known what it was like to have been laid off or to be looking for another job.

What is really quite unsettling is that for many of them their benefits are fast running out and that is what Bill C-50 is all about. It is about treating workers who have worked long and hard with respect. It is helping them out in their time of need. Bill C-50 would provide from 5 to 20 weeks of additional EI regular benefits depending on circumstances and individual eligibility. In so doing, this initiative would provide these individuals with extra time to find alternative employment.

Government Orders

The amendment before the House would make certain that if they are receiving or have recently exhausted their regular benefits when the bill finally receives royal assent, they would have sufficient time to receive all their additional benefits under Bill C-50. This will benefit long-tenured workers from all sectors of the economy.

Long-term workers make up about one-third of those who have lost their jobs across Canada since the end of January and who have established an EI claim. Bill C-50 provides valuable extra time for workers who must now look for a new job. To be unemployed can be a terrible shock for someone who was not expecting it after years and years on the job.

To ensure that workers benefit from this measure regardless of the timing of royal assent, this new provision would establish a fixed date of January 4, 2009 for eligibility. Given that the measure would be available to new long-tenured claimants up to September 11, 2010, this means payment of these extended benefits would continue until the fall of 2011. It is estimated that this temporary measure under Bill C-50 would ultimately benefit about 190,000 long-tenured workers.

[*Translation*]

The amendments to Bill C-50 and Bill C-50 as a whole are part of the great economic action plan for Canada. In short, our economic action plan contains measures to help all unemployed Canadians.

Bill C-50 tells long-tenured employees that they deserve these extra weeks to help them take charge of their lives, because they have contributed so much to their former employers and now find themselves without work for the first time.

We are focusing our efforts on what is important to Canadians; we are helping those most affected by the recession; and we are investing in training and job creation. We have taken a lot of measures. The best way to help the unemployed and their families is to revive the economy and help Canadians return to work. This is our top priority.

Additional measures have been put in place for long-tenured employees. They are the Canadians who have paid premiums for many years and are having difficulty finding new jobs.

So, Canadians are benefiting from the measures included in the economic action plan. There were, for example, other measures that I will mention now. We added an extra five weeks to employment insurance, something that will help 300,000 Canadians. Job sharing has made it possible to protect the jobs of 165,000 Canadians. Freezing the EI contribution rate means that employers have more money and can create more jobs and that Canadians can keep more of their hard-earned income. Our measures include the payment of an additional \$60 million to older workers, because they have inestimable knowledge and potential we must continue to tap. Finally, investments have been made to ensure that Canadians get benefits in a timely manner.

For all these reasons, I call on my colleagues to join me in voting in favour of Bill C-50.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's speech.

I think he would agree that we do not agree on very many things. I think we could begin there, as a common place. I think he would probably understand that people in Timmins—James Bay voted for me and support me because I am opposed to many of the things that the Conservative Party has brought forward and continues to support.

However, I think the hon. member would also agree with me that in times of crisis we are called to put aside the larger differences we have if it means moving forward with pieces of legislation that can actually benefit people who would be in crisis.

For example, we have the bill that is before us right now. Does this address the NDP's concern about EI? Certainly not. However, the difference between the position of the NDP and the position of the Bloc and the Liberals is that they will simply oppose the bill for the sake of opposing the bill.

We want to get this legislation through because we know people who are being affected right now, who, if this bill is not going to help, will be losing their homes this winter.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague on behalf of constituents who have phoned me and asked why this bill was being held up, what kinds of games are being played, and how soon this bill was going to get through? So, I ask the hon. member, how quickly can we get this bill done, working co-operatively, so we can get help to the people who need it?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his support on these important measures which concern all unemployed Canadians.

I think he is quite right in saying that this is a very positive step forward for unemployed Canadians. It is actually quite a surprise to me that the Liberals are fighting this every step of the way. In fact, I would say that our government is fighting the recession; however, the Liberal leader is fighting the economic recovery.

I point out the Liberals because it is the Liberals who are not giving their full support to these measures. I would encourage them to give their full support to these measures. I think that, in part, responds to the question from my colleague.

If we have all the parties working together for the best interests of Canadians, then this bill will move quickly through its process and receive royal assent.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to address a particular thing here that has come up not only in this Chamber but also in committee as well, wherein members of the opposition particularly would say that this is just one thing only. They give the impression it is a big stand-alone kind of thing. The fact is there are many other things that our government has done in respect to the unemployed. There are some good measures.

Government Orders

I would like to ask my colleague with respect to his particular riding, the good riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, if our vast suite of employment measures have been helpful, and how are these measures affecting his constituents in his particular riding?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, certainly my riding, as the ridings of most MPs, has been affected by the economic difficulties which we find ourselves in. The town of Hawkesbury, for example, is a town that is centred on manufacturing, and has had plant closures and layoffs. PGW is in the process of shutting down. Ivaco has undergone many layoffs.

To answer my colleague's question, Bill C-50 is a very important measure for those Canadians who have worked all their lives or much of their lives in one job. In addition to the 190,000 Canadians that we are going to help, those long-tenured Canadians, we have undertaken other measures to help employment insurance help Canadians.

We have extended EI by five weeks. This is helping 300,000 Canadians. We have expanded work-sharing. Work-sharing is used in my riding by businesses. We are helping to protect 165,000 jobs across the country. We have frozen EI premiums, for example. This leaves more money in the pockets of both employees and employers, definitely a benefit for Canadians in my riding and Canadians in every MP's riding.

Again, I must encourage the Liberals to support our government in all of these measures but particularly with Bill C-50. They should stop obstructing positive bills like this that will help Canadians in these difficult times.

• (1345)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity today to put a few thoughts on the table about this very important piece of public business before us.

I want to remind folks that there are actually two issues at play in this debate. One is whether we want to have another election, which has been spoken of and is being spoken of with great trepidation and fear by certainly many of my constituents and others across this country. The other one that is rooted in this bill is the question of whether we want to move the yardsticks on EI.

When I spoke at second reading on this bill a few weeks ago, I called on the House at that time to work to find a way to, in a common cause, do the best that we could in the interest of protecting people out there who are really feeling the hurt of this recession that we have all been part of for quite some time now.

I asked the different parties, the government party, the official opposition, the Bloc, and ourselves, to work together in the interests of workers and those families affected by people losing their jobs, hundreds of thousands of jobs. These jobs are not returning and many communities are still reeling, still wondering what they are going to do.

This recession, even though it may not feel like it in here, at times, is still very real out there. When we go back to our constituencies, the people we run into on the street or in the coffee houses will tell us that it has not let up and the impact is very real.

So, what has happened since then? How has the House responded to that request, to that plea by myself and members of my caucus to try to find some common cause?

Well, the Conservatives, the government party, put \$1 billion on the table for some part of the unemployed work community. It is not everything that we wanted. It is not everything that obviously the Bloc and the Liberals wanted. However, it is certainly a lot more than the Liberals themselves got in their discussions with the Conservatives over this past summer when they met several times over a very important piece of work on behalf of families and workers and communities out there. They came away empty-handed.

What the Liberals decided, because they could not get any movement, any agreement from the Conservatives on this important issue, was that they wanted, instead, to have an election.

I say the time for an election has passed, at this particular juncture. The time for an election, in my view, was last January, when all of us in the opposition benches lost confidence in the government. What the government had tabled at the end of November, the beginning December in this House, was such an insult not only to us who come to work here, who understood the depth and the breadth of this recession that was coming at us, but certainly to the people of Canada. There was nothing in that package, absolutely nothing, that reflected that the government understood that we were in difficult economic times. Those difficult economic times were extraordinary in nature, akin to, some at that time said, the dynamics of the Great Depression. People were actually then beginning to lose their jobs and lose value in their pensions as well as all of the other ways that this recession has come to affect and hurt many working families and communities across the country.

We certainly led the charge at that time and offered to make the leader of the official opposition the prime minister, by way of the coalition. Those who took the time at that particular juncture to look at the package that we had put on the table, by way of a program for the new government, would have recognized that it included the changes that both the Liberals and the Bloc were expecting would happen by this, I guess, offering by the government to reform EI. It was all there.

• (1350)

We have not been shy to talk about the different efforts we have made by way of opposition day motions and by way of bills tabled in the House to reform EI to more adequately reflect the needs people have for support in their time of difficulty.

Here we are halfway across the river. People are really struggling. When I went back home in September of this year after the Liberals announced that they were going to bring the government down and cause an election, people said to me very clearly that that was not the time for an election. That was not the time to be spending \$300 million on an election which the polls showed—and yes polls change during elections—would simply result in our ending up back here with a similar makeup of government.

Statements by Members

When I go back to my riding even today people say to me “no election; this is not the time”. They say to me, “Tony, go back to Ottawa and see if you can find a way to work together to get something done”. People are asking because they are paying attention to what is going on here. They are asking me when Bill C-50 is going to pass, because they are at a place in their working life, and the recession is having an impact on them such that they will need the extra benefit that will come to them when this bill is passed.

One billion dollars is a lot of money. That fact may not have been reflected in the input that we heard this morning from either the Liberals or the Bloc, but I have to say that one billion dollars, however short it may fall of the total amount that is needed in terms of reform to EI, will help a lot of people at a time when they need it most.

As we keep the government going for the short term, we are also told that there will be legislation coming forward this week to reform EI for self-employed individuals. There are a number of people in my riding who are self-employed, who own small businesses, who are struggling just as those who work in big industry are, and they are concerned because they have no safety net. They are asking us to work with government to create a safety net that would give them some assistance when they need it, as they look ahead and see that things do not look so great for them either.

I am also hearing via the media that the finance minister is indicating a willingness to do something on pensions and is actually talking about the very good recommendations and ideas that the NDP are bringing forward and putting on the table with regard to pension reform. We look forward to having that discussion with the government to see if we can find some common ground so that we can give some sense of confidence to people who are either looking at retirement or living in retirement on pensions that in fact those pensions will be improved and protected.

A time for an election will come, perhaps next spring after a budget is tabled, but this is not the time. Today we need to pass Bill C-50 so that one billion dollars can be put out the door and made available to workers who have lost their jobs.

• (1355)

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's debate has shed considerable light on how parties work in the House with respect to certain bills.

I have come to understand that the Bloc members are really there to block legislation that helps Canadians including Quebecers. However, the Liberal situation is a little more difficult to understand. Earlier we heard the member for Mississauga South allude to the forestry sector as being seasonal, which goes a long way to explaining what the Liberals understand about the forestry sector.

However, I am very pleased that the members of the NDP particularly from northern Ontario, and we just heard from the member for Sault Ste. Marie, have given some thoughtful insight into how these technical changes to the bill might help workers across the sectors.

I was wondering if the member could expand on that a little more.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I did not speak to the technical pieces of this bill because they were done by others. However, I did speak to the need for us to move quickly to get this \$1 billion out the door because there are lots of workers in northern Ontario who will benefit greatly from this and are looking forward to seeing it happen.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I serve on the committee with the member for Sault Ste. Marie and his colleague from New Brunswick, who have worked very hard in committee on the bill and asked a lot of difficult questions of the witnesses as they have appeared.

The member commented about the interests of workers, the impact the bill would have on long-tenured workers throughout Canada and the benefits there would be for the people who have worked hard and paid into employment insurance for many years, as have many workers in the riding of Huron—Bruce.

I wonder if the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie could comment a little more about what he feels the impacts could be in his own community. What would the constituents of Sault Ste. Marie see as the possible benefits of the bill compared to the possible benefits of having an election?

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, certainly there are workers across all of northern Ontario who would benefit from this bill passing in the House.

In my own community, people ask me on a fairly regular basis when this bill is going to pass, because they are reaching a point where they will need it in order to put bread on the table, pay bills and buy themselves a little time until the economy recovers in such a way that they can find work. It would, indeed, help a lot of people in my own community and across northern Ontario, and for that I am thankful.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

VETERANS' WEEK

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have so much to be grateful for as a nation. We owe much of the peace, prosperity and freedom we so cherish to the bravery of the fine men and women who served with distinction in two world wars, the Boer war, the Korean war and many missions since.

These were no ordinary acts of courage. Canadian soldiers fought unspeakable evil in Europe as they liberated nations and built Canada's reputation on the world stage. The same is true for Canadian soldiers serving today in Afghanistan who defend the values that we as Canadians believe in.

As chair of the veterans affairs committee of the House and with Veterans' Week upon us, I want to encourage all Canadians to take time from their busy schedules to remember the ultimate sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Canadians and to honour our veterans.

Whether it be in ceremonies at cenotaphs, in churches, schools, homes or workplaces, taking time for remembrance and reflection each year is the very least we can do.

Statements by Members

At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

* * *

• (1400)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Sikhs across the country and around the globe are celebrating the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh religion, who teaches us that all humanity is one. However, let us also take note of another date 25 years ago, when pogroms targeting Sikh homes and businesses began in Delhi.

India has come a long way since then. Yet, for all of us who care about human rights around the world, let us be reminded that we must remain vigilant in regard to human rights violations. In a world more connected than ever before, we can stand together and ensure that such acts will remain a thing of the past.

* * *

[Translation]

31ST ADISQ GALA

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last night, the ADISQ honoured Quebec music artists at its 31st gala, brilliantly hosted by comedian Louis-José Houde.

There was something for every taste and every generation. The group Mes Aïeux won the Félix for group of the year and album of the year, in the contemporary folk category; Coeur de Pirate was named best new artist of the year; Pierre Lapointe's album, *Sentiments humains* won him the Félix for album of the year in the pop-rock category; Yann Perreau won the Félix for songwriter or composer of the year; the Félix for show of the year in the songwriter-composer-performer category was awarded to the group Karkwa; and what can I say about the moving Renée Martel, who won the Félix for show of the year in the performer category?

While Nicola Ciccone was deemed people's choice male performer of the year, the big winner of the night was no doubt the astonishing, engaging Ginette Reno, who took home three Félix awards for her song *Fais-moi la tendresse*.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to congratulate all the artists who make us proud, here and abroad, and who so creatively express the culture and values of the Quebec nation.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Internet is a wonderful tool that allows us to gather information from around the world to better inform our lives, but at times it is abused by mischief-makers or worse.

Today, there is an email travelling the web stating that immigrants receive more money from our government than pensioners receive in pension income. This is absolutely untrue. This racism-based email

has also appeared in other countries, in each case making the same claims for that country and showing the same text and dollar amounts used in Canada.

Immigrants to Canada are required to have sponsors who are financially responsible for them for 10 years. The federal government does not provide them any income support. Refugees, on the other hand, do receive modest income support for one year only, which is about the same amount as that received by those on social assistance.

I would refer the members to the media section of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website at www.cic.gc.ca for their official response to these abusive, xenophobic emails.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, responsible firearms owners in Canada are delighted that their time has finally come. Just two days from now, members of Parliament will have the golden opportunity to start dismantling the useless long gun registry by voting in favour of private member's Bill C-391.

The registry has not saved a single life beyond the political lives of a select few who pretend the registry is effective. It has escalated to costing 500 times the amount originally estimated, which makes the cost of this registry the most excessive program overrun in the history of Canada. It is a tangled mess of unnecessary red tape for hunters, farmers and sport shooters.

This week, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said:

The long-gun registry has been a wasteful fiasco from inception through execution.

We could not agree more. On November 4, we urge all MPs to gaze boldly at the big picture and support Bill C-391.

* * *

• (1405)

2010 WINTER OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the honour of accompanying the Minister of State for Sport and the Canadian delegation to Greece to bring the Olympic flame for the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games to Vancouver.

I must say that one of my proudest moments as a member of Parliament was joining the Canadian delegation and returning to my place of birth, Greece, for such a historic moment: to bring the Olympic flame to Vancouver and our country for the 21st Winter Olympiad.

While in Greece, I had the honour of taking part in the official handover ceremony, in which representatives of VANOC accepted the flame during a traditional ceremony at the Panathenian Stadium in Athens, Greece.

This signals not only the countdown to the games but also the start of the 2010 Olympic torch relay, which offers the unforgettable opportunity to thousands of Canadian torchbearers to live the flame's journey right across our country.

I know that the 21st Winter Olympiad will be the best Olympiad ever. On behalf of all Canadians, I congratulate the organizing committee and our athletes. I wish them all good luck et bonne chance.

* * *

2010 WINTER OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand in the House and celebrate the 100 day countdown to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver. The games will showcase some of the best athletes Canada has to offer.

Next year, we will share in their highs and their lows, but we know that the years of training to get there are just as important. Our government is proud to support amateur sport in Canada, not just at the Olympics but during the crucial developmental years.

Our athletes also find support in programs like Team Visa that provide long-term support to aspiring Canadian Olympians and Paralympians. This commitment is crucial to develop and prepare our athletes for success. They provide support and mentorship with former Olympic competitors in, between and during the games to prepare athletes for one of the greatest challenges of their lives.

With glowing hearts, we salute our athletes and those who help them be faster, higher and stronger.

* * *

[Translation]

PRINCE CHARLES' VISIT TO CANADA

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we live in a parliamentary monarchy. Our head of state is not the Prime Minister, but rather the Queen of England.

Accordingly, a representative of the British monarchy, Prince Charles, will be visiting Canada from November 2 to 12, at the expense of Canadian taxpayers, of course.

We in the Bloc Québécois feel this is an archaic political system that forces us to swear allegiance to the Queen, instead of to the people, and that means that all the legislation we vote on here must be approved by the Queen's representative in Canada, the Governor General.

We think this form of political organization is undemocratic and politically outdated. Like 86% of Quebecers, the Bloc Québécois refuses to support this regime, which is why we will not take part in the activities surrounding Prince Charles' visit to Canada.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's economic action plan proves to what extent we continue to take initiative and listen to the public's concerns. Quebecers and Canadians are calling for action and we are taking action, nothing less.

During these difficult times, the introduction of Bill C-50 on employment insurance is a response to the concerns of workers who

Statements by Members

fear for their jobs. Our government has developed this temporary measure as well as other assistance measures to improve the daily lives of our workers and their families.

In opposing this bill, the Bloc Québécois and Liberal members do not realize how many workers who have had the same job or worked in the same industry their entire lives could end up having to go back to square one.

Our government is presenting concrete solutions and defending the interests of Canadian workers and their families.

* * *

[English]

MEDIA LITERACY WEEK

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is Media Literacy Week.

Digitalization, with its profuse social networking, is now the most used, watched and participatory medium in history. Twenty-first century media in all of its forms is a most powerful influencer, so educating the public to understand the nature, techniques and impacts of media messaging is imperative.

Media messaging is not pure. It is influenced by commercial interests, competition for viewership and ideology. Images and comments vie for attention daily and manipulating the image and the message is tempting. Time limitations that demand simplistic sound bites for complex messages can lead to stereotyping.

The power of the media is evidenced by many young women who measure themselves by an anorexic and unreal media image of beauty, and social networking among youth can sometimes be used to destroy reputations in perpetuity.

The media is an important cultural and informative tool. Media literacy can help us probe, analyze and develop the critical thinking skills necessary to interpret and appropriately value media's social, cultural and political implications.

* * *

●(1410)

ROYAL VISIT

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, will arrive in St. John's for a 12-community, 4-province tour of Canada.

Their Royal Highnesses will make stops in communities as small as Brigus in Newfoundland and Labrador and as large as Toronto and Vancouver.

The royal couple will tour Hamilton's historic Dundurn Castle, view the Olympic and Paralympic village in Vancouver, visit Biodôme in Montreal and participate in the national Remembrance Day ceremony here in Ottawa.

This royal visit will allow Canadians, particularly young people, to learn more about our constitutional monarchy, one of the pillars upon which our country is founded.

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The royal visit is an opportunity for Canadians to learn more about their tradition, history and institutions.

This tour is a celebration of Canadian innovation, national pride and of our presence on the world stage. By sharing our stories, history and traditions, Canadian identity is strengthened.

I hope all members will join me in welcoming their Royal Highnesses to Canada on behalf of all Canadians.

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GOVERNOR GENERAL'S LITERARY AWARDS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Victoria's 2009 nominees for the Governor General's Literary Awards: short story writer, Deborah Willis; children's author, Robin Stevenson; illustrator, Rachel Berman; and playwright, Joan MacLeod.

Victoria also has its own awards for adult and children's literature, won deservedly this year by Patrick Lane and Penny Draper.

My riding is home to an extraordinary community of writers from every genre, including Michael Prince, whose *Absent Citizens* is a superb account of disability politics and policy in Canada; and Katherine Gibson, biographer of artist Ted Harrison.

I am deeply grateful for these artists' contribution to Victoria and Canada's cultural fabric but I am concerned that the cost of living threatens the livelihood of many. I ask the government to make the arts an integral part of Canada's social and economic policy.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is focused on what matters: helping Canadians and their families weather the global economic storm.

We have taken responsive and responsible action to help unemployed Canadians through unprecedented investments in skills training, by introducing legislation to provide extra support to long-tenured workers who have worked hard and paid premiums for years, and by protecting over 165,000 Canadians' jobs through work sharing.

Our Conservative government remains committed to helping Canadian parents balance work and responsibilities.

I am proud that we will be keeping our commitment to provide self-employed Canadians access to benefits so they no longer need to choose between their family and their business.

The Liberal leader wants an unnecessary election that would harm our economic recovery. We will not let that happen.

When it comes to following through on commitments and standing up for workers and their families, Canadians know there is only one party in this House they can trust and that is our Conservative government.

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, municipal elections were held in Quebec yesterday. In fact, for the second time in Quebec, 1,104 municipalities and cities simultaneously held elections in order to fill some 8,000 councillor, RCM reeve and mayor positions.

These elections were hotly contested in some municipalities and cities. Some opted for continuity, others opted for change. We should note that many women were elected and they form a majority on some municipal councils.

The Bloc Québécois would like to congratulate these men and women who have the courage of their convictions and decided to run for office. We would also like to congratulate the winners who, starting today, will be tackling the task of governing their municipality or city.

We wish each and every one a collaborative and most successful term of office.

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ADISQ GALA

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the most important event of the year in the Quebec music industry was held yesterday in Montreal. Of course, I am talking about the 31st ADISQ Gala, where the Felix awards were handed out.

No thanks to the Conservatives, Quebec's music industry continues to impress, as the Liberal Party leader, who mingled with the crowd at the St. Denis theatre yesterday evening, can confirm.

Ginette Reno—known country-wide for her powerful voice—was honoured for her tremendous talent and went home with several statuettes.

The roots revival group Mes Aïeux was also amply rewarded for its folk tunes that take us all back to the bygone days of our shared history.

The next generation is also very promising. Performances by Coeur de pirate, Yann Perreau and Pierre Lapointe said it all.

Long live our music.

* * *

● (1415)

[*English*]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 4, my private member's bill, Bill C-391, which would end the long gun registry, will be voted on here in the House of Commons.

I believe Canadians should know the facts regarding the bill, as opposed to half-truths and myths. Bill C-391 would only end the long gun registry, nothing more and nothing less. Defenders of the long gun registry want Canadians to think my bill would end licensing requirements. This is completely false and misleading.

Under Bill C-391, any individual who wishes to own a firearm would still require a complete safety course and background check, which would include any history of violence, and the police would have immediate access to who has a licence and where they live.

I do want to thank my colleagues from across the floor who have publicly supported ending the registry. They are listening to their constituents.

On Wednesday, my hope is that we will all listen to the voice of Canadians, pass Bill C-391 and finally bring an end to the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the federal government has two clear responsibilities. The first is to ensure a steady and reliable supply of vaccines for H1N1. The second is to provide leadership and information on a coherent pandemic response.

I would like to ask the government a very simple question: How could it have failed so miserably to execute these two critical responsibilities?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our two primary concerns have been to ensure that we have a safe vaccine and that we have an effective vaccine. We are pleased to say that six million doses of H1N1 vaccine have been delivered to our partners in the provinces and territories. We will see even more delivered this week. The vaccine is being distributed as quickly as possible.

I am very pleased to report that on a per capita basis, Canada has more H1N1 vaccine than any country in the world. We will continue to work with our partners.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the same minister did not even say on Friday that there had been significant reductions in the supplies of vaccines across the country. He did not report that to the House.

In August, the health minister said that no matter what happened this fall, they were well prepared.

If they are well prepared, why is there clearly not a sufficient supply of vaccines, no coherent information and absolutely no clear leadership on this important issue for Canadians?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen significant

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leadership demonstrated by the Minister of Health. We have seen significant leadership demonstrated by Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Butler-Jones. We are working constructively with the provinces and territories and with public health nurses.

I am pleased to say that more than six million doses are already available to the provinces and territories. Let me confirm that there will be sufficient H1N1 vaccine available in Canada for everyone who wants to be immunized. This government will not leave a single Canadian behind.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister had an opportunity to tell the House on Friday because he must have been aware that there were significant reduction in supplies to the provinces. He chose not to share that information with the House of Commons on Friday when he was fully aware of it. Those are the facts.

On the weekend, the Minister of Health was blaming the provinces. She was blaming the drug company. She was taking no responsibility herself for what took place. Why will the government not take responsibility for the files and the issues that are clearly right in front of it? Why will it not take that responsibility?

● (1420)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me indicate to the member opposite that I do not accept the premise of his question. We have seen the Minister of Health together with the Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Butler-Jones have an unprecedented amount of cooperation and partnership with the provinces and territories and with public health officials in every corner of the country.

We are pleased to report a number of things. One is that six million doses are now available. More will come this week. There will be a dose for every single Canadian who wants one. We are pleased to say that there are more vaccines available in Canada on a per capita basis than in any other country in the world. That is because of the partnerships with the provinces and the territories and the hard work of the minister and the Chief Public Health Officer.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, weeks ago when I spoke with public health officials across the country, they said they needed clear information on when the vaccine was coming and how much would come each week. They never received that information which they needed to plan. Now there are huge lineups at vaccination clinics. Clinics are short of vaccine. People are being turned away and clinics are being cancelled. Private for-profit clinics are getting the vaccine; thousands of needy Canadians are not.

When is the minister going to take some responsibility for these failures?

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Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the last eight months we have been very transparent in the rollout of this vaccine. We have communicated with provinces and territories, including the critics. Six million doses were produced ahead of schedule. As soon as they were available and authorized, they were transferred to the provinces and territories for their rollout. We will see thousands more this week and one million more next week. We will continue to transfer them to the provinces and territories. They will be rolling out their vaccine programs by jurisdiction.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they needed the security of the date they would get the vaccine and how much each week. They have not gotten that.

These delays and the absence of vaccines could have been prevented. What Canadians need now is for the government to take responsibility. Rather than putting the health of Canadians first, the Conservatives chose to make partisan ads their \$100 million priority for the summer.

The government is blaming the provinces and blaming the drug companies. Canadians want reliable leadership. Why do they not get it from the minister?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Chief Public Health Officer and I have stated time and time again that we wanted to produce a safe and effective vaccine for Canadians. That was our number one priority, that it was safe and effective.

As soon as the authorization was issued, October 26, the provinces and territories were able to start the process of rolling out the vaccine. We had pre-positioned them in the provinces and territories so that they could respond quickly.

We are two weeks ahead of schedule. I will continue to work with the provinces and territories in the rollout of the vaccine.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Pembina Institute report is clear: a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions would have little impact on the economy, leaving polluters such as the oil companies in Alberta to pay for pollution. To enable companies to meet such targets, the government must introduce a carbon exchange that the paper companies in Quebec could join. But the government is refusing to go ahead with the Pembina Institute's proposal, claiming that it is divisive.

How can the Conservatives say that implementing the Kyoto protocol targets is divisive? Is it because it is not as good for Alberta's economy and good for Quebec's?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. Our plan targets greenhouse gas emitters without making economic growth impossible. Quebec's economy also depends on the American market, and with its excessive targets, the Bloc is threatening the growth of a number of SMEs in Quebec. If I understand correctly, the Bloc wants to put Quebec businesses at

a disadvantage compared to their American competitors. That is not what our government wants to do.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising that the minister for big oil is defending the oil companies. What we cannot understand, though, is why ministers from Quebec are defending Alberta's interests instead of Quebec's.

The National Assembly of Quebec unanimously called on the federal government to meet the Kyoto protocol targets. Is there a single minister from Quebec who can explain why he or she is defending Alberta instead of Quebec?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear about the Kyoto protocol and Copenhagen. The objective of the negotiations in Copenhagen is to create a framework to replace the Kyoto protocol. The 192 countries in attendance will all develop national plans once the international framework is in place. Canada has negotiators who can ensure that we are respected at the negotiating table and that this framework reflects our reality. We will not sign any agreement that would go against Canada's interests. That was the Liberal approach, but it is not the approach of the Conservative government.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Rivière-du-Loup is saying that the landfill and methane recapture site in his RCM will lose over \$1 million a year. In the absence of any Canadian regulatory framework with absolute reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions and 1990 as the reference year, and the creation of a carbon exchange similar to Europe's, the Rivière-du-Loup plant will not be able to sell its emissions credits.

Are the Conservative members from Quebec not bothered by the fact that they are expected to worry more about Fort McMurray's future than that of Rivière-du-Loup, which will lose over \$1 million a year?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc and the NDP advocate a North American carbon exchange system, but with European targets. That is absurd.

I would point out that several Liberal members also support this absurd idea. It is an indefensible, irresponsible policy that we simply cannot support.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am thinking specifically of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who came to Rivière-du-Loup to strut about and who refused to defend the biomethanation project. Instead he chose to spew out the usual platitudes.

Is he not bothered by the fact that his government's failure to act on the environment is undermining Rivière-du-Loup's economic development?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. Our government will ensure that our policies protect the environment without compromising our economic recovery. Our economic reality means that our environmental policies must fit with those of our American neighbour. We currently have targets similar to those of the United States. This continental cooperation demonstrates our commitment to the environment.

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the cancellation of Afghanistan's election is very worrisome. Indeed, 133 Canadian soldiers have died in Afghanistan in the name of establishing democracy there.

The failure of the electoral process in Afghanistan leads many Canadians to wonder what is going on there.

In light of the cancelled election, can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us whether he still supports the electoral process in Afghanistan and what we are going to do?

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always been supportive of the independent commission on complaints and also the electoral commission in Afghanistan. We continue to be.

This is a project of Afghanistan as a people. We want to see them move ahead successfully to be able to have a democratic process for selecting their leaders. The decision made by Mr. Abdullah is certainly his decision. We will continue to support the government of Afghanistan and also the people of Afghanistan as they move toward a democratic process, the second time in modern history that they have had an election process.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): We cannot really describe it as an election process as it stands today, Mr. Speaker.

The Prime Minister used to say that we would end our military mission in Afghanistan in 2011. We have always found that a little hard to believe. We know that the Conservatives want to keep our troops in Afghanistan after 2011, apparently to train the Afghan national army, but former chief of defence staff General Rick Hillier says, "If you try to help train and develop the Afghan army or police in southern Afghanistan, you are going to be in combat".

Let me ask our Minister of National Defence, does he disagree with General Hillier on this? Does he actually think our soldiers can be there without fighting?

•(1430)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the leader of the New Democratic Party has read General Hillier's book word for word.

What I will reiterate in the House, as I have many times, is that we will respect the motion that was passed here. We will respect the recommendations that were made implicit in that motion that came from an independent committee that studied the situation in Afghanistan. The combat mission for Canada will end in the year 2011.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another worrisome development in Afghanistan is that innocent Afghans have been labelled Taliban militants and sent to jail because of mistakes by Canadian translators. An Afghan Canadian witnessed at least two such instances. Alarms were raised and memos were written but were ignored. Afghan community leaders say that

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sketchy and botched translations are the biggest irritants in dealing with Canadians.

Could the Minister of National Defence tell us how many Afghans were wrongly imprisoned because of Canadian translation mistakes and what he is doing to fix that problem?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly this is a very complicated issue involving counter-insurgency. It requires the use of local translators. DND and other departments use cultural advisers as well as Afghan translators in this process. We appreciate their help in terms of addressing the needs and the concerns of the culture and the people as we continue to rebuild that country.

As a result of these allegations that have come forward, I have instructed the Canadian Forces department, the Department of National Defence, to look into these particular allegations and to get to the bottom of the matter.

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HEALTH

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the past week Canadians from coast to coast to coast have faced long lines and confusion as they wait to receive their flu shots. In my province, problems with the federal government's vaccine supply chain have forced authorities to change their priority list three times, and that is just since Friday afternoon. Some provinces have stopped vaccinations altogether. Front line public health workers are doing the best they can under these trying circumstances, but the federal government has made a bad situation worse.

Why has the Conservative government failed Canadians so miserably?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recognizing that it is impossible to vaccinate 33 million Canadians in eight days, provinces and territories over the summer months established sequencing guidelines to be used by first line health care workers in the provinces and territories that deliver health care.

The first rollout of the vaccine is six million doses that we have distributed so far. It is intended to be focused on the most vulnerable, based on the guidelines that were established with the provinces, the territories and the chief medical officers of every jurisdiction.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, provincial and regional health authorities have been blind-sided by a lack of flu vaccine and the public has been left confused and frightened.

The federal government had seven full months to do two primary things: provide the vaccine and send a clear and consistent message to Canadians on H1N1, the plan and the rollout.

How is it that the federal government could get it so wrong on both counts?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the advice of the Chief Public Health Officer of the country and the chief medical officers was for us to complete the regular production of the regular flu vaccine. It was important to complete the regular flu vaccine because every year, on average, 4,000 Canadians die of the regular flu.

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As soon as that production was completed, we started the production for the H1N1 vaccine. In fact, we were two weeks early and distributed six million vaccines in the last three weeks to the provinces. We will continue to provide thousands more this week and millions more the following week.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the number of contradictory messages keeps increasing. Canadians no longer know who to believe. Everyone is wondering when it will be their turn to receive the H1N1 vaccine. The Conservatives had two responsibilities when it comes to H1N1: first, to ensure there would be enough vaccine for all Canadians, and second, to run a public awareness campaign.

They failed on both counts. Why?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, this is the largest immunization campaign in the history of Canada. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories in the rollout of the vaccine.

Provinces and territories also developed a sequencing guideline, recognizing the fact that 33 million Canadians could not be vaccinated in eight days. We had to be realistic and focused our efforts on the most vulnerable people. This was the guideline that was established and adopted by the Chief Public Health Officer of the country. The six million vaccines that have been produced to date are to be targeted to that vulnerable group.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives would at least show some leadership on H1N1, there would not be such widespread confusion. If they had been clear from the start and assumed their responsibilities, we would not be in such a mess.

How could the Conservatives allow the opportunity to be vaccinated in a timely manner to depend on where people live or whether they go to a private clinic?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2006 a plan was adopted by the provinces and territories that did not exist under that previous government.

The provinces and territories are doing a great job in getting the vaccine out to their populations. I will continue to work with the provinces and territories in the rollout of the vaccine. Six million vaccines have been produced to date. Thousands more will be distributed this week and millions more will be available. Every Canadian who wants the vaccine will be able to receive the vaccine by Christmas.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, efforts made by Quebec and the provinces to vaccinate the public against H1N1 are being thwarted by the slow delivery of vaccine, which was prompted by a federal directive. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer said that production of non-adjuvanted vaccines will

reduce the production and delivery of regular vaccines for a few weeks.

How can the government explain that because of its lack of preparation, some vaccination clinics might have to close as early as next week?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Chief Public Health Officer of the country recommended that we produce unadjuvanted and adjuvanted vaccines, the unadjuvanted vaccine for pregnant woman. It was important to produce that vaccine because pregnant women were identified as a high-risk group. It was important for us to focus on that vulnerable population in the country and produce the unadjuvanted vaccine.

Before then, we distributed six million vaccines to provinces and territories. Thousands more will be sent out this week and millions more will be distributed across the country. Every Canadian will be able to receive a vaccine by December.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this week, Quebec will receive just 100,000 adjuvanted doses compared to the 400,000 it was receiving weekly for the past three weeks. Canada's Chief Public Health Officer said he did not realize there would be a shortage until last Thursday. What foresight.

How can we trust this government when it did not see this shortage coming?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, GSK had overstated its production abilities for the last week. As soon as I became aware of the situation, I communicated to the provincial health ministers so they were aware of what was coming before them.

Thousands will be distributed this week. Millions more will be produced next week. By Christmas, every Canadian will be able to receive the vaccine.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Fédération québécoise des municipalités and the Union des municipalités du Québec deplore the fact that they are still waiting for the infrastructure money. By insisting on entering into agreements for each individual project in each program, the federal government seems more concerned with its own visibility than the need to create jobs and rehabilitate public infrastructure.

Why is the federal government refusing to transfer a block of funds to Quebec for infrastructure so that it can get to work quickly?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working very well with the Government of Quebec and the municipalities in each region of Quebec. It is absolutely vital to have a good working relationship with the province. Our government respects provincial jurisdictions. It will continue to work well with Quebec and to announce and pay for good infrastructure projects in the province.

• (1440)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the representatives of Quebec's various municipal unions are saying.

Some fear that Quebec will not obtain its share and that a number of projects will not be funded if the federal government sticks to the deadline of March 30, 2011, for infrastructure project funding.

Given that the federal government is in part responsible for the delays, and to avoid abuse, will the government be flexible so that all funds slated for Quebec are truly invested in the Quebec economy?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our economic action plan is a national plan. It is mandatory, not just essential, that it create employment in the province of Quebec. That is the position of our government and of our team. We work well with the Government of Quebec and with the municipalities.

Last month, because of the municipal elections, we were unable to announce projects. However, the elections are over and we will continue to work hard with the municipal leaders and our colleagues in the Government of Quebec.

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[English]

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been nine months since the Minister of Finance tabled his budget. In the past nine months the minister has failed to deliver on his promise to help consumer and small business struggling under the weight of outrageous credit and debit fees.

Here we are some nine months later and there is still no action by the minister, except of course a rumoured quick fix voluntary code of conduct, a move that comes nowhere near addressing the damages to the credit and debit payments market.

Where is his plan, or does he even have one?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the same concern we share about ensuring that financial instruments in our country are fair not only to consumers but to industry and small businesses as well.

In fact, the best way to ensure fair pricing of financial services is to encourage disclosure, competition and choice. We have been working through both the Senate committee and a joint finance and industry committee in the House to ensure that we listen to Canadians and hear what they have to suggest to us for improvements.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that Visa and MasterCard constitute 93% of the debit and credit market in the country. Some competition.

[Translation]

That is not enough. We proposed a number of reasonable solutions to the problem, but the Conservatives have nothing to offer but hollow words. Even their answers are meaningless.

Hundreds of small and medium-sized businesses are hoping for a little help from the government. All they want is a fair and transparent payments market.

Why are the Conservatives turning their backs on consumers and SMEs?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of last week when all of a sudden the opposition Liberals decided that there actually were concerns among Canadians about their pensions. Now in one day they have a meeting. Now today they have a press conference. They are all concerned about Canadians and credit card issues.

We have been listening to Canadians. We have been consulting with Canadians. In fact, the CFIB is suggesting that a code of conduct would be an excellent way to deal with this.

We will be rolling out changes in the very near future. Stay tuned.

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CROWN CORPORATIONS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Robert Abdallah's name has joined those of Senator Housakos, Dimitri Soudas and Tony Accurso on the list of people at the heart of the scandal that has been rocking Montreal, and indeed, all of Quebec.

The mayor of Montreal said that senior public servant André Delisle had raised serious doubts about Mr. Abdallah. Mr. Delisle tendered his resignation as soon as Mr. Abdallah was hired.

What qualities did the Prime Minister see in Mr. Abdallah to try to impose him on the Port of Montreal?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another day, another drive-by smear by our friends in the Liberal Party.

What Canadians want to see is a government that would be focused on the health of Canadians, that would be focused on jobs, economic growth and creating opportunities for Canadians and providing support for the unemployed.

If the member opposite has any facts whatsoever he would like to put on the table, I would encourage him to do so here and then have the courage of his convictions to repeat them outside this place.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before his Senate appointment, Leo Housakos was already benefiting from his privileged relationship with the Prime Minister. On December 7, 2007, he was appointed to VIA Rail's board of directors. Now, VIA Rail is preparing to award a major equipment refurbishing contract to an American company. This will cost some 500 Canadians their jobs.

How did Senator Housakos benefit from these job losses?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am inclined not to dignify that type of question with a response, but I will say that VIA Rail operates at an arm's-length relation from the government. It recently awarded a contract after an open and transparent process with several bidders.

As I have said in this place, and as others have said in this place, the government, at least at the elected level, does not get involved with who gets contracts with crown corporations.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Thursday the Ontario legislature will be debating a private member's bill that would see Ontario join other provinces in holding Senate nominee elections.

Alberta has also introduced legislation to extend its process and a bill is currently being considered by the Saskatchewan legislature.

Could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform tell us if the Government of Canada welcomes this idea?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is welcoming these developments in the provinces. We support the provinces creating processes that allow for the members, the citizens of each province, to select nominees directly.

As the Prime Minister has done in the past, he has respected these results and is willing to continue respecting the results of the will of the Canadian people.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I hear heckling from the other side. I wish they would support Senate reform and enter into the 21st century.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have legitimate concerns about how to protect themselves and their children from the H1N1 virus. They are worried, concerned and afraid and they are especially worried about the government, whose plan for pandemic planning went off the rails this past week. Canadians want some answers. They are particularly stunned to watch the rich sail by to get shots at private clinics that they cannot afford.

My first question is, why is the minister allowing our precious supply of H1N1 vaccine—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, six million vaccines have been delivered to provinces and territories. Thousands more and a million more will be sent out to provinces and territories.

Canada currently has more H1N1 vaccine per capita compared to other countries and there will be sufficient H1N1 vaccine for every Canadian by December. This is one way Canadians can protect themselves from H1N1.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no wonder the minister will not answer the questions directly, the government that is responsible for allowing medicare to be dismantled and privatization to be brought into our system.

We would expect the minister to give some real answers to Canadians who are living in fear and worrying about how they can get access to the H1N1 vaccine.

Why should pregnant women have to stand in line for hours, while the rich get access to a private clinic in Toronto? That is the question. I want to know, what is the minister's plan for ensuring a safe, secure supply of vaccine for everyone?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should know by now that the provinces and territories deliver health care.

This government has produced six million vaccines and has distributed those to the provinces and territories. Each province and territory will then roll out its vaccine campaign based on its infrastructure systems by jurisdiction.

Currently, we have more H1N1 vaccines in Canada on a per capita basis than any other country. There will be sufficient H1N1 vaccines for every Canadian who wants it or needs it by Christmas.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hasty decision made by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to require visas for Mexicans in the middle of tourist season damaged the Quebec industry. According to Tourisme Québec, from August 2008 to 2009, the number of Mexican tourists dropped by 63%.

Will the minister admit that his hasty, unprofessional decision has significantly harmed Canada-Mexico relations?

Oral Questions

•(1450)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we can now see how irresponsible the Bloc Québécois is when it comes to government responsibilities. The Government of Quebec asked me to take action and to reduce the number of false asylum seekers who move to Quebec and who were costing millions of dollars. We acted responsibly with Mexico, the country that has generated the highest number of asylum seekers in Canadian history.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if asylum seekers are causing so many problems, it is because there is no consistency in the commission's decisions. Some commission members allow nearly all requests, and others allow none. It is like a commission lottery. The only way to put an end to this anarchy is to implement the refugee appeal division, which would ensure that decisions are consistent, as proposed by the Bloc Québécois.

When will the minister finally implement the refugee appeal division, as already provided for in the act?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is sad that we are being subjected to these unfounded criticisms. According to the UN, Canada has the most respected refugee system in the world, which the Bloc describes as anarchy. Canada receives more than 1,000 asylum seekers from Mexico every month, who cost Canadian taxpayers \$30 million per month, and most of them settle in Quebec. According to the IRB, 90% of these were false asylum seekers. We took action based on a request from the government—

The Speaker: The hon. member for York Centre.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week we heard of a sidewalk in Parry Sound. Its funding comes out of support for the three-day G8 meeting next July in Huntsville, 84 kilometres away.

The unemployment rate in the region, which includes Parry Sound, is less than half of what it is in Churchill, Manitoba, an NDP riding, and less than 50% of what it is in rural Newfoundland, all Liberal ridings. All these NDP and Liberal ridings are receiving much less in stimulus support.

I ask the industry minister, why?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased to be supportive of the G8. It is an exciting opportunity for Canada to show off to the world one of the most beautiful places on earth. The thousands of people who will attend the G8 summit will indeed stay within 100 to 150 kilometres of the site. We are going to make one of the most beautiful parts of Canada just a little bit more beautiful.

However, some of the people in Muskoka and Georgian Bay wonder why the member for York Centre's riding is getting \$333 million for a subway, when they get such a small portion of that. Maybe he could stand in his place and explain why his riding is getting more infrastructure money than any riding in the country.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this sidewalk runs along Seguin Street in downtown Parry Sound. While it would be nice, for example, to imagine President Sarkozy and his entourage making the 168 kilometre round trip during the G8 to pop in at Lill's Place for breakfast or to pick up a bouquet at Obdam's Flowers, I doubt it.

This government, even in tough times, when Canadians need their government most, again just cannot help itself. Why does it insist on turning every public need, first and foremost, into a political scheme?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the most exciting things about the G8 that will support our tourism industry for many years is the thousands of people in the media from every corner of the planet who will be converging on this region. We hope that they will report on a great part of this world and a great part of Canada, and that will have tourism benefits for decades to come.

The member opposite talks of a scheme. If there is a scheme, it must involve Allan Rock. The scheme must involve Lloyd Axworthy. The scheme must involve Dalton McGuinty. The scheme must involve people of every political stripe who have put politics aside and are working constructively with this government on our infrastructure programs.

The fact that his own riding is getting more money than anyone else's shows how fair we are.

* * *

•(1455)

PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are undeniably in the midst of a pension crisis. We only have to look as far as our own steps to the Nortel workers who demanded action from a government that has left them vulnerable and empty-handed.

The minister responsible keeps insisting that he can do nothing because it is a provincial matter. He is wrong. The Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act is under federal jurisdiction and could provide recourse.

When will the minister stop pretending his hands are tied and do his job to protect the pensions of Canadians?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the pensioners at Nortel face a very difficult situation because of many factors, the circumstances around Nortel before the global slowdown, and of course the global slowdown affecting the markets.

Oral Questions

What we have seen, though, is that this government has recently announced important pension reforms resulting from consultations recently released that will help protect pensioners by requiring companies to fully fund pension benefits on plan termination, make pensions more stable, give pensioners more negotiation powers, and modernize investment rules of pensions.

We are listening to pensioners.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the 12 months ending August 2009, there were more than 5,700 business bankruptcies in Canada.

Currently, these companies can use federal bankruptcy laws to evade their debt to pensioners and instead pay off corporate creditors whose investments are likely insured anyway. Today, the average corporate pension plan is 20% short of the assets needed for its pension obligations.

There is a crisis. The government has the tools to fix it. We have shown it how. Why does it not take action?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is well known to all members of this House that our Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance spent the summer travelling across the country listening to pensioners and various stakeholders talk about the state of Canadian pensions.

I will point out that the NDP member for Sackville—Eastern Shore even said that he would give the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance credit because he had gone across the country to talk about this issue.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians, helping those hardest hit by the global recession get back to work and helping Canadian families through the global economic storm.

The measures we have introduced are having significant impacts on the lives of Canadians. Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development please update the House on the important actions our Conservative government has taken to help Canadians through the economic global recession?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government continues to take action to help Canadians and their families weather the global economic storm. Unprecedented investments in skills training, expanding EI, and protecting jobs through work-sharing are just a few examples. We also remain dedicated to our commitment to provide maternity and parental benefits to self-employed Canadians.

The Liberal leader wants to force an unnecessary opportunistic election that will harm our economic recovery. We will not let that happen. Instead, we will stay the course on our economic action plan, and continue to stand up for Canadians and their families.

HEALTH

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are not enough H1N1 vaccines available to complete B.C.'s inoculations even though B.C. will welcome half a million Olympic visitors in just 100 days. Vancouver's health authority has a strong H1N1 preparedness plan, but not a single federal dollar to help it deliver it.

Will the government provide resources to ensure that B.C.'s preparation measures are delivered in time, or can Canadians just expect more platitudes from the minister as the Olympic games approach?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, six million vaccines have been distributed across the country. We will continue to deliver vaccines to the provinces and territories. Thirty-three million Canadians will be able to receive the vaccine by Christmas.

We will continue to work with the provinces and territories as we respond to this pandemic and assist them in their rollouts.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the report prepared by the Pembina Institute and the David Suzuki Foundation clearly shows that Canada's greenhouse gas reduction targets can be met without building any new nuclear energy plants.

How can the Minister of Natural Resources explain her government's enthusiasm for nuclear energy and justify the billions of dollars spent on it, not to mention its decision to subsidize the development of the oil sands, an extremely energy-hungry industry?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to the Canadian nuclear industry, of which we are very proud here in this country. The 30,000 men and women in southern Ontario and other areas of Canada have worked diligently the past 40 some years to put Canada at the forefront of the world in nuclear energy and nuclear research.

We are very proud of it and that is exactly why we continue to support this industry by looking at ways to modernize and restructure AECL to take advantage of the coming nuclear renaissance.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the escape of 40,000 Atlantic salmon off the B.C. coast will damage the already decimated Pacific salmon stocks, a fact the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has failed to grasp. Last week, the minister gave permission to a B.C. fish farm to recapture these fugitive fish. It seems a little like closing the barn door after the horse has left.

DFO already cannot find nine million Fraser sockeye that disappeared earlier this year. How does it expect to find 40,000 escaped salmon? Will the minister come out of hiding and deal with B.C.'s collapsing salmon fishery?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that the sustainability of our fish and seafood sector, including wild fish and farmed fish, is very important to this government.

We did deal with the escape of the farmed fish. This is under the jurisdiction of the province of British Columbia, but we are working with the province. We will be bringing forward a plan to deal with the low returns of sockeye salmon in the Fraser River.

* * *

POLAR BEARS

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, October 30, the Minister of the Environment travelled to Greenland to sign an agreement between the governments of Canada, Nunavut and Greenland to ensure the protection of shared polar bear populations.

Could the minister please share with the House the importance of this agreement?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has made unprecedented efforts to conserve and manage polar bear populations in Canada. The agreement with Greenland represents a critical step forward in our commitment to protect one of Canada's true natural and national symbols.

I am sure that all members of the House would agree that the strength and rugged beauty of the polar bear stands as a reminder that Canada is a true Nordic nation. We are responsible, as primary stewards, for the health of polar bear populations.

The agreement will ensure conservation and sustainable management practices in both the Baffin Bay population and the Kane Basin population, undertaken by Nunavut, Greenland and Canada.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: To mark 100 days in the countdown to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of past and present Olympians and a Paralympian: Nicole Forrester, high jump; Danielle Goyette, hockey sur glace; Benoit Huot, natation; Bruny Surin, athlétisme; Deidre Dionne, freestyle aerialist.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 2008-09 annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator as required under section 192 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

I thank the Correctional Investigator for his good work, particularly on mental health issues.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology concerning the study of Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

[English]

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities relating to Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (removal of waiting period).

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 22nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 22nd report later this day.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE ACT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-472, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act (Civilian Investigation Service).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present the RCMP civilian oversight act, seconded by my colleague from Hamilton Centre, a former solicitor general in Ontario.

Routine Proceedings

It was four years ago that Ian Bush was arrested in the parking lot of a hockey arena in Houston, B.C. and a short time later was found dead in the local detachment of the RCMP.

In order for the RCMP to do the difficult and dangerous job we ask it to do, it needs the public's confidence and trust. To restore that trust, we must end the tradition of police investigating themselves.

Ian's mom, Linda, and sisters, Andrea and Renee, have joined me here on Parliament Hill to watch the presentation of this bill. It has been named in memory of their fallen family member.

Of all the legislation I have worked on over the years, I have never seen the courage and conviction for change that I have seen in Linda Bush and her ability to push through all obstacles to see true reform in honour and memory of her son.

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

* * *

PROTECTION OF INSIGNIA OF MILITARY ORDERS, DECORATIONS AND MEDALS ACT

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-473, An Act to protect insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance for future generations.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to proudly introduce my private member's bill, an act to protect insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance for future generations.

This enactment would place restrictions on the transfer of insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance to persons who are not residents of Canada. The bill would still provide fair market value to anyone who wishes to sell an insignia awarded under the authority of Her Majesty in Right of Canada but they must provide first right of refusal to the Government of Canada by submitting an offer to the Canadian War Museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization or the Department of Canadian Heritage.

My inspiration for the bill comes from the veterans and future veterans of my riding who serve or have served our country. The bill would ensure the accolades from their acts of bravery would remain on Canadian soil and we would continue to honour them as part of our Canadian heritage.

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

* * *

• (1510)

[Translation]

SEEDS REGULATIONS ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations (analysis of potential harm).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to introduce this bill to amend the Seeds Regulations to require that an analysis of potential harm to export markets be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted.

[English]

Markets have been closed due to contamination in flax of GM organisms. We need to have a thorough analysis of this. The bill would permit that.

Before we approve any GM alfalfa that could devastate, for example, our organic industry as we know that alfalfa is used in the fertilizer and farmers rely on that, we need a thorough analysis to investigate potential economic harm.

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

* * *

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-475, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (methamphetamine and ecstasy).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that would help Canadians tackle the scourge of the drug ecstasy and of crystal meth, otherwise known as methamphetamine.

The bill, introduced previously in a slightly different form by my colleague, the member for Peace River, originally attracted unanimous support in the House. It also received broad acclaim from law enforcement officers, educators, parents and others across our great country. I seek the continued support for the bill from my colleagues of all parties in the House.

The bill would create a new offence for the procurement of ingredients with the intent to manufacture either of these highly addictive and haunting drugs.

Canada is a great nation but we can be better. Our children are safe but they can be safer. Our people are healthy but they can be healthier. Ending drug addiction is an Olympic challenge but what better year to start?

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

* * *

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 22nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier today be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Routine Proceedings

CANADA POST

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Is the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île rising on a point of order?

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

For reasons I do not wish to mention, I needed to be away from my seat during the period to present reports from interparliamentary delegations. Would there be unanimous consent to present the report?

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Okay. Very well. The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the third part of the 2009 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, held in Strasbourg, France, from June 22 to 26, 2009. I have the duly signed copies in both official languages.

* * *

• (1515)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the Clerk.

The first petition is from my riding of Mississauga South and it has to do with animal welfare. We have heard this a number of times.

The petitioners would like to bring to the attention of the House that there is a scientific consensus and public acknowledgement that animals can feel pain and suffer, that all efforts should be made to prevent animal cruelty and reduce animal suffering, that over one billion people around the world rely on animals for their livelihoods and many others rely on animals for companionship, and, finally, that animals are often significantly affected by natural disasters and yet seldom considered during relief efforts and emergency planning despite their recognized importance to humans.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to petition the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, from a combination of cities, including my riding of Mississauga South, is about post offices

The petitioners want to draw to the attention of the House that the federal government is considering ending the current moratorium on post office closures. The federal government has introduced legislation to legalize the activities of remailers, which would erode the revenues of Canada Post Corporation needed to maintain its current universal service obligation.

They also point out that the post office plays a key role in our social and economic life by providing the infrastructure that healthy communities need to thrive and for their businesses to grow.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Government of Canada to maintain the moratorium on post office closures, withdraw legislation to legalize remailers and that it instruct Canada Post to maintain, expand and improve our postal services.

ONLINE PREDATORS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition that is signed by over 2,300 Canadians from New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

These petitioners are calling upon Parliament to enable prosecution of those who encourage or counsel someone to commit suicide by updating Canada's Criminal Code to reflect the new realities of 21st century broadband access and to fund education programs that will empower vulnerable youth to protect themselves from online predators and find appropriate community resources.

NURSES

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present a petition signed by residents of the Lower Mainland who are very concerned that health care professionals, namely nurses, are in great shortage in Canada and that we need to educate and retain Canadian-trained nurses.

The petition calls upon the House of Commons to include a student loan program similar to that which happens in B.C. so there can be social and financial incentives for nurses to remain and work in Canada and that the loan program that is offered over time should be offered to nurses who decide to work in an underserved community anywhere in the country.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I would like to present a petition signed by over 130 constituents who oppose the legislation providing Canadian veteran benefits to Red Army veterans.

The Soviet Red Army was an instrument of the Kremlin in the commission of unspeakable mass atrocities and war crimes against the peoples of Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic States, Hungary, the Czechs, the Slovaks and other countries and peoples.

Routine Proceedings

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians who were refugees from Red Army brutality in the occupation of their homelands in central and eastern Europe arrived in Canada during and after World War II. As a result, the petitioners pray and request that the Government of Canada rescind the legislation it introduced that would provide benefits to those who served in the Soviet Red Army during World War II.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions I would like to present from constituents in the greater Vancouver area.

The first petition is regarding the long gun registry.

The petitioners state that the original budget for the long gun registry was \$2 million, but the price tag has spiralled out of control to an estimated \$2 billion a decade later, and the registry has not saved one single life since it was introduced.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to support any legislation that would cancel the Canadian long gun registry and streamline the Firearms Act.

• (1520)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on medical benefits.

The petitioners state that those who suffer from a number of severe potentially life-threatening conditions do not qualify for disability programs because the conditions are not necessarily permanent. Residents find themselves losing their homes and livelihoods while trying to fight these severe medical conditions.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to enact legislation to provide additional EI medical benefits that would be equivalent to EI maternity benefits.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the subject of the third petition is respect for human life.

The petitioners state that Canada is a country that respects human life and includes in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that everyone has the right to life.

Whereas it has been 40 years since Parliament changed the law to permit abortion, the petitioners call upon Parliament to pass legislation for the protection of human life from the time of conception until natural death.

PENSION BENEFITS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions on behalf of the people of Random—Burin—St. George's, the riding that I represent.

The first petition is from a group of fishermen and women in Newfoundland and Labrador who took early retirement at the request of the federal government back in 1998.

In 2007, Revenue Canada, the tax court, determined that only 25% of retirement benefits should be applied to the capital gains tax

formula. However, 100% of the revenue was in fact taxed, leaving 850 fishermen, 798 from Newfoundland and Labrador and 52 from the Quebec north shore, unfairly treated by the Government of Canada. There are 150 fishers who followed the recommendation of DFO at the time. They had their taxes treated fairly, and therefore each saved, on average, about \$20,000.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to recognize this unfairness and to do the right thing and treat all of these fishermen and women in the proper way.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has to do with the EI system.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to put in place measures that would treat everyone fairly and to recognize the importance of the EI system to Canadians.

They are asking the government to increase benefit duration to at least 50 weeks in all regions, eliminate the two-week waiting period, allow claimants to qualify for entry-level EI benefits in all regions of Canada after working 360 hours, provide benefits that are at least 60% of normal earnings, use workers' 12 best weeks, suspend the allocation of severance pay, and be more flexible and innovative in the uses of EI work-sharing to keep people at work.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition signed by hundreds of Canadians who wish to stop the Canada-Colombia trade deal.

The petitioners say they are concerned with the violence that is ongoing against workers and civil society by paramilitaries in Colombia who are associated with the Uribe government. Since 1991, 2,200 trade unionists have been murdered.

The petitioners believe that all trade agreements must be built on the principles of fair trade which respect human rights, labour rights and environmental stewardship.

Therefore, they ask Parliament to reject the Canada-Colombia trade deal until an independent human rights impact assessment is carried out, the resulting concerns are addressed, and the agreement is renegotiated along the principles of fair trade, which would take into consideration environmental and social impacts.

[Translation]

NORTEL

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, because of the bankruptcy of Nortel, I have the honour to table a petition, signed by a number of Canadians who would like to bring something to the attention of the government.

[English]

The Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act currently do not protect the rights of all Canadian employees laid off by a company when they are receiving pensions or long-term disability benefits during bankruptcy proceedings. These people do not have any preferred status over other unsecured creditors. Employees are unlike any other creditors. They have been largely responsible for creating value for all stakeholders. Unlike debt holders, banks and suppliers, they are not diversified businesses taking risks and having access to tax writeoffs for financial loss. Currently under the Investment Canada Act, the federal government fails to ensure that proceeds of sales of Canadian assets to foreigners are allocated to Canadian employee-related claims before funds are permitted to leave the country.

Therefore, the following petitioners call upon Parliament, first, to amend the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to protect the rights of all Canadian employees and to ensure that employees laid off by a company receiving pensions or long-term disability benefits during bankruptcy proceedings obtain preferred creditor status over unsecured creditors; and, second, to amend the Investment Canada Act to ensure employee-related claims are paid from proceeds of Canadian assets sales before funds are permitted to leave the country.

• (1525)

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition that has to do with animal welfare. The petitioners say that because there is scientific consensus and public acknowledgement that animals can feel pain and can suffer that all efforts should be made to prevent animal cruelty and reduce animal suffering.

The petitioners say that over one billion people around the world rely on animals for their livelihood, and many others rely on animals for companionship. They are often significantly affected by natural disasters and yet are seldom considered during relief efforts and emergency planning despite their recognized importance to humans.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

FUEL PRICES

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from over 150 Canadians from Montreal, Brampton, Barrie, Whitby, Kamloops, Aurora, Brossard and Laval.

The petitioners call upon the Canadian government and Parliament to pay more attention to the effect that high fuel prices are having on Canadians and on the economy.

The petitioners believe a serious lack of competition and transparency in the energy industry has hampered the free market to the detriment of all Canadians.

High fuel prices, they believe, inflate the price of everything we purchase, and of course, during this period of economic uncertainty they cannot ignore the effect that this has on the Canadian economy.

S. O. 52

The petitioners also wish to draw to the attention of the government and the House of Commons that many countries around the world have an energy market monitoring agency and that energy superpowers like Canada need such an agency. They therefore call upon Parliament to finally acknowledge that the high price of fuel is damaging to the Canadian economy.

They ask for the reinstatement of the Office of Petroleum Price Information, which was abolished by the government in 2006 as an energy market information service similar to the U.S. energy information agency, and they also wish to begin hearings in the energy sector to determine how the government can foster competition and provide transparency in the energy market to eliminate the monopolistic efficiencies defence clause of the Competition Act.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also want to table petitions in support of a universal declaration on animal welfare.

These petitions are signed by many of my constituents within the following communities: Thessalon, Blind River, Algoma Mills, Manitowaning, Little Current, Kagawong, Elliot Lake, Mindemoya, Spring Bay, Espanola, McKerrow, Hearst, Massey, Webbwood and Manitouwadge, as well as by people from some other ridings.

These petitioners are asking for the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare to prevent animal cruelty and reduce animal suffering given that people around the world rely on animals for their livelihood as well as for companionship.

Within the proposed declaration the petitioners would like to see a structure that includes a clause for relief efforts and emergency planning for animal welfare.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

H1N1 VACCINES

The Speaker: The Chair has received a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for St. Paul's. I will hear from her now.

Government Orders

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I indeed did send a letter to your office this morning requesting leave to make the motion for the adjournment of the House, pursuant to Standing Order 52, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration.

I now wish to move that motion for an emergency debate on the supply of H1N1 vaccines to high-risk groups and Canadians at large.

Information made public by the government in the last few days indicates that the supply and delivery of the vaccine available to local health authorities this week will fall well short of the previously announced levels.

Further reports across the country show that Canadians in high-risk groups are being turned away from vaccination centres because of lack of supply. The fact that many pandemic experts expect H1N1 to peak in the coming weeks adds urgency to the situation.

I believe all of us in the House feel a responsibility to our constituents to put on the record our concerns and their concerns and to advocate for early resolution of this urgent situation.

• (1530)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for St. Paul's for her submissions on this point. I have considered the matter since I received her letter and have now heard her arguments, and I believe the request does meet the exigencies of the standing order and accordingly, I will allow the debate this evening at the normal hour of daily adjournment.

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[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on Motion No 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Speaker: At the request of the chief government whip, the vote on the motion will be deferred until the conclusion of government orders later this day.

* * *

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE PROTECTION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-27, An Act to promote the efficiency and adaptability of the Canadian economy by regulating certain activities that discourage reliance on electronic means of carrying out commercial activities, and to amend the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, the Competition Act, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act and the Telecommunications Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at the report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Vic Toews (for the Minister of Industry) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Vic Toews (for the Minister of Industry) moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to begin third reading of Bill C-27.

At the outset, I would like to put this bill in the broader context of a global digital economy. In a little more than a decade the Internet has become a powerful factor in the competitiveness of the Canadian economy. It is an essential feature in all of our daily lives.

Digital media is poised to transform the economy and our society in ways that we have not yet imagined. It will increase in importance as an engine for economic growth. Worldwide the digital media sector is expected to grow to U.S. \$2.2 trillion over the next five years. There is enormous potential and Canada must tap that potential, but Canada has lost ground over the past decade.

When the Internet was new, Canada was at the forefront. We were the first country in the world to connect our schools and libraries to the Internet, for example. We were at the forefront of redesigning our framework laws to acknowledge the new technology. We led in the deployment and uptake of broadband. Our ICT companies were among the world leaders. But we have fallen behind.

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As we have gone into this global economic slowdown, several commentators have talked about how Canada will lead the way out of it. The OECD and the IMF have talked about Canada leading the way out of this global recession. The World Economic Forum recently said that Canada will be one of only two industrialized countries to come out in a more competitive position than we went into this global slowdown.

Our falling behind in terms of our ICT laws and legislation puts this progress and increased competitiveness at risk. This pattern is deeply disturbing. To remain at the forefront of a global economy where digital technologies and competencies are increasingly important, we must reverse this slide.

We need to reboot our national strategy for remaining competitive in that economy. Given the complexity of the digital economy, we need to move on many fronts. We are consulting on how best to achieve this to realize its benefits for the economy.

We want to grow the ICT sector to be an even larger share of our economy, because it is a source of high-paying jobs and high R and D intensity. We need to increase the smart use of ICTs in the other 95% of the economy to make them more efficient and profitable, from public services through manufacturing and service industries and natural resources.

We need to close the productivity gap with the United States and increase our global competitiveness through the smart use of these technologies.

These goals rely on certain fundamentals, such as a high-speed network infrastructure and an online marketplace that has the trust and confidence of consumers and firms. We are working closely as a government with businesses to encourage sectors and firms to use information and communications technology more effectively.

Even as we wrestled with the worst economic crisis in a generation, Canada's economic action plan targeted a number of specific actions to energize the ICT sector. All told, nearly \$1.5 billion was devoted to this effort. Among those initiatives was \$225 million to provide broadband coverage to unserved Canadians. This money will leverage additional investment to expand access for many Canadians to important economic and social benefits, including online health services, business opportunities and distance learning.

Our action plan also provided a 100% capital cost allowance rate for computer hardware and systems software for two years, which is helping companies realize the benefits of adopting new ICT solutions.

These investments are part of a much broader agenda to put Canada once more at the forefront of the digital age, but we will not do this by investment alone. Government has a responsibility to create the economic conditions that will help build the digital economy.

One of the ways we are doing this is by creating the right framework laws to build trust and confidence in online transactions and communications. Rules that counter unsolicited email are critical to that framework.

● (1535)

Spam represents between 80% and 90% of email traffic around the world. It is estimated that a total of 62 trillion spam emails were sent last year. This bill is about removing a major barrier to electronic commerce. Canadians see spam as a major problem. The Canadian business community sees it as an impediment to productivity.

Spam is more than a nuisance. When unsolicited emails, websites and even freeware programs such as screen savers contain viruses or other forms of malicious programs, they inflict considerable damage and undermine the confidence of consumers in the electronic marketplace. They discourage businesses from relying on the Internet to reach their customers in new markets. This is harmful at the best of times, but it is particularly damaging during an economic downturn. More people go online to look for job opportunities or the best deals and better ways to manage their finances. It is in these tough economic times that consumers are most susceptible and more likely to fall for the get-rich-quick schemes offered on various websites.

More than ever, we need to maintain consumer trust and confidence in an online marketplace as a tool to help build the economy and eliminate deceptive marketing practices that can cause grave economic harm to Canadians. Spam and related threats impose heavy costs on network operators and users. They threaten network reliability and security and they undermine personal privacy.

Canada is the only G8 country and one of only four OECD countries without legislation dealing with online threats, such as spam, spyware, computer viruses, fraudulent websites and the harvesting of electronic addresses. These electronic intrusions are unacceptable. Some invade privacy and some are used to infect and gain control over computers. Most Internet service providers use filters to try to screen out spam. These filters tie up bandwidth and slow the system down. Even with these defences, spam still manages to get through.

One of the best ways to combat spam is through effective legislation. Bill C-27 puts in place important provisions that would protect Canadian consumers and businesses from the most damaging and deceptive forms of electronic harm. It provides a regulatory regime to promote compliance and protect the privacy and personal security of Canadians in the online environment. It provides a clear set of rules that will benefit all Canadians. It will encourage confidence in online communications and e-commerce.

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This bill combats spam and related online threats in two ways. It provides regulatory powers to administer monetary penalties and it gives individuals and businesses the right to sue spammers. Bill C-27 makes use of the federal trade and commerce power rather than the law enforcement authorities in the Criminal Code. A civil administrative regime such as that in the ECPA is consistent with the approach taken internationally. The law will be enforced by the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

A significant responsibility for enforcing the bill falls to the CRTC, which has a mandate to ensure the reliability, safety and effective operation of telecommunications networks in Canada. This includes the Internet. The CRTC will enforce the provisions against sending unsolicited commercial messages and will have responsibility for the provisions that prohibit the altering of transmission data without authorization.

It will further prohibit the surreptitious installation of programs on computer systems and networks by requiring consent for the installation of all computer programs. In this way, we can help stem the flow of malicious computer programs such as spyware and key loggers. The Competition Bureau will also have responsibilities in stamping out spam under this bill. The bureau has a mandate to ensure fair marketplace practices for businesses and consumers.

The bill before us will extend the Competition Bureau's powers to address false and misleading representations online and deceptive marketplace practices such as false headers and website content. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada has responsibilities to protect personal information in Canada. This legislation will prohibit the collection of personal information without consent through unauthorized access to computer systems and the unauthorized compiling or supplying of lists of electronic addresses. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada will have the authority to enforce these provisions using its existing powers.

All of these are important elements in restoring confidence and trust in online communications.

• (1540)

The bill provides for administrative monetary penalties for those who violate the law by sending spam, making false and misleading representations in commercial electronic messages, installing spyware and viruses on computers, and for stealing personal information.

These laws have sharp teeth. For violation, the maximum administrative monetary penalty is \$1 million for individuals, and up to \$10 million for businesses. In this way, we provide government authorities with the power to fight spam and related online threats.

The second way to fight spam is for consumers and businesses to combat spam to pursue a private right of action. This private right of action has been very effective in the United States. We heard much testimony during the course of the hearings. Obviously a lot of the research and a lot of the work that has gone into this has relied on efforts by other countries to address the very same issues that we are dealing with today. We have learned some things about what to do and what to put in the legislation. We also have learned some things about what maybe does not work so well in the legislation. We have

had the advantage of looking at what other countries have done well and using that to inform our own legislation.

The private right of action will allow individuals and businesses that suffer financial harm an avenue of recourse to be compensated and awarded both actual and statutory damages. Network operators will be able to prosecute spammers in civil cases. This would allow them to take action against spammers that make use of their facilities without the threat of subsequent legal action from a spammer.

Whether through the regulatory agencies or the private right of action, our message to spammers is clear: We do not want them. We will not tolerate them, and if they try to operate in Canada, we will come after them either as private consumers and businesses or as regulatory authorities that make Canada a safe place to communicate and do business online.

At the same time, I want to assure hon. members that legitimate businesses will not be negatively affected. The regime allows for consumer opt-in and some exceptions for implied consent so that legitimate businesses can continue to market through email.

The Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology studied this bill very carefully. It heard from many witnesses, and as a result of some of the testimony, we introduced amendments to this bill. I want to emphasize that the government remains steadfast in its commitment to reduce spam and other computer-related threats that discourage the use of electronic commerce and that undermine privacy. It will protect both consumers and Canadian businesses from unwanted spam.

As we saw during the debate at second reading in this House and as we saw in committee, there is widespread support for the spirit of this piece of legislation and what we are accomplishing. Canadian businesses know that spam costs them money, in the billions of dollars. In this House and in committee, we saw all parties support this legislation as well, and that is important to note. The time is due for this type of legislation.

At this time I would like to thank the members and senators from all parties who have helped make this bill more effective. I would remind this House that this bill has been guided also by the recommendations of the spam task force. We heard from many of the members of the task force as witnesses before the committee as we discussed this important legislation.

This legislation has also been inspired by the now retired senator Goldstein, when he introduced his bill in the other place. I would also like to recognize the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East who has been a long-time champion of anti-spam legislation.

Finally, what I would like to do is assure this House that the bill before us is one step toward a much broader agenda for the digital economy. Our goal is to see a Canadian business climate and social climate that are innovative, adaptive and able to participate fully in the global digital economy.

We as a government will continue to seek input and advice from stakeholders. We will reassert our leadership. As a necessary first step, we want to shut down the electronic threats that are such a source of concern to businesses and consumers.

The challenges are clear, but the potential is enormous. By getting this right, we can do more than simply participate in the digital economy; we can lead. But let us begin by joining our trading partners and neighbours in closing down the inappropriate and harmful use of Internet communications. Let us pass this bill as amended.

• (1545)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. The New Democratic Party has been pushing for some time to have a larger framework of understanding that innovation in the 21st century has to have a full, holistic view of where we go in terms of digital innovation. That is where the new economy rests.

I listened to a number of the issues my colleague brought forward, the need for broadband and to protect us from spammers and the criminal element that is out there to undermine digital innovation.

I was interested in his comments on how Canada has lost its way somewhat in terms of broadband. I am sure he has read the recent FCC report that just came out, which looks at the OECD countries. Canada has gone from a world leader just five years ago to a world laggard in key areas of innovation. We are paying some of the highest Internet rates in the world and getting some of the lousiest service. I do not think any Canadian consumer needs to confirm this. They know this.

The FCC points to the fact that the CRTC, although it does not mention the CRTC by name, talks about the lack of competition, the fact that there is a very small cabal of cable companies that see no interest in further innovation and expanding their broadband access. Therefore, we have a market that is stuck. People have to pay high fees. We get slower service. Competing countries are moving far ahead of us.

Since 2003 until 2009, the big change I have seen is the Conservative government has come to power. We have now gone from leader to laggard. What would the member tell the House to assure Canadian businesses and innovators that the government will get back on track and start to gain some of the ground that it has lost?

• (1550)

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member points to one study. As usual, the study he chooses is probably the most negative one. There have been several studies and many of them point to leadership in terms of Canada's approach to digital issues.

That said, obviously in this area, the area that the bill addresses, we have needed to do more. One of the challenges we have had, and we discussed this in committee at one point, was the fact that through successive minority governments, and we are in our third

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minority government situation, it is difficult to see legislation such as this pass through the entire process.

We saw a concern early on in this process, and that was we would wind up in an election and this bill would die before it could actually go through. This is why we urge members from all parties to ensure the legislation gets passed, as amended, gets on to the Senate and gets passed there.

On the issue of leadership and competitiveness, I would point out that in terms of the overall economy, the World Economic Forum just recently stated, and I stated this in my comments but I will highlight it again, that Canada would be one of only two industrialized countries to come out of this global recession in a more competitive position than we went in.

Legislation such as this to solidify our digital economy and to strengthen it can only help that circumstance. I encourage all members to pass this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-27.

The Internet first came into being about 15 years ago, and since then has grown exponentially, showing no signs of slowing down. We are all using the Internet more and more in our daily lives. It should enhance our productivity. We use it every day, whether to look for work, to shop, to communicate with our friends or to do business. We use it every day, yet there are still some barriers that prevent us from benefiting from the Internet's full potential.

[*English*]

Today, I would like to speak to Bill C-27. Simply put, Bill C-27 is an electronic commerce protection act that intends to prohibit sending of commercial electronic messages without the prior consent of recipients. This is what is more commonly known as spam email. The bill also looks to prohibit the use of false or misleading statements that disguise the origin or true intent of the email, the installation of unauthorized programs and the unauthorized collection of personal information or email addresses.

Studies show that of the total email traffic that exists on the Internet today as much as 85% can be considered spam. The hon. member who spoke previously spoke of different levels. There is some as low as 60% and some as high as 90%. At any level, those levels are unacceptable and something has to be done to correct them.

When we consider the time that is spent sorting through in boxes and deleting unwanted email at work and at home, it does not take long to figure out that spam kills productivity.

[*Translation*]

How many times, whether at home or at work, have we started reading emails only to realize that many of them are unsolicited and cause problems? Such emails can make us waste half or a good part of our day. At any stage, these emails are a waste of time in terms of Canadian productivity.

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[English]

A 2003 report estimated that fighting spam cost businesses and consumers \$27 billion annually in information technology spending, including increased expenditures in the Internet bandwidth, the storage costs, anti-spam software and user support.

This does not take into consideration the numerous hours that people waste just sorting through and finding out what they want, what they do not want, what they have asked for, what was sent to them without their request and getting rid of it. Again, it kills time that we could be using more productively as Canadians. It limits us from taking full advantage of the Internet, whether it is for personal or commercial purposes.

To say that spam is a serious problem to Canadians and Canadian business is an understatement. Spam is a large source of computer viruses, phishing programs designed for identity theft and deceptive and fraudulent business practices that target the vulnerable.

At these times, when the economy is faltering, when people are losing jobs and looking for hope, unscrupulous people are putting emails out there, putting ads on the Internet that are fictitious. They are causing problems. For people looking for somewhere to hang their hat, hang hope on something, what do they get? They lose their hard-earned money or what little they have left.

In May 2004 the Liberal government recognized the danger of spam and established a task force to lead the anti-spam action plan for Canada. The task force held public consultations and led round tables with key stakeholders in the industry.

In 2005 the task force tabled its report outlining 22 major recommendations, including key recommendations to strengthen legislation.

Specifically, the task force recommended Canada implement legislation to prohibit the sending of spam without prior consent of recipients and prohibit the use of false or misleading statements that disguised the origin or true intent of email, better known as phishing, prohibit the installation of unauthorized programs, otherwise known as spyware, and prohibit the unauthorized collection of personal information or email addresses. Bill C-27 looks to implement these recommendations.

Bill C-27 introduces fines for violation of the acts up to a maximum of \$1 million for individuals and \$10 million for businesses. It establishes rules for warrants, for information during investigations and injunctions on spam activity while under investigation. Bill C-27 also establishes the private right of action, allowing individuals and businesses the ability to seek damages from the perpetrators of spam.

At committee stage, flaws were discovered in the original bill. Clause 6, for example, was found to have been written too broadly and could have suppressed some legitimate business communications over the Internet. Clause 8 also defined computer program very broadly and could have suppressed legitimate business software development and impeded legitimate Internet functions.

After considerable work, many amendments were made to the bill, refining measures for electronic messages, computer programs and the protection of privacy rights.

The bill, however, maintains a very heavy-handed approach, which is not always the most effective approach. We looked at different options. We thought for now, with this broad, heavy-handed approach, which seems to be the way the Conservative government likes to do things, we would let it go through in the interest of protecting Canadians, with some options for modifications later on by the people who administer it.

Bill C-27 takes a broad approach to defining a very wide definition of electronic messages that puts the onus on individual businesses to seek exceptions if they believe their activities to be legitimate. The proposed Liberal approach was to define known spam irritants as illegal, with the flexibility to add further definition as electronic messages on the Internet evolved. The concern with the Conservative approach is that an overly heavy-handed approach could stifle electronic commerce in Canada.

● (1555)

I want to remind Canadians that we want to look at the Internet as a tool that will make our lives better, more efficient and allow us to work more effectively. We have to be careful when a bill has a very wide span and catches everything. Overall, however, many changes were made to the bill at committee stage to make Bill C-27 acceptable to the Liberal Party.

We are pleased that the Conservative government has finally decided to act on the recommendation of our task force. At committee stage, many flaws were exposed in the bill and many changes were made. Is this bill perfect? Simply put, no.

One of the areas that is still of concern and will continue to be monitored is the issue of materiality. Materiality comes up in clauses 71 and 73 of Bill C-27. The issue is under the Competition Act's new sections 54(1) and 74.01(1), which cover false and misleading representations. Bill C-27 would make it a criminal offence or a reviewable practice under the Competition Act if sender information or subject matter information in an electronic message was false or misleading, regardless of whether it was false or misleading in a material respect.

The material respect standard is important to retain in respect of electronic sender information and subject matter information.

First, it provides the Competition Bureau with the necessary discretion to brush aside complaints that are raised about purported misstatements that are trivial, and there are many of them, especially from business competitors.

Second, it provides businesses in Canada the comfort of knowing that an honest mistake in an electronic business communication that does not materially affect consumers will not automatically face potential criminal prosecution or civil action under the Competition Act.

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Third, it is a standard under the Competition Act that applies to representation that business makes in all other places, whether it be print, in store, radio, TV or, as we see here, in the body of an email.

It is incorrect to say in advance that anything included in the sender information or subject matter information is always material. If it were correct, then including “in all material respect” could do absolutely no harm because any representation would still be caught as if “in a material respect” were not there.

While the Liberal Party believes the bill remains unnecessarily heavy-handed in its approach, we would support the bill at third reading as action must be taken against spam.

It is important that we continue to monitor the legislation closely going forward to ensure it does not stifle legitimate electronic commerce in Canada. The Liberal Party further notes that the fight against spam is much more than just legislation. The Liberal task force also recommended resources to be put toward coordinating enforcement of this law.

Legislation will only go as far as the willingness to enforce the law. Will the government put the appropriate resources into enforcement? Will the government put resources into working with other nations to stamp out spam? Will the government dedicate resources to work with ISPs and Canadian business to establish the codes of practice? These questions will be answered in the fullness of time.

• (1600)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. I was particularly interested because the issue of spam should be supported by all parties. Yet we have seen a number of articles that were written about the Liberal Party bringing forward a number of amendments that would seriously water down this bill, including an amendment to tighten up the provision on false subject headers.

The Liberals wanted to introduce a provision to limit the scope of spyware. There were motions being promoted by the copyright lobby to allow the surreptitiously installed DRM from being covered under the bill and an exception to a ban on the collection of personal information through any means of technology, if the collection was made by assessing a computer system or causing a computer system to be accessed without authorization. This would be in cases related to investigations, a breach of agreement or laws.

The NDP was very clear in fighting spam and even the Conservatives, who tend to roll over for the lobbyists, at least were willing to hold the line, but the Liberals were the fifth columnists in bringing forward many motions that, fortunately, were voted down or they decided to pull at the last minute, which would have very much undermined this.

Would my hon. colleague tell me why the Liberal Party brought forward those motions, which clearly would have gutted the bill from having any strength at all?

• (1605)

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, I was there during the discussions that took place. We have to look at Bill C-27 as a wide net that captures absolutely everything in its path. It is very important to look at Bill C-27 and ensure that it is functional.

One of the concerns that we had with the bill was that it would be so broad that Internet use and all possibilities would come to a grinding halt. We had to explore all the possibilities so that business could continue to operate. We wanted to ensure that when we see a false statement being made that it actually is a false statement. What I believe the hon. member was referring to is materiality and that comes into play within the subject matter that he was talking about. If the subject matter says something and it is an omission or an error, then there should not be an automatic criminal charge put forward.

We have seen that in other laws which I know the Conservatives are very concerned about, but it is important that we look at the bill and look at all possibilities, listen to all the people who have a vested interest in this, and look at what is best for all Canadians, so the Internet can continue to be a tool that we can use and grow with into the future and make it work to the full ability that it was intended to be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank all the groups that appeared before the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. I also want to thank members from all political parties who sit on the committee.

When I spoke during second reading of Bill C-27, Electronic Commerce Protection Act, I said that this legislation would address several issues facing many Quebecers. The Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology heard a number of witnesses during its hearings on Bill C-27.

Several groups raised more contentious issues relating to the bill, or asked for some justification. But all in all, witnesses told us that it was necessary to move forward with such legislation. I note in particular that when we compare our situation to that of other countries, we find that this bill is necessary. I would even say that Canada is a step behind some comparable countries. Therefore, the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-27, as amended by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

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Incidentally, the clause by clause review of the bill did not really trigger a debate between the various parties, because all seemed to agree on its merits. However, I want to point out a contradiction by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice in the Conservative government. Last week, he said, in this House, that opposition parties had put up roadblocks to delay the passing of Bill C-27. That is absolutely false. That member surely did not ask for a report from his party colleagues on the committee, because he would have found out that the Bloc and the other opposition parties worked positively. I want to confirm that my party, the Bloc Québécois, and members representing the government and other opposition parties on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, did work in a constructive fashion.

I sincerely believe that, during the hearings of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, all members worked hard to find a solution to the issue of spamming, while also meeting the needs of those businesses that voiced their concerns. Clearly, for some businesses, there is a natural fear about how legitimate businesses can continue to reach consumers and customers if the bill becomes law. I suspect that it will pass, because all the political parties at the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology unanimously supported it.

Bill C-27 clearly spells out that organizations will not need the explicit consent of their own customers to communicate with them in the context of what can reasonably be called "existing business relationships". However, if they want to reach potential customers to market a product or a service, or to expand their activities, businesses will not be allowed to communicate by email directly with these people without their prior consent.

Based on the testimonies of a number of groups, it became clear to the Bloc Québécois that an amendment was needed to extend from 18 to 24 months the period during which a business can communicate by email with a consumer without his prior consent. Members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology agreed with the amendment proposed by the Bloc Québécois.

● (1610)

Even though the bill contains a number of legally complex clauses, its aim is to improve the efficiency and adaptability of the Canadian economy by regulating certain fraudulent commercial activities that use electronic mail. With all of the communications tools available today, we are constantly being solicited. We must have effective tools in place to protect the public.

In this regard, the Bloc Québécois expressed concern with regard to clauses 64 and 86 of Bill C-27, the electronic commerce protection act. It would amend the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act. In reality, these two clauses would give the government permission to eliminate the national do-not-call list. Implemented just over a year ago today, this legislation governing telemarketers has been a big success. Today, no fewer than 7,000 telephone numbers of Quebecers and Canadians are on the list. This means it is working well.

In the Bloc's opinion, the current list is doing its job and is used by millions. For a number of businesses, complying with the requirements of the national do-not-call list has meant reorganization

of resources and considerable financial cost. In Quebec, for the Desjardins financial security group, which accounts for 10% of the business of the Desjardins movement, whose head office is in Lévis, a portion of the costs has been calculated at over \$500,000. As this is 10% of the business of the Desjardins movement, it means that meeting the requirements of the national do-not-call list has cost the Desjardins group some \$5 million. We can imagine that a new structure would mean additional costs for businesses that have had to comply with legislation that is one year old.

We understand that Industry Canada wants to keep the door open to replace the list with a new system. We have been given assurance by government officials that there will be no change to the do-not-call list without public hearings and consultation with those concerned to establish how it should proceed.

The link I wanted to create with the national do-not-call list is simple. All email users know about spam. In recent months, the amount of spam appears to have increased significantly. We might ask ourselves whether businesses might have changed their means of contacting consumers before Bill C-27, the electronic commerce protection act, comes into force.

As an MP, I am concerned about the way businesses obtain consumers' consent to transfer or pass on their contact information or email addresses to other organizations. The new legislation will enable us to reduce spam and go after unsolicited commercial emails.

The Bloc has expressed support for another provision of the bill, which aims at prohibiting detrimental practices to electronic commerce, protecting the integrity of transmission data and prohibiting installation of computer programs without consent. It makes sense to avoid the use of consumers' personal information to send them spam.

Bill C-27 thus prohibits the collection of personal information via access to computer systems without consent and the unauthorized compiling or supplying of lists of electronic addresses.

● (1615)

We can hardly be against motherhood and apple pie. The Bloc Québécois feels that companies that want to send consumers information by email should get their consent first. Companies should get prior consent before communicating by the Internet or sending email.

This bill has a noble objective, but it will be a complex law to apply. According to the officials in Industry Canada, though, the CRTC, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and the Office of the Information Commissioner are all going to work together in perfect harmony to figure out how to do it.

Business of the House

The three agencies that will be affected by this change to the law will have to work closely together on the implementation of it. The CRTC will have to do what is necessary to stop unsolicited commercial electronic messages from being sent. The Competition Bureau, for its part, will have to deal with practices like misleading representations online, such as emails falsely claiming to be from financial institutions. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner will have to take measures to prevent the collection of personal information by means of unauthorized access to computer systems and the unauthorized compiling of lists of electronic addresses.

I know the government wants to tackle spam as well. It accounts for 80% of all communications sent over the Internet. These are all the unwanted and unwelcome messages that consumers receive. I certainly agree with that. The committee has convinced me of the need to proceed with this kind of bill.

A number of countries have already passed measures similar to those in Bill C-27 and seem to have had positive results. The various laws passed in Australia, the United States and Great Britain to combat spam have apparently been quite successful.

Bill C-27 will make it possible to develop measures to dissuade as many people as possible from sending spam involving false representation, unauthorized software and exchanges of email address information.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-27. It should help solve a lot of problems that our constituents are encountering and help protect their privacy. Over the years, unsolicited commercial electronic messages have become a major social and economic problem that reduces the personal and business productivity of Quebecers. As I said before, spam accounts for 80% of all the email that is sent to people. Thus, communications over the Internet are much less efficient than they could be.

Spam is a real nuisance. It can damage computers and networks, contribute to fraudulent and misleading commercial practices, and infringe on our privacy. Spam poses a direct threat to the viability of the Internet as an effective means of communication. It undermines consumer confidence in legitimate electronic commerce and hampers electronic transactions.

This is a constantly growing problem and, after years of study, it is time to pass a measure like this. In 2007, the Liberal government established a working group following the tabling of a report in 2005.

● (1620)

The two elections held between 2005 and 2009 have delayed the project. We are now at the important stage of discussing and adopting the electronic commerce protection act.

Essentially, this electronic commerce protection act governs the sending of messages by email, text messaging or instant messaging without consent. Transmission of spam to an electronic mail account, telephone account or other similar accounts would be prohibited. The only time spam may be sent is when the person to whom the message is sent has consented to receiving it, whether the consent is express or implied.

There are other prohibitions as well. No person may alter the transmission data in an electronic message so that the message is delivered to another destination. Nor may they install a computer program on any other person's computer system or cause an electronic message to be sent from that computer system without the owner's consent. This bill clarifies consent before sending. Naturally there will be a timeline for implementation. It was 18 months at first, but it has been extended to 24 months following an amendment presented by the Bloc.

Bill C-27 proposes a private right of action, modelled on U.S. legislation, which would allow businesses and individuals to take civil action against any wrongdoer. Any organization covered by Bill C-27 may, on its own initiative, transmit to the CRTC, the Privacy Commissioner, or the Commissioner of Competition any information in its possession if it deems that information to be related to a violation of the electronic commerce protection act.

These three bodies must also consult each other and may exchange any information in order to fulfill the responsibilities and activities they carry out under their respective statutes. Under certain conditions they may also provide such information to the government of a foreign state or to an international organization.

Canada is not the only country to legislate the protection of electronic commerce. Other countries have passed laws in this matter. France's legislation is known as the law to support confidence in the digital economy. It was adopted in June 2004 and was phased in over six months. Apart from specific rules set out in the postal, electronic communications and consumer legislation, France is required to ensure that solicitations by email, no matter what their nature—business, creative, political, religious or membership, for example—are subject to personal information protection legislation.

Therefore, Bill C-27 is not unique when we look at what other countries are doing. However, having considered the evidence heard by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology and having carefully read the bill, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of this bill. Therefore, at third reading, we will be voting in favour of this bill.

To conclude, I would like to summarize the main aspects of this bill: to prevent the receipt by consumers of unsolicited business e-mails; to prohibit certain practices in order to protect the integrity of transmission data and prevent the installation of unauthorized computer programs; to prohibit the collection of personal information by unauthorized access to computer systems and the unauthorized compiling or distribution of electronic address lists.

* * *

● (1625)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, during the debate tonight pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

Business of the House

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the chief government whip have unanimous consent for this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE PROTECTION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-27, An Act to promote the efficiency and adaptability of the Canadian economy by regulating certain activities that discourage reliance on electronic means of carrying out commercial activities, and to amend the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, the Competition Act, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act and the Telecommunications Act, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's explanation of the Bloc's position on the bill.

One of the issues that has been of concern to us for some time is differentiating. We all know that spam is an irritant but the levels of spam are infecting computers to the levels of international fraud. They use people's personal computers as zombie bots to spread further spam.

We saw that in the U.S., in 2007, Robert Alan Soloway was a arrested and charged with 35 criminal counts including mail fraud, wire fraud, email fraud, aggravated identity theft and money laundering. The Americans went after him on the aggravated identity theft because of his taking over other individuals' Internet domains and computers.

The United States has taken this issue very seriously. Up to now we have been the only G8 country without spam legislation. I would like to ask the member, does the member think this bill is enough to put us in line where other G8 partners are going in terms of dealing with spam?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I think he understands that the current system is inadequate. It makes electronic communication really inefficient and the purpose of Bill C-27 is to clean things up. So I will respond with a brief answer. Yes, Bill C-27 would put us on a level playing field, to some extent, with countries that have passed similar legislation.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, I am very honoured to rise in this place as a representative of the people from Timmins—James Bay, and I take that role very seriously. One of the roles that I am given as a member of Parliament is to review and speak on legislation. This legislation is something that we as members of Parliament need to see in terms of a larger vision. This is not just a one-off bill.

In order for Canada to go where it needs to go in terms of a 21st century economy, we need to have a full vision in terms of the potential for digital innovation and also the pitfalls that are facing us. In terms of a large vision of where we need to be as a country holding its own and being a leader, we need to look at a number of initiatives. Earlier the issue of digital broadband access was brought up in the House. For a country that is as defined by geography as we are, to remain competitive, we need digital broadband.

The FCC report last week, which would be one of the world leaders in terms of its credibility on this issue, it says how much Canada has fallen behind. We have gone from being a world leader in 2003 to a world laggard. Anyone watching this back home does not need the FCC to tell them that we are paying some of the highest fees for Internet access and we are getting some of the lousiest service.

The FCC talks about how it is that Canada went from being a world leader in terms of making sure broadband access was happening, where just in 2003 we were the country to watch, to now being in 20th, 25th, or 26th place on various parts, depending on what indicators we look at.

The FCC points out the lack of competition in Canada. It is not pointing out the CRTC's dropping of the ball on this, but it speaks to something again that we are seeing, that when there is a very small cabal of companies that are basically now running the infrastructure of the Internet, unless there is innovation being pushed forward by small third-party ISPs, we will have a situation where development begins to ossify and that is what has happened. The FCC reports show how much we are falling behind because we are not getting that level of third-party competition from the smaller players. That is one of the elements we need to look at in terms of a larger vision.

Second is the issue of net neutrality, which plays very much into the access of broadband. When there are a few giant players who are deciding the development of speed on the Internet, we cannot have them making the decision as to who is going to be in the fast lane and who is going to be in the slow lane. There needs to be a sense that, in order to have development on the Internet, net neutrality is a key cornerstone. This is not a principle of the so-called computer geeks. Talk to anybody in business and they will say that if they cannot get fast access, they are going somewhere else. They are very concerned about deep packet inspection, for example. They are very concerned that when they put information through VoIP, or through BitTorrent, it could be unfairly slowed down. So that is the second element of an innovation agenda that we need to look at.

Business of the House

The third part of an innovation agenda is upgrading our copyright laws to the 21st century to ensure that we are moving forward and encouraging innovation and encouraging new ideas that may threaten some existing business models, but the only way we are going to have innovation is if we bring our copyright laws up to the 21st century agenda. I spend a great deal of time on the copyright file and I can say that we are finally at the point where we are agreeing that trying to implement laws that would work in 1996 is not going to get us anywhere. We need to be enacting laws that will bring us into the next 20 years.

The other element in terms of a digital strategy is dealing with the irritant factor. That is how most people see spam. They see spam as an irritant. It affects all of us. Every time I go on my computer I have someone offering to sell me a product that is going to make certain parts of my body much larger than they otherwise would be. I think my ears are large enough as it is. I do not need any help, thanks very much. Nonetheless, they will not leave me alone. They are always offering to sell me real estate when I am still paying for the house I bought many years ago in northern Ontario. I could have used the help then, but I certainly did not need the help of spammers.

• (1630)

We laugh about the silly and stupid things we come across in spam day after day, but we need to see the effect that it is having in terms of not just our ability to do our work but the very nature of the threat it is posing to average citizens. Spammers are very tied into a growing level of Internet fraud. They undermine confidence. We do not want to go to a website and leave our email information, because we do not want it to be taken and misused.

If we do not have confidence, it undermines our ability to move forward. Certainly the issue of spam is very serious. Canada has been singled out as the only G7 country without spam legislation. That puts us in a really bad light, because spammers will use our jurisdiction to push for spam. It is all well and good to say that we will get the emails of the spammers and hunt them down. If anybody has ever tried to track one of them down, they know that these emails do not go anywhere.

What ends up happening is that there is a much more insidious move afoot. They move very quickly in terms of their technological innovation. They do not send the spam from a home computer, so they cannot be tracked. They use a number of techniques to basically act as a parasite on other messages going out, to the point where they can actually take over a person's computer without the person using it and download malicious software. They create these zombies or bots.

The threat to privacy and innovation and the threat of fraud become compounded on a massive scale. This needs to be addressed and taken seriously.

For example, just last year, the U.S. came down with some of the heaviest attacks on spammers. I was referring earlier to May 31, 2007, when they went after Robert Alan Soloway. They charged him with 35 criminal counts, including mail fraud, wire fraud, email fraud, aggravated identity theft and money laundering. Prosecutors were alleging that Soloway was using these zombie computers to distribute spam across wide networks.

I will give an example of how this plays out. It is classic in terms of the development of the Internet. The greatest strength of the Internet is the ease with which one can get information out there. Of course, the greatest threat is the ease with which spammers can undermine it.

We can talk about the famous Nigerian 419 scam. Back in the day when the fax machine was the most exciting cutting-edge technology and I was working at a northern magazine, we used to get these emails from this guy. He was a former colonel in the Nigerian army. He was being held prisoner. If only I could send him \$500, he would send me \$100,000. It was very crude. It cost them money every time they sent that out. It went on a fax machine. It made tracking these guys a lot easier.

The 419 scam was a very marginal scam in the 1980s when it was first developed in Nigeria. It is interesting that Insa Nolte from the University of Birmingham said that the development of email turned the 419 scam from a local fraud to one of the largest export businesses in the country of Nigeria. That is how effective it has been.

For every million people who click delete, one person in a million might respond. That is how the fraud happens. I am sure that my colleagues here can tell similar stories, but I am now starting to see email requests for help coming much closer to home, where similar last names of family members of constituents and local references are being used.

This comes from the trolling of information that has been enabled under these massive networks of zombie computers. They can track and pick out names from the email traffic. They are picking out bits of stories and they are able to tailor the stories of personal need and personal threat. My daughter received one yesterday from someone who she thought might be a student who was lost in London. They had two or three key pieces of information about her and she could not figure out how they got that.

That is the kind of computer fraud that is now being perpetrated. Again, many of us will click through and delete. The problem is that there are enough people out there who will respond. So we are looking in terms of basic computer protection and basic civic protection. We need to do that.

• (1635)

However, we need to look at it in a larger area, in terms of what basic rules we are going to put down so that developers, innovators and citizens can use this wonderful new medium that we have, without fear.

I think some of the basic provisions in Bill C-27 are fairly straightforward. We should be asked for consent before any computer program is downloaded on our computer. That should be basic. The idea that spyware could be put into our computer without us knowing should have criminal consequences. We know, for example, there are various forms, such as Trojan rootkits. Sometimes legitimate companies think that by being able to put this spyware into our computer it is going to protect them. But it does not. It undermines consumer confidence.

Business of the House

I just have to refer to the famous Sony rootkit disaster, where Sony decided that on its CDs it was going to put spyware and not tell the consumers. Consumers were buying these CDs, thinking they were buying a piece of music, putting them into their computers, and their computers were crashing and they could not figure out why. It turned out that Sony, one of the biggest entertainment companies in the world, had put in the spyware thinking it was going to go after copyright infringement and what it did was undermine its credibility in the marketplace to a great degree. Companies should never have been allowed to think that kind of move should have been able to take place. No citizen who buys a CD or any computer product to put into his or her system should have to worry that there is spyware in there.

So the issue of asking consent before any computer program or any spyware is put into our computer is a very reasonable provision and a necessary provision.

I think the other thing we need to speak to is that companies cannot take personal information without consent. That is another primary element of the Internet. When we go on the Internet and we go to a website or when we respond to email from someone we might not know, we want to know that our records on the computer, our data on the computer, is not being accessed, and that when we go to a website our information is not being passed on to someone who is then going to come and try to sell us some kind of scam product that we do not want.

If we do not have that assurance, it starts to undermine the ability of consumers and companies to make the most of what they need to make the most of in terms of moving forward.

Earlier a Liberal colleague said he was worried that this was a big hammer that was going to shut down business, and we know there was certainly a big backlash against the Liberals when they seemed to be led around by the nose by some lobbyists on watering down provisions of this bill.

I have looked at the provisions and I have looked at what the Liberals were trying to sneak through, and I do not think it is in line with the 21st century digital innovation agenda. Fortunately, the Liberals are not in the position to run a bill like this, where they would be able to undermine it and ensure that the corporate lobbyists got their way. There are citizen provisions that have to be addressed and this bill is looking at that.

It was the Liberals who wanting to limit the scope on spyware. I am astounded by that. I do not know if they think it is okay to spy on my computer, but I certainly do not think it is. And I, as an average citizen or a legislator, would not support that they wanted to exclude surreptitiously installed DRM from the gambit of the bill.

Once again, when I go to a website or when I respond to an email, I do not want to have to worry that some company thinks it is okay to bury mechanical means for spying on what I am doing.

I was surprised by my Liberal colleagues on this bill, but I think there was certainly a large backlash, because the consumer public is very aware in terms of where we need to go with a digital agenda. So I am glad to see that we have moved forward with all parties on this bill.

● (1640)

The bill only addresses commercial electronic messages. This is not an attempt to shut down individuals who maybe want to do mass emails to their friends and to their friends' friends. There is no provision in the bill to go after people who send out those emails. Personally, I find those emails rather irritating. I do not think I have ever reached the bottom of one of the long lists of cc and cc and cc. I do think it is okay for individuals to do that. The question here is electronic messaging for commercial use. That is the main focus of this bill.

A personal relationship, a family relationship, a pre-existing business relationship would not be stopped. Companies would still be able to send information with respect to previous business dealings, such as someone buying software or something from a company.

I ask the simple question: What is the problem with asking the person for consent to continue? I do not see that impeding in any manner. If I purchase goods and I develop a relationship with a company, that is perfectly fine. But I want to know that my Parliament and legislation will back me up if I am not interested in receiving mass emails, that I can say I am not interested. That is not an unreasonable situation. Contrary to what the Liberals are saying, it is not going to grind business to a halt in Canada. It might if we were still back in the age of the fax machine, but this is certainly not going to grind innovation to a halt.

We worked at committee on this. This is a big bill. We had to look at many areas in terms of ensuring that spam legislation would actually address the problems. I am hopeful that this is the proper first step because we need to start addressing this.

We need to address this in terms of lost potential. We need to address this in terms of interference with competitiveness. We need to address this in terms of fraud. We need to address this in terms of the fundamental issue of consumer rights.

Our computers should not be open to some third party that we do not know, a third party who could be dropping spyware into it, or using it to send out harassing emails, possibly fraudulent emails. When we are plugged into the web, we should not have to worry about what is going to come back down the pipe that we do not want.

Bill C-27 takes some steps toward addressing that. Does it do everything that is necessary? I do not think that is possible at this point. We are going to have to amend and change it as we go because the Internet changes quickly, fraudsters change quickly. We have to run just to keep up as legislators, but this is a good first step.

I am proud of the work of my colleague from Windsor West who worked on this bill at committee. We will be supporting it as it goes ahead.

Business of the House

●(1645)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay has taken a leadership role relative to the Internet and the impact that it has had culturally. Being a bit older than my colleague, to listen to him talk today and give us his thoughts on this helps a person of my generation deal with some of the issues that are happening.

One of the things that I am concerned about is phishing. It strikes me that is a very significant issue.

In my little more innocent time, when I first started going on the Internet, I was asked to take an IQ test, which I should not admit publicly. I had to change every password on my computer after that because I realized that I had made a mistake, especially when the first email showed up at my address. I wound up changing my email address as well.

Does my colleague think this particular bill deals with that situation appropriately?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the issue is of how phishing is used to send out a simple email. Someone responds and then basically they have got that person. They have information. They can use that information against that person. That is a huge concern.

I would like to put it in a broader context. Where it is being used now in a very dangerous way is on Facebook. The Privacy Commissioner has certainly come out, as a result of the excellent work of the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic at the University of Ottawa, and raised the issue of privacy concerns on Facebook.

Every one of us is on Facebook, I am sure. Our kids are on Facebook. They do not see that posting their names, their cellphone numbers, all kinds of personal information about themselves, can hurt them down the road, because there are scammers out there. What is our solution? Is our solution as legislators to say, “Bad, bad, bad. We have to shut this down”, or is it to say that, no, we need to have the laws in place to protect people and to go after the people who misuse it.

Second, I think it is as important, not within the confines of the bill and it would not fit within the bill but I think it is something we need to look at, is the need to educate young people. Until people have been scammed, they will never get scammed so they do not have to worry about it. But as I said earlier, I used the example of a young student who received a scam yesterday and it had three pertinent pieces about her and her personal identity that she figured it had to be someone she knew.

All we have to do is go on Facebook. I could tell a people what high school they went to. I could tell them who their first girlfriend was. I could tell them their date of birth and their star sign. If I am looking to scam a person, going on Facebook is the first place I would go. It is the ultimate phishing expedition and people will see some long-term implications from that kind of free flow of personal, private information that people think is protected because it has just been seen by their friends, but third party applications are using it, and all kinds of corporate entities are getting in and getting access to this information.

●(1650)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Timmins—James Bay on his speech today in the House. I found it very interesting in terms of the scamming and so on that is going on.

Today, I actually received two requests for information from what I believe are people trying to scam me, and those are from organizations trying to get banking information. One of my friends back home was scammed on that very technique and provided this individual with information on banking and got scammed for just over \$3,000.

I am wondering if the hon. member thinks this legislation would help prevent that sort of situation.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's example is very pertinent because it actually speaks to another level.

I spoke of Facebook and young people getting scammed. The banking information tends to affect older people because they are very concerned about their bank credit. They receive an email, and I have received a similar email which looks just like it comes from my bank, and the email says it needs my banking information because there has been a fraud committed. That is how it happens. A person believes they have had a relationship with their bank, but if they look at those emails closely, they will suddenly realize there is something not quite correct. The hon. member raises an excellent point.

Within the confines of the bill, it will be able to go after the scammers who are sending these kinds of messages out. It will allow for people to sue, which is an important provision. The bigger issue, though, goes back to the issue we face with Facebook. We really need a larger information campaign about the rights of the digital citizen and what people need to do to protect themselves. It is not about locking the Internet down. That will not happen. It is about giving people a level of assurance, whether they are senior citizens who are getting on the Internet for the first time or whether they are young people or whether they are people like us who press, press, press, click, click, click all day long. We never know when we will make that mistake.

We do need to have this discussion. It is not a partisan discussion. This is a discussion we need to have as a Canadian legislature in terms of looking at some of the problems out there that are not being addressed. Education will be one of the key ones in stopping these kinds of scams.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this has been a very informative discussion today and I was quite intrigued by a number of my colleague's points. First and foremost, he talked about the threat to innovation, that if we do not get a handle on using the Internet in its most positive way and avoiding the pitfalls, as it were, we are going to lose out in terms of innovation.

I was hoping that he would expand on that notion of innovation.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, Clay Shirky has just written a book entitled *Here Comes Everybody* and what he says in it is that we are on the verge of an absolute transformation in industrial design in terms of economic ordering.

Business of the House

Clay says that when new technology comes in is not when the revolution happens. The revolution happens when the technology becomes boring and every day. When everybody is posting pictures of their babies online and emailing back and forth is when the real, new transformative powers begin to happen.

What Clay talks about is cognitive surplus. For example, if most of us go online and basically treat it like TV, there is no difference. However, if 5% of us are on maybe a genealogical site putting information online or doing something like Flickr where there are millions and millions of photos being built up, there is power in so many people putting just 1% or 2% of their time into building something bigger, like Wikipedia, which has enormous transformative power.

If we look at the success of Wikipedia, Clay is positing that this is the beginning of this sort of wiki building of all kinds of people coming together. That is the new model for design innovation. That is where we are going to begin to see the whole transformation of the industrial complex.

Whereas before, it was hierarchical, top down; now, there is going to be a whole movement. However, in order to make that happen, there has to be confidence and people have to know that as they are sharing information, they are not being ripped off, that they are not going to be getting hit with tons of emails and subjected to fraud. There has to be a sense that they can go online to transform and build new economies, new ideas, and new systems of working together. There has to be confidence and one way to get that confidence is to get the scammers, the spammers and the fraudsters off the Internet.

• (1655)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the third reading of Bill C-27, Electronic Commerce Protection Act, or as it is also called the ECPA.

As chair of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, I want to recognize the constructive work of all the members of the committee from all parties in improving the bill.

The bill, as amended, from committee has benefited from the work over the past months of the members of the committee. As a result, a number of key elements in the bill have been strengthened, clarified and have been done in a way without diminishing the core principles of what the government has been trying to achieve.

Email is a wonderful technology, and it has only been just over 10 years that we have all been using email broadly. In just over 10 years, it has completely changed our lives. However, many of the benefits of email have been offset by the problem of spam, which is unwanted and unsolicited commercial emails.

According to a MessageLabs report of September 2009, which is a division of Symantec Corporation, spam accounted for as much as 86% of all global email traffic. Unfortunately, Canada is in part responsible for this problem.

Canada ranks as one of the top originating states for spam. In Cisco 2008 Annual Security Report Canada ranked fourth on the list of spam by originating country list.

Late last year in the United States, Facebook won \$873 million U. S. in damages from an American court arising from the activities of a spammer based in Canada. That case was prosecuted in the United States and not in Canada. That speaks to the lack of Canadian legislation in place to prevent this kind of activity.

The high volume of spam in recent years has negatively affected the productivity of the Internet and all the technologies associated with the Internet. When a high volume of email is spammed, many people spend hours deleting unwanted messages, networks slow down and companies are forced to spend millions, if not billions of dollars, upgrading their systems, their networks, their backbones, their routers, their pipes to the Internet in order to accommodate the additional bandwidth and network capacity needed to handle this volume of email traffic.

The high volume of spam has impeded the full potential of the Internet as a platform for both personal and commercial use. Spam is more than just unwanted email. It is often used as a vehicle to perpetrate fraud on Canadians. It can lead to online fraud by luring individuals to counterfeit websites, also known as phishing. It can lead to the theft of personal data to rob bank accounts and credit card accounts, called identity theft. It can lead to the collection of personal information through illicit access on one's laptop or on one's computer, known as spyware. It often is used as a vehicle to perpetrate fraud on Canadians.

Not just Canadians suffer but Canadian businesses suffer and often this is an overlooked fact of spam. Canadian businesses suffer because they are the victims of the counterfeiting of their corporate website to defraud individuals. We all know of examples of getting emails from spammers or from other people who wish to perpetrate fraud. They ask for people's banking information. They send an email that contains a page that looks like a Royal Bank website or a TD Bank website and often many unsuspecting individuals give their information to these spammers, the people trying to perpetrate this fraud.

It also leads to spam borne viruses and other malicious software called malware, which are used to create networks of zombie computers known botnets without the knowledge of their owners. This undermines confidence not just that Canadians have in the Internet but that Canadian businesses have in the Internet as a platform for commerce, as a platform for doing business in the 21st century.

I do not think it is hyperbole to say that spam is costing Canadians and Canadian businesses billions of dollars a year in fraud, in network capacity and in the need to upgrade systems to handle the volumes of email which we are seeing. It costs the economy through malicious programs such as malware, spyware, phishing, viruses, worms and Trojans that enter computers. It costs the economy in terms of undermining Canadians and Canadian businesses in their confidence of the Internet, often having to rely on old-fashioned ways of doing business because the Internet is not seen as trustworthy enough to conduct certain types of business transactions.

• (1700)

In response to this problem, the Government of Canada launched a task force on spam to consult Canadians and their businesses. The task force was given one year to consult and report. In May 2005 the task force reported its findings and recommendations in a report to the Minister of Industry. I want to thank the members of the task force for their valuable work in this regard.

Our government has acted on the recommendations and findings of the task force by introducing Bill C-27, anti-spam legislation entitled "The Electronic Commerce Protection Act", or the ECPA. This legislation will deter the most damaging form of spam from happening in Canada and will help drive spammers and their associated activity out of Canada.

The legislation addresses the recommendations of the task force on spam, which brought together experts from industry, academia, consumers and other business experts to come together to craft a comprehensive set of measures to combat threats to the online economy. Successful legislative models in other states were also examined and taken into account when drafting the bill.

The legislation will allow Industry Canada to act as a national coordinating body to educate consumers, track and analyze statistics and trends and lead policy oversight and coordination.

The legislation will also facilitate the establishment of a non-governmental agency, the spam reporting centre, which will receive reports of spam and related online threats, allowing it to collect evidence and gather intelligence to assist the three reporting agencies, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, with the investigation and prosecution of offences.

It is important to note that the ECPA does not apply to non-commercial activity. Political parties and charities, other organizations that contact Canadians through email will not be subject to the ECPA, provided these emails do not involve selling or promoting a product.

Bill C-27 will protect Canadians and their businesses from the most damaging and deceptive forms of electronic harms and provide a regulatory regime to protect the privacy and personal security of Canadians. The rules will encourage confidence in online communications and e-commerce on the Internet.

The bill before us provides the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner with the tools they need to pursue those who undermine our online economy and to work with one another and their international counterparts. The bill has sharp teeth, administrative monetary penalties of up to \$1 million for individuals and up to \$10 million for businesses.

The bill in front of us today resulted from a great deal of work from several different sources. On the one hand, we had the recommendations and findings of the 2005 Task Force on Spam. On the other hand, we have also benefited from some of the work that former Senator Goldstein did in Bill S-220 in this regard.

Some of the features in this bill differ from what Mr. Goldstein had previously proposed. One of the most important is the use of the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy

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Commissioner to enforce the provisions, in other words, using regulatory agencies to enforce the provisions of the spam bill rather than using police enforcement agencies as Bill S-220 had proposed.

The RCMP has other urgent law enforcement responsibilities, and I believe we should not redirect those precious resources to the monitoring of unsolicited commercial email. I believe that regulatory authorities are better positioned than law enforcement authorities for this kind of white collar problem.

In drafting Bill C-27, the government also drew on a wealth of experience in other states in combating spam. The bill drew on work that had been done in New Zealand, Australia and in the United States. The bill also benefited from the approach taken by other states as well. The bill before us is based on the best and most effective aspects of those legislative regimes in those states.

• (1705)

By being consistent with the approaches of other states, by using regulatory approaches and regulatory agencies in effecting this anti-spam bill rather than law enforcement agencies, we will help promote greater international co-operation to combat spam and other online fraud.

As members of the House know, Bill C-27 adopts an express consent regime designed to give businesses and consumers control over their inboxes and their computers. It requires that the individual's consent be sought and obtained in order to permit an ongoing commercial transaction. Once consent has been expressed by an individual, it remains until the individual opts out or revokes that consent. The industry committee took a careful look at how to ensure that the companies that used email could keep in touch with consumers so they did not inadvertently find themselves in violation of the law.

Members of the House will also know that the bill contains implied consent provisions that have been expanded to include suspicious publication of an electronic address. If someone publishes his or her email address on a website or in a print advertisement, he or she is considered to have consented to receive unsolicited commercial messages, provided the sender's message relates to the business or office held by the person.

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Consent is also implied when a person gives out a business card or provides an email address in a letter. Similarly, the amended bill clarifies that when a business is sold, the purchaser has an implied consent to contact the customers of that business. Following the initial transaction between a business and a consumer, the period of implied consent has been expanded to 24 months from the original 18, as first contained in the original bill. This gives businesses even more time in which to obtain the express consent to further commercial transactions.

Another area in which the bill has been amended is in ensuring that updates to computer programs are not adversely affected by the protections we have put in place against malware and spyware.

The committee looked at the impact the bill would have on the installation of computer programs. It has been amended in the situation where the installation of updates, as it is understood as part of an original contract under which the software is installed, is not prohibited by the bill. Most of these programs call for automatic updates, such as daily or weekly updates, to anti-virus software. These updates will not require fresh consent for each instance. Running programs such as JavaScript or Flash programs will also not require express consent each time they are run.

Let me say a few words about the private right of action before I conclude. Some hon. members have questioned whether a private right of action is necessary. I believe it is. The private right of action enforces and complements the enforcement efforts of the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. I would remind the House that this feature has been very effective in other jurisdictions in shutting down those such as spammers who have caused to the electronic economy. I believe it will be equally effective here in allowing groups or individuals to pursue violators. The private right of action will allow individuals and businesses suffering financial harm an avenue of recourse to be compensated and awarded damages.

Finally, the bill is technology-neutral. Bill C-27 recognizes that the convergence of voice and data is happening and will eventually be complete. It will allow the Government of Canada to prevent spam and associated threats regardless of how the technology evolves. Therefore, the bill will remain current in the future as technology evolves.

If Bill C-27 is passed by the House at third reading, Canada will go a long way to combatting spam and spam-related threats. Based on the experience of other states with similar legislation, a reduction in spam is quickly expected. When Australia adopted similar legislation in 2004, it dropped out of the world's top 10 spam-originating states and major spammers in Australia closed their operations altogether.

While the legislation will not eliminate spam entirely, Canadians will see a reduction in the amount of spam in their inboxes. Equally important, the legislation will decrease the most damaging forms of spam from originating in Canada and will help drive spammers and their associated illegal activities out of Canada.

The Internet has become the primary platform for online commerce and general communications. Canada has had a long history of global leadership in the telecommunications sector. E-

commerce is now a part of the Canadian economy, with billions of dollars of goods and services being sold over the Internet each year in Canada.

• (1710)

If adopted by Parliament, this legislation would allow Canada to continue in that leadership, ensuring that we remain a secure locale for e-commerce and for Canadians. It is time for Canadian law to catch up with the Internet age. All parties in the House have expressed their desire to strengthen confidence in online commerce. All parties are opposed to spam and see the danger of it.

We have studied this bill at great length in committee and have emerged with important amendments that clarify it. The time has come to pass it at third reading.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we often talk about individuals and their individual experiences on the Internet. However, there is also this extremely important aspect of commercial business and what it can do from the other side to protect itself and the important practices it can follow to help Canadians understand and recognize legitimate commercial communications.

I wonder if the member would care to comment about the importance of engaging business on the other side. We can legislate only so much, but we really do need partners in this if we are going to deal with it effectively.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, part of this debate that is often overlooked is the cost to Canadian businesses and the problems that Canadian corporations have in managing their email networks. From personal experience, I can say that it costs billions of dollars for Canadian corporations to handle the volumes of spam that we are now seeing.

As the House knows, we in Parliament have size limits on our inboxes. The simple reality is that the volume of email coming into the House of Commons and Senate computer systems is such that a great volume of these emails are spam. While companies can put in place firewalls, routers and other forms of software on their servers to redirect or block spam, at the end of the day, a lot of this spam still makes its way through those firewalls and routers and into the email servers, which then become completely clogged and saturated with this spam. As a result, legitimate transactions and emails are often slowed down or mailboxes are restricted in terms of the amount of email they can handle in order to deal with all of the spam that is being received.

Backup systems have to be enlarged. Bandwidth has to be enlarged. Email systems have to be expanded. All of these represent hidden costs to Canadian businesses. Many times, the senior management of these businesses does not realize the number of dollars that are being wasted on IT departments and chief information officers to handle the volumes of spam that we are seeing.

I think this bill is a move in the right direction because it is going to help Canadian businesses combat the time wasting and resource wasting that this problem creates, despite the efforts taken to put network security in place and expand data storage systems.

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• (1715)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-27. PIPEDA falls under the jurisdiction of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics with regard to personal information.

A number of members have been involved in one aspect of this and that is identity theft. It is a very serious problem in our society and the stories are horrific. The impacts it can have on people are very tragic.

I certainly want to speak in support of the bill, basically to start the process of educating legislators, because this is a starting point from which we need to continue to grow due to the velocity with which the information and technology are growing, as well as some of the tricks and things that we have seen and the way the envelope is being pushed.

Most members will have seen things in their inboxes from people identifying themselves as representatives of their bank. The emails say that the bank is doing a security check and requires members to provide their account numbers or something like that. They look very official. As a matter of fact, often the logos of a bank or the proper or stylized name of the bank will appear. Yet Canadians should understand that banks do not do business related to security and privacy over the Internet. It is just not a secure environment in which to do that.

This bill would establish a regulatory framework, which I think is a very good start. Our economy is changing. Our kids grew up with computers. Their ability to move very quickly through the electronic world is absolutely fascinating.

I actually have a degree in computer science from the University of Western Ontario and at the time I took that degree, we were using punch cards, which will give everyone an idea of where I came from. This is a very serious issue, and I am glad that we are at least at the point that this bill is at third reading and this electronic commerce protection act would prohibit the sending of commercial electronic messages without prior consent of the recipient.

It brings to mind the do not call list system that was established, which Canadians will say does not work very well. It is problematic and we should probably learn from the experience of the do not call list that notwithstanding the mechanisms that have been put in place, somehow things slip through. There is a caution that as much as we legislate, we are not going to be able to anticipate all the pitfalls that may transpire.

This act would also amend the Competition Act to prohibit false and misleading commercial representations made electronically. As I have indicated, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, referred to as PIPEDA, prohibits the collection of personal information by means of unauthorized access to computer systems and the unauthorized compiling of lists of electronic addresses.

That is a reasonable indication that the bill addresses this from sufficient directions. However, I asked a question earlier of the previous speaker. The role of business in this also comes into play.

Last week I just happened to receive a document called "The Canadian Privacy and Data Security Toolkit". This is for small and medium size enterprises, many of which are active. These are the ones that are extremely active, scouring the bushes, looking for that bit of business, that niche for their businesses.

The foreword is by our Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, and the introduction is by Ann Cavoukian, Ph.D., Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario. This was actually produced by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, which is trying to educate its clients about some of the important things.

• (1720)

I want to start off from a business perspective looking back. Some of these businesses may very well be the businesses that are improperly using information they receive from individuals over the net. It states that:

Information privacy is the right of an individual to exercise control over the collection, use, disclosure and retention of his or her personal information. Personal information (also known as personally identifiable information...) is any information, recorded or otherwise, relating to an identifiable individual.

It includes such things as credit card numbers, debit card numbers, social insurance and security numbers, driver's licence numbers, and health cards, all of which deal with a fair bit of sensitive information. This leads to the whole situation of things like identity theft.

A constituent wrote me an email over the weekend to thank my staff for giving her some hints and tips on what she could do to protect herself because she had lost her wallet with all her information in it and had in fact had an indication that someone was already using some of that information. Things happen quickly when information gets into the hands of the wrong people.

The report talks about a privacy breach. On page 83 it says that:

A privacy breach is unauthorized access to, collection, use, or disclosure of personal information. The breach could be the result of an inadvertent act such as the loss of a laptop or by a deliberate act such as an attack from a computer hacker. Both, however, are considered breaches since the information is no longer under your protection.

Other examples of privacy breaches [include] misplaced fax, CD-ROM, or USB drive key[,]...sales receipts with credit card information thrown into recycling bin instead of the shredder[,] old computers reused with personal information still present on the hard drive[,] or customer files stolen during a break-in.

The consequences of a privacy breach could be a number of things such as:

damage to reputation or brand[,] loss of consumer confidence[,] reduced revenues [and] unexpected costs to compensate victims.

The potential damage to reputation or brand can be severe. In a survey of individuals who had received notification of a breach, almost 20% of the respondents terminated their relationship with the company, and another 40% were reconsidering their relationship.

We can see that this is not an inconsequential item we are dealing with for either side. The individual's private information needs to be protected, and a business whether small, medium or large has a role to play in protecting that information which they legitimately acquire through business transactions. There is often the temptation to utilize that information for unauthorized uses.

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There was a case recently within the Government of Canada involving, and I will try not to be too specific, a program to do with a grant for doing something energy related. People who applied for that grant started to receive information on other areas of the government. When someone applies to the Government of Canada for a grant, I would suggest that they do not expect to find themselves on a mailing list and getting information to do with other matters related to the government.

The government itself is also strongly targeted here with regard to its practices. We have to be vigilant to ensure that none of the information the government collects, regardless of the department, is inadvertently or advertently used for a purpose which was unauthorized by the person who made contact with the government in the first place.

● (1725)

There is one other thing that I thought was kind of interesting. Under privacy impact assessment, there is a quick privacy self-assessment. I thought it would be interesting to let members know what small and medium-sized businesses might do.

The first item is, do we know our privacy obligations?

Some businesses are busy. I must admit, from an accountant's perspective, most people who run small and medium-sized businesses are more interested in doing business than they are in keeping the books and dealing with the myriad of paperwork and legislative reporting, but this is about knowing the privacy obligations, both federal and provincial, because there are some differences.

The second item is, has the organization assigned responsibility for compliance with privacy legislation and policy?

This is an important aspect, because it is an indication of whether the company is taking it seriously, that it has a serious responsibility to comply with provincial and federal legislation and to be proactive in terms of protecting the information of individuals.

The third accountability and management assessment question is, has the organization conducted an inventory of personal information to identify what information has been collected, where the information is collected from, who has access to that information and to whom may be the information be disclosed externally?

That is extremely important, because as we well know, one of the ways that people get on mailing lists is that people who accumulate personal information tend to share it or sell it to others. All of a sudden, like a pyramid scheme, it just continues to expand to where all information seems to be in the hands of all people.

The fourth assessment point is, does the organization make use of online privacy resources, for example, websites of the privacy commissioners or the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, to assist with privacy compliance and awareness of privacy developments?

Keeping on top of it is clearly very important, and it will be important for us also to readily assess the evolution of this electronic vehicle that is being used and has caused a great deal of difficulty and problems for individuals and for businesses.

The next point asks, has the organization adopted a privacy policy that addresses collection, use, disclosure to third parties, secure disposal of personal information and retention of personal information as it applies to particular operations?

With regard to that last point about the retention, there is a shelf life for information. For instance, if we have information about someone who is deceased, all of a sudden, if it is made known, that information has to be destroyed.

Our committee has dealt with even something like Google Street View. There are some privacy implications there. There are a couple of others where we have provided information to offshore parties as well, being able to control that or make sure of that when we are complying under obligations we have, for instance, with the United States, which requires that for any aircraft that even just flies over any its air space, documents have to be provided as to who the passengers are and where they came from, et cetera.

Those are extremely important because our private information, our personal information, is everywhere.

I must admit that I tend to keep thinking about whether I should just report as lost and not recoverable all my cards and the other things that have my personal information on them and get new numbers, simply as almost a reaction to what can happen.

● (1730)

Just last week I got a phone call from my bank. I have a U.S. credit card because I have family in the United States, and we travel sometimes to visit them and I use that card. I have not been to California in about 10 years because that is not where my family is, but I was advised that there were two \$1,000 charges to my U.S. credit card. The bank took all the information and advised me that those charges would not be left on my account, and I have a new card today.

Some cards do protect us, but not all of them. It is incumbent on people to understand what can happen when their personal information is used or stolen. Do they have coverage in some fashion? Some of the instruments we use do provide protection.

There are two more questions on the privacy policy side.

The sixth question asks, is the privacy policy made available to individuals prior to or at the time that the personal information is collected? Basically, do employees know what is going on and are they aware of all of the policy related to the activity they are undertaking?

Finally, the self-assessment asks, are your employees aware of the privacy policy and able to direct individuals to it?

I found this to be an excellent document. It also has a checklist on privacy procedures, training and disclosure to third parties. One could even score oneself on this.

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I would certainly recommend this document to hon. members or others who might want to know a bit more from the perspective of business and how it would be able to interact with this legislation. This legislation would help businesses understand the kinds of things they must be aware of and cautioned not to do. It would also make businesses aware of the kinds of things they could do proactively, and that is a complement to the legislation.

Again, this document is called “The Canadian Privacy and Data Security Toolkit for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises”, and it is published by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. I am sure that hon. members would be able to get it.

I appreciate the fact that this legislation has come forward. I think there will be good support from all hon. members. We need this bill to give us the foundation or the basis on which to be able to assure Canadians that we are taking all reasonable steps to provide an environment in which personal information is protected from those who would misuse it or use it for other wrongful purposes.

The bill itself is fairly straightforward. I appreciate that this was a lot of work for committee. I commend committee for going through it. I did notice the breadth of the work that has been done not only at committee, but by others prior to committee work. A long evolutionary process has brought us to this point.

It is extremely important that members also familiarize themselves with this. I hope members take an opportunity in their households to advise their constituents about important legislation such as this, as well as some tips for Canadians at large to help them safeguard their personal information.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I see it, there are two problems that this legislation is trying to address.

The first is obviously the problem of spam as a vehicle to perpetrate online fraud, whether that be phishing or identity theft, spyware, spoofing, counterfeiting, malware, botnets and the like.

The other part of the problem that this bill is attempting to address is the fact that even if spam were not a vehicle for online fraud, even if spam were not a delivery mechanism for all these malicious types of computer programs, even if spam were not doing anything malicious in terms of what it is delivering to people's computer inboxes, it has a second major problem that is often overlooked, which is that it chews up a huge amount of bandwidth, of storage space on corporate and other computer systems. It is reported that up to 85% of all email traffic in the world is spam, and that costs a huge amount to Canadian businesses in terms of bandwidth usage, in terms of storage space, and that is often overlooked.

Much of the spam cannot be blocked by firewalls or routers or other forms of technology. The proof is that when we go into our Hotmail account or Yahoo! Mail account or Gmail account, there will be a folder for spam, because spam cannot even be blocked from entering into their systems and their networks. This has a huge hidden cost for the Internet, both for consumers and for Canadian businesses.

I wonder if the member would comment on that.

●(1735)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I must admit, the first thing I thought of was Bill Gates saying that all anyone would need is 64 kilobytes for their Commodore 64 and nobody would ever need anything more.

On the weekend I picked a little memory stick that has 16 gigabytes of memory on it. The cost of this is coming down very substantially.

On the commercial side, the member is absolutely right. This is a tremendous amount of information. On a personal level, our computers get filled up pretty quickly. I think members of Parliament have all experienced the same thing, where they can go into their office after having left late at night and find somewhere between 100 and 200 emails in their computer. This is such an easy facility to use, so we can understand that so many of these are people from around the world.

The member is quite right that the risk to us is that we have the intelligence or maybe the misapplication of intelligence of virtually the entire world looking at ways in which it can intrude, looking at ways in which it can take advantage of our information, destroy our information, share it with others, or park itself for activation later on.

Some of the Norton software for bugs and the like cannot keep up. Every time I go to Future Shop, there is another version of Norton there.

Certainly businesses need to get engaged here. They have a significant role to play. I do not know how many small and medium-sized businesses, though, have been engaged to protect their information, to protect their software from invasion, and whether they can or even know how to detect it, and this concerns me.

Eventually what is going to happen is that business information will be modified in ways in which there is such a high volume of traffic through it that ordinary businesses that are operationally focused will never be able to see it until there is substantial damage.

Again I thank the committee. I hope we will be able to continue to improve upon the legislation as the risk continues to evolve.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that we support this bill. I see the committee chair nodding his head that, yes, it is an excellent bill. I must say, this bill is a good start. This new legislation specifically targets unsolicited commercial electronic messages. Citizens have been demanding such a bill for some time, and it is sorely needed. Not only are commercial emails sent with the prior consent of the recipient important to electronic commerce, but they are also essential to the development of the online economy.

By drafting legislation prohibiting spam and protecting personal information and privacy, as well as computers, emails and our networks, the proposed legislation is designed to allow individuals and companies to sue spammers and hold any businesses whose products and services are promoted using these means partially responsible for spamming activity.

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As well, email marketers would be required to obtain informed consent from recipients to receive emails; provide an opting-out mechanism for further emails; and create a complaints system. That is the main purpose of the bill. Since most spam Canadians receive comes from other countries, international anti-spam measures are needed. The government should continue its efforts to harmonize anti-spam policies and encourage countries to work together on enforcing anti-spam legislation.

I would like to talk about this a bit longer. We know that spam comes from all over the world. That is one thing. But Canadian law applies only to Canada and Canadians, not to other countries. How might this affect us as consumers? What sort of commercial impact might it have? Businesses here in Canada will not be able to distribute advertising on the Internet using software or other ways of communicating with a computer.

The biggest problem is that because other countries are not subject to this law and their legislation is not harmonized with Canada's, they can keep on sending messages. If I have a business and I decide to send advertising over the Internet for doors, windows and other things, I cannot send a mass mailing. But a business in another country can.

We have to be competitive with industries around the world, because we are part of a global economy now. So what reason do we have to protect consumers? Protecting them against phishing or hacking is one thing, but we must not forget business. That was the committee's main concern. We must not prevent businesses here from continuing to make a profit. Eight billion transactions are carried out on the Internet. I believe that Canadian businesses should enjoy a share of this growth with all the people here in Canada.

It is vital that we ask ourselves whether we want to protect our industries or consumers. Should we let others continue to do business without our being able to participate? These are the questions that should be raised, and they have been raised. They have not received a full answer, but this bill is a major step, because it proposes a concrete measure within a timeframe. It took four years to come up with this legislation, because we wanted something better. As we know, things change much more rapidly with the Internet, where six months is an eternity.

● (1740)

So, fairly soon after this bill is passed, we will have to take time to see how things are unfolding and to make adjustments, as cyberpirates target us.

By the way, how do we define spam? Spam is any electronic commercial message, any text, audio, voice or visual message sent by any means of telecommunication—whether by email, cellular phone text messaging or instant messaging—without the consent of recipients. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that its purpose is to encourage participation in a new commercial activity, and that it includes electronic messages that offer to purchase, sell, barter or lease a product, good, service, land or an interest or right in land, or offer a business, investment or gaming opportunity.

I mentioned what spam is. It has to do with commercial activities, including offers to purchase, sell, barter or lease a product, good, service, land or an interest or right in land. All these are commercial

activities that exist here. With this legislation, these people will no longer be able to use the Internet to send their messages.

What is left for these people to be competitive? Not much. They could use mail services. However, this can be costly, considering that, as I mentioned, such costs will not be incurred in other countries. We always hear—as one member said—that spam requires a lot of work. It takes someone to prepare these emails. If, all of a sudden, we prevent our industries from using the Internet to sell or rent all the products that I listed earlier, what are they going to do? As I just said, they will have to rely on mail services.

Just think how clogged up the system could get if every industry decided to send a mass mailing to all the other businesses, or to households. How much time would businesses spend opening mail, instead of emails? Of course, Canada Post would be pleased, since postal rates are exorbitant, but businesses would no longer be competitive, because of these costs. We should not forget that, because this is a significant economic consideration.

Having said what is considered spam, it is also important to point out what is not. What is not spam are messages sent by an individual to another individual with whom they have a personal or family relationship. For instance, I have no personal ties to you, Mr. Speaker. Imagine I send you a message, not as a member, since that is not allowed. So imagine that someone from outside the House sends you an email, he or she could be subject to fines, since this legislation no longer allows emails from one person to another. The bill reads:

—a message that is sent to a person who is engaged in a commercial activity and consists solely of an inquiry or application related to that activity.

Regarding commercial activities, witnesses came to testify that, initially, the bill required 18 months of contact with the other person. Let me give an example. I know that about every four or five years, family situations and incomes change, so people could be selling their house and buying a new one. With this new law, the real estate agent who sold me my house can no longer contact me after 18 months. In fact, he would be subject to a fine, if the 18-month time limit has passed. In committee, we were able to change that timeframe to 24 months. We would have preferred it to be even longer, to allow businesses and individuals to continue communicating with their existing clients.

● (1745)

As I said, the purpose of this bill was to restrict commercial activity, which is important here.

(a) that is, in whole or in part, an interactive two-way voice communication between individuals;

(b) that is sent by means of a facsimile to a telephone account; or

(c) that is a voice recording sent to a telephone account.

...

(c) that is of a class, or is sent in circumstances, specified in the regulations.

This bill will completely define the issue. There will surely be some flaws, as with any bill, whether it is good or bad. Since this is a new bill, there are always flaws because we forgot something or did not think to regulate something. Over time, we will have to re-examine the bill, more quickly than any other bill, to ensure that we have not left anything out.

The only circumstances under which spam could be sent would be if the person to whom the message is sent has consented to receiving it, whether the consent is express or implied. So, if I send a message and the individual agrees to receive it, a relationship has been established.

Let us take that same real estate agent, and let us assume that I heard from one of my colleagues that his brother-in-law has a house to sell. I would not be able to send that brother-in-law an email to let him know that his brother-in-law had informed me about the house for sale, or to tell him that I know someone who would be interested in buying the house. I could not do that.

I could only do it over the telephone. I could directly contact the individual via telephone or meet them in person. I would have to establish contact before doing business with this person.

So therein lies the problem. Anyone who wishes to establish a business relationship with another person must now do so via the telephone or mail, or meet the individual in person. They could not send a simple email.

We are setting limits. That is the message I want to get across. We are setting limits, but we cannot limit other countries in sending us these messages. We have to consider doing that and count on the goodwill of other countries such as the United States, Australia, France or other European countries. This type of legislation needs to be harmonized. Many countries do not have such regulations or laws. They can therefore do what they want because they are not subject to such legislation.

In addition to being in a form that conforms to the prescribed requirements, the message will have to make it possible to identify and contact the sender. The message must include an unsubscribe mechanism, with an email address or hyperlink, so that the recipient can indicate that he or she does not want to receive any further commercial electronic messages from the sender. If I send a message or an email, at the end of that message there specifically needs to be a box to check or a note explaining to the person how to stop receiving further messages.

I think this is the right approach, but in order for it to be successful inquiries would be necessary. The CRTC would have interesting powers. It could require a person to preserve transmission data, produce a copy of a document that is in their possession and prepare a document based on data, information or documents that are in their possession. It could also conduct a site visit in order to gather such information or, if necessary, to establish whether there was a violation.

● (1750)

Because it cannot do that itself, note that it will have to get a warrant from a justice of the peace prior to entering premises. It

Business of the House

cannot do that by itself; the CRTC cannot do it by itself; the Competition Bureau has certain powers, but there again its powers are limited. Today, the Competition Bureau has no powers of inquiry. That is why there is Bill C-452, which will give the Competition Bureau three types of powers of inquiry: an exclusive power of inquiry, a power of inquiry to summon and protect witnesses, and a power to search. That is what is important.

How can agencies conduct inquiries and do the work for which they have been created if they have no power? I have introduced Bill C-452 to give the Competition Bureau this power so it can conduct inquiries and do the work we expect of it.

If the court believes that a person has violated any of those provisions, it may, which is not to say that it will have to, order that the applicant be paid an amount representing the loss or damages suffered, or any expenses incurred. If it is impossible for the applicant to establish those amounts, the court may order that the applicant be paid a maximum of \$200 per contravention, up to a maximum of \$1 million. I am choosing my words carefully: not “shall order”, but “may order”. That is very different.

As I said earlier, the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner must also consult one another, and they may share any information with one another in order to carry out their activities and responsibilities pursuant to their respective powers.

So there are three agencies: the CRTC, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and the Competition Bureau. Together, they have certain powers under the bill. However, they must be capable of communicating with one another. We know that these agencies have their private preserves and they are not prone to disclosing information.

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner is another thing again. The Liberal member referred to this earlier. That Office is an important player in this regard.

Unsolicited commercial electronic messages are becoming a serious social and economic problem that undermines the personal and commercial productivity of Quebeckers. Not only do they hinder email use for personal communications but they also threaten the growth of legitimate e-commerce. As I mentioned earlier, when people are assigned to open these emails, time is lost and businesses become less competitive. That causes a problem.

I would like to point out something else. The minister, or another organization somehow involved in Bill C-27, has managed to ensure that a clause in this bill could jeopardize the National Do-Not-Call List (DNCL). A door has been opened because one of the clauses states that the DNCL—set up by this government and containing the telephone numbers of seven million people who do not wish to be unnecessarily pestered by telemarketers—could be deactivated. They have now made it possible, within one year, to eliminate a list that cost millions to set up.

● (1755)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech.

Business of the House

The issue that we are trying to deal with here, on all sides I would hope, is the need to ensure that innovation continues to happen, that we believe that the Internet is going to be more and more of a vehicle for not just economic innovation but for social, cultural and political discourse. Therefore, there has to be the issue of confidence.

When people go on the Internet and they respond to people they might not know, they have to have a fundamental sense of confidence that they can make those connections. Without those links that are being made from person to person, from business to business, major problems will occur in terms of impeding productivity and also undermining the fundamental revolutionary power of what is before us.

The issue of spam is not simply an issue of an irritant. It is not simply that it bothers us because we have to delete from our inbox everyday hundreds of useless irritating emails. The deeper issue is the underlying issue of spam that leads to fraud. There is such an interconnection between the misuse of Internet communication and international fraud rings. We see that Canada was alone in the G7 in terms of having any kind of plan for dealing with spam up until now and we are also one of the worst spam bases in the G7 and, in fact, the world.

Could my hon. colleague speak to the connection between fraud and spam, and the need to have an international standard because a spam artist knows no domestic boundary or border?

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has identified the problem and its implications. Yes, it can be useful. There is spam, emails, and there are important things. There are things we can use every day. It is true that there has been fraud and that is why we have a bill. However, we must be careful. I can certainly understand how a great deal of spam can affect the productivity of some companies.

However, if we restrict people here and our businesses—those trying to make an honest living for themselves and their employees—if they can no longer use email and the Internet to sell and promote their products, what do they have left? As I was saying earlier, that leaves the postal service. This will hurt small businesses, who will not be able to keep up with big businesses. Larger big businesses will win out and smaller businesses will disappear. Is that what we want? It is one thing to protect our citizens. But we must also protect our businesses so that they can continue to participate in a given market.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a question of my colleague today.

I am very concerned about the bill with regard to the cost and confusion the legislation might have for small businesses in the country. Oftentimes the government introduces legislation. Then, after it is introduced, it is quite a complicated process and expense communicating with small businesses and getting them up to speed on what the requirements are.

I can think of many initiatives in that area over the last several years. I just wonder if the member has any thoughts about how we should be proceeding with regard to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, my colleague put his finger on the problem. Yes, we discussed it in committee. It would seem that businesses would continue for some time, because as for any other bill, we do not yet know what impact it will have.

That is why I said during my speech that this bill would have to be reviewed again as soon as possible after it is passed, to determine whether or not it presents a problem for our businesses. That is what should be done. Six months is a long time and a year is much too long, but we would have to look at the legislation again to determine whether it has affected our companies and our society directly.

• (1805)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we have moved this legislation along to the point where it should be ready to be made law. However, then we look at the do not call registry which was made law.

I am sure most members of the House have received phone calls. I receive calls at home all the time telling me my credit card information is incorrect and I have to press 1 immediately to correct credit card information. I am getting those calls at home. I was not getting them before the do not call registry was established.

It seems to me that we can say whatever we want in the House about spammers. We can talk until we are blue in the face and yet the fraud and misrepresentation continues, and the lack of political will to get serious about this remains in place.

I would ask my hon. colleague, does he think, besides reviewing the bill and its effectiveness, we need to show our other competitive countries in the G8, which are actually serious on these things? We preach the gospel of change, but it seems that once something is implemented, the government goes back to being an agnostic on actually dealing with it.

In light of the failure of the do not call registry, would my hon. colleague like to perhaps guess where this is going to go?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, yes, I will. A witness told us. That was our concern. We knew that the question would come up when a clause was put in the bill that could abolish the national do not call list.

The question did come up, and there was no mention in the answer of abolishing the list. The government wants to be able to replace this regulatory system in future if necessary.

I believe that they want to abolish this list. I do not know why, since they are the ones who introduced it. It cost businesses \$5 million to comply with the list. This bill contains a clause that could abolish it. That is unfortunate, because the do not call list has been in place for a year and it is working.

Business of the House

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, when the government brought in the do not call registry, individuals signed up so they would not be called. Then we found out that international scammers simply walked away with that list because internationally the registry is not respected. All the people, who put their numbers on the list so they would not be called, found themselves victimized by fraud artists and scammers.

There is talk about taking the existing registry and rolling it into Bill C-27. That is possible and I am open to the suggestion. However, my concern is this. Given the fact that the government showed absolutely no teeth in dealing with all of the scam artists in the Cayman Islands, and wherever else, who obtained the list of our citizens, how are we going to ensure that we are protected from international scammers who have no interest in what we proclaim in the House of Commons?

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Shefford has only 30 seconds left.

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely the problem. The bill does not mention what is happening at the international level. It only makes reference to what is going on locally, here in Canada. Anything outside the country is excluded. We do not hear about it and we cannot pass an international law either. We would need the G7 or G8 to pass a law that would be respected and endorsed by all its members.

I want to go back to the do not call list. I personally put the question to the chairman of the CRTC, who told me that the list is working. Federal public servants use it. I do not know why they identified it and included it in this legislation. I do not have an answer to that.

•(1810)

[English]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Yukon.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-27, the electronic commerce protection act.

I think that the last interchange is an indication that the legislation before us may have its shortcomings but the urgency with respect to bringing the legislation forward is undeniable. It is undeniable because of the invasiveness of spam and that people's lives can be turned absolutely upside down by those who use spam with the intent to defraud and to use information that is available through access to information. It has been pointed out that no technological firewall or router can act as a barrier and people are absolutely susceptible to those who have spent a huge amount of time thinking of how they can, through an email invasion, access information that will be used fraudulently.

This is not an issue over which the government or any particular party has proprietary rights. In this House we all share the responsibility to have in place a legislative regime that anticipates the nature of this invasion through electronic commerce with the intent to defraud or to put forward false information.

We all share the desire to develop the tools. This will not be the end. The committee has made amendments to original legislation that was put forward through a committee or a task force process. This bill will go through the Senate process. I would assure members of the House, and I refer in particular to the interchange that just took place, there will be other mechanisms undoubtedly, other tools that will be developed through the continuing process of developing the legislation.

I am sure there are people who are watching who only see bits and pieces of the debate. People do not always see the total context within which the debate on legislation is taking place. I would like to provide a chronology to put things in context.

Spam is a serious concern for individual Canadians and businesses. Back in 2004-05, the then Liberal government established a task force to look at anti-spam legislation. That task force brought forward recommendations which generally paralleled the bill before us. Those recommendations were aimed at prohibiting the sending of spam without prior consent as a first principle. The second principle was that it would be an offence to use false or misleading statements to disguise the origins or true intent of an email.

The task force led to a number of key recommendations. I think there were 22 recommendations in all. The government of the day established a series of round tables to seek input from the business community and the community in general.

•(1815)

At that time, the specific recommendations were to prohibit the sending of spam without prior consent as the first principle, to prohibit the use of false or misleading statements disguising the origins or intent of an email, and to prohibit the installation of unauthorized programs. Spam artists are so cunning that if a person does give clearance to a misleading and disguised email, information with respect to even the person's passwords can be made available, which gives access to the person's email content, websites, et cetera. The final principle that was established through that task force was to prohibit the unauthorized collection of personal information or email addresses.

This bill has all of the elements of those task force recommendations and looks to implement the recommendations of that task force. As I have said, this is not a Liberal approach or a Conservative approach; in fact, it appears that the bill has the support of all parties in the House.

There is one aspect of the bill that is different from the regime that was put forward back in 2004-05 under those recommendations, and that is with respect to fines and the implications with respect to what may happen if one is found guilty of violating the intent of the legislation. The fines for these violations can go up to a maximum of \$1 million for individuals and \$10 million for businesses. It establishes rules for warrants, for information, as was discussed by the last speaker and in questions, and in particular, that information being available through warrants during investigations and injunctions that can be sought on spam activity while under investigation.

Business of the House

The bill also establishes the private right of action, allowing individuals and businesses the ability to seek damages from the perpetrators of spam. That is a particularly important principle. We have talked about victims and victims' statements during criminal proceedings and recently with the bill that firms up the interventions with respect to parole and the ongoing communication with those who have been victimized with respect to how the provisions of parole are carried out.

This bill also attempts to err on the side of victims. It gives them the ability to seek damages from the perpetrators of spam, depending upon the nature of invasion of privacy and the activity that took place.

It was pointed out that the committee had some problems with flaws in this bill. Clause 6 seemed to be a little too broadly written and, as has been pointed out by other speakers, could suppress a very legitimate part of our application of technology and the whole sector. It could impose an adverse position with respect to those who are creative within the technology, the rules of the technology and so on. It was pointed out that the committee was not satisfied to that extent. However, amendments were made to the bill.

The bill also maintains a very strong and some have said heavy-handed position, but given the nature of the illegal activity going on, I think that all of the House would concur with the committee's intent to make those who are guilty suffer.

• (1820)

Generally speaking, those in the stakeholder groups were not satisfied with the original task force recommendations, and there may be some who are still not satisfied with the bill. However, as I have indicated, it has gone through the committee stage, amendments have been made and at this point I think we have to err on the side of those who use their email and other technology for positive and high value-added activity and go after those who would victimize those who are using the technology.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I realize that there are certain provinces, I believe Quebec is one and Manitoba is another, that have class action legislation. Ontario might have it as well.

I wonder if the member could confirm that class action provisions might be applicable as far as the bill is concerned. It seems to me that if we are dealing on an individual basis, it is a much more positive approach if we could have the bill affected by class action lawsuits, whereby people could take action on the part of a whole group of people who were being victimized by certain types of spam activity.

I wonder if the member would comment on that and whether he has any ideas for improvements.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is a lawyer, and I very much respect his knowledge of not only this kind of legislation, but the recourse that innocents would have with respect to the law.

The bill leans toward the concept of victims' rights. If victims' rights can be characterized through class action, and in other aspects of law, both civil and criminal, then that can happen. This is embarking on new ground. There will be many who will be viewing the intent of the bill and the legislation. It may be contested through

the courts, but certainly the provisions with respect to victims would leave the door open, I would say from a lay person's perspective, to class actions. That would mitigate the cost associated with an action. Also, with the kind of publicity that is entrenched in that approach it would do what the bill, in terms of its intent is trying to do. It would put those who would use spam for defrauding and other criminal purposes on notice that more than individual court proceedings could occur. Class actions are very costly. The repercussions could be serious and would act as a deterrent, I would think. However, I am sure that the member would have better suggestions than I would from a legal perspective.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is always very succinct and informative in his speeches.

In his speech he talked about the fines, which he said were slightly different from the original task force recommendations. What specifically was he getting at? I would like his opinion on that. Also, I think there needs to be a significantly large fine for huge corporations because some of them look at a small fine as the cost of doing business and just carry on. It does not have an effect.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, there are those with legal experience who could probably give a better answer to that.

When I review the bill and look at fines of a maximum of \$1 million for individuals and \$10 million for businesses, it would seem that is a pretty serious step toward the objective the member has which I inferred from his question. In that there is not a regime that is that serious now, this would be a fairly substantive deterrent. These are very serious charges and very serious fines.

The whole process through the bill establishes a framework for investigation. The notion that there are rules to be established with respect to warrants, for information during an investigation and so on, certainly provides a framework which will make the bill a much greater deterrent, if it is fully understood, than exists at this time.

• (1825)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2004-05 a Liberal government anti-spam task force consulted the public widely and had round tables with stakeholders. This important bill to limit spam did not come out of the blue. There were four major recommendations from the task force.

The first is prohibiting the sending spam without the prior consent of recipients. I cannot imagine anyone in the public who would not want this to come into effect very quickly. We all get hundreds and hundreds of nuisance and unwarranted spam. People must be dreaming for the day when they will no longer be sent. Quite often it is the very same message with a different title, which I will talk about a little later. This will be a very popular part of the bill for businesses and anyone who uses a computers.

The second is the use of false or misleading statements disguising the origin or true intent of the email. I am sure everyone has received emails that they have opened by accident because they are very clever titled such as "You haven't paid your bill" or other more creative ways of getting us to open the email. Then there is the very same email we received one hundred times trying to sell us the very same product.

The third major recommendation from the Liberal task force is the installation of unauthorized programs prohibiting that and no one would want that to occur.

The fourth is the unauthorized collection of personal information or email addresses. That is very significant. Canadians and businesses do not want the unauthorized collection of their personal information. All kinds of damage can be done.

We only need to go back to the debates we have had recently on commercial crime to see the huge multi-billion dollars in damages and lives ruined because information of individuals has been used for fraudulent purposes. Computer technology is relatively new. In a previous job before I became a member of Parliament there were no computers in business. In that it is a new technology, people, especially seniors who were not used to this throughout their lives, could easily be hoodwinked into giving personal information, which is then be used to victimize them. It is very important this not be allowed to continue.

Let us look at the scenario where millions of unauthorized, unwanted messages or spam go through the Internet. How important is the Internet to today's life? It is really a backbone for many people and for many businesses. The whole way that our society functions

• (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member will still have time available in his time slot.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in group No. 1.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions on the motions at report stage of Bill C-50.

Call in the members.

• (1845)

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. A vote on this motion also applies to Motions Nos. 2 and 3.

• (1855)

(The House divided on Motion No. 1, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 121)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Anders
Angus
Ashton
Bagnell
Belanger

Aglukkaq
Allen (Welland)
Allison
Anderson
Ashfield
Atamanenko
Bains
Bennett

Benoit
Bevilacqua
Bezan
Blaney
Boucher
Braid
Brison
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Cadman
Calkins
Cannis
Casson
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Cotler
Crowder
Cummins
D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Del Mastro
Dewar
Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Goodyear
Grewal
Hall Findlay
Hawn
Hill
Hoepfner
Holland
Hyer
Jennings
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Layton
Lee
Leslie
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Mendes
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Pacetti
Patry
Pearson
Prentice
Proulx
Rafferty
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Savage
Saxton
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Silva

Business of the House

Bernier
Bevington
Blackburn
Block
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Byrne
Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Charlton
Chow
Clarke
Comartin
Crombie
Cullen
Cuzner
Davidson
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dechert
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Dryden
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Fast
Fletcher
Foote
Galipeau
Garneau
Godin
Goodale
Gourde
Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Hughes
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lebel
Lemieux
Lobb
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Maloway
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinty
McLeod
Menzies
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
O'Connor
Obhrai
Oliphant
Paradis
Payne
Petit
Preston
Rae
Raiitt
Ratansi
Regan
Richards
Rickford
Rota
Savoie
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Shipley
Siksay
Simson

Business of the House

Smith	Sorenson
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Szabo
Thibeault	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Tweed	Uppal
Valeriot	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Volpe
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Wasylycia-Leis
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Wifert	Wong
Woodworth	Wrzesnewskyj
Yelich	Young
Zarac— 217	

NAYS

Members

André	Bachand
Blais	Bouchard
Brunelle	DeBellefeuille
Deschamps	Dorion
Duceppe	Dufour
Faille	Freeman
Gaudet	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Laforest	
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lavallée	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Malo	Ménard
Paillé	Plamondon
St-Cyr	Thi Lac
Vincent— 29	

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy	Ambrose
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Demers	Desnoyers
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Finley
Gagnon	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Lunney	Mark
Miller	Mourani
Nadeau	Nicholson
Ouellet	Paquette
Pomerleau	Weston (Saint John)— 20

The Deputy Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 carried. I therefore declare Motions Nos. 2 and 3 carried.

Hon. Jay Hill (for the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1900)

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

(Division No. 122)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Aglukkaq
Albrecht	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Ashfield
Ashton	Atamanenko
Benoit	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Carrie
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Comartin
Crowder	Cullen
Cummins	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dreeshen
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dykstra
Fast	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Glover
Godin	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hill
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	Hughes
Hyer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Layton
Lebel	Lemieux
Leslie	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menzies	Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Paradis
Payne	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Savoie	Saxton
Schellenberger	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Siksay	Smith
Sorenson	Stanton
Stoffer	Storseth

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EMERGENCY DEBATE

[English]

H1N1 VACCINES

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely the supply of H1N1 vaccines.

● (1905)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, and I want to thank all of the Speakers for granting this important debate.

This past weekend I was inundated with calls and emails from MPs, asking questions and describing the situation on the ground in their ridings. I think it is important that tonight we get to tell those stories and call on the government to respond to this crisis.

Peter Newman has said that politics in Canada is the art of making the necessary possible. Determining what is necessary and fighting for it is political. In public health there is a role for politicians of all political stripes to fight for the necessary resources to protect the health and safety of Canadians, and ensure that the priorities of the government of the day are in line with the needs of Canadians. This is not partisan, but it is political.

When the minister stated that there was no pandemic plan before the Conservative government took office, that is partisan. Canada has had a pandemic preparedness plan since 1988. In 2003 we learned the lessons of SARS, and quickly put in place a response to David Naylor's report: collaboration, cooperation, communication and clarity of who does what, when. We put in place the Public Health Agency of Canada, appointed Dr. David Butler-Jones as the first Chief Public Health Officer for Canada, and established the public health network for Canada where all 13 jurisdictions would be able to plan together with the federal government for the public health of all Canadians.

Canada's pandemic plan was one of the best in the world. The plan ensured a supply of vaccines for all Canadians and adequate stockpiles of Tamiflu. These were good planning decisions. Our criticism is not with the plan, but with the failure to adapt the plan quickly to respond to this new, novel virus, and the execution of the response to the pandemic itself.

In the 2004 budget we put in place a trust fund of \$100 million for the provinces to build the capacity for front line public health. In 2007 the Conservative government cancelled that fund. The 2006 budget booked \$400 million for pandemic response. We now find out that the government put the reserve fund into five annual packages of \$80 million, and each year without a pandemic, the money has disappeared.

Strahl
Thibeault
Tilson
Trost
Uppal
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
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Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Wong
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Sweet
Thompson
Toews
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson
Yelich

NAYS

Members

André
Bagnell
Bélanger
Bevilacqua
Bouchard
Brunelle
Cannis
Crombie
D'Amours
Deschamps
Dorion
Duceppe
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Eyking
Folco
Freeman
Garneau
Goodale
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Hall Findlay
Holland
Laforest
Lalonde
Lee
Lessard
MacAulay
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Mendes
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Oliphant
Paillé
Pearson
Proulx
Ratansi
Rota
Scarpaleggia
Silva
St-Cyr
Thi Lac
Valeriotte
Volpe
Wrzesnewskyj

Bachand
Bains
Bennett
Blais
Brison
Byrne
Cotler
Cuzner
DeBellefeuille
Dhaliwal
Dryden
Dufour
Easter
Faille
Foote
Fry
Gaudet
Guay
Jennings
Laframboise
Lavallée
Lemay
Lévesque
Malo
McGuinty
Ménard
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
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Plamondon
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Szabo
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PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy
Cannon (Pontiac)
Demers
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Gagnon
Côte-Nord)
Lunney
Miller
Nadeau
Ouellet
Pomerleau

Ambrose
Cardin
Desnoyers
Finley
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Mark
Mourani
Nicholson
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Weston (Saint John)— 20

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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The Minister of Health has continued to state that she is working with the provinces and territories, yet she unilaterally decided that the provinces and territories would pay for 40% of the costs of the vaccine and for all of the costs of the administration of the vaccination program.

The provinces and territories have been asking for help. The government has refused to listen. All summer we have been seeking assurance that there were in place the resources and the capacity on the ground to get the 50.4 million doses of vaccines that had been ordered into the arms of Canadians.

There seems to be some confusion between the role of the Minister of Health and the role of the Chief Public Health Officer for Canada. The Chief Public Health Officer for Canada has the responsibility to find a consensus with his counterparts on the science and then give the best possible advice to Canadians. Canadians needed clear and unambiguous messages. Instead, there were too many opinions and conflicting guidelines, and the resulting dangerous confusion. His job is also to give the best possible advice to the Minister of Health, including his assessment of the need for additional resources for communication and/or improving front line public health capacity.

The Minister of Health has the responsibility to act on his advice, listen to her provincial and territorial counterparts, and then go to cabinet and make her case to be able to deliver what is needed to protect the health and safety of Canadians. Wrapping itself in some constitutional cocoon is a dangerous approach for the federal government.

There is a difference between health and health care delivery. In 2003 David Naylor's report on the lessons learned from SARS quoted Disraeli: "the care of public health is the first duty of the statesman". It is time for the minister to do her job and help her minister of health colleagues across the country, so that their public health authorities can deal with this health emergency now. It is time for statesmanship, not time for an ideologically-based mantra of "not a federal responsibility". She is Canada's Minister of Health.

The lack of an effective national communication plan has meant that doctors and nurses administering the vaccines are spending time answering questions that could and should have been answered all summer.

• (1910)

As information changes, the federal government has a responsibility to spend the dollars necessary to ensure that Canadians truly understand the facts and what is expected of them. The public education campaigns from the NHS in the U.K. or the CDC in the U.S. demonstrate what a proper public education campaign should look like, especially the effectiveness of the campaign targeted to children, which is totally missing in Canada.

Last weekend it was the father of a child who had died from H1N1 who explained that shortness of breath was not a normal symptom of influenza. He said he wished he had known that earlier.

Since June, the doctors in Manitoba have been recommending a public awareness campaign to make sure that every Canadian with influenza who is experiencing shortness of breath would immediately seek medical attention. They were worried that the morbidity

and mortality of patients they had seen in Winnipeg could have been dramatically reduced if they had presented to hospital earlier.

Two weeks ago, we asked a number of local medical officers of health across the country if they felt ready for the vaccine rollout. They had been given no certainty of the quantity or the starting date of the supply.

They described a total absence of sensitivity of the operational realities, the logistics of storage and security, let alone setting up clinics with so little notice. They described a total absence of central leadership, a lack of clarity and no commitment to the additional resources that would be necessary.

They insisted that the front lines had to know what to expect and what not to expect. They had no idea of the costs and no idea of what would be reimbursed. They were worried that the demonstration projects had not been built and that no money had arrived on the front lines. Medical officers of health were being asked to go to their local boards of health or regional health authorities and municipal councils handcuffed by the lack of information.

This summer when we drew attention to the lack of planning and resources for aboriginal communities, the minister was telling us that 90% of the communities were prepared while the grand chiefs and our personal experience were telling us something quite different. The unfortunate body bag incident followed a lack of response to the ongoing criticisms by the first nations community of the local regional office of Health Canada. The government responded well by appointing the respected Dr. Paul Gully to First Nations and Inuit Health and things have improved.

There are many questions that will have to be answered later. Having only one production line in one company available for all the vaccines needed for Canadians has clearly caused delays. Priority must be to have the shortest possible gap between the arrival of a pandemic and the time when a significant percentage of the population has been immunized.

I cannot believe that any MP on any side of the House could look at the lineups in his or her riding and be able to say that this response to the pandemic is being executed properly or blame some other jurisdiction. We need to redouble our efforts as politicians to immediately secure the resources necessary to help local public health units get on with the vaccination campaign, additional funds for school-based campaigns, and hire back retired nurses.

We need to ensure, as soon as we have the promised three million vaccines, that we get them into the arms of Canadians as quickly as possible. We also need to ensure that hospitals and family doctors in our areas are confident that they have the resources necessary to look after Canadians who do get sick.

In a visit to B.C. Women's Hospital on Friday, I was truly impressed. Its patients are all immunized and it certainly seems ready.

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It is indeed a fine line between our due diligence in holding the government to account and partisan grandstanding. We believe that the government has a huge role to play in the response to this pandemic. We will do our job and we want the government to do its job.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will start by saying that all of us in the House are very concerned for those affected by the H1N1 virus. As a parent of a 13-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter, I was particularly impacted by the stories last week and what those families went through.

I want to talk about the facts. The facts are that six million doses of the H1N1 vaccine have been delivered to the provinces and territories. There is enough vaccine for all priority groups. Canada currently has more H1N1 vaccine per capita than any other country in the world. That is a fact.

We have heard many very tough-minded questions from the Liberal Party over the last few days. I am wondering if the Liberal Party has done any research on how many lives will be saved because of the actions of this government.

• (1915)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, as I explained, the critical point in any pandemic is the time between when it arrives and when 60% to 70% of the population is immunized. With every week, the longer it takes, there is a risk of increased mortality and morbidity. This rollout has not happened properly. I am too concerned that lives will be lost.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Madam Speaker, as we have looked at the lineups in our communities, I think all of us have concluded that something has gone wrong.

People should not have to head to clinics that have been hastily put together at 4:00 in the morning, hoping to be able to have the administration of a vaccine. That simply should not be happening.

The fact of the matter is that the government has not taken care of the crisis the way it needs to do. In fact what we see here is a tendency of the government to point fingers at the provinces or drug companies and others instead of taking responsibility.

I would ask the member to comment on whether or not she agrees with me that the government should be stepping up and saying that the administration of the medication, the financing of the programs to get the vaccine to people when they need it should be financed on the same basis as the vaccine itself.

Right now the federal government is not sharing in that responsibility. That is one of the reasons we are not seeing the vaccine delivered the way it should be.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I believe that there were to be negotiations in terms of additional resources for rolling out the vaccination program.

As the member for Vancouver Quadra said today in question period, there is a problem in the actual rollout in Vancouver as we await the Olympics. The medical officer of health for Vancouver has received not one penny from the federal government to help roll out

this plan. She also has not received money for mass immunization clinics.

Across this country there is a patchwork quilt of worry. We could do better if the government would break open the piggy bank with “pandemic response” written on its side.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to know what my colleague thinks of the quote, “The facts are that the federal government was responsible for making sure that there was enough vaccine for Canadians...[Prime Minister's] Chief of Staff Guy Giorno was sitting in for the planning meetings for the rollout of the vaccine”. That is from Rob Russo of CBC News Now on November 1, 2009

We have spent—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I will have to interrupt the hon. member to give the member for St. Paul's the opportunity to respond. There are 40 seconds for a response.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I will let the member finish. It is questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): If the hon. member does not wish to respond, then we will resume debate.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I do believe that the comments of the advisers to the Conservative government are quite shocking. What the Conservatives said in the summer was that they would be prepared. They need to fix what has happened on the ground now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Chair for allowing this debate, because it reflects the national urgency of this issue. I also thank the hon. member for St. Paul's for her remarkable work on these issues.

• (1920)

[*English*]

This debate is not simply about an epidemic; it is a debate about the proper role and function of government. The role of government is to prepare citizens, to lead citizens and to inform them. In all three dimensions, the government has failed in its duties. I will begin with the government's failure to prepare.

[*Translation*]

The H1N1 flu first appeared on April 23, in Mexico. On April 27, I asked the first question in the House, namely: where was the government's plan to meet this challenge? But there has not been any plan since then.

The Conservatives waited before ordering vaccines. The United States ordered vaccines on May 25. France did so on July 16. But the Conservative government waited until August 6. That delay is critical. It shows a lack of leadership and a blatant lack of preparation. Thirty-five countries ordered their vaccines before Canada did.

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[*English*]

The Conservatives began vaccination later than other countries. China, Australia, the United States, Sweden, Japan, the United Kingdom, all began vaccinations before our country did. Canada did not begin vaccinations until October 26. The U.S. began administering the vaccine on October 5, before Canadian trials had even begun.

Two weeks ago, the Minister of Health said the vaccine would be available to all Canadians in early November, and now she says it will not be available until Christmas. We have discovered that there is not an adequate supply for next week.

The Conservatives did not order non-adjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women until it was too late, and they provided extremely confusing advice at all times.

This failure to properly inform the public has become a source of enormous anxiety to Canadian families. They do not know what public information to believe. This is producing anguish in families that is the direct responsibility of the government.

[*Translation*]

Earlier, I referred to a lack of preparation, but there was also a lack of leadership. The provinces and territories asked the federal government for additional resources. Four hundred million dollars were allocated in the 2006 budget—which amounts to \$80 million annually—to help the provinces and municipalities face this challenge. So far, there has been no reply and no cooperation on the part of the government.

Finally, I want to mention a simple reality: epidemics do not care about jurisdictions, about territories. The municipal, provincial and federal levels of government must work in a spirit of consultation and consensus building, and it is the federal government's responsibility to develop a national plan so that all stakeholders can be interconnected. This is what is lacking in the government's approach.

[*English*]

Instead of taking responsibility, the government blames everybody else. The government blames the drug company because there is not enough supply for next week. The government blames the provinces and territories. "We do not deliver health care," the government says. We understand that, but the role of a national government is to provide the planning framework in which everybody does his or her job, because as I said, epidemics do not care about jurisdictions. What the national government is there to do is to bring people together. The government has failed to do that consistently since the beginning of the crisis.

The question now is when will the government own up and take responsibility? When will the Prime Minister begin to exercise the leadership that is his responsibility here? Why does he refuse to lead? Why does the entire government shift responsibility to the drug companies, to the provinces, to the municipalities, anybody it can instead of standing up and doing what the Government of Canada ought to be doing?

Finally, there is the failure to inform, the failure to prepare, the failure to lead. This is a government that has spent something like 10

times more on its own publicity, publicizing its own highly partisan infrastructure program than it has spent on public health information. This is the most astonishing failure of all of the government's failures. Clean, clear public information that everybody can understand is the right of every Canadian citizen. We could have avoided the anguish in all the Canadian households had the government done its job. It failed to do so.

Ultimately, this is not just about an epidemic; this is about the proper role of government in our society, the proper role of a federal government. The government has failed to do its job, which is why we are having this debate tonight.

● (1925)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am sure it will come as no surprise to you that I find the comments of the hon. member distasteful, outrageous and irresponsible.

The Liberal Party of Canada has sought from the outset to politicize this, to confuse and to confound Canadians, to work against the coordination that has existed among this government, the provinces and people who deliver health care in our country. They should be ashamed of themselves, that member in particular.

The member has pointed out that other countries ordered the vaccine in advance. Could he name a single country that has more vaccine per capita than Canada? If he cannot, he is wrong. He should name the country.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Madam Speaker, the member opposite has attempted to say that we are politicizing a public health problem. It should be perfectly clear that we are doing our job.

For months, my hon. colleague, based on her experience of many years in family medicine, has been patiently taking the government to task, asking it to do its job. It is our party that has pointed out that the government has failed to launch a public information campaign. It is our party that has raised the question of when it will have a plan to deal with this crisis. It is our party that has been asking consistently when it is going to work in co-operation with the provinces. It is our party that has been asking where the plan is.

We have no apologies to make about the work we have done in the House of Commons.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Madam Speaker, would the member agree with me that one of the failures here has been that the federal government does not seem to understand the role that a national government needs to play in a crisis?

If this were a weather disaster, if we were dealing with a storm or flood that had done enormous damage, the federal government would immediately step in with 90% of the funding for the work that would need to be done. It takes off of the shoulders of the local folks, who are trying to respond to the crisis, the sense of how they are going to cover the costs and they can simply get down to doing the work that needs to be done.

This has not happened in this instance. Only 60% of the funding for the vaccine itself is being provided by Ottawa. The local governments and provinces are having to provide 40% and that does not cover any of the delivery.

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Would the member agree with me that this fundamental failure has resulted in the disastrous situation we saw this past weekend, where families were lined up from four in the morning trying to get help? When will the government take the action that needs to be taken by a national government?

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Madam Speaker, I am delighted to see the hon. member has sided with the Liberal position, which is this is fundamentally a question about the role of a national government in a time of crisis.

However, I cannot help observe that last Friday in the House he seemed to be saying something very different, which was that everything was going pretty well. He must have had an awakening weekend, as he has discovered the full extent of the problems that have begun to transpire in the way the government has handled this crisis.

I would simply repeat what I said earlier. This is a test of the function and role of a national government and on the basis of that test, the government has failed it.

• (1930)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am always pleased to provide the House with an update on the efforts of health portfolios to respond to the H1N1 flu virus outbreak. The reason for that is I am very proud of and stand behind all of our efforts to date, especially considering H1N1 is a novel virus. It is not something we have encountered before.

This new form of influenza is causing sickness and death in demographic groups that are usually most resistant to seasonal viruses and other disease outbreaks. For the first time in a long time, we are seeing school-aged children, youth and working-age adults hit hardest by this virus. More often it is the very young and very old who are most at risk of severe cases of the flu. With seasonal flu, over 90% of deaths and about 60% of hospitalizations occur in people older than 65. I would like to focus today on the facts about our response.

In April we received a report of these illnesses from Mexico. Our international reputation is such that when Mexican officials realized they had a problem, they called Canada first. We indicated that we would be happy to assist and immediately began doing so. We also began working immediately with the World Health Organization and our international and Canadian partners to respond quickly to this developing situation.

Since that day, the Government of Canada's actions have been unprecedented and we continue to demonstrate the leadership that Canadians, governments, health professionals and organizations are looking for during an outbreak. Let me provide just a few examples.

This is a very unique, new virus that could not be identified by a traditional method. However, the Public Health Agency's National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg is an international leader in infectious disease diagnostics and research. Our lab had processes in place to identify emerging pathogens along with cutting edge technology that not all labs have.

Once we received specimens from Mexico, we got to work right away. Our National Microbiology Laboratory had test results within

24 hours. We mapped the genetic code of the Canadian and Mexican flu viruses, the first time that was done in the world.

The scientific excellence and leadership has been the hallmark of our response to the H1N1 influenza virus outbreak.

On the epidemiological side, we implemented heightened surveillance through FluWatch and began providing support to affected areas, including first nations and Inuit communities.

We began holding regular media briefings. In fact, since the spring, I have held over 41 media briefings. This is unprecedented and it is consistent with our commitment to keep Canadians informed as part of the pandemic plan. In addition, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada and myself have conducted hundreds of media interviews.

The 1 800 O Canada information line has received calls requesting over 300,000 copies of the government's H1N1 preparedness guide and almost 50,000 of the guides have been downloaded from the Public Health Agency website. Radio and television ads are airing nationally, focusing on personal preparedness and vaccine information in the weeks to come. We will continue to roll out our multimedia, multi-phased citizen readiness marketing campaign.

In order to ensure that my colleagues on the other side of the House are kept up to date, we have provided over 40 briefings for opposition members of Parliament.

Last summer, after consultation with the provinces, territories and international partners and suppliers, we purchased enough doses of the H1N1 vaccine for every Canadian who needed and wanted it. In addition, we have ensured that pregnant women have access to unadjuvanted vaccine, following the advice of the World Health Organization.

The rollout was planned for early November, however, because of the hard work of many people in my department, who have been working 24/7, we were able to announce, on October 21, the authorization of the adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine. This means that provinces and territories were able to begin last week, on October 26, the largest vaccination campaign in our country's history. To date, six million doses of adjuvanted H1N1 vaccine have been delivered to the provinces and territories. That is currently more H1N1 vaccine per capita than any other country in the world.

• (1935)

We have sufficient vaccines for high-risk populations that need it. Many more Canadians will continue to get their shots over the coming weeks as more vaccine becomes available. Let me make one point very clear. There is not a shortage of vaccine. Every Canadian will be able to have the vaccine by Christmas.

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There has been a tremendous uptake since the campaign began. We are encouraged by the fact that Canadians see the importance of being vaccinated against this pandemic flu. Provinces and territories are reporting many thousands of Canadians getting their shots. Right now, jurisdictions are giving more vaccine per day than they have ever given in history. There will be enough H1N1 vaccine available in Canada for everyone who needs and wants to be immunized. Not a single person will be left out.

Because we know that it would be impossible to vaccinate everyone in the country at one time, the Government of Canada, in co-operation with the provinces and territories, jointly determined sequencing guidelines for the distribution of the H1N1 flu vaccine. It is important for these guidelines to be implemented and respected. That is why we have started distributing the vaccine ahead of schedule so health care workers and Canadians at high risk of severe complications could be first in line to receive the vaccine.

In addition, I would like to remind colleagues that the northern isolated communities of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories have received their entire allotment of adjuvanted vaccine and will be able to have their populations vaccinated within two weeks.

Our goal is to have vaccinated every Canadian who needs and wants it by Christmas. This will be an incredible help to us in the fight against the spread of H1N1.

However, in broad terms, all of this is just the beginning. The flu season in Canada traditionally lasts until April. I know my colleagues, the parliamentary secretary to myself and members of Parliament will provide more details on our response so far, but I will also say that all of these efforts are a testament to the planning and to the strengthened systems we have nurtured over the past few years. Our response to the H1N1 flu virus began as soon as we were informed.

As the House knows, the World Health Organization officially declared an H1N1 pandemic in June. What is different this time around relative to previous pandemics is that we are better prepared than we have ever been before.

The reason is the Government of Canada is working from a strong framework, the Canadian pandemic influenza plan. It is a plan built on years of collaboration with provinces, territories and the medical community. Its goals are to minimize serious illness and overall deaths and to minimize social disruption among Canadians as a result of an influenza pandemic. That plan is constantly being fine-tuned. We are continuing to work on all the recommended preparedness activities and outstanding issues it outlines.

To help in rolling out pandemic plans and response, we continue to develop and update guidance documents for such concerns as clinical care for pregnant women. In fact, just last week, we released three new sets of guidelines. We released guidelines on how Canadians can reduce the spread of H1N1 flu virus while they are traveling. These guidelines help clarify how passengers, crews, travel agencies and operators can help reduce the spread of infection on planes, trains, ferries and buses.

We also issued guidance to assist those in remote and isolated communities, homes to some of our most vulnerable population. Our guidance on clinical management of patients with influenza-like

illnesses will help doctors, nurses and other health care providers provide the care that residents in remote and isolated communities need.

The third guidance document will assist remote and isolated communities across Canada develop a plan for mass immunization. This is critical because health care services in many remote and isolated communities are carried out in small to medium-sized nursing stations and health centres by a small number of staff.

Because of the unique health challenges that remote and isolated communities face, we will be issuing several more guidance documents over the coming weeks to ensure that those who live far from the large urban centres in southern Canada receive the health care services they need to stay healthy.

● (1940)

Other supporting documents are being updated based on more recent data and experience we have seen during the influenza outbreak. This has laid the foundation for us. It is the strongest example possible of the spirit of collaboration.

Since the outset I have stressed the importance of collaboration in every action taken to manage the outbreak on behalf of Canadians. Our response has been supported by systematic ongoing contact with the World Health Organization and other international partners.

Within our borders we have made a concerted, coordinated effort to share information and lessons learned with our provincial and territorial counterparts. Experts and decision-makers from all jurisdictions from the entire spectrum of public health management have come together to ensure an appropriate and timely response to the outbreak.

From day one we have been working with first nations leaders and provinces. We are working to ensure that communities have everything they need in a timely manner based on the best public health advice, and of course we are committed to making sure first nations have the support they need to protect their communities.

As we move forward we are increasing efforts to make sure H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccines get to those Canadians who need and want them the most. I am confident that the actions taken so far along with our continued efforts this fall and winter will continue to serve Canadians well. While the course of this pandemic may have been unexpected, we have demonstrated our ability to adapt quickly and effectively to rapidly changing events.

On October 29, we learned from our supplier GSK that the quantity of vaccine to be shipped to the provinces and territories would be, for the short term, much lower than expected. While we had known before that there might be less vaccine available, we had no idea until then the extent of the shortfall. When I found out and when we found out, we advised the provinces and territories immediately.

The temporary reduction in supply was caused by the fact that GSK can produce only one type of vaccine, adjuvanted or non-adjuvanted, at a time. It needed to shut down production of adjuvanted vaccine in order to comply with its commitment to producing non-adjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women.

This temporary shutdown combined with the earlier-than-expected authorization and roll-out of the vaccine caused the reduction we are now seeing. However, GSK assures us that it will be back up to providing the provinces and territories with millions of doses over the coming weeks. We are in constant contact with GSK on its production schedule. We have begun posting information on the expected supply on our website and sharing this information with the provinces and territories.

We are dealing with a very new disease and we have been working and will continue to work as quickly as possible given these circumstances. This government's planning efforts have paid off. No matter what else comes our way, we are well prepared. We plan to continue regular media briefings and get information out to Canadians quickly and effectively through advertising and otherwise.

We are committed to ongoing collaboration, transparency and communication. These are the tools that will help us prevent the spread of H1N1 and manage the outbreak and get us through this pandemic.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Madam Speaker, may I ask the hon. member three very specific questions? First, if the influenza was first detected in Mexico on April 23, decoded in early May and declared a pandemic in June, why did Canada not order vaccine until August 6?

Second, given the unexpected, by her own admission, interruption of supply by GSK this coming week, what guarantee can she offer Canadians that supply will be adequate in subsequent weeks?

Third, given the fact that every Canadian can see these lines, the long waits, the confusion, the uncertainty and the anguish, can the minister begin to accept any responsibility for this situation? It appears she is pretending she has no responsibility for the evident distress that Canadians are facing.

• (1945)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Madam Speaker, since April, I have been working with the provinces and territories in the rollout of the pandemic plan.

I was a territorial health minister for five years and know full well, intimately, the plan that was developed back in 2006 and agreed to by provinces and territories. There were lots of lessons learned at that time, and during the SARS outbreak, to develop a plan for Canada. When it was time to implement the plan, provinces and

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territories became aware of the presence of H1N1, over a weekend, from the confirmed lab results in Mexico.

In terms of why August was the date chosen, the chief public health officers and medical officers across the country through their ministries advised us at the time that it was very important for us in Canada to complete the production of the regular flu vaccine.

We know full well that in Canada about 4,000 Canadians die of the regular flu. The medical experts recommended that it was important to complete the vaccine against that. So that was completed over the summer months. As soon as that was done, the production of the H1N1 vaccine started, again based on the medical advice of the provinces and territories.

Something else that was developed, which my good friend from the NDP took part in, was a gathering in Winnipeg of a group of medical experts and chief medical officers to look at the cases we were seeing in Canada, the more serious cases, and what some of the underlying conditions were. They brought together a number of experts across the country and international community to develop the sequencing guidelines.

We recognized at the time that we could not immunize 33 million Canadians at one time, and it was important to target the most vulnerable. That guideline was established for the provinces and territories to use in the rollout of the first six million doses of vaccine distributed to the provinces.

I will continue to work with the provinces to roll out the vaccine to them as soon as it comes through from GSK.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I take encouragement in the minister's specific reference to dealing with H1N1 in first nations.

As the proud representative of northern Manitoba, one of the regions that has been hit the hardest by H1N1, I am encouraged to see that direction being taken. However, the way H1N1 has been dealt with, specifically with regard to with these first nations, since we have seen the first signs, makes me wonder about the commitment behind the direction that has been proposed.

I saw chiefs put out call after call for meetings with the minister. I saw chiefs and leaders from our region frustrated that they were being denied on the basis of facts coming out of their communities, about people on respirators, about the needs on the ground. Certainly we all know about the debacle that took place around the body bags.

As we move forward, beyond the work around the vaccine, because I see we are quite focused on that, my concern is what confidence we can give to first nations in the area of funding. When it comes to giving out the vaccine, when it comes to getting extra staff, and when it comes to the fundamental issue—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. Minister of Health.

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•(1950)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Madam Speaker, as I have said before in this House, I know some of the challenges of living in small, remote communities, because I come from a small, remote community and the nearest hospital is about 500 or 600 miles away. We have a nursing station. There are always challenges in delivering health care.

What I can say to the member, and I said this in a question period in response to her, with regard to funding, is that as Health Minister I increased funding for first nations health. Our government increased housing for first nations. The member voted against that.

I will continue to work with first nations communities to address their issues. In fact, I had to cancel a very important meeting with 400 chiefs in British Columbia to stay for this H1N1 emergency debate. I will continue to work with them.

I have had numerous meetings with the chiefs in Manitoba. In fact I was there just a few weeks ago and met again with the chiefs. I delivered a radio show to 65 first nations communities. I was in Regina. I went to a reserve to meet with first nations chiefs.

We will continue to work with the first nations chiefs, not only in the area of pandemic preparedness but also to address some of the health challenges they have in their communities.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is for my colleague, the minister.

Seeing us in the House today, politicizing and not being partisan—

Hon. Maria Minna: Look in the mirror, for God's sake. Look in the mirror.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Look at your nose.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Madam Speaker, I am being harassed about being partisan.

I would like to know how the minister feels about this. When the Leader of the Opposition uses a first nations child, an action that is racially motivated for political gain, I find that unacceptable. I see the member for St. Paul's doing the same thing with an aboriginal youth with a thermometer in her mouth. That is hurtful. To hear in committee that she is just trying to help is unacceptable. That is how I feel. I would like to see the Leader of the Opposition and the member for St. Paul's stand and apologize to the House tonight.

I want to know how the minister feels about this very issue, being aboriginal herself.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Madam Speaker, I have said from the beginning that it is very important when dealing with a health care crisis, like a pandemic, to keep party politics away because Canadians would want us to do that.

One of the first things I did when we started dealing with this situation was to call the opposition critics to get them onside and explain to them what we were dealing with. My number one concern was the health and safety of Canadians.

In terms of managing a pandemic, it is also very important to communicate facts based on science and not to be fearmongering in

any population, particularly the most vulnerable in first nations communities.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes has only one minute and a half for a very brief question.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be brief.

In her speech, the minister spoke about discussions she had had with GSK, the supplier of the vaccines, regarding the availability of unadjuvanted vaccines, without being specific about when things would get back to normal. She simply told us that more will be available in the coming weeks or in the near future.

Can the minister be more specific about when the unadjuvanted vaccines will be available?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: Madam Speaker, when we approved the authorization of the adjuvanted vaccine, we also started looking immediately for non-adjuvanted because GSK had not yet produced them. We have 225,000 doses that are currently being distributed across the country for pregnant women and more vaccine will be produced through GSK in the coming weeks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, like my colleagues, I am pleased to participate in this emergency debate on the second wave of the H1N1 pandemic.

It goes without saying that there is an urgent need for this debate, since in Quebec and in all the provinces of Canada, we are seeing lines of people waiting to be vaccinated but unable to get the vaccine.

I heard the minister and the government members accusing the opposition of playing politics with this debate. I can understand some of the government's criticisms of the Liberal Party, because, unfortunately, the Liberals used a 10 percenter to send a document to aboriginal communities, resurrecting the body bag issue, when the communities had already accepted the government's apologies. However, I do not appreciate having the minister associate me and my party with this or having her accuse us of simply trying to take advantage of the situation.

Throughout consideration of this issue, ever since the WHO declared the pandemic a level six on June 11, we have been trying in every way possible to cooperate with the government and the Public Health Agency in order to ensure that the people of Quebec and people across Canada receive the best services, the best information and the best care.

That has always been our motivation. However, we see the confusion surrounding this vaccination. It is important to get answers from this government since it is up to us to relay accurate information to our constituents. We want to ensure, through our interventions, that our constituents have access to the vaccine, the antivirals and the information.

In August, the members of the Standing Committee on Health held a meeting to get an update from the government on the status of its plan. At the time, I already mentioned to the minister that I felt this plan was being disclosed bit by bit. It is hard to work with a piecemeal plan because we end up reacting to situations instead of providing the public with clear guidelines. The public was entitled to the facts because when it comes to H1N1, it is their health that is at stake.

We know that some patients with this disease have had very serious respiratory problems and that a number of deaths have been associated with this flu pandemic, hence the need for a clear plan.

However, it seems that the government does not want to give us a clear indication of the availability of doses of vaccine that will be distributed to Quebec and the provinces. We know that in Quebec and in the provinces structures are already in place or are being implemented in order to optimize the doses received at the mass vaccination centres.

The fact that the Chief Public Health Officer and the minister only found out last Thursday that Quebec would receive approximately 300,000 fewer doses of vaccine indicates a lack of foresight.

• (1955)

To inform people at the last minute, while they are waiting in line to get a vaccination, that they will not be able to get it the next week or in coming weeks shows a lack of preparedness. It simply makes no sense that they did not know beforehand. The Chief Public Health Officer seemed to even say that vaccination clinics will have to close. That just does not make sense.

In my opinion, the confusion began when the government delayed approval of the vaccine. Other countries had approved the vaccine before Canada. The United States, Australia and France approved a vaccine on September 13, 18 and 25 respectively. At that point, Canadians began saying that the government must have delayed approval because there was something not right with the vaccine. Conspiracy theories surfaced on the Internet about how components of the vaccine or the adjuvant were harmful to health. People began to have doubts.

But when people understood, they all wanted the vaccine. We did educate people, and I do not accept the government's suggestion that we did not do our jobs. My Bloc Québécois and I did everything we could using scientific evidence to reassure our fellow citizens that the vaccine is safe. Once we did that, a huge number of our people wanted to get the vaccine. Once again, the government should not have based its action plan on the assumption that a certain percentage of the population would get the vaccine. It should have acted on the assumption that the vast majority of people would want it.

Earlier, the minister said that the vaccine supplier—the sole supplier, I should point out—completed its production of seasonal

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flu vaccine before starting to produce H1N1 flu vaccine because seasonal flu can be fatal and we need the right tools to deal with it properly. I agree with that. However, a government with a clear and precise plan would have sought out other avenues or even other suppliers to ensure that all of our fellow citizens receive the vaccine while it mattered.

At the moment, we are right in the middle of the second wave of the H1N1 pandemic, and many of our fellow citizens are not yet vaccinated. We know that those at low risk of complications will not be vaccinated until December. Earlier, the minister said that everyone would be vaccinated by Christmas. However, people are coming to see us and they are saying that by Christmas, it will all be over. They are wondering if they will even need it by then. They are wondering whether they will already have come down with this flu by Christmas. These are legitimate questions. The government has to give people the answers they need.

• (2000)

The minister also said again in her speech that production of adjuvanted vaccines for the general public had to be stopped so that GSK could produce unadjuvanted vaccines for pregnant women. But I believe I heard that the World Health Organization and government representatives have said that the adjuvanted vaccine could also be suitable for pregnant women. This message will have to be clarified.

Last Monday, the government announced that it was purchasing 200,000 doses of unadjuvanted vaccine from an Australian company. When the government announces that it is buying unadjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women, people can easily think that the government has found an alternative way to distribute unadjuvanted vaccine to Quebec and the provinces for pregnant women. But now, a week later, we are finding out that that was not the real reason the government was buying unadjuvanted vaccine from Australia. Here again, the way in which the government is going about procuring vaccine is not clear.

All these questions are relevant because, as I said earlier, people expect to be vaccinated quickly because we are right in the middle of the second wave of the H1N1 pandemic.

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We know that the federal government has a \$400 million special fund created by the previous government for use in the event of a pandemic. We have watched the Conservative government whittle away at this money, withdrawing \$80 million a year because the fund had not been used to respond to a pandemic in the previous 12 months. But this money could be made available to Quebec and the provinces to improve information sharing about the vaccination campaign, for example. Or it could be transferred to Quebec and the provinces to help them hire more nurses to administer the vaccine when it arrives. Of course, all that needs to be part of a clear, coherent plan.

Earlier, I heard my colleagues talking about the situation on native reserves and in first nations communities, and rightly so. When the health committee examined this issue in August, first nations representatives, including grand chiefs, came to tell us about a disturbing situation, one that this government should be ashamed of. It is also disgraceful for the Liberals, who formed the previous government, since one of the reasons this virus, the flu virus, has been able to spread so quickly in those communities is due to overcrowding, in addition to the fact that certain isolated communities do not have access to potable water.

● (2005)

When, in 2009, our citizens do not have access to potable water in a country that former Prime Minister Chrétien called “the most best country in the world”, that makes no sense. One might wonder about the government's real desire to tackle this problem, which has been an issue for many years.

I remember asking government officials if they had only recently realized that certain areas within Canada did not have safe drinking water. Of course, we were told that measures would be put in place, but they had to be introduced gradually, over time, and so on. As we can see with the first wave of the flu, the fact that this aspect was neglected is making that population even more vulnerable.

The Speaker is signaling that I have only three minutes left. My colleague across the floor wishes to give me 15 minutes, Madam Speaker. Is he right? Do I really have 15 minutes left? Of course not.

In conclusion, I would simply like to come back to the fact that the minister talked about the schedule for ordering the vaccine. How is it possible that we have known since June 11 that there was a level 6 pandemic, but that the 50 million doses were not ordered until August? How is it possible that the government waited until September to order the adjuvanted vaccine, when we could have easily ordered the unadjuvanted vaccines earlier, while we were waiting to hear whether the adjuvanted vaccine was approved or safe?

That would have surely put us in a better position to help those who simply want to be vaccinated. It would be completely irresponsible on our part not to question the minister and the government about this. It is unfortunate; I know. The minister does not like it, but it is clear that deep down, we have some questions, as we all sit here in this House, and we hear from the agency and from experts. I can only imagine what Canadians are thinking, as they receive sometimes contradictory information and wonder when they will be able to get vaccinated.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their attention, and I encourage everyone in this House to participate in this important emergency debate on the H1N1 pandemic.

● (2010)

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to my colleague, and again, I want to wish my colleague a happy birthday. For all the world to know, he is 36 years old today.

In actual fact, at the health committee, as the member is very well aware, we have had aboriginal people come and testify, including Grand Chief Ron Evans, from Manitoba, from my province, who is a great leader in Manitoba.

There was an issue, right at the beginning, about body bags. The minister was very careful to make sure that it was examined and reported. It was found out that the nurses themselves had ordered the body bags because they wanted to ensure they had a lot of all sorts of pandemic supplies, and the body bags were there as part of those pandemic supplies.

When Grand Chief Ron Evans came to the health committee last time, he applauded the minister and said that indeed things were coming along very well, that things were much better.

However, the saddest day on which I have ever been on a committee was when the grand chief held up a 10 percenter, and on the front page was a picture of a morgue. On the back of that ten percenter was a picture of a little girl, holding her head, with a thermometer in her mouth. And this came from the Liberal Party.

I would ask the member how he felt when this kind of thing happened. Did he think that opposition parties had politicized this pandemic, right in front of all the aboriginal people, to try to make points?

● (2015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Madam Speaker, if I may, because my colleague the chair of the Standing Committee on Health pointed it out, I would like to officially thank her for her birthday wishes. She may boast of celebrating my 36th birthday with me in the House, if she likes, on the night of this emergency debate.

In fact, when Grand Chief Evans came to meet with us at the committee, all of his comments dealt with the support he had received from his province and private agencies to put together a kit so it could be distributed. That was the gratifying aspect of his comments: in a nutshell, preparation plans in the event of a major problem were ready. In fact, we have heard this on several occasions from officials of this House and from government employees. I was completely bowled over to see the Grand Chief hold up that ten percenter, because to me it did not belong there. As parliamentarians, we prefer to offer accurate information and make sure that our fellow citizens have access to a vaccine or appropriate kits, for example.

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[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, and I would like to ask his opinion.

As early as 2004-05, the World Health Organization said we must prepare for a pandemic flu. In 2006, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said we must come together and prepare. In 2007, the World Health Organization warned against complacency.

It was the job of the government to maintain a current pandemic plan and resources to respond. In the 2006 budget, \$400 million dollars were set aside, and \$80 million has disappeared since.

My question, though, is that the second wave of the pandemic was announced on a Friday, in Ontario and in British Columbia. The vaccine rollout began last week. There has been confusion, frustration and lineups. The people who were vaccinated this past week will not be protected for 10 to 14 days. There is a slowdown this week. Modelling studies show that the peak hits around five weeks.

Does the hon. member think Christmas is early enough?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: Madam Speaker, my colleague is somewhat correct. The question is a good one. Is Christmas early enough, when we are currently in the second wave of the pandemic? That is what the debate this evening is about.

The government realized that the supplier might not be able to supply the hoped-for doses because it had only one production line. The government denies it, but on the other hand, it seemed like it wanted to blame the company because the company had over-estimated its production. That really does not make sense when distribution has to be planned during the period when the pandemic is in full swing. We cannot play with words like this when ultimately it is the public's health at stake.

Has the government failed in this regard?

● (2020)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by wishing my hon. colleague a happy birthday as well. Since he is also one of my youngest colleagues in this House, I think this is a good opportunity for us to work together, given that there are so few members here to represent our generation.

Regarding the question, I would also like to hear his opinion as a member from Quebec. Quebec has really shown a great deal of initiative in the fight against the H1N1 pandemic. My province, Manitoba, has also taken some initiatives. I could give several examples of provincial governments that have really shown us what must be done.

In the meantime, however, we have a federal government that points at the provinces. This government has not shown any leadership. It still does not really understand what needs to be done, not only to support the provinces, but also to provide some direction, show some initiative and really support Canadians.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's thoughts on this.

Mr. Luc Malo: Madam Speaker, if I may, before I begin, I would like to once again thank my colleague from Churchill for her birthday wishes.

Yes, Quebec's health and social service centres had their action plans in place, but they could not vaccinate people without vaccine. There is no question that the federal government is responsible for providing vaccine to the provinces. It cannot hide from that. It cannot wash its hands of the whole affair and give all kinds of excuses for why the vaccines are not available. The government should have had a detailed timeline from the very beginning.

Once again just now, I asked the minister about this. I asked her if she could provide clearer answers about when previous levels—400,000 doses per week in Quebec—would be reached again. She could not even give me an answer. I asked her a straightforward question during this debate and she could not give me an answer. That inability to answer is what makes people wonder when they are going to get the vaccine. My question is absolutely pertinent.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

We are facing a very serious situation. I very much appreciate that the Liberal member put forward the motion for this emergency debate. This is obviously an urgent matter for those people, those families waiting in line that we see on television.

I imagine that these people hope that, in this House, we will have a respectful discussion where we will share ideas, present the issues and encourage the government to take action. We could also highlight various facets of the problem so that we will come to a better understanding of what needs to be done.

As part of this serious debate, I wish to make some suggestions. I remember my conversation with the mayor of Kitimat, Mrs. Monahan. She had just learned that all the schools in Kitimat were to be closed.

● (2025)

[English]

I was speaking with the mayor of Kitimat on the phone who had just learned about the closing of a mill and the loss of 500 jobs, which is pretty much an economic disaster. She told me she had just heard 10 minutes before that schools were having to be closed in Kitimat because of high absenteeism. I was thinking of the families who are now having to look after their kids at home in the midst of that situation.

I am thinking of the nurses who work with the homeless people in our communities, people like Cathy Crowe in Toronto underlines how many homeless people are likely to be very severely affected by this virus as it spreads through the shelters.

I was thinking of the chief from northern Manitoba who met with me and the member for Churchill and only hours after that conversation received a phone call that one of the family members had passed away and had to return immediately home.

These are immensely personal situations that we are dealing with. I think at this particular time we all have to work together. One of things that we have to do together is to ensure that the vaccines that are available are distributed as quickly as possible.

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I had the opportunity to chair the Toronto board of health for many years and so I have a little familiarity with what is involved. I am hearing from the people in the public health sector that one of the problems they are facing is that they really do not have the resources to deliver the vaccinations on the ground and they are having to reallocate from other parts of their budget and other parts of their activity.

I remember thinking about what happens when we have a weather disaster, a flood or an ice storm. We actually have a system in place where 90% of the funding is going to be provided by the federal government. In other words, if one is a local decision maker, one can say, “We don't have to worry about the money. It's going to be taken care of. Let's get this plan going and move as quickly as we can to try to prevent as many problems as possible”.

This would be my key proposition to advance. It is time for the federal government to step forward and say, “We're ready to backstop the financial requirements of the delivery of the vaccine so that people can get the help as quickly as possible”. I sincerely request the government to accept that suggestion in good faith.

I believe that if the government were to talk to some of the provincial officials, and I know they are having these conversations because so have I. And I can say they are worried about the costs and they are not able to do as much as they might be able to do if they knew the federal government would stand behind them.

If we can prevent tens of thousands of people from becoming sick, I know I will be able to sleep better at night knowing we did everything that we could.

[Translation]

Therefore, we propose that the government inform the provinces and territories that the funds will be available to deliver the vaccine to families, clinics and doctors. My second suggestion is that more advertising is needed. That is definitely true.

[English]

We have too many people who just do not have the information they need. They walk up to me on the street and ask me questions. I am not a medical expert, so I am not really in a position to answer some of the questions they are asking me. I am not going to try to lay them all out here in the time I have available. I think the members in the chamber know what I am talking about.

Therefore, I would hope that a very significant increase in the investment that we are making on informing people could be done as quickly as possible. That may mean adjusting some of the priorities. We have ad buys from the government out there. Perhaps we can make some switches and put some of this important public health material into the advertisements right away.

I am not trying to be critical because decisions are made about ad buys months ahead of time, but perhaps something could be done so that more of the questions could be answered, so that people will know what to do because they are at a high level of anxiety right now.

[Translation]

I would also suggest to the government that it is essential for MPs to be engaged with the government, as a Parliament, on a daily basis on this issue.

● (2030)

[English]

I think we have to put this particular crisis into the top priority in our work around here in the days and weeks to come. I would hope that we can find a way to do this that produces results for Canadians.

If we see what we normally see in the midst of this health crisis, as people are going to funerals, as young lives are being lost, people are going to become very disappointed in all of us. I would ask the government and I would ask all the parties to accept the propositions that we are bringing forward in good faith. I think it is a time for a level of engagement and commitment from Parliament, the likes of which we do not often require and we do not often see.

[Translation]

I undertake to ensure that the NDP will provide concrete ideas and suggestions. At times, we may have some constructive criticism. If we see that something is not working as it should, we will point it out in a non-partisan way.

[English]

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to participate in this emergency debate.

I can only think about this really as a family member, as a grandfather. The best call I had today was that my daughter, who has a four-month-old baby, was able, finally, to get her vaccine this morning. That made me feel good for a whole lot of reasons and we have millions of Canadians out there who are looking to feel that same security.

Let us get on the job and make that happen. Let us ensure that it is not something that we have to pay \$2,000 or \$3,000 in order to get that protection for our families. Let us ensure everybody gets the protection they need.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Toronto—Danforth for his comments. I want to address, if I could, the latter part of his comments with respect to the adequacy of the educational program that the government has frankly failed to engage in during the last number of months, knowing at least in June of this year that the pandemic was forthcoming .

Particularly, with respect to his comments about the people stopping him in the streets, without exception I am being stopped in the market, in the bank, and in the grocery store and asked the same questions.

I appreciate that the member's comments tonight are much more tempered than they have been during his comments in question period, but I am wondering if he could comment on the adequacy of the government's education program in informing the public about the preparedness that they ought to have undertaken by—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton: Madam Speaker, hindsight is a wonderful thing; however, I do think that there was some evidence last spring that there was something pretty serious coming at us, and I would like to have seen more information of a preventative and informative nature being available to the public.

I do not think it is too late for us to move on this now. The fact that we have agreed to an emergency debate sets the tone that we would like to see a real change in direction. Certainly, I called for that in my comments and I hope that the government would see fit to respond.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's comments with great interest.

The first thing I wanted to do was commend the hon. member for putting the interests of Canadians first. He made a very thoughtful, rational and reasonable intervention here this evening, where he clearly demonstrated that what matters most is the people in our ridings. I think that is the way each and every one of us feel.

I would simply state that I believe that this type of effort and this type of intervention is what Canadians expect of this Parliament and what they are hoping that this Parliament is able to achieve when we face challenges like this one.

I guess I have nothing further to say to the member other than to commend him for his intervention this evening.

Hon. Jack Layton: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments and thank him very much.

● (2035)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I too appreciate the tone and the reflective nature of the member for Toronto—Danforth's comments. There is always a temptation to rush to over-the-top comments that give us headlines, but on an issue like this, it really is incumbent upon all of us, especially in a minority government, to work together collectively.

Bear in mind the hon. member did say that where criticism is due, or where there are constructive criticisms to be made, that will happen, but to work together collectively, all of us, really is what Canadians expect from us.

My question is this, very briefly. The hon. member mentioned he was chair of the Toronto board of health for six years. In my background, I chaired the Hamilton public health services and social services. I wonder if he could give us a perspective on the pressures they face because the minister was suggesting that somehow they have let people down.

Could he let us know what pressures are facing the local health boards?

Hon. Jack Layton: There are many pressures, Madam Speaker, but the key one that they face in this sort of situation is how they are going to finance the work that needs to be done and how they have to cut back on what should really be happening because the resources are just not there.

The purpose of one of my key propositions here tonight was for the federal government to step forward and bring that 90:10 kind of sharing that we bring in during a weather disaster when it comes to financing, so that those will not be obstacles in the next few weeks.

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I hope the government—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to follow my leader in this very important debate.

I want to begin by acknowledging the significance of this evening's discussion and thank the Speaker for recognizing the importance of having this debate.

This is our first opportunity to question the government about some of the unfortunate developments that happened this week that caused grief and anguish among Canadians everywhere.

We are not here tonight to throw stones or to cast blame. We are here tonight to get answers so that we do not repeat the same mistakes, so that we can fix the issues that have emerged, and Canadians will not have to worry and live with such fear and concern and anxiety day in and day out.

I remind members in the House that we are dealing with a most virulent, serious virus that can cause deep lung problems in people, leading to death. I remind everyone in the House that there have been 5,700 deaths in the world since the H1N1 virus first made its ugly appearance in our society.

I remind everyone in the House that we have just hit our 100th death in this country. This week alone we saw 11 deaths, young girls and boys from all parts of this country, whether we are talking about Timmins or Ottawa or Bloomingdale. Kids that were in good health and at the height of their activity were struck down. Manitoba also experienced something similar last spring when a 40-year-old man with no preconditions suddenly dropped dead from this virus.

We know how serious it is, and that is why we are raising questions tonight. We are prepared to give credit where credit is due, and we have done that over the many months we have been dealing with this issue.

I want to remind members that last April when the virus first emerged, we were quick to acknowledge the work of the minister in terms of briefing the opposition, in terms of having regular briefings, and in terms of keeping us informed. We will always acknowledge the government when it does something right.

We also, along with the government, celebrate the achievements of Dr. Frank Plummer with the National Microbiology Laboratory, who was the first scientist to decode the virus of Canadian and Mexican sources. We have much to give thanks for and we are quick to give praise where praise is due.

But this week something happened. The wheels fell off the bus. Something went terribly wrong. The commitments made by the government did not prove to be worth the paper they were written on.

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I want to remind members how often we stood in our places and asked questions about how we were prepared as a nation for a national pandemic. Each and every time we received the same line: “We are on track. Don't worry, we have enough vaccine for everybody in this country. We don't need to prioritize people. We don't need to sequence people. We don't need to single out at risk people. We don't need to worry about setting up clinics. We don't need to do any of that because, in fact, we have the vaccine and we are going to get it out as promised”. The government did not do that. Something went wrong.

The government can blame GlaxoSmithKline or it can blame the provinces or whoever, but we need to hear the government say tonight that something did go wrong.

The government needs to say it is prepared to assess the situation and fix the problem, so that we can deal with people's anxieties and actually ensure that the vaccine will be forthcoming in the next week and the week after that, leading up to full coverage well before Christmas we would hope, because as everyone in the House has said, there is not much point in getting a vaccine out in December if the flu season is already over.

We want the government to act as quickly as possible with a secure supply of safe vaccine. We thought that was what it was doing on October 21 when it announced that, lo and behold, it was ahead of every nation around the world and would be bringing forward 50 million doses to cover the country and no one would need to worry.

The government promised three million doses a week. It turned out that was a bit of an exaggeration. In fact, it was two million in the first week, maybe two million the next week, and then suddenly almost nothing.

On Friday, when the provinces were already busy setting up mass immunization clinics, spending millions of dollars in terms of hiring staff, getting the facilities in place, getting the equipment, and doing everything necessary, the government picked up the phone and said the vaccine will not be forthcoming. Sorry, no can do.

● (2040)

I want to know, as does the rest of the House, when did the government know there was going to be such a short supply? Why did it not tell the provinces sooner? Why was it not more forthcoming about the actual situation?

Interestingly, on October 26, one week ago today, an official from GlaxoSmithKline said at committee said, “We are on track. We are on schedule in terms of producing the vaccine”. That was Monday. By Thursday, word started getting out that that was not the case. The provinces started preparing. Manitoba certainly started alerting people, much to the chagrin of the minister, whose office promptly scolded anyone for citing this as a problem. The provinces were not officially notified until Friday morning. How does one plan for something as serious and significant as a national pandemic, ensuring vaccinations of the at-risk groups and then the rest of the population, if the federal government cannot be forthcoming or even keep its word in terms of the vaccinations that are available?

If there was a problem, the government should have said so. It should have told us what the problem was. Maybe it was quality control. Maybe it stopped the production in order to do the non-

adjuvanted vaccine. Maybe something else happened. We do not know. Maybe the government exaggerated what it was intending to do on October 21, when it told the whole world that it was ahead of the game and that it was going to solve the problems of this national pandemic in one fell swoop.

All we need from the government is for it to be honest, up front and transparent with what has happened. We know that we have to deal with this in real time. We know that we have never experienced it before. We also know that people are dying. Children are dying. Middle-aged men are dying. Pregnant women are scared out of their minds about what to do. They are getting all kinds of conflicting advice.

One can imagine with all of those fears going on, seeing this kind of inaction from the government and at the same time reading in the papers about private clinics getting access to the vaccine so that they can hand it out to their high-paid clients. People are buying their way to the front of the line.

We raised it in the House, but the government did not have the decency to address that. It did not have the decency to stand up and say that it is also offended by that and that it will see to it that the Canada Health Act is enforced every step of the way. It did not say that it would not allow our precious H1N1 vaccine to go out to the highest bidders.

This is about ensuring that the people who need it get it first and that it is distributed and dealt with on a public, not-for-profit basis. There is no room anywhere in our health care system for that kind of privatization. There is certainly no room in a time of crisis for a government to allow this to happen and then to say nothing about it. There is no room for it to not come clean and at least say that it should have set out guidelines, that there should be national standards and that it failed on that front.

Today, all we are asking is that the government look at the problems that happened and sort them out so that over the next few weeks, the provinces and the people of this country can be guaranteed the vaccine as they line up and wait for it. We ask that it follow the advice of my leader and start to look at cost sharing some of the expenses around this and not just 60% of the vaccine, where it ended up not keeping its end of the bargain.

We ask that it start to pay for some of the additional costs that every province has to bear and first nations communities have to undertake, anywhere extra costs come with the pandemic. We ask that it come to the table and be prepared to cooperate and show that we can solve this problem together.

We are not here to create fear or to scare people. We are here to say that there is concern and anxiety out there which the government has a responsibility to address. That is exactly what we expect from the government tonight during this emergency debate.

● (2045)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to some of the comments the member opposite made. At one point she said that our government promised to solve this problem in one fell swoop.

I have been in the chamber many times during question period when our Minister of Health has been very clear that Canadians could expect the rollout of this vaccine in the first week of November. In fact, we were earlier than that. The other thing that I think Canadians need to be reminded of is that Canada has more vaccine available per capita than any other country in the world.

Granted, there are many more to be vaccinated, but does the member honestly feel that it would be possible to vaccinate 33 million Canadians in the first week of the rollout of this campaign?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question, because when we asked the minister in the House way back in the middle of September when we came back from the summer recess what was the plan in terms of setting priorities for at-risk groups, the minister and the Public Health Agency officials said, "Do not worry. We do not have to have a priority list. We do not have to sequence, because we have 50 million doses ready to cover this country". We knew it would take time to roll out, and that is why we asked for leadership from the government to identify those groups, just as President Obama did in the dead of summer, just as the Manitoba government and other provincial governments did early in September. They did not wait for the federal government to finally come forward on September 16 with its list of priorities, leaving the provinces to sort it out themselves and resulting in no national strategy.

When the problem hit and people were coming in droves to get vaccinated because of fear, worry and anxiety, the government could not produce what it had promised. We are not talking about 50 million doses. We are talking about three million doses a week, as it promised, and the government could not keep its word. That is where the problem lies. The government cannot set up demand and expectations and then fall down on its end of the bargain. The government has to be faithful and true in terms of its commitment and keep its word.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague raised many important questions.

Could the member comment on why the government ordered the vaccine so late in the year? It ordered the pandemic vaccine in August. That was after other countries had ordered it. Then the government gambled on the date of when the second wave might hit. It was preparing for November.

What if this had happened earlier, as in the past? What if it had hit in September and October? What would the government have done to protect the health of Canadians in that gap period?

The importance of having a pandemic plan is to update it as required. Why did the government choose to use only one company and only one production line?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Madam Speaker, those are excellent questions.

With respect to the tardiness of the government in placing its order, that is one of the questions of the hour. We know that Treasury Board's decision was not made until the end of July. An order was placed on August 6. That was weeks and weeks after the problem had been identified, and after the health committee had held emergency meetings in the summer, and of course the Conservatives

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suggested that we were just playing politics, to push them in terms of getting prepared, and that was the result. That is a question that has to be addressed.

Also, a big problem has emerged by the government not following its own advice to ensure there are at least two suppliers of a flu vaccine. That is the policy in place for every other flu vaccine. When it comes to H1N1 vaccine, the government decided that it could go to one company. An expert witness at the health committee showed just how much of a problem that is. Dr. Rob Van Exan from Sanofi Pasteur came to our committee and said that in a normal regular flu season, which predates GSK's involvement in this, there were always at least two companies that were given the contract. Producing a vaccine is difficult. There could be quality control problems, and there is a need for a backup supply.

For some reason the government decided to go with one supplier only. On top of that, the government gave the supplier an additional contract beyond whatever the company signed eight years ago to allow it to switch production in order to make the non-adjuvanted vaccine.

• (2050)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House tonight to address Canada's overall plan for preparedness with respect to the H1N1 virus.

Canadians remember all too well the 2003 outbreak of SARS, severe acute respiratory syndrome. It killed 44 Canadians, made hundreds more sick and paralyzed a major segment of our health care system for weeks. More than 25,000 residents of the Toronto area were placed in quarantine, myself included. The economic effects reverberated across the entire country. The SARS experience brought to a head growing concerns about the capacity of Canada's public health system to anticipate and respond effectively to public health threats.

In May 2003, the former minister of health appointed Dr. David Naylor, then dean of the University of Toronto's school of medicine, to chair a national advisory committee on SARS and public health to look at ways to improve Canada's public health system.

The committee on SARS and public health was established in early May 2003. The committee's mandate was to provide a third party assessment of current public health efforts and lessons learned for ongoing and future infectious disease control. Committee members represented disciplines and perspectives from across Canada. Several were directly involved in responding to SARS in different capacities.

The committee reviewed source documents, conducted interviews and engaged consultants to undertake surveys, additional interviews and analyses to illuminate aspects of the SARS experience. Advice was also sought from a constitutional legal expert. Over 30 non-governmental and voluntary sector stakeholders submitted helpful briefs and letters.

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The Naylor report said that dealing successfully with future public health crises would require a truly collaborative framework involving different levels of government with a shared commitment to protecting and promoting the health of all Canadians.

As Dr. Naylor said, Canada's ability to contain an outbreak is only as strong as the weakest judicial jurisdiction in the chain of provincial and territorial public health systems. He said that infectious diseases cannot be addressed in isolation by any one public health entity. All levels of the public health system needed to be reinforced and their components more fully integrated with each other.

Pre-SARS there were no federal transfers earmarked for local and PT public health activities. Public health competed against personal health services for health dollars in provincial budgets, even as the federal government increasingly earmarked its health transfers for personal health services priorities.

The SARS story, as it unfolded in Canada, had both tragic and heroic elements. Although the toll of the epidemic was substantial, thousands in the health field rose to the occasion and ultimately contained the SARS outbreak in this country. It was no small feat. For that, their efforts should be applauded.

Following Dr. Naylor's report, a new federal approach to Canada's public health system took shape based on three pillars: first, creating a chief public health officer, CPHO, for Canada; second, building a pan-Canadian public health network; and third, building a federal public health agency.

In 2004, the Public Health Agency of Canada, PHAC, was created and the Public Health Agency of Canada Act was passed in April 2006.

As the main federal agency responsible for public health, PHAC supports about 2,400 researchers and staff, as well as a wide variety of programs and services offered by both the federal government and non-governmental agencies, NGOs, across Canada.

Long before the conception of PHAC, the federal government was working closely with the World Health Organization and other public health bodies to focus on initiatives to strengthen pandemic influenza preparedness, consisting of five program components. The position of the World Health Organization, WHO, with regard to a pandemic has always been that it is a question of when, not if.

The WHO worked with member countries to produce a global agenda for influenza surveillance and control to prepare for the next influenza pandemic and to coordinate international action in influenza surveillance and control.

● (2055)

The WHO urged all countries to develop or update their own plans for dealing with influenza. In keeping with the WHO global agenda, the federal-provincial-territorial governments in Canada established a pandemic influenza committee that produced the Canadian pandemic influenza plan, CPIP. Among other things, the plan provided a framework to guide the actions of all levels of government for prevention, preparedness and response implementation activities. Provinces and territories used the plan as a framework for developing their own plans.

In addition, in keeping with the plan, we took a number of important steps to strengthen its pandemic readiness. We increased surveillance and monitoring of influenza outbreaks to detect cases and clusters of severe or emerging respiratory infections and to effectively prevent and contain their spread.

Also, national case definitions and standardized laboratory tests and protocols were developed to ensure consistent approaches to diagnosing, managing and reporting cases of severe respiratory infection. An influenza pandemic vaccine contract was put in place to enhance capacity to produce enough doses to meet domestic supply needs based on one dose per person in the event of a pandemic.

A pandemic influenza preparedness strategy aimed at further strengthening Canada's pandemic influenza readiness was recommended. Building on activities identified in the CPIP and outstanding issues, the proposed strategy included: first, development and testing of a mock, for example a prototype vaccine, using the H5N1 virus to test domestic production capacity and enhance regulatory readiness to reduce the time later required to prove a pandemic vaccine; second, federal contribution toward the initial establishment of a national stockpile of antiviral medications; third, new research and development measures to improve Canada's influenza research capacity and to develop rapid vaccine technology for emerging influenza viruses; fourth, emergency preparedness and response measures to improve federal-provincial-territorial capacity to respond to an influenza pandemic through health and social service planning, testing of the CPIP and development of national standards for emergency social service, psychological, social service delivery; and fifth, communications and collaboration activities to engage stakeholders in the development of a national risk communications approach and to strengthen international collaboration.

Budget 2006 provided \$1 billion over five years, years 2006 to 2011, to implement this preparedness strategy to respond to the threat of pandemic influenza, including a pandemic contingency fund. This money sought to strengthen federal capacity in seven major areas: vaccines and antivirals, surge capacity, prevention and early warning, emergency preparedness, critical science and regulation, risk communications and federal-provincial-territorial and international collaboration.

PHAC received \$384 million over five years to strengthen federal human health capacity to prepare and respond to the threat of avian and pandemic influenza in several areas including: rapid vaccine development capacity and the purchase of antiviral drugs; support to on-reserve first nations communities in the development, testing and revisions of community level influenza pandemic plans; risk communications strategies, including social marketing campaigns; field surge capacity such as the deployment of field epidemiologists and laboratory experts to affected countries and quarantine officers to points of entry; establishment of the national veterinary reserve and Canadian avian influenza vaccine bank; and early warning surveillance in collaboration with the WHO.

In addition, Health Canada received \$15.5 million to address the needs of first nations communities with respect to public health emergency planning and for regulatory work, including review readiness and safety monitoring for vaccines and resources for review and approval of antiviral drug submissions for the treatment of pandemic influenza.

● (2100)

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the CIHR, also received funding of \$21.5 million. This continues to support over 140 pandemic and influenza-related projects that contribute to managing the current influenza outbreak. CIHR continues to examine this research in contribution to the understanding of the H1N1 flu virus and better management of this outbreak.

This funding was a significant investment that showed foresight, leadership and commitment to the health and well-being of all Canadians. It is because of this investment that Canada has been on the leading edge of the global response.

In fact, other countries have commented on how well Canada has been responding, including Dr. Margaret Chan, head of the WHO, who specifically commended Canada for all its efforts. I think Canadians would agree that we are well prepared on each and every level.

In May of this year the health portfolio accessed the 2009-10 contingency fund to support first and second wave activities. The health portfolio used the 2009-10 contingency funding to respond to urgent H1N1 pressures on PHAC, Health Canada and the CFIA and to initiate second wave planning. Thanks to these efforts, Canada is a global leader in pandemic planning and we are implementing the Canadian pandemic influenza plan to reduce the effects of a possible pandemic.

The pandemic plan is the product of an extensive dialogue and collaboration with provincial and territorial public health authorities, health care workers, scientific experts and academics. It is only through this foresight and advanced planning that the health portfolio has been in a position to respond as quickly and effectively as it has to the H1N1 virus.

I want to give the House an update. At the end of the first week of the largest mass immunization campaign in Canadian history, the Government of Canada supplied the following amounts of H1N1 adjuvanted vaccine doses to the provinces: in Ontario, 2,229,000 doses; in Quebec, 1,331,000 doses; in British Columbia, 818,000 doses; in Alberta, 622,000 doses; in Manitoba, 206,000 doses; in

Saskatchewan, 173,000 doses; in New Brunswick, 129,000 doses; in Newfoundland and Labrador, 86,000 doses; in Nova Scotia, 160,000 doses—

Hon. Wayne Easter: Why don't you tell us how many you're short?

Mr. Colin Carrie: —in Prince Edward Island, 29,000 doses; in the Northwest Territories, 34,000 doses—

Hon. Wayne Easter: You're short 110,000.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I hear some heckling from the other side. I had hoped we would not make little of this subject. It is very important for the provinces and the people of Canada to know. I am really disappointed with the continued heckling and politicizing of this.

In the Yukon Territory, we have provided 24,000 doses and in Nunavut, 22,000 doses. Today and tomorrow GlaxoSmithKline, the H1N1 vaccine supplier, will be shipping 486,000 more doses of vaccine to the provinces and territories.

I want to talk about H1N1 and pregnant women. Extraordinary efforts went into procuring unadjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women. The Government of Canada secured 225,000 doses of unadjuvanted H1N1 vaccine for pregnant women and the distribution is as follows: in Ontario, 86,800 doses; in Quebec, 52,000 doses; in Alberta, 28,600 doses; in British Columbia, 25,000 doses; in Manitoba, 9,200 doses; in Saskatchewan, 8,100 doses; in Nova Scotia, 5,400 doses; in New Brunswick, 4,400 doses; in Newfoundland, 2,900 doses; in Prince Edward Island, 900 doses; in Nunavut, 600 doses; in the Northwest Territories, 600 doses; and in the Yukon, 400 doses.

I hope this will show Canadians who are watching tonight and the opposition that we are rolling out our plan. We are ahead of schedule in our plan and we are committed to putting the safety of Canadians first.

● (2105)

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, this issue is a non-partisan issue. When we are dealing with human lives, we should stick with issues that matter to Canadians. Therefore, it is for this reason that I react poorly to the government blaming the provinces and the vaccine manufacturers for the issue Canadians are facing.

The hon. member ought to address some facts, which I will state right now.

The health authorities around the world saw this pandemic coming when it first hit in April. While many countries ordered their vaccine in May, the Conservatives waited until early August. The World Health Organization recommended production of H1N1 vaccine on July 7, but the Conservative government waited until after August 6 to place its vaccine order with GlaxoSmithKline, delaying vaccinations for Canadians.

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When we look at other countries, other countries placed their vaccine orders much earlier than Canada. China began mass vaccination by administering the first H1N1 flu shots on September, Australia on September 30, the United States on October 3, Sweden on October 12, Japan on October 19 and Britain on October 21. Canada did not start administering the H1N1 vaccine until October 26.

Canadians deserve an answer.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been getting a consistent answer. I am very proud to be part of a government that has responded quite quickly to this pandemic.

I was in Washington a couple of weeks ago, attending a convention. Some of the top doctors from Tunisia, France, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and all over the world were there. Two things they complimented us on were the handling of the H1N1 pandemic issue in Canada and our economic action plan.

The member stood and said some things that he claimed to be facts, but he is simply wrong. I do not know how to explain it any better than that. We have not blamed anyone.

In fact, he talked about us ordering in August. Back in 2001, under his government, an agreement was made with GlaxoSmithKline to provide vaccines in an event of a pandemic. When we ordered, we ensured that we would have enough vaccine for each and every Canadian who wanted it.

To be specific, as of today, six million doses of the H1N1 vaccine have been delivered to the provinces and the territories. There is enough vaccine for all the priority groups. That is the number one in the world per capita amount of vaccine for our population.

Therefore, the member across the way, unfortunately again, is absolutely wrong.

● (2110)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about a very impressive strategy and gave us a history lesson as to how the situation has developed. However, the fact is, and my colleague, our health critic, mentioned this as well in her speech, we are not trying to blame people here. However, the government, if it has made a mistake, should simply admit that it has made one and promise to do better.

The public was of the understanding that there were 50 million doses. Liberal members have indicated when the orders were made and indicated when the process started.

We should have been screening the most at-risk people from the very beginning. Instead, the government simply started to roll out the program and vaccinated whomever showed up in the lineups. Then after only one week, it announced that it did not have enough to continue the next day. Alberta has closed its clinics for a week. That is not very good long-range planning.

There is nothing wrong in admitting a mistake has been made. If the government has made a mistake, just say that it has and that it will improve.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I am very impressed with, being part of this as the Parliamentary Secretary to

the Minister of Health, is how well our minister, our Prime Minister, and our government have taken a lead with this very important health issue.

Not only have we taken a lead, but we have worked collaboratively. As members heard in the speech by the minister earlier, we were one of the first when Mexico found out that it had this issue in its country. The Mexicans came to us. They came to Canada. They came to the Canadian officials.

I am really a little sick and tired of the opposition running down Canada's public health system and running down the Canadian health officials, who I know personally have been working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to implement our rollout.

In 2006, we were the government that put in the pandemic plan, not like the previous government under SARS in which we know there was no plan and it handled it horribly.

Our minister and our officials are the envy of the world. As I said earlier, I was in Washington and they praised Canada. It is unfortunate that sometimes we have to go outside our country to get kudos when they are deserved. Unfortunately, all the opposition can do is run down our health care system and our good officials who are doing good work.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot of heckling on the opposition side, most of it without much merit.

I would like to read a statement from the local news in the riding north of mine, although part of the health unit covers it also. I wonder if this is a good enough result for the opposition. This is from CKNX AM 920 in Wingham, Ontario, in regard to the Grey-Bruce health unit. It states:

After wait times of up to 90 minutes at the first clinic last week, today people are leaving with their shot after 20 to 30 minutes according to spokesperson Drew Ferguson.

We have heard a lot of cackling here that the opposition wants to see better. Is five minutes better? Twenty to 30 minutes seems quite reasonable to me. Perhaps the hon. member would like to give his thoughts on the work of Grey-Bruce health unit and its support staff.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the member for Huron—Bruce for all his good work. Of course, I would like to commend all the health officials in his community and right across the country. I know these people who are working around the clock to do what is best for Canadians.

To put it into perspective, this is unprecedented. This is new. This has never happened before, and Canada has taken a lead in the world.

We have been working collaboratively from day one with our provincial and territorial partners. That is why we can stand here today and say Canada is doing the job, Canada is the envy of the world, and we are very proud of our health care professionals in the community.

● (2115)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can talk about headlines.

The headline in today's *Guardian*, in P.E.I., is "H1N1 flu vaccine shortage to impact island clinics". It says:

A nationwide shortage of vaccines will delay P.E.I.'s H1N1 vaccination plan for the coming weeks

In Prince Edward Island today we have four schools with over 35% absenteeism, and 35 schools with an outbreak of 10%.

The parliamentary secretary went through quite a series of numbers, but he did not talk about what we are short. Where is the plan on the shortage of vaccines that would deal with the problems we are having in Prince Edward Island and across the country?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the misinformation from the other side is unbelievable.

These rollouts have been discussed with all the provinces and territories in advance. We have enough out there, as I said earlier: six million doses. In the member's own province of Prince Edward Island, as I mentioned, we had 29,000 doses of the adjuvanted vaccine and 900 of the non-adjuvanted. This rollout was supposed to be for the high-risk people in the communities.

I am very happy to say that we have worked hard with the provinces and we will continue to work hard with the provinces on this rollout. This is a complicated thing, but again I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the health professionals especially in Prince Edward Island who are doing a good job of getting this done.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Throughout May and June of this year, 21 remote and isolated communities in northern Manitoba were significantly affected by the H1N1 virus. When and where did these cases start and spread? An investigation needs to be undertaken as to why aboriginal cases were not picked up, or if they were, why they were not reported and acted upon.

What federal officials went to northern Manitoba as Canadian scientists went to Mexico? Where was the compassion and the urgency to see first-hand the devastation, the lack of supplies and infrastructure, and most important, what was needed to perhaps slow down the spread of the virus and guarantee prompt treatment of very sick individuals?

Why was there a lack of federal action during the spring wave in aboriginal communities? Why were aggressive containment measures not attempted? The WHO has since said these measures can slow the spread.

What was done to ensure the administration of antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu in a timely manner? Antiviral drugs, when used for treatment, can make someone feel better or shorten the time a person is sick by one or two days. They can also prevent serious flu complications. Dr. Anand Kumar, an emergency doctor from Winnipeg, explained to our parliamentary health committee that some people had to wait seven or eight days for treatment and that this likely impacted patient outcome.

Aboriginal people account for only 4% of the Canadian population. Why were 17.5% of those who were hospitalized aboriginal, 15% who stayed in ICU aboriginal, and 12% of deaths

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aboriginal? As of October 7, why were 38% of confirmed H1N1 cases first nations or Métis persons living off-reserve? A real investigation is needed so that these sad and sobering statistics are not repeated.

Every effort should have been taken to protect the health of aboriginal Canadians, as we had historical hindsight wherein the native population of Okak, Labrador, was hard hit. Only 59 or 266 people survived.

There are underlying health issues today, breathing difficulties, diabetes, underlying socio-economic conditions such as four and five families living in a household, environmental issues, and lack of clean running water. As such, my colleague from the riding of St. Paul's and I travelled to aboriginal communities to see first-hand the state of pandemic preparedness and we wrote a letter to the minister asking for answers to our questions. My colleague asked that the health committee be called back in August, because the House had recessed June 18 and would not sit again until September 14.

One chief reported that, of 30 communities in northern Manitoba, two had a pandemic plan and none had been tested. Pandemic preparedness and response should not be a test in patience and humility for aboriginal peoples, and we recognize the government's action in bringing back Dr. Paul Gully.

Going forward in the second wave, we want to ensure that each community has an H1N1 plan that has been tested, with the necessary supplies, funding and human resources so that people receive treatment in a timely manner and suitable infection-control measures.

The summer provided an unprecedented opportunity, namely to remain vigilant and prepare for a possible second wave in order to reduce hospitalizations, deaths and socio-economic impacts. However, members of the parliamentary health committee learned that the government would stay the course regarding H1N1. Canadians did not need platitudes, but rather, planning, answers and action during the critical summer period.

While no one could have predicted what the fall might have brought, preparedness was our insurance policy. The more we prepared for a pandemic, the greater the probability that we would be able to mitigate impacts. During the summer, where was the Prime Minister, the health minister and the government in engaging decision-makers and citizenry regarding H1N1 influenza?

• (2120)

The summer was the time to inform the public about a potential second wave of H1N1 and the means by which individual citizens could lessen the impact on their families. The summer was also the time to encourage communities and ensure that vulnerable populations were prepared.

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While underlying medical conditions such as autoimmune diseases and breathing challenges make individuals more at risk of complications or more likely to experience severe or lethal infections, how should information have been communicated to at-risk groups? This is key.

The summer was the time to plan for a possible gap between the onset of a pandemic, the second wave, and the time when vaccines might be ready.

Why did the government choose one vaccine manufacturer with one production line, particularly when influenza vaccine supply has a greater degree of unpredictability than the supply of any other vaccine? The United States contracted with five companies.

Why did the government order late and allow for a late delivery date? What was the contingency plan to ensure backup product and timely delivery of initial vaccine doses?

The government gambled on a possible November or December start date for a second wave of H1N1 and it estimated wrong. The second wave hit parts of Canada in October, as it did in the past, and before the vaccine was available.

The rollout began this past week, sadly, with confusion, frustration and lineups. Those vaccinated this past week will not be protected for 10 to 14 days. This week, there is a drop in vaccine doses.

How many Canadians have been vaccinated? What percentage of the population do they represent? What is the government's contingency plan for the gap period? That is the time between the second wave hitting and when people can get vaccinated.

Communication is vital in responding to any crisis, and clear, consistent messages are required. Our offices have been inundated by health care workers and the public who want real answers.

Perhaps the greatest confusion has surrounded vaccine for pregnant women. The World Health Organization advisory panel on vaccines recommended in June that non-adjuvanted vaccine be used for pregnant women if it were available. However, the Conservative government ordered adjuvanted vaccine in early August and later ordered non-adjuvanted vaccine. Why were pregnant women an afterthought?

When the WHO made its recommendation in June, there was no safety data for the adjuvanted vaccine in pregnant women, and expectant women fared poorly during past pandemics.

The government then recommended that pregnant women wait for the non-adjuvanted vaccine unless the cases of H1N1 were rising in their area. If the woman was over 20 weeks, she should take the adjuvanted vaccine.

To add to the confusion, the government then ordered 200,000 doses from Australia. We recognize that the position has now been made clear.

Regarding the adjuvanted and non-adjuvanted vaccines, we must ask: Who made the decision to halt the production of the adjuvanted vaccine? On what date was the decision made and the provinces and territories told? On what date did the minister know the delivery date

would be delayed, and when did the minister inform the provinces and territories and the Canadian people?

Since the spring we have asked over 200 questions of the government regarding pandemic preparedness. We wanted to ensure that the government was prepared for a possible second wave. We are now in full response mode and we need bold action.

We need the \$400 million from the 2006 budget redeployed to pandemic response. We need additional resources for the provinces and territories. We need clear, consistent messages for public health and Canadians.

• (2125)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Etobicoke North is on my health committee and is someone who has a science background. She knows full well that the reason our vaccines were rolled out when they were was to ensure, number one, that the vaccines are very safe for Canadians. Also, every single Canadian has the opportunity, if he or she wants it, to have that vaccination.

As far as having one supplier goes, it was their government that signed the contract for the one supplier which will last until 2011. The other thing is that when we talk about this pandemic, we are talking not about politics but about people. We have to be very careful that people are taken into consideration.

The Liberal Party was the one that put out that dreadful ten percenter that has hurt a lot of people. Can I ask the member opposite if she knew about that ten percenter? Did she agree that ten percenter should have been sent out?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has raised many issues.

Regarding safety, we must have a safe vaccine. China began mass vaccination in September, Australia on September 30, the United States on October 5, Sweden on October 12, and Japan on October 19. I do not think any of these countries were going to give their people an unsafe vaccine.

It is important that we ask why only one supplier was used, and the member mentions this was a decision made in 2001. The job of the government is to update the pandemic plan so it is current, so we are best able to respond, to have the resources.

I believe the last comment was regarding the ten percenter. I had no knowledge of that ten percenter, but along with my colleagues that day in the health committee, I apologized.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess the question we want answered most is why we did not start off on a national basis inoculating or vaccinating the most-at-risk people first.

The government pretended to have a handle on this whole issue. It kept saying it was going to start the vaccination program on November 1 and it had 50 million doses. Then all of a sudden, very quickly, we see the government accelerated the program. It started a week ahead.

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After only five days of pandemonium across the country, it has decided it does not have any more vaccine. It has to wait.

In terms of the most at risk, I understand, for example, that in Manitoba tomorrow the military personnel are being vaccinated. I do not know that they are in the most-at-risk category.

I would just ask the government to pull back a little bit here and quit being so defensive, and maybe admit that it does have a problem. I do not think the Liberals are imagining things here. I think they have been laying out some pretty good facts here, through speaker after speaker.

The government is just basically reading its notes from the Prime Minister's Office, just pretending that there is no problem here. Just wake up—

• (2130)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has brought up two important issues. One is priority. The government created new vocabulary. In the summer, in July, the United States was told who would be on their priority list. In September we were given a sequencing list.

It is important to realize that the second wave of the pandemic hit in October, as it has in the past. The vaccine rollout started the week after. We have had one week of rollout. While the government is promoting the idea that six million doses have been given out, it is not the number of doses that have been distributed that matters; it is the number of doses of vaccine that have gotten into the arms of Canadians.

I think we would all like to know how many vaccines have been administered to Canadians. What percentage of Canadians will now be protected in 10 to 14 days, remembering that this week there will be a drop in the number of those doses?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this emergency debate on the A (H1N1) virus. I asked to take part in it because I have spent my whole life, whether as a general practitioner or as a politician—mayor or member of Parliament—trying to understand people and disease, but particularly listening, diagnosing and then supporting my patients through their ordeals, whatever these may have been.

Health is the single most important thing for each and every one of our fellow citizens, and we must, to the extent possible, try to maintain our health, including through prevention. Prevention can be a very personal matter such as eating a healthy diet or being a non-smoker. However, prevention is also a government's responsibility, as is the case with the current A (H1N1) pandemic, regarding which the Conservative government has failed miserably in its prevention approach.

Let us not forget that we are now going through the second phase of this pandemic, with the first phase having begun in Mexico, last spring. So, the Conservative government was aware of the issue and had plenty of time to prepare for it, but showed no leadership in this regard. The other countries have been preparing for a long time to

fight this pandemic, but what has the Conservative government done?

Health authorities all over the world saw this pandemic coming when the virus hit, back in April. And while many countries were busy ordering vaccines in May, the Conservatives waited until early August.

The World Health Organization, the WHO, recommended the production of H1N1 flu vaccines on July 7, but the Conservative government waited until August 6, a month later, to order vaccines from GlaxoSmithKline. That unbelievable delay is largely responsible for the current shortage of vaccines. The WHO also recommended non-adjuvanted vaccines for pregnant women on July 7, but again the Conservatives waited and did not order those vaccines until September 4. Why did it wait for close to two months before making a decision?

The federal government's slowness in following up on the WHO recommendations resulted in the production of adjuvanted vaccines being slowed down this week, because of new priorities in the production. This is why fewer vaccines have been delivered to Canadians.

A number of other countries placed their orders for vaccine much earlier than Canada. The United States and the United Kingdom placed their first orders in May. Yes, I said in May. By July 24, Novartis International had already received orders for the H1N1 vaccine and was holding discussions with more than 35 governments. It had even signed contracts with the United States, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The Americans alone ordered more than \$1 billion worth of H1N1 vaccine and it was delivered well before the vaccine was made available in Canada.

Take China for example. It started its mass vaccination campaign by administering its first H1N1 vaccines on September 21. Australia did so on September 30, the United States on October 5, Sweden on October 12, Japan on October 19, and Great Britain on October 21. Canada, on the other hand, did not start vaccinations until October 26.

A government that felt responsible for the health and safety of its citizens would have acted back in May. A responsible government would have taken the lead on this by conducting a public education campaign at all levels. Did this Conservative government promote the vaccine, explain the gravity of the illness to Canadians, and tell them as well that in order for the vaccine to be really effective and substantially reduce the number of people who fall sick, as many people as possible have to be vaccinated? The answer is no.

The harmful effects of this virus should be explained to Canadians through the electronic media, newspapers, schools, the universities and even religious institutions. People have a right to know. Five medical doctors in the Liberal caucus issued a press release on this and have been constantly asking the government questions about it, but are still without an answer.

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South of the border, the Obama administration has proclaimed a national health emergency and given U.S. health authorities additional powers to deal with the pandemic and contain it. Instead of informing Canadians about the possibly very serious effects of the virus, the Conservative government preferred to spend \$60 million announcing infrastructure projects and providing tax information. It puts concrete before health.

• (2135)

Things have been in total chaos for weeks, if not months. It has been left to the media to invite experts to give the public information. There has been complete silence from this government, other than meaningless and unworthy answers to questions asked by opposition members. A sample answer: "Canada has the best per capita vaccination rate." I am sorry, but that is the lowest common denominator. We are not talking about "per capita", we are talking about men, women and children who are all worried.

It is because of the inaction of this government, which has not been able to explain what this flu strain is. Why get vaccinated? Is the vaccine safe? Should pregnant women be vaccinated? Should children be vaccinated? Because of their inaction in the face of this crisis, panic started to emerge after the unfortunate death of a young boy in Ontario and the proportion of people wanting to get vaccinated rose from 30% to 80% in a few days.

The Liberal Party of Canada implores the Conservative government to use part of the \$400 million set aside in the 2006 budget for intervention in the case of a pandemic. Yes, we are in a pandemic situation now.

The entire population should be vaccinated, but while we wait we have to tell the Canadian public, over and over, that one of the best ways to protect yourself against this illness is always a simple thing to do: whenever possible, wash your hands as often as possible with soap and water or a substitute product.

I could continue, but in conclusion, I implore this government to give health priority over concrete.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's comments.

The member has indicated he is a health professional and he would be aware of Canada's stocks of Tamiflu and Relenza, antivirals that we have invested in to make sure Canada is in fact prepared. We have made key investments in groups such as ICAV, located at Trent University in Peterborough, which is working on research on truly human monoclonal antibodies for people who are sick, so we can, in a much more aggressive way, deal with viruses like H1N1.

The Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. David Butler-Jones, has spoken with our health minister on numerous occasions and told Canadians how to be prepared for this virus.

In August I sent out a mailing to my entire riding telling constituents how to be prepared for a flu virus. I undertook that because I think all 308 of us in the House are elected into a position of leadership in our communities.

I would ask the member if he has sent out a full distribution mailing to constituents in his entire riding to tell them how to be prepared to combat the H1N1 virus.

• (2140)

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, there is a little difference between an MP doing his job and the government doing its job. I really think it is the job of the current government to do what the member just mentioned.

For sure MPs could do some mailings in their own ridings. They could reach their people, but it is not as important as the government doing so. It was the responsibility of the Minister of Health to do so and also the responsibility of the Prime Minister to do so.

You failed to do it, and right now there are men, women and children who are scared. They do not know what is going to happen and they do not know because you are not present. You did not care soon enough about this. By soon enough I mean in May. When there was the first phase of this, you were not there.

Where were you at that time? Why were you waiting? There is no reason to wait and I repeat that I really feel there is nothing more important than health. It is more important than any cement, any infrastructure you can build in this country. You need to build health in this country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would like to remind all members in the chamber to address their questions and comments to the chair.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Halifax West.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his remarks. Obviously, I know he is a doctor. So I would like to ask him a question that one of my constituents sent me. Many people have told me they are confused because they have not really received good information from the government. Someone asked me this in English.

[*English*]

If pregnant women are urged to get the non-adjuvanted vaccine, why then should an infant over six months receive the adjuvanted form of vaccine?

[*Translation*]

Can my hon. colleague comment on that for my fellow Canadians?

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Certainly what is important is that all Canadians be able to get vaccinated. The provinces are responsible for vaccinating all Canadians, from one end of the country to the other. It is also up to the provinces to take the lead and vaccinate pregnant women and children with an unadjuvanted vaccine. If public health officials in the provinces and the Canadian official agree, I think we should follow their advice. Those people are in an excellent position.

I think everyone should receive the vaccine. Getting vaccinated has to be a priority for the public because it is the one and only way to reduce the number of cases and avoid a Canadian pandemic.

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Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

This is the first time in Canadian history that we have had such a huge vaccination campaign. One of our primary responsibilities is to ensure that Canadians have reliable, up-to-date and complete information on the H1N1 influenza and on how to protect themselves during the epidemic.

I would like to focus on the methods we have used to inform Canadians during the pandemic and on how we foresee pursuing the information campaign.

The number of activities we have undertaken over the past six months is quite simply phenomenal. Communications have been shared at a breakneck pace from day one. Take for example the number of people who have consulted the Public Health Agency's Web site: more than 3.1 million hits since April.

I should also mention the great interest in the Government of Canada's *H1N1 Preparedness Guide*. Nearly 300,000 guides have been ordered or downloaded. We will have to reprint the guide again after distributing more than 650,000 copies to 6,500 Canadian post offices in two weeks alone. We will not have enough guides and we released them just two weeks ago.

We have also launched massive media campaigns. The Public Health Agency of Canada is broadcasting a message to all Canadians. This week, that message was heard on 238 radio stations. Health Canada is broadcasting messages to first nations and Inuit people through 80 radio stations in addition to public service announcements on northern community stations. The department has also published messages targeted to these people in 43 community newspapers and placed advertising banners on first nations and Inuit websites. Between October 19 and October 30, we mailed a brochure to more than 10 million Canadian households, to tell families how to identify the H1N1 virus and where to find additional information.

There is a great deal of interest in the H1N1 flu. The Government of Canada is responding to that demand by providing timely, factual and relevant information on the virus. The degree of awareness about H1N1 in Canada is now extremely high, particularly considering that six months ago no one had heard of the H1N1 virus or the pandemic.

We are finding out that people are making decisions regarding their health and are assessing the choices available to them.

The information campaigns, the public announcements, the numerous interviews given by the Minister of Health and by Dr. Butler-Jones, and the press conferences we are holding several times a week are all initiatives which show clearly that we are providing Canadians with a great deal of quality information.

Here is another example. On Tuesday, after vaccination centres opened across the country, we noticed a threefold increase in the number of people visiting the Public Health Agency of Canada's FightFlu.ca website. Until then, the all-time record was 60,000 hits. On that Tuesday, 196,000 people visited the site, or 22,000 people per hour. Canadians know about the FightFlu.ca website, and they visit it in large numbers.

They look at an average of three pages each time, which is very good. They spend more time on these pages, which means that they are actually reading the content and that they go further to get information.

It is also easy to see that they are showing up at vaccination centres. They want to get vaccinated. Three weeks ago, few people wanted to get the vaccine. We are working with all our partners to ensure that Canadians will indeed get vaccinated.

● (2145)

Our efforts are paying off, and because everyone has worked together so closely, we are ready for whatever winter brings.

When the epidemic began, we distributed more than four million health alert notices to travellers in Canadian airports, in cooperation with Transport Canada.

In late April, we started running infection prevention messages in 24 international airports in Canada, in cooperation with the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.

In May, we distributed posters to 49 airports showing how to prevent infection by using proper hand washing technique and coughing into one's sleeve, for example.

We have also signed an agreement with the Weather Network, which is using information from the Public Health Agency's FluWatch site on its website and its television stations in French and English. The Weather Network is also broadcasting general infection prevention messages on behalf of PHAC.

The volume of targeted, factual, complete information we are providing to Canadians and the variety of methods we are using to do so are quite simply unprecedented in Canadian history.

I could also remind this House that the national communication strategy is a multi-tiered strategy. The federal government is not alone in providing Canadians with information. We are working in partnership with the provinces and territories and local authorities.

All the information Canadians are receiving is coherent and comes from reliable sources in the public health community.

We are ready, and we are helping Canadians get ready and get informed.

● (2150)

[English]

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her comments on the means by which the government is disseminating its message. The member opposite does not talk about the message and the consistency or the lack of clarity in the message.

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I am wondering if she could provide any information as to what consistent, clear information the government is providing to the provinces, to parents, to Canadians, as it relates to booster shots for children. I know the Winnipeg regional health authority has told parents to bring their children back for a booster shot 21 days after they get their first inoculation. So in mid-November, there will be many children who will be in line for a booster, but we do not know what the rules are. Will there be a vaccine available and should children be getting a booster? Perhaps the member could talk about the content rather than the method of the message.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question.

The members should remember one thing. We do not play politics with the health of Canadians, in contrast to the Liberals. We work closely together with the territories and provinces. The guide on how to prepare for the H1N1 virus can be downloaded. We have also printed 300,000 copies. That will not be enough and we will print more, because it is a very good guide.

Everything is there. It says what the H1N1 virus is, how to prevent infection, how to recognize the symptoms, how to care for a sick person, what the vaccines and antivirals are, how to plan a campaign against the virus, Canada's plan, and all the resources. It is a very good tool to use. I encourage my Liberal friends to use it too. It is very good for our communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the H1N1 pandemic is now in full bloom in Canada. Canadians are scared. Over the last couple of weeks, Canadians have been getting sick and Canadian children have been dying. The pandemic train has left the station.

Unfortunately, the immunization program has just arrived in chaos. Why have other countries like the United States been able to roll this out weeks in advance? Even countries such as China have begun immunization weeks before Canada. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary could answer.

The minister had said that, by Christmas, not a single person would be left out. Would the parliamentary secretary be able to look in the eyes of the parents of children, the 13-year-old and the 10-year-old who have already died, and all those Canadians who will get sick and die over the next couple of months and say that this is truly good enough?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I will look my friend straight in the eye and tell him that I will be one of the first to go and be vaccinated and will also take my mother because she is old and suffers from bronchitis. No, I am not afraid to save my life, or the lives of Canadians, and I do not play politics with the health of Canadians and Quebecers.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tonight we have heard a lot of conversation

around the role of the federal government. I would like to hear her perspective in terms of the importance of us having a very good working relationship with the province.

• (2155)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pardon me. I believe there has been a misunderstanding. The member is next on the speaking order. We are resuming debate.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps someone could ask me that excellent question.

I stand behind this government's solid approach to managing this H1N1 outbreak and to our comprehensive, forward-looking pandemic plan.

Tonight, I will focus my remarks on vaccine timing and availability.

I can think of no more eloquent a response for those who have expressed doubt to our capacity to manage the outbreak and to note the facts. To date, six million doses of adjuvanted H1N1 flu vaccine have been delivered to the provinces and territories. That is currently more H1N1 flu vaccine per capita than any other country in the world, more than the United States, Great Britain, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, or anywhere else.

More to the point, we have ordered enough H1N1 flu vaccine for every Canadian from coast to coast to coast who needs and wants to be immunized. No one will be left behind. And, yes, that H1N1 flu vaccine, a safe and effective vaccine, will be available to Canadians in a timely way.

We have not cut corners on safety in order to rush product to Canadians. We have acted in a responsible and deliberate way that balances the need to ensure a safe and effective vaccine is available and the need to stay ahead of the outbreak. That is a tough balancing act, but I believe we have the balance right.

Last week witnessed the beginning of the largest mass immunization campaign in Canadian history. That campaign, slated to start in early November, actually began ahead of schedule, on October 26.

We moved more quickly because our early warning systems told us the nature and pace of the second wave of the outbreak had changed.

We moved more quickly because we could draw on the knowledge, expertise and experience of an extensive global network of regulatory agencies and public health experts to assess H1N1 flu vaccine safety and the effectiveness across different populations.

We moved more quickly because our regulator and our vaccine manufacturer had worked closely together to define both the expectations and the process to be followed to approve a vaccine for a novel influence of flu virus, but in advance of this outbreak so we can move more quickly if the situation required this.

We moved more quickly because the context had changed and the health and safety of Canadians was at risk.

Because we knew it would be impossible to vaccinate everyone at one time, the Government of Canada in co-operation with the provinces and territories jointly determined sequencing guidelines for the distribution of H1N1 flu vaccine. This was done to ensure that vaccine programs could target priority groups first, allowing those who need the vaccine most to get it first.

As per the agreed upon guidance, these priority groups are: people under the age 65 with chronic conditions; pregnant women; children six months to less than five years of age; people living in remote and isolated settings or communities; health care workers involved in pandemic response or the delivery of essential health care services; and household contacts and care providers of persons at high risk who cannot be immunized or may not respond to vaccines.

I want to assure members that the Government of Canada, along with the provinces and territories, has been working diligently to distribute and administer the H1N1 flu vaccine as quickly, safely and broadly as we possibly can.

The Government of Canada provides important technical information, guidance and the real time support provinces and territories need to make informed decisions about when, how and to whom to administer the H1N1 vaccine.

Provinces and territories, which have the lead responsibility for administering the vaccine, rely on this extraordinary partnership to make clear and consistent information available to health professionals and ordinary citizens. We are moving forward together.

Canada's vaccine supplier, GSK, has informed us that the vaccine supply being shipped across Canada will be lower next week. In order to meet our request to produce a supply of unadjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women, the company had to switch over its vaccine production fill line.

● (2200)

Without getting overly technical, the formulation for unadjuvanted vaccine differs slightly from that for adjuvanted vaccine and the vial size is also different.

Switching production from one vaccine to another and then recalibrating fill-lines and retesting output for quality takes about three to four days. That resulted in reduced vaccine availability for November 2. However, normal vaccine production has already resumed and our output should return to normal by next week.

As some who is not a member of a high risk group, it is without hesitation I would prefer to wait a few extra weeks to ensure that pregnant women are protected. It is also important to note that every batch of vaccine is quality tested before it is shipped to the provinces and territories. Lots that do not meet the quality standards are not released, which can have an impact on the weekly number of doses distributed.

The Government of Canada has been in constant touch with GSK and the provinces and territories and is sharing information with the provinces and territories on each week's supply of vaccine as soon as it is available.

There has been constant communication both at the working level and at the senior management level to share information on both

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availability and possible delays. We are working together with one goal in mind, to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Indeed, by the end of last week, six million doses of vaccine had been delivered. That is more vaccine per capita than any other country in the world.

I want to express my gratitude and appreciation for the many health care workers working at clinics. These are very challenging and unique circumstances they are working under. Jurisdictions are giving more vaccine per day than they have ever given in history. I am very pleased to see many thousands of Canadians on the priority list getting their vaccines.

It is important to take a global perspective. Diseases do not respect borders. This is a worldwide pandemic. Many countries around the world are beginning their vaccine campaigns and each are facing different challenges in getting their populations vaccinated. However, it is important to remember that Canada is in the very fortunate position and we remain hopeful to have every Canadian who needs and wants to be vaccinated by Christmas.

Scientific studies show that the vaccine is safe and effective. We know that from clinical trials conducted in several countries around the world.

The H1N1 flu vaccine is produced in a similar manner to seasonal flu vaccines, which have been used safely and effectively in Canada for many years. The vaccine contains an adjuvant, which is an ingredient made of naturally occurring oil, water and vitamin E that boosts the body's immune response and increases the vaccine effectiveness. The same adjuvant was tested in 45,000 people and did not identify any safety concerns for healthy adults or children.

Now that immunization has begun, the Public Health Agency of Canada will work with provinces and territories to produce weekly reports of all reported adverse events associated with the H1N1 vaccine. This reporting will be done through the existing system, the Canadian Adverse Events Following Immunization Surveillance System. This system is supported by health care professionals who report adverse events to their provincial-territorial public health offices, which share the information with the agency. This existing system will be supported by additional projects that will provide more detailed data specifically about the H1N1 flu vaccine.

The Government of Canada will continue to work with its provincial and territorial partners to ensure that all Canadians have the information they need to make informed decisions about immunization. Most important, we have stayed on message to get the vaccine.

Unlike in the era of our grandparents, we are truly fortunate to live in a time when we have a capacity to mount a quick and robust response to emerging viruses.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about the six million doses. I will ask this again. How many doses have actually been administered?

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She also talked about the importance of getting the vaccine. We know this is the best way to protect the health of Canadians. It is also the best way to reduce the risk of severe disease. No one can predict the rate of severe disease, but some experts say it is one in one thousand cases, which could translate to 1,500 to 2,500 ICU cases simultaneously across the country. I believe there are about 3,000 ICU beds.

Do we have a national surge capacity plan in Canada and are we able to move resources to where they are needed?

• (2205)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, that sounded like a multi-pronged question.

In terms of the six million doses of vaccine, what is particularly important is that a good proportion has gone to the north, almost enough to cover every citizen in the north.

Given the time to transfer to health care facilities, to target the rural and more isolated communities was very important. I am sure the nurses, the physicians and other workers in public health are getting those vaccines out as quickly as they possibly can. I know that they ramped up their personnel to do that.

I also have to reflect on the member's comment. My background is in health care and part of my role was to work with pandemic planning. I can remember four years ago that part of our pandemic planning within our health authority and within our province was to look at our capacity and consider worst case scenarios in terms of what it would mean for our ICU and what it would mean for respirators. That work was done a few years ago in many of our health authorities and hospitals.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech by my colleague, with whom I have the pleasure of sitting on the Standing Committee on Health. I know she examined this aspect along with me and I would therefore like to ask her a very simple question. In order to administer the vaccine, we must have enough doses of it, hence the importance of the debate this evening. Why did the government not get together with GSK and acquire the necessary doses of vaccine when there were a lot of pharmaceutical companies that were prepared—

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Six.

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: My colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine stepped up with the answer. Six other companies were ready to supply the vaccine. So why did the government sign an exclusive contract with GSK when it was its responsibility to plan ahead and sign contracts with other companies?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, when looking at this, we have to remember that we currently have a global crisis. Countries across the world are ordering vaccines for their populations.

In Canada what we have to be thankful for is that right now we have more vaccines per capita than any other country. Also, we are going to have enough vaccine to vaccinate every single person in our population who chooses to be vaccinated. In Canada we need to feel fortunate about those facts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity this evening to talk about the H1N1 issue and the urgency surrounding it. As a member of the Standing Committee on Health, as I just said, I have come to understand the tremendous breadth of the H1N1 problem over the past few months.

I have to say that I was extremely surprised by the government's amateur—yes, amateur—handling of the H1N1 crisis.

Earlier, I asked my colleague a question about companies. In 2006, the government signed an exclusive contract with GSK to distribute vaccines. As the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine said, six companies were capable of supplying the vaccine. Therein lies the problem. We knew we were headed for a pandemic. The government was warned months ago, nearly a year ago. We agree that the H1N1 pandemic began sometime in December 2008 or January 2009. The government was therefore well aware of the issue and could see the problem coming.

In my opinion, the federal government is to blame for the long lineups of people waiting to get the H1N1 vaccine, because of its poor organization and lack of preparation. We went through the SARS crisis, which gave us some idea of what to expect. The federal government should have learned something from the SARS crisis and come up with some improvements regarding this situation.

The problem is that the Conservative government did absolutely nothing. It could have taken action a long time ago. On January 11, 2009, the WHO declared a phase 6 pandemic for H1N1. The Government of Canada waited until August 2009 to order 50 million doses of the adjuvanted vaccine and until September 2009 to order the non-adjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women. That is extremely worrisome. I mentioned the month of August 2009 for 50 million doses of the adjuvanted vaccine. Since that time, the government has known that the adjuvanted doses could not be given to pregnant women, and this was repeated many times in committee. We heard from witnesses and doctors who knew it posed a problem, but the Conservative government never got the message. Suddenly, about a week and a half ago, it finally realized there was a problem and that there would not be enough non-adjuvanted doses for pregnant women, who are one of the of high-risk groups for H1N1.

This government's mismanagement does not end with the H1N1 flu. Unfortunately, it extends to a number of other files, so much so that sometimes I miss the Liberals.

About a week and a half ago, the government purchased almost 200,000 doses from Australia even though our pharmaceutical companies were ready to manufacture the vaccine. The government did not want to do business with them, which I find very troublesome for another reason.

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My colleagues may find it ironic coming from a Bloc member, but I think this is unfortunate for Canada's pharmaceutical industry in general. We have some very good pharmaceutical companies, in Quebec as well. I am thinking primarily of the very good companies located on Montreal's West Island, as well as in the rest of Canada, in Toronto, for example. They could have started up production and supplied the vaccine. Unfortunately, the government did not want to do business with them.

The government did not act prudently. Rather than ordering the vaccine from a number of pharmaceutical laboratories, in order to ensure a steady stream of deliveries, the government relied solely on GSK. It then blamed the company for overestimating its production capacity. You do not take such risks with people's health.

At present, the Government of Quebec has a lack of resources to deal with H1N1.

• (2210)

The shortage of vaccine doses has sparked a wave of panic among citizens. With all the horror stories circulating about the swine flu, I can understand why people flocked to the vaccination clinics when the first doses became available. In some areas, there was an odd dynamic because people were being urged to get the vaccine but the polls showed that they did not necessarily want to be vaccinated. We ended up with the problem of having everyone wanting to be vaccinated because of the disastrous scenarios circulating.

People have shown up in droves to be vaccinated, even those not in the high risk categories but who had concerns about H1N1. That is understandable given the confusing announcements about the Conservatives' plans and their amateurism in telling us that all was well but that there were some problems. We were never given the right information by the Conservatives. And that is also the case for a good number of other files.

Without accurate information, citizens have decided out of fear to go en masse to be vaccinated. We now have the problem of not having enough doses of vaccine.

What is more, according to the Canadian Press, money is available to provide the provinces with additional funds to cope with this urgent situation. The government did not hesitate to write big cheques with the Conservative Party logo on them, but it is slow to open the coffers to help the provinces to deal with this pandemic.

I will admit that I have a great deal of difficulty with the Conservatives telling us that we in the opposition are engaging in demagoguery with H1N1, that we are playing politics with H1N1, and the public is not fooled either. It knows full well that when the Conservatives advance that type of regressive argument that adds nothing to the debate, they are only hurting themselves.

The federal government, as I was saying, is largely responsible for all this. The Bloc Québécois feels that the federal government is largely responsible for the H1N1 vaccination campaign. By taking this crisis so lightly, the government has caused panic in the public, who feel caught off guard and completely misinformed. The government's lack of organization just confirms the concerns the Bloc Québécois has had from the start about the possibility of the vaccine not arriving on time to avoid the second wave of the H1N1 influenza pandemic.

I was saying earlier, being a member of the Standing Committee on Health, that we have been talking about this since August. Since August we, together with the Liberals and the NDP, have been expressing our fears and pointing out the problem and we have done exemplary work. I am thinking about the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, who did a fantastic job of asking the government for answers and asking witnesses to provide arguments to show that the Conservatives had not been doing their job.

The government's lack of organization just confirms our concerns. The World Health Organization had been warning authorities for quite some time about a global outbreak of the pandemic. The concerns about this possibility were raised as soon as the virus appeared in early spring 2009. What is more, the WHO declared this a pandemic in June 2009.

The federal government could have planned ahead for the production of non adjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women, who are the most vulnerable to H1N1, knowing that there was no clinical test for that group and thereby prevented an inexcusable delay in the production of the regular vaccine.

I have a hard time understanding how Europe approved the vaccine weeks ago, yet our government had not yet approved it. If memory serves me right, it was not approved until last Wednesday. The member for Verchères—Les Patriotes could tell me. Yes, it was last Wednesday.

• (2215)

Europe had already approved it weeks earlier, and the Conservatives did so only last week. The Public Health Agency of Canada has had to deal with droves of people, and the government approved it last week, based on the European studies. Why did the government not encourage the agency to approve it earlier? In the end, they used the same European studies, but they waited, and that delay cost us very valuable days for producing the vaccine. When we are talking about fighting a worldwide flu pandemic, like the H1N1 pandemic, every day counts.

The federal government should have planned ahead for the production. Although Canadian public health officials have confirmed that they had not anticipated such a rush from the public to get the H1N1 vaccine, they should have planned to order doses based on the total population, and not on the number of people who expressed an interest, since at the beginning of the crisis, the government thought that several doses would be needed for each person. This is a matter of public safety.

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In fact, at the start of the information campaign, the government ordered 50.4 million doses from GSK, enough for everyone in Canada to receive an initial dose. All the governments of Quebec and the provinces are asking the federal government is to provide them with enough doses for their population. But this is something the federal government cannot seem to do properly, judging by the latest news about delays in the distribution of the vaccine. The Conservatives can say that all Canadians who want the vaccine will be able to receive it, but it remains to be seen whether they can protect themselves before it is too late. It is estimated that, with luck, everyone who wants to be vaccinated will be by Christmas, which still gives the virus plenty of time to spread.

As I said earlier, this debate is useless. It provides an opportunity to show how the federal government has failed. The government has a responsibility to release additional funds so that Quebec and the provinces can hire more nurses to vaccinate people when the vaccine arrives. These funds could also be used to improve information sharing on the vaccination campaign. So far, the federal government has been sending mixed messages to the public, and people are becoming more and more confused.

I would like to summarize the situation. The WHO advised health authorities on June 11, 2009 that the world was at the start of a phase 6 influenza pandemic. Canada announced that it was ordering 50.4 million doses from GSK on August 6. As I said earlier, every day is important in the fight against a pandemic. There is evidence that the government wasted valuable time for no reason. The federal government ordered 1.2 million doses of unadjuvanted vaccine for pregnant women on September 6, 2009. I feel that this brief chronology is very important, because it shows how the Conservative government has failed.

When a pandemic as serious as this one is developing, the government should not waste precious weeks waiting and twiddling its thumbs. I am not questioning the quality of the work done by the nurses at the Public Health Agency of Canada and all of Canada's health officials. The problem lies with the government, which took the issue lightly, as it has done in a number of other debates. It did not take the issue seriously and wasted many weeks thinking, deliberating and waiting instead of acting.

There is something that is very unfortunate and very ironic. Suppose we look at the byelections being held now in Quebec. The Conservatives' slogan is "Action, not elections". Unfortunately, just the opposite is happening.

● (2220)

There is no government action. Health Canada approved the H1N1 vaccine on October 21, 2009, and the vaccination campaign started on October 26, first for health workers and then for other groups at high risk, such as children from six months to five years old, people who have compromised immune systems, people living with babies under six months of age or with others who have compromised immune systems, and pregnant women, more specifically, women who are at least 20 weeks pregnant as well as all pregnant women who have a chronic illness.

Most people—and this is the problem—will not be able to start getting vaccinated before December 7. It does not take a genius to know that the flu will have already wreaked havoc by December 7. If

the government had not lost so many weeks, we could have started vaccinating people well before the critical point was reached. There is not much danger of the flu spreading in the summer, and the proof is in the fact that the number of people infected with the H1N1 virus went down this summer, at least in the northern hemisphere.

We all know that the critical time will be between December and February. Why did the government not act responsibly and ensure that we had the vaccine in time to reduce the risk of the virus spreading?

The government's information campaign has caused total confusion in the target population from beginning to end, whether because of the lack of basic advice or the lack of vaccine. We note, in particular, the time it took to get the H1N1 vaccine approved. Canada was one of the slow ones in this regard. The United States approved it on September 13, Australia on September 18 and France on September 25.

Those governments acted responsibly. They wasted no time approving it since they already had conclusive results about the vaccine and they made sure to do it as quickly as possible, suspecting that the faster it was approved, the faster the pharmaceutical companies would be able to produce the vaccine, and the faster the public would be able to get vaccinated.

That delay allowed time for the public to become wary of the vaccine's safety and for myths and conspiracy theories to spring up.

I am told I have only two minutes left. I will say that we are very short of time because I could have spoken for hours. I did however talk about it at length in the Standing Committee on Health.

I have to say that the one thing I have noticed regarding the Conservative government on this issue, and it is the same on every issue, is the amateurism with which they have acted. What I find tragic is that this is extremely dangerous because we are talking here about the health of the public. All the Conservatives offer us is not apologies; they simply say that the opposition is playing politics with a subject as serious as the H1N1 flu, when exactly the opposite is true. We have stepped up to our responsibilities, we have questioned the government and we have made our recommendations.

● (2225)

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hardly know where to begin. I compliment my colleague on an eloquently delivered set of remarks, but it was eloquently delivered rubbish.

He talks about messaging. The messaging from this side of the House has been absolutely clear. The messaging from the Chief Public Health Officer of the country has been absolutely clear. The people who have been muddling the message are the people across the floor with this kind of postal garbage that has been going out to Canadians.

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He talks about delays in getting the vaccine out. The safety of Canadians, the safety of the vaccine, and the effectiveness of the vaccine was a priority for this government. He talks about the U.S. as an example. The U.S., in fact, has had to pull back from the kind of stuff it was putting out because it proved to be non-effective. Does he want us to go down that non-effective road?

He talks about the adjuvanted and unadjuvanted vaccines and the twiddling of thumbs. Should we have twiddled our thumbs while 4,000 to 5,000 Canadians die every year of normal flu, if we can call it normal flu? Should we have twiddled our thumbs with that? It is absolutely ridiculous.

I want to ask my colleague one simple question. Is he smarter and more qualified than the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada to make qualified remarks in this area?

[Translation]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, there we have the Conservatives' only argument and the proof that this member was not present at the Standing Committee on Health, because I was there with my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes. We asked the witnesses questions, we questioned Dr. Butler-Jones, and the answers he gave us were plainly in agreement with what we were saying.

I may have been off the mark, if I may put it that way, and I do not think I am smarter than the people at the Public Health Agency of Canada. I simply think that I represent the people in my riding who have fears, because we do not have the necessary doses. There is a word for that, and it is "responsibility". The government had a responsibility to live up to. It had a responsibility to do business with companies other than GSK.

Why did the government not do business with other companies that had the capacity to produce these vaccines? Why did it not even bother to talk with those companies about whether they were also capable of supplying some of the doses?

● (2230)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Bloc Québécois member for his speech. He is one of the youngest members of Parliament. In fact, he is the youngest of all the members in this House, and he is very wise. I believe he is absolutely right tonight.

I have a question for him regarding our Standing Committee on Health. A week ago, a GSK representative told everyone that everything was fine. The only thing we can interpret from that is that this company is in the process of producing 3 million doses of this vaccine.

Now, who is telling the truth? Is it GSK, which is saying that everything is fine with the contract, or is it the government, which is saying that the company is causing the problem? What is the truth? What is the problem with the production of vaccines?

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, clearly, everything is not okay. The Conservative government made promises and created high expectations with regard to GSK's ability to distribute enough vaccine. The problem is that GSK did not hold up its end of the bargain.

Why did it not hold up its end of the bargain? That is an interesting question. It did not do so because all of a sudden, it turned out that the government did not plan for the production of non-adjuvanted vaccine, or at least, failed to consider its usefulness. What did the government do? It paid dearly for vaccine from Australia and asked GSK—in a politically motivated and amateurish decision—to alter its production line to produce non-adjuvanted vaccine when it suddenly realized that it had nothing to give the highest-risk group, pregnant women.

It is clear that everything is not okay. Someone is hiding the truth. Whether that someone is the government, well, if one looks at how it has handled this matter from the beginning, some serious questions have to be asked.

Not long ago, there was talk of supplying 3.5 million doses per week, if I am not mistaken, but actual production has been dramatically lower. So there was a problem and, as I was saying, the problem was with the shift in production priority. From one day to the next, someone decided to change production over to the non-adjuvanted vaccine. Since the very beginning, we have been talking about the underlying problem, which is that there was one single supplier.

I see that, unfortunately, I have very little time left. If only the government had dealt with other pharmaceutical companies, they could have helped meet the need in this kind of situation, and we would not be here debating this issue today.

[English]

Mr. Francis Valeriotte (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member from Quebec to pursue his line about the education campaign undertaken by the government.

Specifically, in Guelph, almost without exception, people are noticing the almost paltry sum spent by the government on educating the public when it comes to H1N1, as compared to the vast millions and millions of dollars in self-promotion that it has spent. As a result, there is inadequate messaging that they have received.

I am wondering if he has experienced the same problem in his riding that I experienced in Guelph regarding the lack of information about H1N1.

● (2235)

[Translation]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, thankfully, at least in Quebec we have the Government of Quebec, which makes up for the rest of Canada, I am sorry to say. What is unfortunate, as my colleague from Guelph just indicated, is that the Conservatives were much more interested in investing money in things that would pay off politically, such as their infrastructure programs—which they boasted about to no end, but from which we have yet to see any results—for electoral considerations, in order to win the next election, as opposed to investing in an information campaign concerning vaccination. I mentioned this a little while ago when we were talking about the big logos on the giant Conservative Party cheques.

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This is what posed a big problem for us, because from the beginning, people did not have the necessary information. They knew a lot more about the money the Conservatives were giving to their riding than they did about the need to be vaccinated. I must admit, I find that extremely shocking, because they are playing with the health of our citizens.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about how he almost missed the Liberals, and I can assure him that the families of the 43 people who died in Ontario as a result of SARS certainly do not miss the inaction and the lack of leadership that was shown by the previous Liberal government with respect to that issue.

He knows full well that this government is working faster and more safely than any other government around the world to make sure that the vaccine that we send out is safe and effective and that it works. We are also not forgetting the regular flu that also hits Canadians.

The hon. member talked a lot about education. We heard a bit from members of the Liberal Party with respect to education. I wonder if he could tell me if his idea of educating people would be, as the Liberals would suggest, responding to a questionnaire that is at www.feedback.Liberal.ca/bodybags? Is that the type of education that he is talking about? Is that the type of education that will help Canadians overcome their fear? I do not think it is. I think we need a debate that is—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Repentigny.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is very interesting, and here is why. First of all, indeed, the ten percenter he mentioned is very telling. I must admit, like him, I was also appalled by what the Liberals did, and I invite people to read the evidence of the Standing Committee on Health. Now the problem is that no matter how many mistakes the Liberals made, they do not excuse the Conservative government's mistakes. Furthermore, while the Liberals may have made some mistakes, they are in opposition. The Conservatives, however, are in power, and that is much more dangerous.

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am listening to the colleagues across the floor and what I am hearing is politicizing. This is a Canadian health concern, a world health concern and I am hearing political grandstanding. I am aboriginal, but first of all, I am Canadian. I joined the RCMP to serve and protect this country. There are members in the House who are doctors who took an oath to help Canadians, and I think this has been lost today and tonight. I am very upset and I am very ashamed to see what has transpired here tonight. That is how I feel. That is what I am going to be saying and I should not have to say anything more. That should be my speech. However, we all have to reflect here tonight. The Liberals opposite may laugh about it, but this is how I feel.

Regarding the pandemic planning response for on-reserve first nation communities, this government has worked with all partners to

ensure that first nation communities in Canada are prepared for the H1N1 influenza. This is the result of ongoing and tireless efforts among the federal government, provincial governments and most importantly, first nation communities and leadership. We must recognize that pandemic planning for first nation communities is a shared responsibility. When it comes to providing care to first nation communities, ensuring effective collaboration between the different levels of government is paramount.

First nations have been involved since the beginning. From day one we have been working with first nation leaders and provinces to ensure that communities have everything they need in a timely manner based on the best public health advice. The response to H1N1 is a true partnership among the Government of Canada, the governments of the provinces and territories, first nation leaders and first nations communities. We have maintained close contact with first nations from the beginning of the pandemic and have listened closely to their concerns.

Given the experience of SARS, the Government of Canada has worked with first nations and provinces over the past few years to raise awareness of the risk of infectious disease and to support the development of community pandemic influenza plans. As an RCMP member, I remember working in close conjunction with the provincial governments and the federal government to develop a pandemic plan that could help police officers deal with the pandemic in their communities, aboriginal or non-aboriginal. These plans reflect the needs of these communities and have been prepared with the support of Health Canada. These plans will enable a sustainable response to future emergencies and will form part of the ongoing emergency preparedness at a local level.

Health Canada continues to provide technical support to first nation communities for the development, testing, revision and implementation at the community level of influenza pandemic plans. We have provided the necessary funding in 2006-07. Health Canada allocated \$6.5 million over five years to support pandemic preparedness for on-reserve first nation communities. Health Canada has also secured additional resources for the federal pandemic contingency to support a response to H1N1 outbreaks in first nation communities during the first wave.

Other commitments include, through budget 2009, \$305 million over the next two years to strengthen current health programs to improve health outcomes. We have also provided an additional \$135 million that would go toward improving health services infrastructure including health clinics and nursing stations in first nation communities. The most recent support to first nation communities has been the response to specific needs expressed by first nations.

● (2240)

Budget 2009 provides a two-year funding target of \$165 million for the completion of drinking water and waste water infrastructure projects to address health and safety priorities on some first nations communities across the country.

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Budget 2009 also provides \$400 million over two years for innovative approaches to the increase and betterment of on-reserve housing, including new social housing projects, remediation of existing social housing stock, and a range of complementary housing activities.

The Canadian pandemic influenza plan includes Annex B, which defines the roles and responsibilities of all partners in the pandemic planning for on-reserve first nations, including the federal and provincial governments and first nations communities. As a result, today nearly all first nation communities across Canada now have a specific community plan that guides their actions in responding to an outbreak of H1N1 influenza. These plans are based on principles of national and provincial pandemic plans, but were developed by first nations community leaders to respond to the unique needs of each community.

In addition, close to 90% of these plans have been tested, whether a community has had an outbreak or not, meaning first nations have a high level of readiness and ability to respond to H1N1.

During the first wave, when first nations communities did experience outbreaks, such as those in northern Manitoba, the Government of Canada worked with its partners to ensure a timely, coordinated and comprehensive response. Those communities ably demonstrated that they were able to respond to very difficult situations.

We are all aware that first nations communities have been devastated by the epidemics in the past. We are aware of this and have made great efforts to support their communities, to work with them and the provinces, so that the necessary responses have been put in place to reduce, as far as possible, the risk of death and severe illness in first nations.

We are also aware that H1N1 caused severe disease in the spring in first nations communities, particularly in Manitoba. We responded to the needs of the communities and provided added supplies and support, and we have seen that remote and isolated communities are a priority for the distribution of the vaccine.

Health care was provided through community nursing stations to those first nations with influenza-like illness. These facilities were staffed with dedicated, qualified health professionals and provided with all the medical equipment and supplies that were needed, including hand sanitizers, antiviral medications to treat those who are sick, and information on clinical care guidelines and infection control measures. Restocking of essential equipment and supplies for nursing stations can often be done within 24 hours.

In addition, antiviral medications were shipped out in advance of any outbreaks for those first nations communities that were deemed to be at greater risk of an H1N1 outbreak. These antiviral medications continue to be used as a primary response to H1N1 disease while the immunization program rolls out.

We continually monitored and adjusted the allocation of health professionals to respond to the needs of first nations communities, and in the case of northern Manitoba, we worked closely with the provinces to help provide additional physicians. Those who were severely ill were provided with emergency medical transportation to the closest provincial hospital to receive the care they required.

Very early on in the first wave of the H1N1 influenza, we recognized that there might be a number of factors that placed first nations communities at greater levels of risk. We know, for example, that younger people aged 16 to 25, pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions face greater risks from H1N1 influenza. We know that first nations are younger than the national average and that the birth rate on reserves is three times higher than it is in the rest of the country.

We also know that there are higher rates of chronic disease within first nations communities, and that social conditions, including overcrowding and limited access to water for handwashing, pose challenges in minimizing the spread and impact of a number of infectious diseases, including H1N1 influenza.

● (2245)

These factors put first nations communities, especially those in remote and isolated areas with limited access to provincial health services, at particular risk for H1N1 influenza. Health Canada, working with its partners, has taken a number of steps to address these risks. Working with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, we helped to ensure the delivery of supplies of water to communities to support proper handwashing and help prevent and control infections in the home.

Special medical adviser Dr. Paul Gully was put in place. He has been responsible for coordinating emergency health services to first nations communities affected by the H1N1 virus. Dr. Gully joined Health Canada following his assignment at the World Health Organization as a deputy United Nations system influenza coordinator. He has also worked previously with Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

This government has also worked with first nations and the provinces to ensure that vaccination is a key component of the overall strategy to fight H1N1 influenza. We are working with provincial governments to ensure first nations communities receive H1N1 vaccine as quickly as possible.

Mass immunization clinics are in place in many first nations communities. Remote and isolated communities have been prioritized based on the national sequencing guidelines developed with the provinces and territories. We understand that the uptake rate in many first nations communities has been very high. This is due to the leadership shown by first nations representatives and their promotion of immunization against H1N1.

Immunization clinics in first nations communities began on October 26. We expect that all clinics for remote and isolated first nations communities as a priority group will be in place by the end of this week.

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Health Canada has supported the rollout of these immunization clinics by training home and community care nurses to provide the H1N1 vaccine and by providing additional health professionals from regional and national offices to go out to first nations communities to support the vaccination efforts.

As with any major undertaking of this nature, we face a number of challenges along the way. We have worked closely with our partners to learn from the challenges and improve our collaborative response to H1N1 influenza for first nations communities.

The minister has met with a number of first nations leaders at the national and provincial levels, and has visited a number of first nations communities, most recently the Cowessess First Nation in my home province of Saskatchewan, to see the community's successful approach to H1N1 pandemic planning.

Back in April 2009, the Government of Canada launched a public awareness campaign to inform Canadians about the H1N1 flu virus, including print media reaching first nations audiences.

The second cycle of this national marketing campaign is now being rolled out. It includes specific communications products tailored to first nations communities, including radio and print advertisements, and a mail-out of a pamphlet to first nations communities on H1N1 symptoms, infection prevention practices and tips on influenza preparedness.

The joint communications protocol signed with the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister of Health will strengthen our collaborative efforts and improve communications with first nations communities.

On November 10, the minister will be co-hosting a first nations H1N1 virtual summit. This virtual summit will provide first nations with a comprehensive overview of pandemic preparedness in an interactive and ongoing format, and will facilitate online participation across the country, including first nations communities and leadership, health technicians and decision makers.

This will provide additional information to first nations communities and leadership on H1N1 influenza preparedness and response, including the importance of getting immunized. The timing of this virtual summit is right. It will be able to answer questions of concern to first nations, especially the youth, so we can continue to support the efforts of local first nations leadership.

• (2250)

We realize the job is not done. This government will continue to work with first nations and support first nations preparedness and response through the second wave of the H1N1 influenza.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons Canadians are concerned is they are hearing on a daily basis about another death of a child from H1N1. This afternoon at 4:30 Whitehorse time another school-age girl passed away. This is one of the reasons we are having this emergency debate. It is clear that the government has failed Canadians in the rollout. It has failed Canadians in public education. It has failed in coming up with a plan to resolve the untenable situation that we have right now.

Could the member tell Canadians why the government has failed them so miserably at this time of need?

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out what this government has done during this really tragic global pandemic. It is a world pandemic.

We never want to see loved ones contracting H1N1 and perishing. No one wants to see that. Losing loved ones is the hardest thing for anyone.

I look at the numbers. Everyone here tonight has been talking about numbers. We have to look at the faces. When people politicize the passing of people, that is not acceptable.

I come from a northern community. I have family that live on reserve. They are first nations and aboriginals and I am worried about them.

Enough with the politicizing, please.

• (2255)

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a feeling the member may have just answered the question I had.

Coming from the great Kenora riding and having been a registered nurse working in isolated remote first nations communities across the country, including the Arctic, I am very pleased to report that in more cases than not, in many instances there were community level responses, responses by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch and provincial governments that managed the first outbreak of H1N1 quite well.

I can speak of a number of isolated first nations communities in my riding. I worked very closely with the branch to ensure that all aspects of anything the government could do and anything the branch could do in the community that needed support to manage the first outbreak went smoothly. As a general statement it did.

I ask my first nations colleague how he felt and perhaps how people in isolated remote first nations communities felt. I certainly know how people in my own riding felt when a medical doctor, a member of the opposite party, sent out the kind of literature that she did, exploiting first nations at the expense of this issue. The member then had the gall to stand up in the House, as several of her colleagues have done today, to say that this is not a political issue. I am just wondering how first nations people in his riding felt about that kind of exploitation and complete lack of respect for this issue and the people that it affects.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rob Clarke: I think I have the floor, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We can only take one question at a time. The member for Kenora has asked a question, so I will listen to the answer by the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

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Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I did receive a lot of response in my riding from the aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities.

I can see my colleague does not mind hate literature or racial literature, so here I am looking at some literature that the Liberal leader sent out depicting a first nations child with a thermometer. Then I see our colleague from St. Paul's and perhaps tonight I will ask her if she has time to stand in the House and apologize to Canadians.

That is all I ask in the House.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while it may be true that the material circulated was offensive, and it is worth noting that the Liberals apologized for that mailing, it is also true that first nations in this country are disproportionately affected by the H1N1 virus. In fact, first nations in Manitoba have said that clearly from the outset and have asked the government to recognize that fact and ensure that they are able to get access to the vaccine as a high-risk group in our society.

I appreciate the member's speech today, but we have had disagreements about this in the past. I wonder if he now recognizes the importance of listening to the voices of his own community when they say that a host of factors are contributing to the situation, such as, overcrowded living conditions, poverty, lack of access to medical supplies and services, conflicting information, and lack of access to running water, that all combine to make an ideal breeding ground for H1N1. They ask the government to appreciate that fact and act on it. Will the member?

• (2300)

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, living in the north, having lived on reserve and having lived off reserve, I have seen the conditions that people have lived in for hundreds of years. What I have seen this government do is put the money forward with respect to proper water conditions and better living conditions for first nations.

Tonight we are looking at the pandemic plan. In the 2006 budget, this government invested \$1 billion to increase the preparedness to respond to public health threats, such as a flu pandemic. This also includes planning in first nations communities. I think I speak on behalf of all Canadians when I say to stop with the fearmongering tonight and let us work together on finding a solution.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can understand the hon. member being upset and suggesting that the questions that are being asked are political, but he is wrong. It is the duty of the Government of Canada to protect the people of Canada in an epidemic and in such a public health crisis as the current one. It is also the responsibility of the members of the opposition to ask the government why it has not fulfilled its responsibility to do exactly that.

Other countries, knowing about the same pandemic, the same global flu, were able to put into place the preparations to take care of those who are susceptible and vulnerable. Also, the job of good public health is to stem the spread of contagion. This is something the government did not pay attention to. It did not get enough vaccination. There were many other companies, not just the one company, that it could get vaccination from. It did not do that. As a result, now the people who are susceptible are afraid and now the spread is of great concern. There is no vaccine for people who need

it. This is something the government must answer for. It is not political; it is a very real accountability issue.

The Deputy Speaker: There are 30 seconds left for the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about accountability.

What about SARS? What did the Liberals do when there was SARS? I remember having to work on the front lines when there was SARS. They did nothing.

This government has made an investment in the preparedness for the pandemic planning. It has invested over \$1 billion in this pandemic planning, yet the Liberals keep on ranting over there.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have obviously been listening to the debate this evening and I want to respond to some of the points that have been made.

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate, particularly after the intervention of my colleague from Repentigny, as well as listening very closely to the comments of my colleague from Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, and of course, my colleague from St. Paul's who spoke earlier, as well as the Liberal leader.

This debate is important because one of the things we know is that due to the nature of the modern world, we are likely to be facing this kind of issue and this kind of pandemic more often than not. My colleagues opposite have mentioned SARS. There will be lots of time to analyze the responsibilities of federal and provincial governments with respect to SARS. No doubt there will be a public inquiry or review of some kind with respect to this particular issue that we have been dealing with and there will be ample opportunity for all of us to figure out what has happened and what needs to happen.

However, it is very important for the House to reflect on this question, because there are going to be more such incidents. We know this because the world is getting smaller, because various kinds of diseases that formerly were isolated in one part of the world or another no longer can be isolated, because when they strike their impact is much more sudden, and because certain conditions that affect people, such as asthma, are far more widespread than they were before.

Many of us, if I may speak personally, who have been asthma sufferers for a long time were rather surprised to learn that we are part of the vulnerable community because of susceptibility to the virus.

H1N1 came upon us last year. It is an illness about which there was a great deal of concern and anxiety at the beginning because no one quite knew what it meant. It has a severe impact on certain individuals.

I will quote the comments of the Chief Public Health Officer, whose name has been invoked a great deal this evening as well as in other debates. Dr. David Butler-Jones said on October 26, on *CTV News*:

We have no way of predicting which 18 year old, which 10 year old, which 30 year old who's previously healthy will end up on a ventilator. The only way we can actually prevent that is ultimately to be immunized.

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If I may say so, if nothing else emerges from this debate and discussion, perhaps the fact that a greater number of Canadians might decide that it is time for them to take seriously the risks and for them to make the choice to be immunized is a positive outcome.

In listening to the debate and explanations from the minister and also in reading much of the discussion that has taken place over the last several weeks, I have no hesitation—

By the way, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver Quadra, who has been waiting patiently for me to utter these all important words, which I now do.

There seem to be three assumptions in place. The first one is that the second round, the so-called second wave of H1N1, would come somewhat later in the flu season than in fact it has.

The second assumption of policy seems to have been that one supplier would be best. I look across at my colleagues opposite who I would have thought ideologically might be a little uncomfortable with the notion that a single state-subsidized supplier is going to be the ultimate best solution for national planning.

The third assumption seems to have been that a low-key approach would be the best. The politest term that I think one can apply to the government's approach over the summer is that it was decidedly, from a public standpoint, low-key. The public was not widely informed about H1N1.

My colleague from Peterborough spoke earlier tonight and said he in fact had circulated a flyer throughout his riding. I congratulate him for that. I do not think there were 300 other members who did the same. Perhaps there were, I do not know, but the simple fact of the matter is that the public has not been particularly well informed on this matter, because the government decided for whatever reason that a low-key approach would be best.

● (2305)

There are these three assumptions, and we know one other fact, which is that from the time people get their shot, it takes 10 days for the immunization to take full effect. That is what we are told. That is what the experts tell us. That is what we read in the paper. So from the time people get their shot, they have 10 days in which they have a better chance of being protected from the spread of the virus than they would otherwise have.

These three assumptions have been widely shared. They might be called the conventional wisdom that has taken hold of the government. The government has relied on consensus and what it has heard from experts in saying this is the approach that it has decided is the best. There are at least three things that have followed from these assumptions. This is what we need to analyze, understand and recognize as posing a potential problem.

First, in terms of its impact and the severity of the illness, the second wave of H1N1 has started again without a vaccine being widely available, and in some cases, without a vaccine being ready at all. That is a fact. Members opposite might say, and many of them have, that I am politicizing and engaging in hyperbole. No. Actually, we are looking at the timeframes and saying, when one looks at when the wave started, the vaccine was not widely available.

Perhaps the wave started sooner than was expected. We will need to know the answers to these questions.

Because of what we call a screw-up with respect to the production of the vaccine, there are people in vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, people under the age of 65 who have an underlying condition such as asthma or a heart condition or something else, and young people between the ages of 16 and 25, who are not getting the vaccine this week. They are not getting the vaccine this week because there is not enough vaccine available.

Again I stress that these are simple facts. They are not hyperbole. They are not exaggerations. They are not things that are being thrown around. They are facts. They are unfortunate facts, but they are a reality.

The second consequence from the decision to have a single supplier, and my colleague from Repentigny has referred to this, is that supplies are affected by bottlenecks and by changes in demand. In speaking today, the minister said that the reason they had a delay was because they decided that they needed to get the flu vaccine before the H1N1 vaccine, as if there is only one place to get the vaccine.

● (2310)

[*Translation*]

We do not live in a place where there is no competition. Other companies could have supplied the necessary vaccine, but the government decided that one single company would be responsible for supplying vaccine. I am telling my fellow members that we are all familiar with the problems associated with having a single source. Having a single source causes problems. That is the problem we have now.

[*English*]

The third consequence, the consequence of the low-key approach, is that the public is not quite as well informed as they need to be with respect to this question. A couple of comments have been made that I found interesting to listen to and important to analyze. The first is a comment by the minister and others. I think Dr. Butler-Jones may have said it, and I think it was the minister who said it. They said that they were not expecting the level of demand that was there. They were not expecting the responses from the public.

One can only ask, what exactly were they expecting? If a 13-year-old teenager, tragically, passes away, that is going to have an instant public reaction. That is going to cause a level of public concern. I know it is politically inevitable that there will be charges back and forth with respect to what is taking place.

We have asked tough questions. We have a responsibility to do that as the opposition. We have asked for a debate. We have a public debate, and that is a healthy thing. I think it is important that the public be informed, that they be aware of the public policy choices that have been made by the government, and that they be aware of some of the consequences of those choices.

If, in the course of events, the government decides to change course to become more active in its publicity and more engaged in its leadership role, and if the public can in fact be better informed as a result of the debate and the controversies and the comments that have been made, then I am one of those who thinks that is a good thing. That is a healthy outcome. It is important for Canadians to be well informed about this issue and it is important for us as Canadians to know the choices that we face.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague opposite. Certainly as one sits and listens and reflects on what he had to say, one realizes that there are different points of view to express on this. However, the fact is that any one of us, and I think the comment was offered earlier this evening, can sit and be a Monday morning quarterback on issues like this. It is easy to look in hindsight to see how one might have done things differently, but one cannot escape the fact that Canada has prepared for this situation. It is far ahead of just about every other jurisdiction in the world and has been complimented for that.

Just yesterday, Dr. Butler-Jones commented on the degree to which Canadians have been vaccinated. It is far above any other country and their response to this.

I appreciate what the member has to say, but would he not believe, when he considers the evidence, the facts and the gains that we have made on this issue, that we are making good progress, and when health officials—

• (2315)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, having been the first minister of a province, I have had my share of Monday morning, Tuesday morning, Wednesday morning, and Thursday morning quarterbacks. Indeed, many of those quarterbacks are still out there and many of them are at the opposite side, and 20 years later they still have advice and views with respect to what took place 20 years ago. So I am very familiar with the problem that he has described.

My one concern in all of this, and I have spoken with many public health officials and in fact have had several phone calls over the weekend from doctors and others, and the one comment that a doctor made, whose name I will not repeat for fear of embarrassing anybody, because he is a respected public health doctor, is that, as he said to me, we have to understand that one of the consequences of the shortages we are experiencing this week is that there are members of vulnerable groups who will not get vaccinated soon enough to protect them from the impact of the illness. He said that could have been prevented if we had not had the shortages and bottlenecks that we had, but we now have them and we have to deal with the consequences of that.

I can only say to the hon. member that part of the job of being in opposition is asking difficult questions and making difficult points.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will just stop the hon. member so we can accommodate one more question, if that is all right.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the speech that my colleague has just given.

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One issue that has not been touched on very much tonight is that in the midst of the shortage, the bottlenecks and the lineups was this absolutely shocking report about a clinic in Toronto, Medcan, getting access to the vaccine, and of course, then inoculating those clients of that clinic who had paid a very large user fee.

My question to the member is, what does he know about the situation? Why does he think it happened? What does he think can be done about ensuring that the rare supply of vaccine we have goes to those most in need?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the first question is that I do not know anything other than what I read in the paper.

The second comment I would make is that I think everyone who receives the vaccine, whether it is a private clinic or whether it is a private doctor, has an obligation to follow the priorities that have been clearly established by every expert with respect to who should get vaccinated and who should not be vaccinated.

I would certainly share with the hon. member the sense that access to the vaccination should never, ever depend on one's means or the size of one's chequebook or the fact that one is a member of a clinic or not a member of a clinic.

As to how it would have happened, I think the simplest explanation is that the provinces each made decisions with respect to where the vaccine would go, whether it was made in one part of the country or another. There were other clinics, I am sure, in Quebec, in British Columbia and elsewhere that have received the vaccine, just as family doctors and others, all of whom are small businessmen, have received the vaccine.

I would just make the point to the hon. member that I think we all have to agree that the most important thing in these next days is to make sure that the members—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The time for questions and comments is over. We will go to the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I take the privilege of speaking to this emergency debate, I am going to begin by adding to what the hon. member for Toronto Centre was saying about the government's low key approach to the issue of H1N1.

I am dismayed at how the government is not taking responsibility for the mistakes that it has made over the course of the last few months. Of course there will be mistakes. Without taking responsibility, the government is just defending itself. It is not learning from those mistakes. That is a disheartening condition that I have observed as a member of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Health.

I would like to put on the record the fact that all members on the Standing Committee on Health were determined to treat this as a non-partisan issue. Our job was to try to identify any gaps and put ideas forward, so the government could actually do a better job and be successful. The whole committee was dedicated to that.

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The committee was not made up of a set of armchair quarterbacks as one member mentioned. The committee actually had some leading experts on pandemic preparedness. The committee had an ex-minister of state for public health, who herself had set up, in response to what was learned from SARS, the Public Health Agency of Canada with its budget to deal with pandemic preparedness.

There was a set of civil servants who had been working for members of the opposition and now working for government members. They were using a framework that had been set up by Liberal opposition members. Everyone was on the same page.

What started to become very clear was the fact that there were gaps. Opposition members on the committee pointed out that we needed to have updates in the summer because things were going wrong.

Committee members heard that aboriginal communities were not being listened to and were not being served. They heard from representatives of front line caregivers who said there was no coordination. We also heard that the front line people who had to deliver the vaccination and the preparedness plan were disconnected from the structure of the leadership.

In hearing those things, committee members took some clear steps toward ensuring that there were summer briefings. They had to drag agreements out of Conservative members in order for the committee to play an oversight role so that parliamentarians could know what was happening and to focus the committee meetings on H1N1 rather than have them be scattershot over the fall on important issues but not yet emergency issues.

Members of the health committee played a constructive role and pointed out things that needed to be done in a constructive way. However, the government has had the pathological inability to take responsibility.

At the risk of sounding political, the government is very good at taking credit, whether it is for the way the public's dollars are spent, or in any number of other ways. Government members have been so obsessed with taking credit, they have forgotten how to take responsibility.

The theme of "Everything is okay. Don't worry there will be vaccinations for everyone. Don't worry, be happy. It's all under control" is a theme that we have been hearing at committee for months, meeting after meeting, despite the fact that we had been hearing from representatives of public health, chief medical officers and many other experts that "All is not well".

Yes, we have learned from SARS and there have been improvements, but all is not well. We need to do better. Now we are seeing some of that begin to crystallize. We are not doing a good enough job. Unfortunately, people are suffering as a result of the vaccines being ordered late. As a result of the confusing messages from the government, the supply of vaccines is drying up.

● (2320)

Not taking responsibility is a key theme with the minister and the government unfortunately and we heard it here tonight. The government has been blaming the provinces and territories, blaming medical experts for the government's own decisions, blaming drug

companies, and now blaming the opposition as opposed to taking responsibility. Where is the leadership on this issue? It is completely missing in action.

Coming from Vancouver, I have another concern around the mismanagement of this issue that has led to the lineups and the panic, the shortages of vaccine, the lack of availability in the coming weeks, and the lack of information. I am going to take a moment to read some very worrisome news that the government needs to be aware of and perhaps is:

Quarantine was imposed in [Ukraine's] nine western regions due to the epidemic of the H1N1 influenza, commonly known as swine flu. It was also decided to declare a three-week ban on all mass events and introduce a three-week holiday period at all educational institutions.

In other words, schools are shut down. Public events are cancelled. A huge disruption to society in the Ukraine. According to the president:

We will introduce a special system to stop unnecessary travel from one region to another. We will cancel all mass meetings...for three weeks...We are considering (imposing) a quarantine not only in the west but also across the country, because the virus is spreading very fast.

I cannot comment on whether this is a proportionate response to a crisis in Ukraine, but it is incumbent on me to point out to the government that in less than 100 days now we will have half a million visitors coming to Vancouver in British Columbia for the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. Should we be in a situation such as the Ukraine, it would be a huge disappointment and a huge disturbance of the Olympics that Canadians are so excited about and so proud of.

Having been recently in Olympia where the Olympic flame was lit and in Victoria where it was received from Greece, the beginning of the relays across the country, I know how important the Olympics are after so many years of work from an economic perspective, the human perspective, the inspiration to youth and to sports, and the hundreds of thousands of visitors that will come to Canada. We have to do an absolutely impeccable job of preparing for this with the vaccinations, preparing and preventing Vancouver and British Columbia from continuing to be a hot spot and having to consider the Ukraine-type response.

The government has been letting British Columbia down. I heard from the provincial medical health officer a number of weeks ago when I asked whether there are adequate resources from the federal government. I heard, "No, we have not received any cost-sharing for actually implementing vaccinations".

At the committee I asked the head of the public health agency if there is a shortage of resources for the provinces and I was told, "No, there will be adequate resources". But going back to the Vancouver chief medical officer I was told there is no funding for the delivery of a mass vaccination program. That will cost between \$8 and \$10 per person. That is \$25 million to \$30 million in British Columbia and not a dollar from the federal government. That is historic, the first time in history that there has been a mass vaccination with no resources from the government.

I call on the government, as are the Liberal MPs, to put back the \$400 million set aside for pandemic response by the Liberals in budget 2006 for this time period, support emergency planning to help local health authorities cope with this issue, and divert the \$60 million from the Conservatives' self-advertising of their economic plan and partisan misuse of funds into the pandemic so that people can properly understand what they need to do and respond to that.

• (2325)

I call on the government to take responsibility and stop taking credit.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in regard to the words from the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, I think that instead of attacking the situation, we should be very proud of the health care workers in Canada and proud of the role Canada has played in the world.

There has been more vaccination delivered per capita than any other country in the world. I think we should be telling Canadians how proud we are of the role that our health care workers are playing along with the excellent work of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

We should talk about the incredible co-operation we are seeing in this country. If I could quote Dalton McGuinty, and I would like to hear the member's comments in regard to this, he said, just last week, that overall we are working the best we can, working closely with the federal government. They decided, by and large, on certain protocols, what is best when it comes to delivering this vaccine. He said he is not an expert.

I think there has to be a debate at one point in time as to the best time for delivering the vaccine, who should be in the first wave, and who should be receiving it. He said that it is being done in a timely way and that a lot of thought has gone into this, a lot of expertise went into this, and we see governments of all stripes working together, believing they are doing the best job.

Does the member for Vancouver Quadra not see the achievements happening in Canada, not just the negative?

• (2330)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I see a public health system under strain.

I see health authorities in British Columbia and other provinces that are already maxed out with their public health obligations now being asked to deliver mass vaccination programs without a dime of assistance from the federal government.

I see people working overtime. I see a shortage of resources to actually deliver this in Vancouver. I would encourage the member to think about the results we want. We have heard many reasons why things have gone off the rails. We might hear a lot of reasons why we have a disaster.

What we actually need are results. That means taking responsibility where there are errors, putting corrections in place, and being willing to listen when there are errors.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this afternoon I received a very heartfelt email from a constituent living in Leaside, who asked very clearly that I not try to

score political points in this debate tonight but instead try to reach a constructive conclusion to this.

The question I have comes directly from this email. It is from a father of a one-year-old and a three-year-old, two daughters, both diagnosed this past weekend with H1N1, and both now on Tamiflu. The concern that he has, however, is the difficulty he had in getting the medicine, Tamiflu, the rationing that is going on with that, and the availability of it in a form that a one-year-old can take. It was not available.

I am wondering if the hon. member, as a member of the health committee, heard from the government about access to Tamiflu, not the vaccine but Tamiflu, as a treatment. As the member for Toronto Centre said, as this pandemic progresses and we are not able to actually stop it, maybe we are going to have to try to cure it as it comes.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would say that primarily what we heard in the health committee were various versions of: "Do not worry, be happy. There is enough dosage for everyone. Everybody will get it".

What we are seeing now is a great deal of concern. There is a great deal of chaos and misinformation in the meantime. I cannot say that we have had clear information about how things will actually be delivered, either in the preventative vaccination or in the post-illness treatment.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we just had an outstanding presentation in committee from the Health Minister. She has been to the committee many times. Dr. Butler-Jones, Dr. Plummer, and all the leading health officials in Canada are keeping everyone informed on a daily basis. They are keeping Canadians informed through a gigantic media program across the country.

I really think that it is very important at this time to not politicize the pandemic but to work together. Would the member not agree with that?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, first, I acknowledge the chair for her leadership in the early time period with the committee dealing with H1N1. However, I am forced to go back to my original point, which is it is not about the job that Dr. Butler-Jones has done, or anyone else. It is about the need for the government to take responsibility when there is feedback about what has not worked and what can be improved. We are not seeing that tonight and we have not been seeing that from the minister.

• (2335)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking.

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First, I begin by reiterating and further supporting the proposition that the leader of my party, the New Democratic Party, made earlier tonight. It is certainly something that our health critic from Winnipeg North has been fighting for as well. It is the idea of what the role of the federal government is at this stage in the game.

We have been rehashing and going over the past few months time and time again, but I reiterate the point that we need the federal government to take a stand, to take leadership and to commit to financially supporting the work currently being done on the ground with respect to the rollout of the vaccine, as well in terms of dealing with the flu as it goes on.

We need to reassure the partners on the ground, whether they are provincial governments or first nations governments, that it is important, at this time, for them to go all out, to give everything, to put the personnel on the front lines with the support they need to ensure the messages get out, communications-wise, and to ensure we invest in this effort 100%. The only way people will do that is when they know the federal government is there to support those efforts. As we all know, it really comes down to the finances.

That proposition is so important to me as the member of Parliament for Churchill. I know what H1N1 means in our region. I had the opportunity earlier to ask a question of the Minister of Health. For me, H1N1 is a very shocking reality that has been part of the region I come from for quite some time now. The first wave of the flu hit us among the hardest, certainly per capita, in its level of impact compared to many other regions across the country. The impact of H1N1 has been felt most by not only northern Manitobans but by first nations. I want to emphasize that it is not only by first nations in remote communities but first nations across the region.

The experience of working with chiefs, with leaders and with health care workers on the ground has been a very trying because of the challenges they have had to face. It was very disillusioning to see that the chiefs, Chief McDougall, Chief Harper and Chief Knott of the Island Lake regions, were getting basically a response of silence by the health minister when more people were being impacted than they had previously anticipated. That silence was a direct reflection of the lack of commitment and concern when it came to what first nations faced.

While I have heard declarations in some of the positive directions that are taking place, I question what that means in terms of action. We heard that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs had to go out and fund raise to get flu kits that the federal government said were not needed, flu kits that contained Tylenol and thermometers, things that are not easily accessible in remote first nations communities. Essential tools in fighting this pandemic were denied by Canada's government, the government that has the fiduciary obligation to first nations.

● (2340)

Time and time again there were real communication challenges for people in regional offices. That breakdown in communication with first nations that were on the front lines of this pandemic was disillusioning as a Canadian, certainly as a member of Parliament, and was a real signal of things to come.

Many of us back home have anxiety, as do many Canadians, because we know what happened beforehand. Some of that sentiment was an inspiration for people to get on board in terms of planning and networking, but the question of funding and financial support for these initiatives is extremely pertinent.

Two weeks ago I met with people working with the MKO, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak. People show up at the door of the health office. They told me about a family that showed up at the door of the office in Thompson. The family needed a house because there was overcrowding in the community. The family knew that overcrowding helped H1N1 spread. The family wanted to avoid that. It wanted to avoid its children getting sick.

Organizations are trying to cover everything, from concerns about health care professionals coming into communities and avoiding things like burnout. They are trying to be in touch with the federal agencies in the work they are doing. They are having to do everything, including being asked to find homes for people, something that is not written in any document when it comes to the job they are supposed to do. This is the level of anxiety and these are the kinds of needs we face in the north.

MKIO made a proposal, which I supported, asking for direct funding when it came to some of these support roles. We heard it was under consideration, but have yet to hear whether anything will be done. I hope it is an area that is considered for financial funding, recognizing that organizations and people are working long hours day in and day out with great stress. They want to ensure they have the supports needed.

I also I was pretty horrified to hear that when organizations asked for extra supports, initially they were told to pull out from other programming. What are they supposed to pull people out of, addictions work, suicide prevention? In a moment of need, are these the kinds of priorities people are supposed to choose?

All these services are important in first nations and northern communities. It is pretty disgusting to hear that people are expected to take funding out of essential services to deal with a global pandemic, which we have known for some time was going to hit us.

First, I hope this area is very much considered, especially when it comes to working with first nations, as I noted, because of the fiduciary obligation.

Second is the element of communication. I know it is a recurring theme. I visited my home town of Thompson and people asked me if they should get the vaccine. This is a real sign that the message is not getting through to Canadians, the confidence and information they need and the anxieties they have.

As a member of Parliament, while I would like to think that I can show leadership on a number of areas, the medical area is one that we need to be communicating on a lot better and the federal government needs to be showing leadership on.

A lot of work needs to be done. Much of our discussion is focusing on the here and now, as it should, but I hope we can work together at looking at some of the next steps we need to be taking as we fight this virus across our country, for first nations, northerners, rural Canadians and Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

• (2345)

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's riding is in northern Manitoba, which neighbours my riding in northern Saskatchewan, and her riding consists predominantly of aboriginals.

My question is about the ten percenters that have been sent out by the Liberal opposition. What is her opinion of the ten percenters and how did it affect her riding? Did she received one from the Liberal leader, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, and how were they received by her constituents?

Also, I am curious how the ten percenter from the member for St. Paul's was received and her personal opinion of these ten percenters.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, our riding received one of the ten percenters and it was a shocking image, an inappropriate image. I understand a discussion took place in committee. I am glad to see it was raised by people like the Grand Chief who also felt very strongly about it.

The substance, being the question of the body bags, of which there are all sorts of theories that have been put forward in terms of what happened, has to be dealt with. At the end of the day, it is very important that we continue to look ahead to see how we can best support first nations and not use them for shock value or drama, but to listen to them, listen to their needs and be there to support them.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member especially for mentioning the special aspect of aboriginal and rural communities.

I come from the farthest riding from Ottawa. I can tell the House that all Canadians are at risk. It is very important that they are all protected.

The member made an important point about people asking her whether they should be immunized. The member for Toronto Centre made the important point that if anything should come from this debate, it is very important that people set aside their concerns and be immunized.

Could the member elaborate on that point?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I have made it clear that I plan to get the vaccine at the earliest possible time. Given that I am not in the first set of priorities to get vaccinated, that the people in my region, my neighbours, my friends, people who live in communities that I represent need it more than me, I have also made it clear that they should get it done.

I also want to highlight as well that I, like many Canadians across our country, do not have a family doctor. Therefore, it makes it a bit challenging to engage in the medical discussions. It points to the real weaknesses of our health care system and the need for us to step up and not only deal with supporting our health care system when it comes to crises but support it throughout so we all have the care and that relationship to the health care we deserve throughout our lives.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, would my colleague comment on the situation that we learned of today with respect to private clinics in Toronto and in Vancouver getting access to the H1N1 vaccine and being able to give this vaccine to highly paid wealthy individuals, while people in her

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constituency, who are living in poverty, are wondering where they are going to get their vaccine?

Today, the Canadian Health Coalition put out a press release and basically said:

Priority flu shots are meant for people at high risk, not those with high incomes... It's queue-jumping plain and simple.

How does my colleague feel about this issue?

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing this up time and time again. It is absolutely shocking. It is time we see the federal government take a stand for a system that we are so proud of as Canadians, the medicare system. I am proud to be part of a party that fought for it.

This is the time for the government to stand up, put its foot down to ensure that this does not happen. It should work with the provinces because it is unacceptable and unjust.

• (2350)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand before you tonight, as have many others, to discuss the serious issue at hand, which is the lack of H1N1 anti-virus.

I have to say that many of us have been quite worried as to whether the government had a good handle on the situation at hand. It became evident toward the end of last week that our fears were well founded. As the weekend progressed, we heard about the long lineups at clinics. Then we heard about clinics turning people away. We heard about pregnant women waiting for hours on end, standing in lineups. That was followed by the headlines this morning about private clinic patients jumping the queue.

Had the Liberals and the Conservatives stopped privatization of health care and did what Canadians expected government to do, which is to enforce the Canada Health Act, we would be living in what the father of medicare's vision had founded. Our universal health care would not be two tiered and jumping the queue would not be an issue.

Tons and tons of concerns have been voiced in the House throughout the day and this evening. The issue is of great concern for many people.

A couple of months ago I visited the Pic Mobert First Nation community in my constituency. The residents had some concerns with regard to the directions they were being provided to get ready for the H1N1, such as to name someone to take care of the H1N1 virus in case it hit and to name someone to get out the protocol. The only thing is there was no money attached to hire a person. They wondered what they should do in the meantime. Should they stop giving the preventive medicine that they are giving for the high rate of diabetes in their community? That is a shame. This is a first nation community.

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We heard from other members with regard to the impact on first nations. We heard about the situation in Manitoba. Some of the highest rates of H1N1 illness are on first nations.

What is of great concern as well is that there is a high amount of tuberculosis in these communities. It is all linked to the fact that there is poverty, a lack of water and a big problem with housing.

I met with an elder from Nunavik last week. It was quite evident that even in Nunavik, and we know that the Minister of Health is from Nunavik, there are big concerns with regard to the housing crisis. People are packed into houses. It is almost as bad as what is happening in our jails these days, where two, three or four people are being packed into a cell that is supposed to hold one person.

Getting back to the first nations, the newspapers showed today that TB is at an all-time high. We probably are experiencing one of the world's biggest pandemics with regard to tuberculosis. It is 100 times the amount that we have seen in other communities. This is only in Manitoba. It is a shame that we are seeing this over and over again. We do need a government that will act on that.

I received a call from one my constituents in White River. The lady was very worried. We have been telling people to get vaccinated, to get the H1N1 anti-virus. We have been telling people to get that vaccine and yet, when they go to get it, they are turned away. She was very worried because her son is a severe asthmatic and he is high risk. We had to make arrangements. We had to tell them how high risk her son was and that he really needed to get his shot. Finally, they agreed to give him the shot. That family will sleep well tonight, but there are many more families that will not be sleeping well tonight because they are at high risk and they do not know whether they will be able to get their shots tomorrow.

We heard about the young boy in Timmins who passed away. There are a few others, one in Ottawa and I believe one near Toronto. It is a sad thing that people are dying. These were healthy people.

We have been telling Canadians to get vaccinated, that we are going to be ready to roll this out. The government did not say it was going to be a pilot project and that maybe there would only be enough serum for a couple of days. It is sad that the government cannot see fit to ensure that there is enough vaccine for people.

• (2355)

The best thing that happened tonight was something our leader did. The member for Toronto—Danforth got up and indicated the solutions that we should be looking at at this point. There needs to be better communication. We need to take some of those ads that the current government is running with regard to the infrastructure

stimulus and redirect that money into better education on the anticipated vaccine that we hope is going to be coming through again soon, and we need to fund initiatives to help these provinces and communities to deliver those.

As some of my colleagues have indicated through the night, there have been some very serious concerns with respect to how the government has handled the H1N1 file. It would appear that we are seeing a situation similar to the SARS outbreak, which the government cannot seem to get a handle on. We are really hoping that the government will work with opposition members to ensure that everybody's voice is heard and that the communities are not being left out in the cold, as we are seeing today.

I want to go back to first nations. I have also not yet mentioned rural communities. In rural communities, it is not very easy for people to displace themselves to go and get the medical help that they need. Some people have to travel quite a ways and others do not even have a way to get there.

I will just mention my communities of Pic Mobert First Nation and even Manitouwadge. If they had to go somewhere else to get their shots, it would be very difficult for them to get out of their community because there is no public transportation there. People from Pic Mobert have to travel at least 20 minutes to get to the highway to take a bus to go see the doctor. These communities are finding themselves in hard times and now in harder times, because we are saying that for them it is not a big deal and that they will eventually be able to get the vaccine when it becomes available.

I must reiterate a lot of the information that was provided here tonight. I sit on the health committee, and I know the committee has had a lot of concerns about what has been transpiring here. Lots of questions have been asked. We were always told that everything was rolling out and that everything was on time. Obviously, it has not been.

I think I have said just about all there is to say on the issue, except that we would really like the government to apologize to those who have not been able to get the vaccine and to ensure that it gets back on board and does everything it can to make sure that people have access to that.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 12 a.m., I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day, Tuesday at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(Motion agreed to)

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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