



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, April 26, 2012**

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**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 26, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)  
[*English*]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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### JOBS, GROWTH AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY ACT

**Hon. Gail Shea (for the Minister of Finance)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures.

(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, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I move that the report be concurred in.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure

and House Affairs in relation to requesting an extension to a later date the consideration of the review of the Standing Orders. If the House gives its consent, I move that the report be concurred in.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for London—Fanshawe, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Monday, April 30, 2012, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### PETITIONS

#### RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a large number of people from Churchbridge, Langenburg, Yorkton and many other places in my constituency.

*Routine Proceedings*

The petitioners state that Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being that says a child does not become human until the moment of complete birth is contrary to 21st century medical evidence. They also state that Parliament has a solemn duty to reject any law that says some human beings are not human.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as human by amending section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

HUMAN RIGHTS

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to present two petitions. The first petition deals with the ongoing struggle for human rights in China, particularly the situation with respect to Falun Gong practitioners.

The petitioners, who are primarily from the greater Toronto area, Scarborough and Mississauga, call on the Minister of Foreign Affairs to express Canada's concern to the People's Republic of China and to urge that it cease and desist from the persecution of the practitioners of Falun Gong.

• (1010)

THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, the second petition is from residents primarily in the Vancouver area.

The petitioners call on the House to live up to commitments that had been made in a private member's bill by the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, which passed in the House in the last Parliament.

The petitioners call for a reduction of greenhouse gases by 25% below 1990 levels by 2020, and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. The petitioners point out that the issue of climate change is rapidly becoming a crisis.

INTERNATIONAL AID

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I wish to table a petition from the residents of Edmonton, St. Albert, Beaumont and Calgary.

The petitioners point out that Canada led the world in setting the target of 0.7% of gross national income for international assistance and is far from reaching the target, and that the European Union countries have committed to meeting the target of 0.56% GNI by 2010 and 0.7% by 2015.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to reverse its decision to cap international aid in the budget and establish procedures for meeting Canada's 0.7% commitment by 2015.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 522, 524 and 525.

[Text]

Question No. 522—**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

With regard to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation: (a) broken down by department, what programs have been put in place since government funding ended to ensure the continuation of services to victims of residential schools; (b) for each program identified in (a), what is the number of clients served broken down by (i) province/territory, (ii) recipient organization for each of the fiscal years 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012; (c) for each program identified in (a), how much funding was provided; and (d) if programs have not been developed for former Aboriginal Healing Foundation clients, why not and when will they be developed and implemented?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, since 1998, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, AHF, has received \$515 million to provide community-based healing initiatives to address the experiences of former students of Indian residential schools and their families and communities. This investment includes the provision of \$125 million in 2007 as part of the Indian residential schools settlement agreement, the IRSSA. In 2010-11, \$46.8 million was allocated for the Indian residential schools resolution health supports program, the IRS-RHSP.

In addition, in budget 2010 the Government of Canada announced an investment of \$199 million over two years in new funding to Health Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, and Service Canada to meet the increased costs associated with implementing the IRSSA. Going further, economic action plan 2012 commits to continue work with aboriginal communities and organizations, provinces and territories to improve the mental health and well-being of aboriginal peoples in Canada.

In 2011-12, Health Canada provided approximately \$245 million for a range of on-reserve mental health and addiction services, from mental health promotion to addictions to suicide prevention to counselling and other crisis response services, treatment services and after-care services.

Health Canada works with its regional and national partners to ensure that all former Indian residential school students and their families are aware of the services available to them via the Indian residential schools resolution health support program. Health Canada has reached out to all former Aboriginal Healing Foundation projects to assist them in referring their clients to Health Canada's existing services. Information has also been distributed through direct mailings to community health centres, nursing stations and treatment centres, and has been sent to former students participating in an adjudication hearing, participating in a truth and reconciliation event, or receiving a common experience payment.

In order to ensure access to services for eligible former students and their families who had been previously served by Aboriginal Healing Foundation projects, Health Canada has entered into 26 new agreements with aboriginal service provider organizations and has enhanced funding to 22 existing service providers. Of the 26 new contribution agreements entered into by Health Canada to deliver resolution health support program services, 20 are with aboriginal organizations that were previously funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. If services are not available in an individual's home community, Health Canada will arrange for transportation to a professional counsellor or cultural support provider, or for a resolution health support worker to visit the community.

Health Canada does not have data available on the number of clients served. Rather, data is collected on the number of funded service interactions and counseling sessions and is available at the national level only.

In 2010-2011, the most current year with complete data, IRS-RHSP delivered approximately 170,000 emotional and cultural support service interactions to former IRS students and their families and approximately 31,000 professional mental health counselling sessions.

In 2009-2010, the IRS-RHSP delivered approximately 80,000 emotional and cultural support service interactions to former IRS students and their families and approximately 27,000 professional mental health counselling sessions.

Question No. 524—**Mr. Malcolm Allen:**

With respect to the Crop Logistics Working Group formed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada on November 7, 2011, what progress has been made with regard to: (a) a template service agreement; (b) movement of product in producer cars; and (c) key public sector performance measurements?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), regarding a template service agreement, the crop logistics working group allows agriculture stakeholders, including shippers moving product in bulk and intermodal and carload shippers, to identify common interests and exchange views about issues, including service level agreements, in support of the Transport Canada facilitation process following from the rail freight service review. A crop logistics working group subcommittee continues to work to support agriculture sector stakeholders who are involved in the Transport Canada facilitation process.

With regard to (b), the crop logistics working group provides a forum to discuss and exchange views and to examine in detail operational issues, such as the movement of product in producer cars, arising from the transition to marketing freedom for wheat and barley. A crop logistics working group subcommittee considered issues related to moving product in producer cars and has submitted recommendations to the co-chairs of the working group.

With regard to (c), the crop logistics working group fosters discussion among agricultural stakeholders on key public sector performance measurements to reflect the present and future needs of an evolving crop logistics sector. A crop logistics working group subcommittee is documenting the range of grain industry performance measurement initiatives being undertaken by public and private entities, including the performance measurement protocols

### *Business of Supply*

and methodologies involved in this performance measurement work. The subcommittee is also identifying the gaps in grain industry supply chain performance measurement and is working to develop a grain logistics performance measurement framework.

Question No. 525—**Mr. Malcolm Allen:**

With respect to the Crop Logistics Working Group, formed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada on November 7, 2011, when will a report be available on the progress made by this working group?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the crop logistics working group's terms of reference include a briefing for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The working group is not preparing a formal report.

[*English*]

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

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—PENSIONS

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP)** moved:

That this House reject the government's plan to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement from 65 to 67 years even though the current system is financially sustainable.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this motion, which reaffirms our dedication to seniors and the viability of old age security in Canada. This motion highlights that the system is sustainable if we maintain the eligibility for OAS at age 65.

I am also pleased to be splitting my time with the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

*Business of Supply*

The motion is about government priorities or, more accurately, the lack of intelligent practical priorities that benefit Canadians. Investing in seniors, investing in our economy and ensuring they have security is essential because seniors spend all of their money in their community. They shop at home and create jobs in local businesses.

I also want to talk a bit about the impact of the government's decision to increase the age of retirement to 67 on young people who are working today.

Raising the age of the OAS-GIS penalizes younger Canadians. The Conservatives claim that their changes are necessary to ensure that the pension system is viable for future generations. However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the OECD and numerous other pension experts dispute this claim.

This change proposed by the government will hurt younger Canadians more than the baby boomers of today. These young Canadians are already facing record levels of unemployment, which tends to reduce income levels later in life. There is an extremely high level of student debt among these young people and housing costs are eating up more and more of their earnings.

The government's decision will make life for young Canadians even more difficult. It will affect the poor the most. Those who can least afford to choose will be impacted negatively. Above all, senior women will be disproportionately affected.

I have been meeting with seniors across the country, as has my partner in the seniors pensions portfolio. Yesterday, I was in Truro, Nova Scotia where I talked to seniors who told me that investing in seniors should be a priority.

Canadians have taken great pride in the social safety net that we have in this country. Beginning in 1927, J.S. Woodsworth convinced the minority government of Mackenzie King to create the old age pension, which, in about 1952, became the OAS. Since that time, we have seen all kinds of changes, with the addition in 1967 of the GIS, all to help alleviate seniors' poverty.

The OAS is universally available to all retirees who have lived in Canada for 10 years or more and full pensions for those who have been here for 40 years after age 18 with pro-rated scales for those who have been here for less than that time. It is the first of three government supported retirement income systems, the second being CPP-QPP based on workplace earnings and the third being private savings like workplace pensions, RRSPs and RRIFs. For singles, the maximum OAS monthly payment is \$540.12. The average is about \$508. The maximum GIS is \$732 with the average being \$491. That makes a total income for a single person of \$15,270. The low income cut-off in Canada is \$18,373.

It is interesting and quite disturbing that when it became clear about 35 years ago that there would be lots of baby boomers, the government's response was that we must have RRSPs. In the interim, we have discovered that RRSPs are expensive in terms of government revenues. It costs about \$18 billion to supplement RRSPs.

●(1015)

The tragedy is that RRSPs are not a good savings vehicle. About 40% of their value was lost through management fees over a 45-year period. If it is necessary to cash them in, such as if someone needs a new roof or the furnace breaks down, there is a huge penalty. Fewer than 30% of Canadians are able to find enough money at the end of the month to even consider RRSPs. Therefore, as a savings vehicle, they are not very good.

The next concern about pensions probably heated up with the Nortel employees. Many of those employees lost 40% of their pension benefits. I need to underline that pensions are deferred wages and they belong to the employees. Nortel declared bankruptcy and then sold off a great deal of intellectual property that was worth millions and billions. The governments in the U.K. and in the United States protected their Nortel workers' pensions. Canada did not. The Conservative government chose not to. It could have because the NDP had a bill before the House, workers first, that would have protected holiday pay, severance pay and pensions. The government could have acted and chose not to.

Because of the Nortel meltdown and the crisis that so many workers faced, people became aware that only 30% of Canadians have private pensions and many are dependent on CPP, OAS and GIS. In many cases, it is simply not enough for people to manage, particularly single women. The call for reform was out there, and justifiably so. The federal government agreed to meet with the provinces, and nine of them wanted pension reform. Alberta balked, and the federal government then said that it would bring in pooled registered pensions plans.

I will tell everyone about pooled registered pension plans. First, the employer may or may not set up a PRPP and the employer determines the level of contributions, although the employer may choose not to contribute. If employees want out, they need to give 60 days' written notice. The problem with these so-called pension plans is that they are not indexed. They are defined contributions without any set or determined pension benefit. They are gambled on the stock market. They are not reliable and have very high management fees. It is just another crapshoot, which is simply not acceptable. Nothing in the PRPP proposal sets management expenses at levels equal to or lower than those of the Canada pension plan. As a result, CPP is still a much better deal.

*Business of Supply*

What is needed is real reform, and six provinces are still interested in talking. I will begin with CPP, which is the best way to save for retirement. It covers 93% of Canadian employed workers, essentially the entire labour force, and it is portable from job to job across the provinces. It keeps up with the cost of living and is exclusively financed by workers and their employers. It is absolutely independent of any cost to government. It is safe, secure, indexed against inflation and, as I mentioned, there are very low management fees. In terms of CPP reform, a modest increase in CPP contributions, as Bernard Dussault, the former chief actuary for Canada pension, said, is absolutely doable. Therefore, we can do that.

We can also take a very close look at OAS. We know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has been very clear in saying that we can afford OAS now and in the future. Right now it is about 2.3% of gross domestic product. In 2030 it will climb to 3.3% and then it will go down significantly. To pretend that we cannot afford it is simply abusing the numbers.

● (1020)

I hope the House will support this motion. It is absolutely essential. If we respect our seniors, we will make sure their pension and their retirement is secure.

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I was listening to the opposite member's speech.

We have heard that there are some really simple facts. The number of Canadians over the age of 65 will increase from 4.7 million to 9.3 million over the next 20 years. At the same time, by 2030, the number of taxpayers for every senior will be two, down from four in 2010. This is pretty simple math: more seniors and fewer workers.

Would the member opposite explain why they are refusing to look at those particular facts?

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Madam Speaker, I am reminded of the old saying that one can use numbers and figures for whatever one wants, and in this case the government is manipulating figures.

Yes, there will be 9.8 million seniors, so let us plan for them. Let us start now. Let us start with plans around their health needs, home care, long-term care and pharma care. Let us consider their need for affordable housing. The government has no interest in a national affordable housing strategy and seniors' main concerns about their finances, their housing and their health care, as the three top priorities.

The government uses figures, and that is fine, but I trust the OECD and I trust the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who said that in the 1990s, the cost of OAS was about 3% or higher. Right now it is 2.3%. It will rise to 3.3% in 2030 and then decline.

We can absolutely afford this, and to say anything different is to undermine and cheat the seniors who built this country.

[Translation]

**Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for moving this motion and making the opening statement.

I would like to begin by situating the debate where it belongs. For people who have worked their whole lives, old age security means

independence and dignity. It is a universal program for everyone, but in particular, it helps fight poverty among seniors.

Raising the age of eligibility means downloading responsibility onto the provinces because many people will have to rely on social assistance.

I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that. Are we not fighting for the dignity of people who have contributed so much to today's society?

● (1025)

[English]

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** It is interesting. Madam Speaker, you may recall I said in my remarks that the government did not consult with the provinces when it decided out of the blue that it would raise the age of retirement from 65 to 67, and it will have a profound and negative impact.

The provinces and private insurance at this point in time base the retirement age on age 65, so there has been no discussion. There has just been this heavy-handed "thou shalt".

One of the realities, and we have discovered this through our research, is that raising the age from 65 to 67 will indeed have a profoundly negative impact on seniors. It will increase their poverty rate by as much as 28%, 38% for senior women. That means we will have 95,000 more poor, impoverished, struggling seniors.

This is a country that was built on the belief in support for people, in the social safety net, in making life better. I do not see anything better about what the government has done.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Madam Speaker, today is the second time the NDP has proposed an opposition day motion on old age security. It did so the first time a few weeks ago because the government raised some suspicions about how it planned to go about reforming the old age security program. The Conservative government refused to answer any questions, which is why the NDP moved an opposition day motion to ask the government not to balance the budget on the backs of seniors.

Unfortunately, we need to have a second opposition day dedicated to old age security today because the government finally announced its plans and confirmed the fears of many Canadians. The government confirmed that it would gradually raise the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67.

I am proud that we, as a party, are opposing this austerity measure proposed in the Conservative budget.

*Business of Supply*

Some time ago, I travelled around the province of Quebec and met with many people from across the province. I would like to share their concerns with the House today.

First of all, they asked me what would happen to their private pension plans. That is one concern that was raised and that is completely understandable. In fact, many doubts remain about what will happen to these pension plans if the government raises the age of eligibility for old age security. Some may ask, what does one have to do with the other? There is definitely a difference between old age security and private pension plans arranged between employees and employers. However, they are related. Indeed, the calculations made by employers for their private pension plans are based on the fact that employees will receive old age security at age 65 and the employers can therefore reduce the amount of the private pension when the old age security is paid out.

People are worried. Small unions have just negotiated their working conditions and pension plans, and they are worried about whether they will be able to renegotiate their pensions or whether there will be a gap between when their private pensions diminish and when they receive old age security. That is one concern for which, unfortunately, we have yet to receive a clear answer.

I was also asked when the Prime Minister intends to retire. Unfortunately, I cannot answer that question, but I would like to.

People are also wondering whether there are other ways to reform old age security, since the proposed reform seems to be a direct attack on the people who are the most vulnerable to poverty. It is true. Why is this government choosing to push back the old age security eligibility age? Unfortunately, we have no information on that either.

The government seems to be making things up as it goes along. It needs to make cuts somewhere so why not here? There are other solutions, but there have been absolutely no discussions on this whatsoever and this is another question we are unable to answer because the Conservative government is not providing us with any information.

In any event, one thing is clear: there is no need to cut old age security. To me, the types of cuts the government wants to make to old age security are not the issue, because the important thing here is that the government does not have to touch old age security.

Someone else asked me the following question. He wanted to work longer, but his employer lets go of employees when they are 50 or 55 because he says they get too old or cost too much. That person wanted to know whether the government had thought about that.

That is a very good question. Just because the government requires people to work two more years, that does not mean that everyone can. When a person does physical labour, at age 55 their body is no longer able to do the work. Even if the government threatens to cut people's pensions or to give them money later, they might not be able to work that long.

Then there are the people who want to work longer and can, but are dismissed when they reach a certain age or are strongly encouraged to leave their job to make way for young people. This brings us to another possible solution. If the government wants

people to work longer, then why not give employers incentives to keep their employees longer? That would be a good way to address the problem.

•(1030)

The government could also help people who decide to continue working after the age of 65 or 67. That is already built in to a certain extent because people who decide to continue working for another five years are not penalized and they accumulate the amount of old age security, which they can receive later. This is one example of a very attractive incentive. No one's arm has to be twisted. However, it will not be any more effective, because those who can no longer work at 55, 60 or 65 can no longer work, and that is that. There are other ways to encourage people to stay in the labour market, and there are other ways to encourage employers to keep their employees longer.

Can the hon. member tell me how to better prepare myself? The Conservative government keeps on saying that it will give us time to prepare ourselves for the delay in accessing old age security. What can I do? Hon. colleagues, there are things that can be done to prepare for retirement. Unfortunately, not everyone can do them.

Consider that someone working full-time at minimum wage may be living below the poverty line. Will this person be able to put aside \$50 or \$75 a month for retirement? Unfortunately, they will not. Even if they were told 20 years in advance, this person would not be able to adequately prepare and would be affected by the increase in the eligibility age for old age security.

There is something else I wanted to talk about. I believe that these concerns and questions that are not being addressed indicate that the increase in the eligibility age will have major consequences. This is a direct attack on the middle class and on the people most vulnerable to poverty.

The government has not convinced us that it was necessary to make cuts to the old age security program. Experts have all stated that the old age security program is sustainable. The member opposite spoke about "pretty simple math". I am sorry but, in my opinion, a minister's common sense or the "pretty simple math" done by a Conservative member do not hold up against a study conducted by a Government of Canada chief actuary. They do not hold up against the findings of a parliamentary budget officer, a study conducted by the OECD on pensions throughout the world or a study conducted by university X or Y, which all show that the old age security program is sustainable. I am sorry but the "pretty simple math" argument does not fly. I do not believe that it holds up against the opinion of experts who all agree that the program is sustainable.



*Business of Supply*

The number of seniors will in fact increase for 5, 10 or 15 years, but we are able to deal with that increase since it was expected. Actuarial calculations are done over decades, 50 or 60 years even. The actuarial calculations allowed for an increase in life expectancy. Logic and common sense tell us that we cannot disregard the arguments and conclusions of experts. What is more, since the Conservatives did not have specific objectives, we do not know whether the proposed measure to increase the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67 meets the objectives. We do not know if these measures will really have the expected impact on old age security.

First and foremost, the objective was not clear. Second, the government has not provided any figures or studies to show how much money it will save. Will the amount saved be sufficient to make the old age security system sustainable? I get the impression that the Conservatives are just winging it. They are saying that cuts have to be made somewhere, and this is where they are going to be made. Why? We do not really know. It is truly ridiculous that the Conservatives are going to attack a program that places Canada among the countries that are best equipped to combat poverty among seniors. They are going to make cuts to this program without explaining why and without explaining what the impact will be.

• (1035)

In conclusion, the NDP feels that cuts to old age security are clearly not necessary and that a lot more could be done to improve the quality of life of seniors rather than reducing it.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** Madam Speaker, our intentions are very clear. Our intentions are to save Canada's pension plan for the foreseeable future.

It is interesting to hear my colleague opposite, and indeed the NDP. The common refrain is that there is always lots of money and that is all we spend. That is the NDP's solution to everything.

She talked about experts. Let me quote a real expert. David Dodge, the former Governor of the Bank of Canada, said this:

...we're at least 15 years late in getting started in raising that age of entitlement for CPP, OAS and the normal expectation as to how long people would work in the private sector with private-sector pension plans. That's absolutely clear, and because labour participation rates will start to fall later this decade, we're up against the wall.

This is not a partisan comment. This is not a Conservative pundit. This is the former Governor of the Bank of Canada—actually appointed by the previous government, I might add—who is saying we are actually late in moving on this issue and we need to do something now.

Would the member comment on the comments of the former Governor of the Bank of Canada?

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Madam Speaker, I am glad to hear that the Conservatives have finally quoted an expert to justify their cuts to old age security. Unfortunately, their chosen expert is a former governor of a bank, and I do not think that the opinion of that former governor holds much water in light of the calculations of the Government of Canada's chief actuary.

I am sorry, but if the Conservatives do not put any faith in the conclusions of the Government of Canada's non-partisan experts, then how long will it be before they get rid of those positions? Why not get rid of a few more while they are at it?

It is true that we will be dealing with an aging population, but the situation will be temporary. The government is not saying that since there will be more seniors, it will help and protect them; it is saying that since there will be more seniors, it will make cuts to the programs that help them escape poverty.

At any rate, cutting those kinds of programs will not save money because it has been shown that poverty affects the crime rate, people's living conditions and their health. The provinces are going to be forced to foot the bill. There is no evidence that raising the age of eligibility for old age security will really save any money.

It seems to me that there is a tidy sum of money set aside for old age security and that the government would like to get its hands on that cash and do something else with it.

• (1040)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to say how much I appreciated the speech by my colleague and neighbour and how much I agree with her. Like her, I would like to respond to our colleague's question.

[English]

He, for once, quoted an expert.

[Translation]

Even though I am asking my question through the chair, I will look at the member.

[English]

I would ask the member through you, Madam Speaker, what she would say to this quote of the OECD about Canada's increasing the pension age:

There is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pension ages in the foreseeable future.

Is the OECD wrong or right?

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Madam Speaker, according to our colleagues' pretty simple math, perhaps the OECD study is wrong. However, even if the old age security program costs the government more for the next 20 years—that is a fact and we all agree on that—the government's studies and experts are saying that we can deal with this.

Yes, certainly, if the government reduces its revenues, it will have a hard time funding programs that are important to Canadians, but we must bear in mind that a budget is not an obligation; it is the government's choices.

*Business of Supply*

Will the government choose to invest the money needed to ensure our seniors' quality of life or will it choose to invest elsewhere? That is the question people need to ask. There is no reason for the government to present these cuts as inevitable or as an obligation. That is false. Our program is sustainable. This is not merely an opinion. It is not a matter of common sense or simple math. This is what the experts are saying.

So, let us focus on that and ensure that our seniors will have a better quality of life, instead of doing something else with the money that belongs to them.

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to explain why the government will be opposing this motion. I am also pleased to say that I am very flattered that the opposition seems to be using my comment again and again. Obviously, repetition is something that is quite flattering, and I greatly appreciate it.

In budget 2012 our government indicated the changes that will be made to the old age security program to ensure the sustainability of the program for future generations. This morning our government tabled the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act to implement various provisions of the budget. The legislative changes to the old age security program are contained in this bill.

It is my hope that by tabling the details of this legislation, we will be able to dispel much of the fearmongering that members opposite have chosen to wilfully bring forward. I note that they seem to be ignoring the realities of our aging population here in Canada.

Even after I and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development have risen dozens of times in this place and delivered the same answer, I still feel the need to reiterate that all those currently receiving OAS and GIS benefits will not lose a single cent because of these changes, no matter how often the opposition wants to fearmonger otherwise. People who are close to retirement—that is, people who are age 54 and over as of March 31 of this year—will not be affected by this policy change at all. We are providing Canadians with a lengthy period of notice in order to adjust their retirement savings plans. Sadly, we have witnessed attempts by the opposition to score cheap political points by fearmongering on both these points.

Our government is committed to ensuring the sustainability of the old age security program for future generations. These changes will ensure that the OAS remains strong and that it will be there for our children and grandchildren when they need it.

Before I go further, I will outline that these changes have nothing to do with the Canada pension plan, which is a separate program with a different form of financing. There is no sustainability issue for the CPP. It is fully funded for the next 75 years at current contribution rates. This fact has been confirmed by the Chief Actuary.

However, the same cannot be said for the old age security program. I am aware that our government has already explained why these changes are necessary many times over, but the current motion before the House indicates yet again why there is a need to reiterate

these reasons. The opposition just does not seem to understand the reality of an aging population here in Canada.

Life expectancy for Canadians has gone up significantly over the last number of decades, and it is expected to continue rising. It is good news, of course, that Canadians are living longer, healthier lives. They enjoy one of the longest average life expectancies in the world, at around 81 years of age.

I am currently a pediatric orthopedic surgeon. As a medical professional, I am well aware of the many advances Canadians have made in making healthier life choices. However, with the increases in life expectancy, Canadians are collecting retirement benefits for a much longer time than when the OAS was first introduced. This has an impact in the ratio of workers who are paying for the benefits our seniors are collecting.

● (1045)

[Translation]

In 2010, 4.7 million people collected basic old age security. By 2030, the number of people collecting OAS will have nearly doubled to 9.3 million.

[English]

To put it bluntly, this means that a small number of working taxpayers will be supporting a larger number of OAS recipients. As a result, the cost of the OAS program is projected to rise dramatically, from approximately \$38 billion now to \$108 billion in 2030.

As members know, the baby boom generation—that is, people born between 1946 and 1964—is the largest cohort in Canadian history. Canada's wealth and economic productivity expanded enormously when baby boomers brought their values, knowledge, skills and energy into the workforce. They have contributed greatly to the development of our great country, but now, as these men and women are starting to retire in greater numbers, there are fewer and fewer younger workers to replace them.

In 1990 the ratio of working-age Canadians compared to the number of retired Canadians was roughly five to one. Today, the ratio has shrunk to four to one; in 2030, it will be two to one. The visualization and the realization are quite striking. There will be only two working people for each retired individual. This will be the first time that this has happened in the history of our country, and it will have a profound effect on the fiscal balance of our country. The fewer people we have in the workforce, the less productive our country is likely to be and the less tax revenue there will be to pay for government programs.

Canada is not alone in this demographic shift. Population aging is a worldwide phenomenon. According to the United Nations, in 2005 10% of the world's population was 65 years of age or older; by 2025, that proportion is expected to reach about 15%, or slightly more than one person in six.

*Business of Supply*

If we look to our neighbours and counterparts in the industrialized world, we see that many have already started reforming their pension systems to take demographic changes into account. Twenty-two of the 34 OECD countries have recently increased, or announced plans to increase, the public pension age. These include the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Japan, Denmark and many others. These countries are making changes to keep their retirement income system sustainable and ensure the financial security of their older citizens now and in the future. It is time for Canada to follow their example.

The OAS program cannot continue in its present form indefinitely. It is becoming unaffordable and needs to reflect demographic shifts. That is why we are taking action now to give Canadians certainty to plan for the implementation of these changes in the future.

If we had refused to acknowledge these realities and had simply sat back and done nothing, the OAS program would be unsustainable. OAS is the largest single program of the Government of Canada, and it is funded 100% by annual tax revenue. Let me be clear on this point: the benefits that were paid this year to our deserving seniors came exclusively from the taxes that were collected this year. This is why the ratio of workers to retirees is critical to the understanding of why we have to act now to ensure the sustainability of this program. Today we spend 13¢ of every federal tax dollar on old age security; if we do not make changes now, in about 20 years that share will grow to spending 21¢ of every federal tax dollar on this program.

If we do not make these changes to the OAS program, there are only two alternatives for dealing with this cost: raising taxes or diverting funds from other government programs and services. We know that the tax-and-spend coalition across the aisle has no problem raising taxes. Whether it is a job-killing carbon tax or increases to the GST, the opposition has not met a tax it does not like. However, considering the decreased ratio of workers who would have to shoulder the increased costs of government services, raising taxes would critically damage Canadian business competitiveness and the Canadian economy.

As an MP, I represent an Ontario riding, and my constituents know far too well the record of the leader of the Liberal Party and his track record of damaging a fragile and struggling economy by increasing taxes. This is simply not a reasonable solution, and it would cause far too much harm to the Canadian economy. As we have consistently stated in previous campaigns, the Speech from the Throne, and the most recent budget 2012, we remain committed to our low-tax plan for jobs and economic growth.

Diverting funds from other programs and services is obviously not an option. To pay for the increases in OAS, the government would be forced to take funds that are currently being used to support deserving Canadians requiring assistance from the government.

We have seen over-the-top reactions from the opposition benches as the government moves to find efficiencies for our latest rounds of deficit reduction reviews. They simply cannot have it both ways. We are talking about an 8% increase in the total cost of government spending. We are convinced that the only way, and the only just way, to relieve the cost pressures on OAS is to raise the age of eligibility.

This would ensure that the OAS will still be there for our children and grandchildren by the time they reach retirement.

The proposed changes will happen with a lengthy notice period and will be phased in over several years. We will gradually raise the age of eligibility from 65 to 67. These changes will not affect people who are currently receiving OAS benefits. They will continue to receive them as they did before.

The operative word here is “gradual”. Nothing is happening overnight. In fact, the transition will only start on April 1, 2023, which is 11 years from now. Once the transition begins, it will take six years to complete. To put it another way, the process will take 17 years, until 2029. This is a longer implementation period than most OECD countries will provide when increasing the eligibility age of their public pensions.

• (1050)

Let me be very clear on this. Everyone will have more than a decade before the changes start to set in, and it will be close to two decades before they are fully implemented. There is ample time for all Canadians to adapt their retirement plans.

Anyone 54 years of age as of March 31, 2012, in other words those born before or on March 31, 1958, will still be entitled to OAS and GIS at age 65.

The ages at which the OAS allowance for low income spouses and the OAS allowance for the survivors are provided remain the same for anyone who is 49 years of age or older as of March 31, 2012. They will continue to be eligible between the ages of 60 and 64.

I know this is reassuring news to older Canadians after all the fearmongering that has happened from our opposition colleagues. I want to reassure Canadians that current seniors' benefits are not being affected.

For younger people, there is plenty of time to prepare for these changes and adapt their retirement plans. Canadians born between April 1, 1958 and January 31, 1962 will be eligible to receive their OAS benefits and the GIS between the ages of 65 and 67, depending on the month in which they were born. The details of the transition will be outlined in the budget and are also reflected in the budget implementation bill which was tabled this morning.

Canadians born on or after February 1, 1962 will be eligible to receive OAS benefits at the age of 67. For the allowances, the range of eligibility will shift from between 60 to 64, gradually increasing to 62 to 66 for people born between April 1, 1963 and January 31, 1967, depending on their birthday. In other words, the age of eligibility will be 62 for the allowance and the allowance for the survivor for people born on or after February 1, 1967.

*Business of Supply*

Certain federal programs that are currently providing income benefits until age 65 will be changed in tandem with the OAS program so that there is no sudden gap in income for recipients 65 and 66 years of age. These programs include those provided by Veterans Affairs Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

Also, the Government of Canada will compensate provinces and territories for net additional costs they face resulting from the increase in the age of eligibility for OAS. Again, for Canadians who are 54 years of age or over as of March 31, 2012, they will still be eligible for the OAS pension and the GIS at age 65. If they want to stay in the workforce past 65, they will be able to defer their OAS benefit and receive a higher actuarially adjusted pension up to five years later. I will speak to this in a moment.

In addition to gradually increasing the age of eligibility, we are making two other changes to OAS we believe will benefit Canadians. The first is proactive enrolment. Right now all seniors have to formally apply for the old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits. Between 2013 and 2016, we will begin proactively enrolling Canadians into the OAS program, eliminating the need for seniors to apply. This will reduce the government's administrative burden, but more important, it will ensure that more seniors have access to the benefits they deserve.

We are making changes to the OAS in the near future, changes which I think Canadians will appreciate. We will be providing Canadians the flexibility as to when they will be able to start receiving the OAS pension. Canadians turning 65 on July 1, 2013 will have the option to defer their OAS benefits for up to five years. People who defer receiving their OAS benefits to a later time will subsequently receive a higher actuarially adjusted monthly pension for the rest of their lives.

This change will give people more flexibility and choice when planning for their retirement, especially when they want to continue working past the age of 65.

It is no secret that Canadian seniors are choosing to stay in the workforce longer. This is a great time for the Canadian economy. More than ever, we need to be able to tap into their energy and continue to benefit from the knowledge and skills they acquired over a lifelong period in the economy.

The flexibility of deferring the OAS pension will make it worthwhile for many Canadians to stay on the job. I want to emphasize that pension deferral will be an option, not an obligation. I would also like to point that people who defer their pension will, on average, receive the same total OAS pension over their lifetime as those who do not defer their benefits.

Never in the history of our country have so many people lived such long and fulfilling lives. This is something to celebrate. However, an aging population is also creating new challenges that we have to face realistically.

When the OAS was introduced, Canadians could expect to live only a few years after retirement. Now many can look forward to two or more decades. Over the next 20 years, the number of Canadians over the age of 65 will jump from 4.7 million to 9.3 million. This is a staggering increase in a relatively short period and it comes with a

high price tag. The annual cost of OAS will increase, in fact triple, between 2010 and 2030 from \$36 billion to \$108 billion.

• (1055)

At the same time as our seniors population is rising, the ratio of workers to retirees will be falling. Unlike the Canada pension plan, the OAS is financed entirely from tax revenues from workers paying that year. Currently, one in seven Canadians is over age 65. By 2030, less than 20 years from now, the ratio will change to two to one. Fewer people working means less revenue and higher costs.

We owe a lot to our seniors. They built our country and they deserve security and dignity in retirement. Our government is determined to take on this responsibility in a fair and prudent fashion to ensure that the OAS system remains sustainable. It is the responsibility of the federal government to think of the future and act in the long-term interests of Canadians. Sadly, the opposition has refused to acknowledge the realities of this aging population. Private sector economists, financial institutions and former Bank of Canada governors have confirmed that we must act now to ensure OAS is sustainable in the long term.

Unfortunately, the opposition parties have chosen the low road. Their baseless fearmongering and ignorance of the need for change do not serve the interests of Canadians. We will not follow the opposition's approach of sticking our heads in the sand and pretending we are oblivious to a coming challenge.

I ask all members in the House to consider our duty to our constituents, to our great country and to our current and future retirees, to rise above our partisanship and to reflect on the actions that need to be taken to ensure fiscal sustainability of a cherished social program. As such, I ask all members of this House to reject the opposition motion and support the actions that our government is taking for the long-term sustainability of OAS for future generations of Canadians.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that this government is making another harmful, arbitrary and unilateral decision that will penalize our seniors, especially our most vulnerable seniors.

The member across the floor talked about myths. I think she is completely mistaken and that this Conservative government is perpetuating its own myth. I recently met with some people in my constituency who are very worried about this plan to raise the retirement age and who clearly see—this is no myth for them, but a reality—that they will not be able to find new jobs in the labour market.

How does the member's government plan to address this kind of problem?

• (1100)

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, let us be very clear. There will be no reduction in current seniors' pensions.

*Business of Supply*

As I have mentioned several times in this House, in order to ensure there is old age security for future generations of Canadian retirees, these changes need to be made now. The shift in demographics of the number of individuals that will be retired and eligible for OAS will jump substantially from 4.7 million to over 9.3 million over the next 20 years. We need to take action to ensure that this cherished social program is available to future generations of Canadians.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, our colleague started by complaining that she always has to repeat the same things. Therefore, I invite her to say something else and answer a very simple question.

The report of the OECD said, taking into account all the aging trends she mentioned, that because of the sustainability of our program today, it will remain sustainable in the future. The OECD concluded that there is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pension ages in the foreseeable future. By the way, the Chief Actuary and the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the increase in the OAS will be only one percentage point of our economy in the next 20 years and after that it will go down.

As she does not want to repeat the same thing over and over, what is her answer with respect to these numbers?

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, our OECD colleagues have all stepped forward and made these changes already. We are following suit to make sure that future generations of retirees in this country have a program that Canadians cherish. Seniors built this country. Young individuals now are doing exactly the same thing. We want to make sure that future generations of Canadians are able to receive OAS. That is why we are going to gradually implement, from 2023 to 2029, a program that Canadians will cherish, very similar to the substantive changes that many of our OECD colleagues have made to their retirement programs.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for a very informative speech which set out what we are actually doing.

Members on the other side take a very short-term view. They cannot look forward a few years, let alone 15 years. In this case, we are way behind. We should have done this previously. In fact, David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada said:

[W]e're at least 15 years late in getting started in raising that age of entitlement for CPP, OAS and the normal expectation as to how long people would work in the private sector with private-sector pension plans. That's absolutely clear, and because labour participation rates will start to fall later this decade, we're up against the wall.

It is clear that it is time for action. The point we continually have to make is that we are not removing benefits for today's seniors. This will not be implemented until 2023 and it will not be fully implemented until 2029, 17 years from now.

Is 17 years an adequate warning for people to adjust their retirement plans?

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, in my riding of Simcoe—Grey there are a lot of young families, people such as Pam Irwin and her husband, Larry, and Stan Voutier from Wasaga Beach. These young people are concerned that old age security will not be there at all for them. They are delighted that they are being given an opportunity to make sure that a cherished social program in this

country will be available for them. They know they have a long adjustment period to make sure they save for retirement. This will not begin until 2023 and will not be fully implemented until 2029. These are young people in their thirties and forties who are delighted that this government is taking action now to make sure that they, as future retirees, will be protected.

● (1105)

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, that was a rather stunning statement by the parliamentary secretary. She said that people in Canada are delighted about the government's unilateral move without consultation. An Ipsos Reid poll said that 74% of Canadians oppose raising the OAS age. This is a government that once ran on a platform of open and transparent grassroots participation, yet it unilaterally made the decision in Davos, Switzerland to raise the OAS age.

I have had the opportunity to talk with representatives of Norway. The member opposite said that what the government is doing is in keeping with what is being done in Europe. The House should know that Norway went through a two-year intensive consultation with the public and its labour office. Norway has high regard for its workers. It consulted extensively with workers and the people.

I would like to know what other options the government considered and with whom it consulted.

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, let me be clear. This government consulted with Canadians substantially. We received a strong mandate on May 2, 2011 to move forward with our low-tax jobs agenda. Part of that is making sure that we have sustainable social programs. We have taken action to make sure that future generations of Canadians are protected and will be able to receive OAS. There is a long timeframe during which this will be implemented. It will be gradually implemented starting in 2023 until 2029.

This government did consult widely. We consulted with the entire Canadian public, which gave us a strong mandate on May 2, 2011 to take action.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Madam Speaker, the government does not want to answer very basic questions.

Some OECD countries are increasing the age to 67 years because they are spending much more on their elderly than Canada does. This is the conclusion of the OECD. The OECD predicts that by 2060 pension costs in Canada will amount to 6.2% of the GDP, in relative terms, less than what the OECD countries on average are spending today. This is why we do not need to raise the age to 67 years.

Could she answer why the OECD, the PBO and the Chief Actuary disagree with her? Could she answer that, for once?

*Business of Supply*

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, I am accountable to the people of Simcoe—Grey. They are my constituents, and they want to make sure there is a sustainable program available to them. Old age security is something they cherish.

Many of my constituents actually want to make sure these programs are available for themselves, their children and their grandchildren. That is exactly what this government is doing by making changes in eligibility for OAS over the long time frame so that individuals know when they need to make these adjustments. From 2023 to 2029 will be the implementation. It is a 17-year window.

I am very confident that Canadians, particularly those in my riding of Simcoe—Grey, will be able to make those adjustments.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** No answer, no answer.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. We may not like the answers—

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** There is no answer.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. We may not like the answers or the questions we get, but we must respect when another member is speaking.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for York West.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, you are so right, but it is also so difficult when we stand in the House and continue to ask questions on serious topics and continue to be ignored or given answers that we know are not accurate, based on what we know.

I am pleased to speak on this very important issue. I will be sharing my time with the absolutely wonderful member for Random—Burin—St. George's, who is a constant fighter on behalf of her constituents and seniors in this country. They and we are fortunate to have her with us.

Here we go again. We are speaking in what I would call a Bill Murray moment. We are again debating a motion on how to stop the government's attack on low-income seniors.

As my party's critic for seniors and pensions, I am pleased to say that we are going to support this motion because we are all here, at least on our team, to support Canadian seniors. We are here to reaffirm a commitment that the Liberal Party of Canada made and will continue to reinforce, that in our goal to form the next government three years from now, we will make sure we maintain the age of retirement at 65.

We have looked into this issue with all seriousness. Everybody knows it is not a financial issue. It is an issue of choice and ideology, which I will speak to further.

The Liberal Party of Canada believes that 65 is an appropriate age. If people want to continue to work until 75 or 80, God bless them all. The government is going to force people to wait an extra two years when many of the people who I see have been in really tough jobs all their lives and can barely make it to 65. The Liberal Party is and will continue to be firmly committed, if given the opportunity by Canadians three years from now, to ensuring that this does not move forward.

What would the motion do? Let us be honest and not mislead anybody who is watching today. We support the motion and we will be working with our NDP colleagues on this issue. If the motion is passed, it will go the same way a lot of things go with the Conservative government. It will go into the nearest trash can, and nothing else will happen.

I do not want to mislead people into thinking we can overturn it. The current government has a majority, and when a government has a majority it does pretty much what it wants. We will stand up and holler and scream and do all the things we are supposed to do, but at the end of the day that is what a majority government is going to do. It will take the Canadian people out there to respond and work with all of us to ensure that does not happen. If Canadians rise up, speak out and vote, that would be helpful for all of us in opposition.

The intent of the motion is to roll back the Prime Minister's attack on the pensions of low-income seniors. It would assure seniors and baby boomers that the view held by the Cons is not shared by all of us. The motion echoes the Liberal call to stop and reverse the government's increase to the age of retirement.

The motion helps to remind Canadians that the Conservatives continue to govern with a mandate they secured under false pretenses. We had an election just over a year ago. This did not come out of the blue. We do not suddenly have some huge financial stress on us, meaning that we have to do this. Twelve months ago there was no mention of this.

In fact, the Prime Minister made a commitment that there would be no change to health care, that health care transfers would stay the same. He said he had no intention of touching pensions. Rather than introducing pension reform in the larger sense, all the government has introduced is PPRPs that would do very little to help people save for retirement.

That is what we should be talking about, the need for serious pension reform in this country, opportunities for people to be able to save. No matter whether they are homemakers, or on low income, people need to be able to save a few dollars. We need to introduce programs that would allow and encourage that. Even with the age being 65, far too many people continue to live in poverty today.

While many of us continue to argue for increases in OAS so that fewer people would be living at the levels of poverty we know many of our constituents are, the government has taken unprecedented and unnecessary steps to make people wait an extra two years. It is absolutely uncalled for. There are no statistics to show it needed to do that.

• (1110)

As my colleague mentioned, in the OECD some of those countries have very rich pensions. Some of them have a 50% or 60% replacement. What do we have in Canada? We are proud of what we have, but it is not enough. It is a 25% replacement. Many of us have been arguing for years to increase that so we do not have as many people living on \$15,000 a year.

*Business of Supply*

I asked some on the other side, and they have constituents living on \$15,000 a year. It is not just us who have not quite as affluent ridings. Members should stop and think about what it is like to live on \$15,000 a year. By the time they pay rent, transportation and medical bills, I often hear from my constituents that they have to choose between getting a prescription filled and buying a quart of milk. Life is tough for a lot of people out there, even though we would like to think that everybody in Canada is rich. They are not, seniors in particular, for a variety of reasons, including the kinds of jobs they had.

Also, people were led to believe, by their own lack of knowledge, that when they got to be 65 there would be a pension there for them. Our system is not a pension. It is a supplement to one's own savings. If we ask most Canadians who are not saving very much money, they think that when they are 65 they will have a pension. In Norway they would have a pension. In many of the other countries they would have a pension. However, we do not have a "pension" in this country because we need serious pension reform.

Notwithstanding the Conservative Party's conviction for election fraud and promising not to cut the pensions of seniors, as I mentioned a moment ago, the Prime Minister misled Canadians and tricked boomers into trusting him with their votes. I can guarantee that all the people I am meeting with will not be tricked the next time. I am sure even Pierre Poitras would be shocked by the dubious nature of this scheme. He is probably right at that age where he will be affected by this change as well.

Canadians have earned these benefits, and by pushing the OAS eligibility age from 65 to 67, the Cons are hurting those Canadians who are the most vulnerable.

What the government is forgetting is that it is not giving people anything. It is rotating their money back to them, which they paid in all of those years. It is their own money they are getting back.

Seniors and baby boomers have worked their entire lives. They have paid their taxes, raised their families and contributed to this nation. Everything that we enjoy every day came from all of them. Now as they grow older they are simply asking the government to fulfill its promise to let them live in dignity. But the Cons say, no, they will have to wait an extra two years because they have not worked hard enough. The government will say the sacrifice it is forcing seniors to bear is for the long-term prosperity of the entire system. However, all the federal government's own reports have determined that the OAS is clearly sustainable. We do not face the pressures that many of the other countries are facing because they have a very lucrative and rich system when it comes to pensions. We do not have any of that. That means the Conservative cuts to OAS are being made as a matter of clear choice. That is what government and governing is all about, choices. It makes the choice where it makes its cuts. It makes the choice as to where it invests taxpayers' money. We can see very clearly where the current government is making its choices as to what it cares about.

The Minister of Finance has said that the budget was about choices. That is one place where I agree with him. The Cons have opted for jets, jails and fancy juices, while the Liberals continue to stand for and with Canadian seniors and baby boomers. As I indicated earlier, three years from now we could very well be into

another election. The Liberals have committed and will stay committed that the age of 65 will remain, so people can have a few years for a second career or a bit of a better lifestyle than having to be forced to continue to work. These are ideological cuts by the government and will only increase the pressure, in addition to all the other issues that are being downloaded to the provinces, to force people onto either welfare systems or some sort of subsidy. That is very embarrassing and humiliating for the thousands of Canadians who have worked hard, paid their taxes and were never on welfare or unemployment insurance or anything else. They worked all of those years. When 65 comes, they are planning to retire. Now some of them will be forced to apply to the province for welfare, something that is extremely humiliating for many.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to this very important issue. I hope we are able to raise some of these concerns as the day progresses.

● (1115)

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the government keeps saying that we cannot afford this pension plan right now and that is why it is raising the age of accessibility to 67. If we would have tax fairness in this country, a tax system that is according to the revenues of everybody, would we be able to afford social programs like the OAS?

● (1120)

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Madam Speaker, we do not need to do anything. We can afford it today. It has always been built in and has always been part of the plan. The government did not suddenly wake up on May 3 and find out that we have some major disaster facing us. This has been part of the overall planning of the governments from Lester Pearson to Pierre Trudeau, a commitment to do this. The Liberals have always been fiscally and socially responsible. It was the Liberals who introduced these programs. When the Liberals were elected in 1993, we inherited a \$43 billion deficit because of the overspending of the Conservative government. We know what is necessary. This can be funded and can continue to be funded.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Madam Speaker, my question for the opposition member is quite simple.

Is her position not totally irresponsible? Are the Liberal Party and the opposition not burying their heads in the sand and misleading the Canadian public? Why? It is very simple. We know that in 2030, the old age security program in its current form will cost \$108 billion and that all of that money will come from taxpayers.

Should we not do the responsible thing, follow the example of every other major western country and change the age of retirement from 65 to 67? Is that not sustainable development? Does my colleague not agree that we should move forward and take responsible measures to ensure the sustainability of our old age security system?

*Business of Supply*

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Madam Speaker, it is ridiculous to hear the kinds of comments and stories that the government members try to pass on to Canadians. The program is sustainable and we know that. The Conservatives make up these smoke screens. This program is clearly sustainable.

It comes back to choices. If we had to make a choice today between jets and fancy jails or the seniors of this country, who will we support? We will support the seniors who built this country and who pay our wages every day that we are. We should not be attacking seniors. It is about choices. The Conservatives' choices are jets, jails and all kinds of fancy extravagances that they spend on, and they will turn around and take it out on our seniors. Canadians will not let that happen because they will never re-elect that government.

[Translation]

**The Deputy Speaker:** One minute remains. The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville for a very quick question.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her excellent speech and the Minister of Veterans Affairs who, unlike his other colleagues, seems to want to engage in a debate with us.

The answer to his question is very simple. There is no doubt that the cost of the program will increase, but the Canadian economy will also increase and, at the end of the day, it will cost, at most, only one percentage point more to the Canadian economy and then the cost will decline after that.

That is why the OECD, the chief actuary and the Parliamentary Budget Officer are saying that the government is wrong and that the program can very well be funded for the foreseeable future.

I hope that I have answered his question and that he will now change his mind.

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Madam Speaker, it is really hard for those of us who know and care about this issue. We talk to our constituents all the time and we know the struggles and the fight for an increase in the OAS and GIS because of the fact that people are living on \$15,000 a year. We need to be moving forward and having a discussion and debate on real pension reform for future Canadians so they have opportunities to save and invest their money. Investing in things like the supplementary Canada pension plan would make it very easy for people, even homemakers and the self-employed, to be able to put a few dollars aside so that when they get to be 65 years old, which is the age that we on this side believe is the right age for retirement, people will have an opportunity to start second careers and to have the money to do that.

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of the opposition day motion, which reads:

That this House reject the government's plan to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement from 65 to 67 years even though the current system is financially sustainable.

I am not sure there is another issue that I can think of, recently anyway, that has galvanized the people of Canada so much in terms

of opposition to what the government has proposed. It is totally unreasonable, unacceptable and unconscionable that a government would consider this. Seniors, some of whom have worked for years in very physically and mentally challenging environments, will now have to wait an additional two years to access a program that has been there for them for years. It is not right, not fair and is something that I hope Canadians will continue to speak out on and will continue to make representation about because, even though it will not impact those who are of age now to qualify for OAS, it will impact their children and their grandchildren.

We tend to lose sight of the fact that the longer we have people in the workforce, the less jobs there are available for those who are younger and looking to get into the working environment. Most of our young people today are unemployed or underemployed. What message are we sending them? The government is telling them that they will need to make a go of it themselves, that they will need to find a way to make it happen. If people are being forced to work until age 67, there will be fewer opportunities for young people and there will continue to be fewer opportunities as long as the Conservative government is in power because of the choices it makes that influences the people of Canada.

I will speak to how we arrived at this debate on this motion by highlighting some important dates in history. This shows the mindset of the Conservatives. In 1927, the Conservatives voted against the introduction of the old age pension. Fortunately, in 1951, a Liberal government passed the Old Age Security Act. In 1965, a Liberal government established the Canada pension plan. Later, in 1967, that same Liberal government, led by prime minister Lester B. Pearson, introduced a guaranteed income supplement and lowered the eligibility for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement from 70 to 65.

That was a government with a conscience. That was a government that recognized that things become difficult as one ages and that things tend to happen from a medical perspective as one ages. That was a government that recognized how important it was to take care of its citizens.

In 2001, the current Conservative Prime Minister and then member of the right wing National Citizens Coalition declared his disdain for national pension plans and wrote an open letter to the premier of Alberta demanding that Alberta withdraw from the Canada pension plan altogether. That puts it in perspective. That explains exactly where the government, led by the Prime Minister, is coming from.

More recently, in the 2011 election, the Conservatives assured Canadians that if elected they would not cut pensions. In black and white, on page 23 of the Conservative 2011 election platform, it says:

We will not cut transfer payments to individuals or to the provinces for essential things like health care, education and pensions.

Well, we know quite the opposite has happened. Unfortunately for Canadians, this commitment was nothing short of fiction.



*Business of Supply*

•(1125)

In 2012 the Prime Minister showed Canadians his true colours when he hid during the election, which was only a year ago, and broke his promise not to cut the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

Unfortunately for Canadians this is not the first time the Prime Minister has made a promise to do one thing, only to do the opposite. Whether it be his broken promise in the 2006 election on the Atlantic accord, which impacted the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, or his bogus commitment in 2008 election not to run a deficit, or his phony guarantee in the 2011 election to balance the books by 2014, the Prime Minister and his Conservative government have made it clear, through their legacy of broken promises, that they cannot be trusted to keep their word.

In budget 2012, after the Prime Minister committed to all Canadians in the last election, “We’re not going to cut the rate of increase in transfers for healthcare, education and pensions. That is job number one”, the Conservatives are breaking another promise and decreasing the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement by raising the age of eligibility from 65 to 67 even though the current arrangement is more than sustainable.

The Conservatives tried to manufacture a structural crisis surrounding the financing of the old age security that just does not exist. While it is true that the retirement of baby boomers will result in increased costs for the old age security program, Canada's economy is expected to grow significantly over the next 20 years. That economic growth means that by 2030 the old age security program will only comprise 0.7% more of Canada's economy than it does today. This is not unaffordable by any measure.

The Conservatives are trying to manipulate the facts by not including the entire picture. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, 2030 is when old age security expenses will peak and following this peak, old age security expenditures will continue to decline until they return to current levels.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has looked at this. He has come to this conclusion. He has researched the issue and it is totally contrary to what the government has said. Old age security is sustainable. Reckless Conservative spending is not.

On January 13, 2012, Jack Mintz, research director of the Government of Canada's working group on retirement income adequacies, stated:

The overall view that was taken about our pension system in total, when you look at Old Age Security, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, as well as Canada Pension Plan, was that it is relatively financially sustainable...

This is more research that points to the fact that the government is off-base and has no idea what it is talking about. A government that professes to be a competent manager and cannot get something as simple as this right, begs the question why, and the why is choice. It is the way the government thinks. It does not have a social conscience and this is a prime example of that.

The reality in Canada is 40% of old age security recipients earn less than \$20,000 a year in retirement. This proposed delay will cost our lowest income seniors over \$30,000 in benefits. This cut to the

old age security will have a devastating effect on the retirement security of our most vulnerable future seniors.

Since the Prime Minister announced his plan to cut the old age security when he was in Davos, I have heard opposition from every corner of my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's, and not just in my riding, but throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and from the rest of the country.

This unscrupulous action by the Conservative government, and there have been many more, has garnered so much opposition and resulted in so much negative feedback. It is the wrong decision and it is a decision that must be reversed or we will have a future generation of seniors who will be unable to pay for the most essential things like heat, light, food and medicine. This has to be overturned.

•(1130)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her speech. I would now like to know what she thinks about the following statement: it would seem that this government's priority is to spend billions of dollars on corporate tax cuts, while eliminating support for seniors, women in particular.

Does she have any suggestions to prevent women from continuing to be poor their whole lives?

•(1135)

[*English*]

**Ms. Judy Foote:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. colleague. We know that women, particularly women who are seniors, have a really difficult time.

The one thing we know is that when people lose a spouse, they lose half of their income but still have a home to run and many of the same expenses. It is so unfortunate that the ideology behind the government is that wealthy corporations deserve breaks and not those who are the most vulnerable.

My recommendation would be to err on the side of those who need help most and recognize that while there is nothing with making a profit, and I have always said that, companies need to recognize that the people who made it possible for them to make a profit need help as well.

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the member opposite wants to talk about unscrupulous actions.

I would like to point out the irresponsible action of the opposition members, one after the other, who continue to fear-monger among seniors as though somehow anyone who is retired today will be impacted. The members know full well that these measures will not be implemented until 2023. They are modest changes that will not be fully implemented until 2029. People are living longer. No one currently retired will be affected in any way by the changes that are being proposed.

*Business of Supply*

I want an economist for the member. Patricia Croft says, “The fact of the matter is Canadians are getting older, the demands on the system are getting greater, and the costs are going up”. She goes on to say, “Just about every other G-20 country has raised the retirement age. Why should we be different?”

Finally, a well-known Canadian, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, says, “I just hope that not everybody on the opposition side of the House is crazy. There’s lots of people there that understand full well that there’s a big problem here”.

What does the member have to say about the comments by the former governor of the Bank of Canada?

**Ms. Judy Foote:** Madam Speaker, first, I have to assume that my hon. colleague was not in the House when I spoke. I made it very clear that people who were now eligible for old age security would not be impacted, but their children and grandchildren would be.

I am sure if the member heard that, he would take back the comment he just made.

There are varying opinions. However, when we talk about old age security, Canadians who get on old age security need every cent they get. To be clear about this, yes, people are living longer, but not everyone is living longer. How we all wish we would live longer. People are still dying.

The point is things get tougher for seniors depending on their working environment. I know, from my riding, people who work in fish plants stand on cold, hard, concrete floors, for 8 hours a day. By the time they get to be 65, they look for that help that should come to them from the Government of Canada. They have been paying taxes all these years and now we are telling them they have to work an additional two years.

Let us talk about people in the fishery, people who work on the ocean. These people need help when they get to 65, not having to work a further 2 years.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would remind all hon. members that it is not permitted to suggest whether a member is in the House or not in the course of debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

I rise today to support the New Democrat Party opposition day motion sponsored by my colleague for London—Fanshawe. She has put a tremendous amount of work into this issue and I applaud her dedication to Canadians.

Through budget 2012, the eligibility age for OAS and GIS will be raised from 65 to 67 starting in April 2023, with full implementation by January 2029. This means that all Canadians under the age of 54 will be affected by this change.

I do not remember hearing about this change in the election, which was just a year ago. In fact, the Conservative election platform stated, “We will not cut transfer payments to individuals or to the provinces for essential things like health care, education and

pensions”. After the election, the Prime Minister stood in the House and said, “This government has been very clear. We will not cut pensions”.

Not only did the Conservatives fail to campaign on this issue, they hid their agenda and misled Canadians. That is unacceptable.

Canada's New Democrats believe that the OAS and GIS is easily sustainable and actually projected to decrease in cost relative to the size of the economy in the long run.

According to York University pension and retirement expert, Professor Thomas Klassen:

I haven't heard any academic argue that there's a crisis with OAS, which is why I was surprised a few days ago when the Prime Minister seemed to say there was a crisis...there's got to be a lot more evidence that there's a problem, and I don't see that evidence.

This is a manufactured crisis. This is not about the sustainability of the OAS and GIS; this is about an ideological agenda.

Edward Whitehouse, the leader of the OECD pension team, stated:

The analysis suggests that Canada does not face major challenges of financial sustainability with its public pension schemes...Long-term projections show that public retirement-income provision is financially sustainable. Population ageing will naturally increase public pension spending, but the rate of growth is lower and the starting point better than many OECD countries.

Canada's New Democrats want to strengthen Canada's pension plan, not weaken it. We believe that a better option would be to expand CPP. A modest increase in premiums can finance a doubling of the CPP, providing real sustainable retirement security for all Canadians.

I want to read a few emails that I received from Canadians who are very concerned about these changes.

The first one is from Fred and Evelyn. Fred says, “I am 68 years old next month, and Evelyn is 65. Your proposal to double pension benefits is exactly what I had in mind for some time”.

They are referring to the proposal of Canada's New Democrats. They go on to say:

Ourselves included, we worked hard in Canada, still paying taxes and bring up our children as good citizens. I...work 40 Hrs a week, at night, as a watchman at a major vehicle dealership, (at minimum wage), and Evelyn works part-time as a Hostess at a local Real Canadian Superstore.

We're not lazy, and we never were, and it would be nice sometime soon to be able to bid good bye to our employers, if our pensions were doubled in total!

This one is from Teresa, from Coquitlam, who says this about the government:

In addition, although the changes to the OAS do not affect me, I think you are wrong to extend the eligibility to 67 yr[s]. You will be penalizing older people in lower socioeconomic levels and vastly underrating the pain you are inflicting on working people who do not have the options that higher salaried Canadians enjoy. You do not have my support for these changes. I think many other Canadians feel the same way.

*Business of Supply*

●(1140)

Claudette says, “This change will not only impact seniors, who will be forced to work years longer, but also our country's youth, who now see few decent employment opportunities. This will only worsen as people delay retirement because of financial hardship. Assurances by the government that raising the age for OAS would have no impact on current retirees are misleading. This change would impact everyone, and immediately.”

I also have a number of emails that were sent in when people who had looked at my website felt that they wanted to speak out and voice their concern.

John, in Port Coquitlam, says, “The Prime Minister should have raised this policy issue as part of his re-election platform. We all know what happened to our former premier”—this, of course, is in British Columbia—“for not being forthright with the electorate with the HST. We need our political leaders to be more honest, open and transparent.”

The next one is from Anne, in Coquitlam. She says, “While these proposed cuts will not affect my pension, as I have been retired for over 10 years, I have family and friends for whom these cuts will definitely have an impact. It may mean working longer, if health and job opportunity allow, or significantly reducing their ability to cover necessary costs, particularly medications and health care costs. As costs in all areas of living continually increase, this small pension can mean the difference between getting by or having to make very difficult choices affecting health and longevity.”

This one is from Sandra, in Coquitlam, who says, “This decision adversely affects women who have raised families. This is despicable and unnecessary and puts hardship on vulnerable people who were hard-working and law-abiding citizens. It seems mean and petty to me.”

Robin, in New Westminster, says, “For those of us reaching our senior years, please maintain funding for the OAS. My grandpa fought in World War I and my dad in World War II. I was born here and have lived here all my life. I have worked, paid my taxes and paid my dues. Many wonderful seniors who made this country what it is today desperately need the OAS funding. Many will find themselves in very difficult situations if the OAS is compromised.”

Nargis, in Coquitlam, says, “[The] Prime Minister...is not thinking about the seniors who have worked hard for this country and are looking forward to their retirement. I think it is very unfair if he goes through with it. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister will create more poverty amongst seniors. I do agree it is a direct attack on the most vulnerable people.”

Lennox, in Burnaby, writes, “Seniors who have worked all their lives and paid their taxes contributing to the economy of Canada should not be made to endure cuts to their pension in their old age. This is utterly unfair.”

Donna, in Coquitlam, says, “I understand the Conservatives are making plans to change the eligibility age for OAS. They do not appear to know the average Canadian too well at all. I am now 64 and will qualify for OAS in August. I understand that I will qualify, but what of the next generation to come? Pensions are being eroded

or done away with completely, so what will the average Canadian live on? I was a single mother of three, and the concept of saving for a rainy day never entered into the plan. Shame on the Prime Minister and all his pals. Shame, shame.”

Mary, in Coquitlam, says, “People who do not have any source of income apart from OAS and GIS need to have additional financial assistance. The cost of living continues to rise without the funds to support the basic necessities for them.”

●(1145)

Finally, Eunice writes from Coquitlam, “The Canada pension plan is wholly funded by employers and employees with government management. Why does your government plan to stop CPP for those now 57 years and under, when it has been proven to be sustainable with good government management?”

**The Deputy Speaker:** I must interrupt the hon. member at this point. Perhaps he can conclude during questions and comments.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

●(1150)

**Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the opposition will say that there will be a reduction in pensions, and that is patently false. Nothing could be further from the truth; in fact, our government has made the most significant enhancements to OAS and GIS in some 25 years, while the NDP has voted against that. Perhaps this member would like to stand in his place and tell us why he has consistently voted against increasing the guaranteed income supplement for our neediest seniors across the country.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Madam Speaker, what I voted against was a bad budget.

That is what we are looking at as we look at a package of priorities throughout the budget, and that is what I did not support. This budget does not serve Canadians; in fact, the Conservatives' priorities are to spend billions of dollars on corporate tax giveaways while slashing services that families rely on in Canada. That is what I voted against, and that is what I see happening here in terms of the change to OAS eligibility from age 65 to age 67. That is what Canadians are speaking to me about through letters, through emails and through talking to me. That is what their concerns are. This is a question of priorities. This is a question that Canadians feel the Conservatives have not got right.

[Translation]

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Madam Speaker, we are talking about seniors, which is a good thing. However, the government is attacking future generations instead. Our youth are already paying more for their education and housing and to provide for their families, and now their future is being jeopardized.

*Business of Supply*

Young people have been taken hostage by this government. They see how the government is destroying Canadians' social safety net little by little and ensuring that those who have enjoyed benefits that have been in place for decades will be the last to do so. The fair Canada we have known is no more. The message is clear.

I would ask my hon. colleague what we can say to our youth, who will have to work longer to pay for this slashing of the social safety net.

[*English*]

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague raises two questions there. Besides the message, it is also the consultation.

The government has not consulted with Canadians. It has definitely not listened. Experts commissioned by the government to review the OAS told the Conservatives that there is no crisis with the current public pension and that it is sustainable, but the Conservatives now are planning to slash the OAS. It is a very unfortunate message that we will have to tell Canadians: they are now going to have to work longer and continue to work harder before they get the pension that they have worked for and contributed into all their lives. This is now going to be a less affordable situation for very many Canadians. As the Canadians who wrote into me are saying, they may have to choose between health care and the medications or food they need just to survive.

That is a very unfortunate message, and it is not the right message that we should be delivering to seniors, the people who built Canada.

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I do not doubt that the member is getting calls and contacts from people about this concern. We hear again that we are talking about seniors. In fact, we are not talking about seniors today, but about future generations. Do members not see that it is our responsibility to encourage them and help them understand that we are planning for their future? This is not ideological; it is protecting their future.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Madam Speaker, this is affecting people 54 years of age and under, who are heading into retirement very soon. This is something governments knew was coming. This is not happening today; we have known about the demographic shift for decades.

The real issue is priorities. It is a question of priorities. Many Canadians are telling me that the Conservative government does not have the same set of priorities that they feel strongly about. That is what they want to see in their pension plan, in budgets and in the priorities of Canada.

• (1155)

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to take a quick second to thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for his exquisite pronunciation of my riding's name.

[*Translation*]

I rise today in this House to defend the rights of my citizens in Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel—and I did say rights—because, on this side of the House, we insist that retiring with dignity is a right. The consequences of the Conservatives' attacks on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement will seriously harm my constituents' ability to enjoy this right.

This House represents a vast country. We have many rural ridings that are feeling the effects of a struggling economy. A large number of jobs are disappearing from rural areas and so are our young people, because of the lack of professional jobs. These ridings often include isolated places where it is difficult to access health services and the population is aging fast.

As MPs, we should not be reducing the deficit by stealing Canadians' pensions. In my riding, the average annual net income is \$17,000, and it continues to decrease because of the recent economic problems in Canada and abroad.

Thus, my constituents would benefit the most from old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. Furthermore, we owe it to them. Old age security and the guaranteed income supplement are the cornerstones of our public pension system because they provide guaranteed measures to combat poverty.

Not only are the Conservatives stealing two years of future pension from Canadians but they are also targeting the most vulnerable. What is more, they are doing it for reasons that do not make any sense. Canada's old age security program is not experiencing a financial crisis. The latest actuarial report from the government indicates that the OAS and GIS represented 2.37% of the GDP in 2011. This percentage will experience a minimal increase to 3.16% in 2030 but will then drop below the current level to 2.35% of the GDP in 2060, which shows that there is no long-term viability problem for those affected by these changes.

It has been strongly established that the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs are effective and economically sound. Clearly, the government's statements are unfounded. Its position is not supported by any statistics or serious research. Meanwhile, the Conservatives are making cuts to the government agencies that could provide a solid basis for decision making.

It is true that the population of Quebec and Canada is aging. As I said before, this phenomenon is even more apparent in my riding. In my riding, in the Argenteuil and Papineau regions for example, right now, the median age is 10 years higher than in the rest of Quebec. What is more, this statistic is expected to continue to increase until 2026. Yet, growing older is not a crime. The people who will be retiring soon have worked just as hard as those in previous generations. They deserve a decent retirement at the very least.

The fact that the population is aging does not make the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs unsustainable. The government is fearmongering despite the fact that there is no causal link between the two factors. The facts tell us two things: first, the cost of the old age security program and the guaranteed income supplement is expected to drop in the long term; and second, the cost of poverty among seniors is astronomical, from both an economic and social perspective.

Like many of this government's austerity measures, this attack on the most vulnerable Canadians is despicable. In fact, this budget cut is attacking those who are most vulnerable for a number of reasons: age, illness, poverty and disability.

*Business of Supply*

•(1200)

The middle class and the less fortunate will be hit hardest by this because they are the ones having trouble making ends meet. They cannot afford to save more money.

They work at physically demanding jobs, and because their jobs are so difficult, they are unlikely to work until they are 67. Quebeckers and Canadians with chronic illness or disabilities will also suffer because they cannot always work past normal retirement age.

The median income in Papineau and Argenteuil is 10% to 20% lower than in the rest of Quebec, but household size is about the same. Goodies for big business and cuts to economic development services will not help my constituents. They are farmers and small business people who dedicate their lives to their work, help create jobs and diversify my region's economy. Old age security is the least we owe them.

I do not understand how the Conservatives can play at sorcerer's apprentice with social programs that work. Reputable economists across Canada agree that OAS and the GIS go a long way toward helping seniors escape poverty, but that more should be done.

We also know that people living below the poverty line are more likely to be victimized. All of the evidence shows that poverty makes people more vulnerable to violence, abuse and neglect. The government claims that it takes crime against seniors seriously. But its actions on this issue suggest otherwise.

The modest income guaranteed by the public system is a more effective defence against abuse than the expensive punitive measures that the government wants to introduce. Having to wait two more years for a public pension means two more years of uncertainty and risk for these vulnerable seniors.

In closing, I would like to congratulate my colleague from London—Fanshawe and my colleague from Pierrefonds—Dollard for their work on this file. I would also like to thank my colleague from London—Fanshawe for moving today's motion. She is a heroic defender of Canada's seniors, and I truly appreciate her work.

I urge all members of the House to realize that we are on the brink of doing irreparable damage to the financial security of seniors in Quebec and Canada. I truly hope that all members will support this motion on behalf of their constituents who depend on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement in their later years.

[*English*]

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in her speech, my hon. colleague mentioned that these changes will affect the most vulnerable Canadians. Would she comment on how these changes will impact those vulnerable Canadians and how Canada's New Democrats would approach this situation in terms of a strong pension plan?

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question gives me the opportunity to say that if elected to government in 2015, New Democrats would return the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS to 65 years. Instead of cutting services and spending billions on corporate giveaways, New Democrats would use practical affordable measures to lift every senior out of poverty by expanding

the GIS, not making it more restrictive. The NDP has long argued that a better option for Canadians is to expand the CPP.

My colleague also asked about who would be affected, who are the most vulnerable. I spoke about my constituents in general, those who are hard workers, those who are disabled, those who live in poverty, but also specifically, we are talking about women. OAS and GIS are important sources of income for female seniors. More than half of the income for 1.2 million seniors, or 28% of seniors, comes from OAS and GIS, but for female seniors it is 38%. That is because women are not necessarily in the workforce as long as men are. Some mothers stay home to take care of their children. As a result, this affects the benefits women receive. They also live longer. They will be experiencing greater poverty as a result.

•(1205)

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate all morning. Some New Democrat MPs have quoted from letters and so on from Canadians across the country.

The question I had as I was listening to them was whether they are correcting the record and actually telling people the whole story. Some people have some misconceptions. Some of them are 65 or 67 years of age right now. Those people would not lose any benefits and yet they were of the understanding that this would affect them.

Do New Democrats actually tell people the whole story, that we are actually protecting the system for young people who will be looking to it for some security?

The Institute for Public Sector Accountability stated:

The problem remains, and may get worse as the demographics of the country change.

For those in the workforce and coming into the plan, they too must understand the new realities and make greater financial sacrifices today for their long term retirement benefits.

We have to do the responsible thing. There is an obligation on the part of members on the opposite side to tell Canadians the whole truth.

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my colleague noticed, but I am a young Canadian. I am part of the generation that is supposedly being helped by these changes.

I have news for the Conservatives. They claim that these changes are necessary to ensure the pension system is viable for future generations, such as myself. However, it is quite to the contrary. It will hurt my generation.

Young Canadians today not only are facing record high levels of unemployment, which tends to reduce income levels later in life as well, but they are also facing extremely high levels of student debt and rising housing costs. This is eating up most of their savings which means they cannot put away extra money for their retirement.

I would also point out that it is the Conservatives who are misleading Canadians, because they are saying that it is not sustainable over the long term. Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer indicated that OAS and GIS are entirely sustainable in their current forms.

*Business of Supply*

**Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Nepean—Carleton.

I rise today to respond to the motion put forth by the member for London—Fanshawe. We oppose this motion.

It is imperative to reiterate some facts and be clear about them.

No current recipients of old age security will see any reduction in their benefits because of these proposed changes. These changes will gradually increase the age of eligibility for OAS from 65 to 67 years starting in 2023 with full implementation by 2029. This means our government is giving Canadians up to 17 years to plan and adjust accordingly.

Unfortunately, it appears that members opposite continue to take a head in the sand approach to the whole issue of OAS sustainability.

Our Conservative government is acting now to ensure the sustainability of OAS for future generations, for our children and our grandchildren. That is why we have come up with a reasonable plan to ensure all Canadians can continue to count on OAS for a more secure retirement future.

I do not believe anyone can dispute that our government is committed to ensuring seniors have the highest possible quality of life. I am proud of the work we have done to strengthen Canada's retirement income system, and more broadly to help address issues that matter to seniors.

As a result of actions taken by our government, seniors and pensioners will receive \$2.5 billion in additional targeted tax relief this fiscal year. We have introduced pension income splitting and have increased the age limit for maturing pensions and RRSPs. As a result of these actions, 380,000 seniors have been removed completely from the tax rolls. What does this really mean to the seniors I have met across this country? It means that more money will go directly into their own pockets to spend or save as they see fit.

Sadly, if it were up to the opposition parties, they would have raised taxes on all seniors, not reduced them. Whether it was a job-killing carbon tax, an increase in the GST or any number of other tax increase proposals put forward by the opposition parties, one thing is clear: if either the NDP or the Liberal Party were in power, the cost of living for Canada's seniors would be higher.

Enough of pointing out the obvious, negative, damaging effects the opposition would inflict on Canada's seniors if they were in power; rather, I would like to continue the discussion on how our government has delivered, and will continue to deliver, for seniors.

We have strengthened the support of the retirement income system and invested in a GIS top-up benefit for Canada's most vulnerable seniors. In fact, it was the single largest increase to the GIS in over 25 years. What did the opposition do? Once again both parties voted against it. In total, this top-up provided additional annual benefits for more than 680,000 low income seniors.

Going back a little further, in budget 2008 we increased the amount that can be earned before the GIS is reduced to \$3,500, so that recipients can keep more of their hard-earned money without

any reduction in GIS benefits. Once again, as they have been known to do, almost as if they were in a coalition, both parties voted against this measure.

The CPP was modernized in 2009 to make it more flexible for those transitioning out of the workforce and to better reflect the way Canadians currently live, work and retire.

We built a better framework for federally regulated registered pension plans, including ensuring that an employer fully funds benefits, even if the pension plan is terminated. We expanded pension options with the introduction of pooled registered pension plans for millions of Canadians who have not previously had access to a large-scale, low-cost, professionally administered company pension plan.

•(1210)

Shifting gears for a moment, I would also like to discuss what many consider to be the greatest policy innovation in a generation to help Canadians save for their retirement, the tax-free savings account, TFSA, which we introduced in budget 2008. I do not think I need to tell members which way the NDP voted, but I will anyway. That is right. Again, the NDP voted against it. That is shameful because the TFSA is particularly beneficial to Canada's seniors, as withdrawals from a TFSA do not affect income supports such as the age credit or OAS and GIS benefits. The TFSA also benefits seniors by giving them a savings vehicle to meet their ongoing savings needs.

As well, there have been several other initiatives that have demonstrated our support for seniors. We have eliminated the mandatory retirement age for federally regulated workers unless there is a bona fide occupational requirement. This allows the choice for Canadians to decide how long they wish to remain active in the workforce. We have also provided \$400 million over two years for the construction of new housing units for low-income seniors. Since 2006, we have provided \$220 million into the targeted initiative for older workers. This program is a federal-provincial-territorial employment program that provides a range of employment services for unemployed older workers in vulnerable communities. I am proud to report that about 75% of older workers who participate in the TIOW go on to find new employment. That is something we can be proud of.

I have just listed the unprecedented support our government has given to seniors since 2006. Let me highlight some other positive changes that were announced in our most recent budget. We announced our government will be working with a third-quarter project to assist seniors who are looking for jobs. For example, our government has for the first time introduced proactive enrolment for OAS benefits. These changes, which will start in 2013, will reduce the obligation of many seniors to apply for benefits and help ensure seniors receive the benefits they deserve.

*Business of Supply*

Unfortunately, we have heard the same fearmongering and misinformation from the opposition about the sustainability of the OAS. Whether it be through misleading and confusing op-eds sent to local newspapers or partisan mail-outs and petitions that misrepresent the facts, the opposition parties have engaged in a reckless campaign of misinformation aimed at scoring cheap political points. We have heard a lot of questions about the savings associated with the proposal. Such questions miss the point entirely. We are taking these actions to ensure the survival of this benefit for future generations. We are implementing these measures to give predictability and certainty to those preparing for their retirement.

It is particularly hypocritical of the Liberal Party to be grandstanding on such an issue. This was the same matter that Paul Martin attempted to change in the mid-1990s to ensure the sustainability of this benefit. Unfortunately, the Liberals lacked the conviction to show real leadership and decided to pass the buck to a future generation and a future government to make the tough choices in the long-term interests of our nation. It is no surprise that Canadians elected a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government.

I would ask my hon. colleagues across the way to put aside their partisan blinders and to think of the long-term sustainability of this program. There is a greater interest than their perceived short-term political gain in considering this issue.

• (1215)

We need to act now to provide Canadians the certainty they need to plan for their retirements. We have heard from many private sector economists and the chief actuary, as well as pension and financial experts alike. They agree that the increased demand of a rapidly aging population is going to threaten the sustainability of the old age security program.

I would ask opposition parties to get their heads out of the sand and to stop their wilful ignorance of the very real challenges that face our nation because of an aging population and to join with the government in voting against the motion.

**Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I just have one question. Did the government consult the provinces before changing the age to 67? We all know that the provinces will have to cope with the two years that seniors are not going to receive money.

• (1220)

[Translation]

For now, the economic burden will be downloaded onto the provinces and they will have to deal with it. The money that this government refuses to invest for seniors will have to be invested by the provinces.

Why is this government not assuming its responsibilities, instead of chucking them onto the provinces?

[English]

**Hon. Alice Wong:** Mr. Speaker, it is exactly what the government has done. We have already made it clear in our budget that any net loss that might incur to provinces and territories because of the changes will be compensated by our government.

There are 11 years to discuss this. We will keep working on this in the next provincial and federal government meetings.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has suggested that she has solid information and knowledge of the government's intentions with regard to the old age security program and the GIS program. She has suggested there will be no changes to any current recipient.

I would like to ask the honourable member this, since she has personal and intimate knowledge of the government's intentions. The current policy of allowing the optioning of registered retirement income funds for the purposes of the calculation of GIS has currently been deemed illegal by the Tax Court of Canada. It has said that within the Old Age Security Act there are no provisions to allow for the optioning of RRIF income, yet the government continues to do so. It has suggested that if the government were to ban this practice, according to policy, it would be negatively impacting current recipients of old age security and GIS benefits.

Is it the intention of the Government of Canada to amend the Old Age Security Act to allow what it is currently doing under policy to occur statutorily by an amendment to the Old Age Security Act to allow the optioning of RRIF income for the purposes of the calculation of eligibility to the GIS program?

**Hon. Alice Wong:** Mr. Speaker, the question we are debating right now is whether we should extend the age of eligibility from 65 to 67. That is what we are debating right now.

Let us listen to what some of our economists have said.

“What is less reasonable is the quasi-hysterical and downright demagogic reactions from opposition critics to what was a fairly modest proposal”. That was from the Montreal *Gazette*.

Here is another quote. “Without any changes, Canada will be hard-pressed to provide any social or institutional programs beyond seniors' income supplements and health care.” That was in a *Star Phoenix* editorial.

Another quote says, “opposition parties' efforts to panic Canadians that the...government is targeting seniors are as disingenuous as they are dangerous”. That was in a *Star Phoenix* editorial.

Another quote says, “The fact of the matter is Canadians are getting older, the demands on the system are getting greater, and the costs are going up”. That was said by Patricia Croft, economist, *The Bottom Line*, CBC *The National*.

All these quotes just confirm that our move is in the right direction.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in order to project the future, Winston Churchill always suggested looking to the past. If we are to project the future costs of the old age security program, we must look to the increase in costs we have experienced in this program in recent history.

*Business of Supply*

When the Government of Canada introduced old age security, in roughly 1950, the age of eligibility was 70 and the average life expectancy was 69. That meant that the average person would not receive any old age security. People would not live long enough. Today, one can receive old age security at 65 and collect it until the average end of life, age 82. That means a 17-year average period of collection for a given Canadian. The massive increase in costs that result from this demographic reality are obvious.

In 1975, for example, there were seven working people for every single senior. Now, there are four working people for every single senior. That trajectory will not only continue over the next two decades; it will accelerate.

This is the point where we take the recent history and project it into the future in order to see ahead and look a little further down the road. Within 20 years, the cost of OAS will triple, the number of people receiving it will double and the number of workers supporting each retiree will fall by half.

Why will this occur? The first and most obvious example is that baby boomers are going to retire. This large bubble of population demographic has travelled through the age categories and is about to reach its period of golden years when the people are too old to work and are expected to collect from the system in the period after their retirement.

There is a second reason why the costs will go up. That is that the life expectancy of that larger group of people is increasing. That means that the duration during which that larger group of people is collecting OAS will lengthen.

I did some interesting research through Statistics Canada data and found that the average life expectancy is growing by 47 days each year. That means that people who die today at their average life expectancy will be about 47 days older than the people who died last year at their average life expectancy. Every year that goes by, the average person lives almost 50 days longer. Therefore, in 2031 the average person will live to about 84. That means, under the current eligibility for OAS, a person could collect for almost two decades.

This was a program that was created with the expectation that the average person would not reach the age to collect it at all, and over the last half century, because people are living longer and because the benefit has been made more generous with the eligibility age lowered to 65 from 70, there is already a very long time during which someone can collect this benefit.

We can understand, with the increase in recipients and the relative decline in contributors, that the cost of the program is going to rise. That is exactly what the research demonstrates.

• (1225)

Using information from a report by Christopher Ragan at McGill University, the Macdonald-Laurier Institute calculated, "...by 2040 Canada would face a \$67 billion deficit (in today's dollars) based on current policies and demographic change". The same institute stated that the old age security program will account for one-quarter of total spending by the federal government by 2030.

It goes on to state:

The federal government currently spends about 15 per cent of all spending on OAS/GIS and that's supposed to be go up to about 25 per cent. But if you're going to put up spending on that by 10 percentage points of everything the federal government spends, you're going to have to either put up taxes or make some cuts somewhere else.

Just to visualize, for every \$1 that the Government of Canada spends two decades from now, 25¢ will be spent on OAS and income support for our seniors. That will mean less money for health care or higher taxes for working families in Canada. To summarize, when there are more people collecting from and relatively fewer people paying into OAS, we have eventual shortfalls. It is like a glass of water. One can only drink out of the cup what is poured into it. If there are relatively fewer people pouring into the cup and relatively more people drinking out of the cup, eventually somebody goes thirsty. That is why we must take action now to avoid such a drought.

We have a Prime Minister who, in the spirit of John A. Macdonald, seeks not short-term tactical political advantage but has the capacity to look a little farther. It is clear that there is no political advantage to the Prime Minister in making this change. It has given the opposition a great opportunity to attack the government and fear-monger with seniors, but the Prime Minister did it anyway because he is prepared to accept the short-term political cost in order to advance the long-term national interest of the nation. He is doing exactly what Germany and Australia have done, which is to gradually and with great notice increase the age of eligibility from 65 to 67, a two-year increase over a gradual period of time.

The opposition says that it opposes this approach but has no suggestion on how it would make up the cost differences that we expect due to these demographic and mathematical realities. It also proposes a 45-day work year for employment insurance, which means that somebody could work for 45 days and then collect employment insurance for the rest of the year. It has supported a Liberal bill that would make newcomers eligible for OAS after only living in the country for three years. Those proposals would cost billions of dollars and the only proposal that the opposition offers to pay for it is to increase taxes on business.

Here is the problem with that. It comes back to pensions again. The reality is that the pension system in this country is heavily reliant on those same businesses that the opposition seeks to tax. I will give one example. The Canada Post pension plan for unionized postal workers is invested in the big businesses that the opposition wants to tax. The top five holdings as of last June were TD Bank, Royal Bank, Bank of Nova Scotia, Suncor and Canadian Natural Resources, banks and oil companies, the twin villains in any left wing storyline. When we increase taxes on those companies, it is an accounting fact that they have less money to pay in distributions to their shareholders, the largest of whom happen to be pension funds that provide for seniors who worked as unionized, often blue collar people, and expect to collect a dignified retirement as a result of the after tax profitability of the companies in which those funds are invested.

We are taking responsible action to protect our safety net, to keep our economy strong and to create jobs. That is the vision of the Prime Minister. Does it take courage? Yes. Is it worth it? Absolutely.



*Business of Supply*

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. Although it was meant to be reasonable, I did hear some absolutely absurd things. For instance, he said that shareholders will receive less money because pensions have to be paid. It is a question of priorities. Would we rather give priority to all individuals, or only to those who have a lot of money?

My colleague said that the Conservatives are responsible and that they are taking measures. The first question we need to ask is this: if this issue is so important, why did this government not hold a public debate before making a decision?

• (1235)

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, the question of whether or not to hold a public debate is a public debate in itself. The answer is therefore the same as the question.

[*English*]

He also asked about the shareholders of these companies that he wants to tax more. Of course, all of the cornucopia of benefits that his party wants to sprinkle across the population it claims will come by just taxing businesses.

Who are these shareholders that he would ultimately be taxing? One of them is the Canada pension plan. Members of the NDP claim to support the Canada pension plan but that has \$18 billion invested in domestic equities. Domestic equities are Canadian companies. The only benefit that the Canada pension plan gets from investing \$18 billion in those companies is on the after tax profit of those enterprises. If we increase the taxes, the benefits are reduced. The Canada pension plan would be poorer if we start taxing its assets at a higher rate.

What the NDP and the Liberals are proposing every time they wag their finger at successful Canadian businesses and promise a tax increase is nothing less than a new tax on public pensions. It is a tax on the pensions of unionized workers at places like Canada Post. These are mathematical facts. The member cannot argue with the laws of gravity.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary a question that my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville tried very unsuccessfully to ask. It is a very simple question.

The OECD, the Chief Actuary of Canada and the Parliamentary Budget Officer have all said explicitly that OAS is sustainable over the long term. This is partly because Canada's pensions are less generous than in other countries, so that they can be sustainable, notwithstanding the aging of the population.

With those three authorities saying clearly and explicitly that OAS is sustainable, why do government members continue to say the opposite?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for the hon. member, here is what the OECD study on pensions, entitled "Pensions at a Glance 2011", actually said on page 47:

If life expectancy continues to increase, as most forecasts show, then significant increases in the effective retirement age are required to maintain control of the cost of pensions.

That was from the OECD. Those are the facts. The member referred to the OECD and I have told him what it said.

What the hon. member fails to address in his question is how pension funds, which are overwhelmingly invested in successful Canadian businesses as the principle source of income for those funds, would make up the gap if his party, along with the NDP, were to increase taxes on the earnings of those companies? He should indicate to the pensioners across this country why he wants to tax their pensions at a higher rate and how he expects them to make up the difference.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Newton—North Delta.

I want to bring to the attention of the House that this is only the first of many changes that need to be made to our pension system if the Conservatives are to have their way. This is only the beginning of what will be an ideologically-driven reduction in the amount of benefit that individuals would expect to receive from their government after working a lifetime in Canada and expecting a reasonable ability to retire.

I am one of those baby boomers who is the problem. We were constantly being told that, as a result of the improvements Canada was making to our standards of living, as a result of automation and as the result of all kinds of advances in medicine and in science, not only would we have an easier life, with fewer working hours in each week, but we would all be able to retire earlier and that we should not have to worry about retiring later.

The Conservatives are ensuring that those advances are being stopped and, in fact, they are moving backward. They want to take the country backward and that is so wrong.

I am the opposition deputy critic for persons with disabilities and the Conservatives have not yet said what they intend to do to the Canada pension as it pertains to persons with disabilities.

Two individuals from my riding, who are both on a Canada pension disability pension, have written to me. They are younger than the age at which this change to the OAS will not affect people. Therefore, they will be affected by the change in OAS. They have already realized that they will have an enormous gap in their income because their Canada disability pension ends at age 65. They are both permanently disabled, cannot work and cannot do anything to change their situation. Their income is such that they do not have enough money to save more for their retirement. The Conservatives have said over and over again that they are giving people plenty of notice so they can save more for their retirement and bridge the gap between 65 and 67. However, those two individuals and many more across Canada are not able to do that. Physically and financially, they cannot manage between 65 and 67.

*Business of Supply*

What is the answer? There is no answer from the government. Its answer is to give the provinces some money. Those individuals would be forced to apply for welfare when they turn 65. We are telling our disabled people in this country that they now must accept a lower standard of living. That is in violation of our signature on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and that is unacceptable to this side of the House.

That is one of many side effects of the government's single-minded, ideologically-driven agenda of reducing what the government gives back to its citizens. This is not about some crisis in the aging of our population. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that it is sustainable in the long run.

All of the figures show that this baby boom generation is a temporary blip but the government is proposing to make a permanent change to Canada's retirement system. We cannot and we should not move backward and take the country backward with each step of the current government.

The member opposite suggested that a person's life expectancy is growing and he used the number 82. Eighty-two is really only the number for females. It is considerably less for males. However, let us say that life expectancy is growing. Part of the reason life expectancy is growing is that we are investing money in our medical system. The current government has decided to stop increasing the amount of money we invest in our medical system, limiting it instead to increases relative to inflation.

• (1240)

That will have the impact of shortening our lives, in particular, those people who are in the 20% lowest category of income who already have a lifetime that is shorter by 20% than the rest of Canadians. We are telling those people that it is too bad, so sad, that they are going to have to work two years longer. They cannot as they are physically unable to.

The government has failed once again to warn Canadians that this is but the first salvo in what will be a domino effect of moving to age 67 for the old age security system. That system is the underpinning of every other retirement system in the country, save and except for those individuals who make way too much money to need the OAS. Those individuals who are making more than \$120,000 a year in their pension do not need our protection. However, the government has created a domino that will affect every individual who makes less than \$120,000 a year. They will need something to make up the difference between 65 and 67 or they will have to wait until 67 to retire.

The government has not said yet, but I am sure it will, that it intends to change the Canada pension plan to make it dovetail with the OAS. Has anybody here had any on that debate? Have we had any discussion on the Canada pension moving to age 67?

It necessarily must follow. We cannot leave a gap and say that one set of pension plans has an age of 65, but the underpinning of all of them has an age of 67. It does not work. Financially it does not work, societally it does not work and it does not work in determining what one's retirement will be. One cannot now plan for retirement at age 65 when a big chunk of the money is missing between 65 and 67. Therefore, not only would the Canada pension plan have to change,

and the government has not said anything about how it would do that, but all employer pension plans would have to change.

Employer pension plans are based on what a person can reasonably expect to live on when they turn the age of retirement. The age of retirement in every employer pension plan is 65. That will have to change to 67. The normal age of retirement that is stated in almost every employer pension plan in the country, and I have dealt with lots of them, is 65. However, it could not continue to be 65 if the other income support that it depended upon disappeared. Therefore, it would have to become 67 years of age.

This is another creeping piece of the puzzle of how the government would force all young people to wait to retire at 67 and work an extra two years. They would have a 45-year work life instead of 43. We are going backward and we do not want to do that.

Employer long-term disability plans all end at 65 or death, whichever comes first. Now those employer disability plans would have a gap between the age of 65 and 67. What are those individuals supposed to do? Will the employers magnanimously start paying more money into those disability plans in order to continue to pay people until 67? I highly doubt it. I think there would be blood on the street before that happened.

Will the employer life insurance plans, which all end at 65, suddenly become amended and end at 67 so the life insurance plans would continue? Will provincial welfare plans, which now end at 65, be suddenly amended to end at 67?

The government has said that it would help the provinces. However, we have a government that is saying that it cannot afford to keep this system up, but it has lots of money to hand the provinces so they can keep the system up. There is a bit of hypocrisy going on there.

Finally, the provincial disability plans have exactly the same problem as the Canada pension plan and disability plan in that the provincial disability plans end at age 65. Therefore, if someone says that we can change OAS without changing the Canada pension plan, employer plans and all the rest, they are either lying or dreaming in Technicolor.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has to deal with an aging population. Right now, there are four workers investing in pension plans for every pensioner. However, in 20 years, there will be only two workers for every pensioner.

The actuarial tables show this. We need to plan for the future.

[*English*]

Seniors today are not being threatened by anything that is being proposed, but the opposition is recommending that we do nothing.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

If we do nothing, it will cost taxpayers a lot more to pay for the benefits they want to have. Who will pay for that? Businesses, through higher taxes? What exactly are these businesses? Businesses are the pension funds. Who should pay for these additional costs?

• (1250)

[English]

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** Mr. Speaker, we do have a plan to solve this crisis, and it is not a crisis, but a blimp or bump. Part of the spending of the government is on guaranteed annual income supplements. If, as we suggest, the Canada pension plan were to be doubled, as it should be, it would end those guaranteed income supplement payments to a lot of seniors and that would reduce the government expenditures by enough to continue the system.

We do not need to move the ages from 65 to 67. What we need to do is ensure that the systems that are in place are sufficient to provide people with a standard of living at age 65. Right now those systems include a lot of government support and we suggest that the Canada pension plan take over some of that slack. This then would actually improve the government's financial position when the baby boom generation finally exits the earth.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on a comment that was made by the previous presenter, the parliamentary secretary. He asked why people were complaining that there was not a public debate when there was one. I remind the House that the only reason there is any public debate is because we, the official opposition, have called the public debate.

What is equally reprehensible to the actual amendment the Conservatives have made to access to old age security is the way in which it has been done, and Canadians have resoundingly spoken out against it. This issue is only second to the top priority of Canadians, which is protecting public health care, another area where the government has refused to conduct a public consultation.

Does the hon. member believe it would be more appropriate to table such an amendment and then open it up, over many months, for direct consultation of Canadians on a variety of options and the pros and cons?

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** Mr. Speaker, I believe this is too big an issue to be tossed away in a comment in Davos, Switzerland by the Prime Minister and then become buried as part of a much larger budget. This issue will be rammed through by the government in the passage of its budget because it has a majority. There is no attempt to have the dialogue with seniors, and not just seniors but with the children of seniors. I do not think our seniors want to leave the country worse off than they found it, but that is what the government will do.

I do not think this dialogue needs to be with seniors only. It needs to be with their children and their children's children. We will not have that dialogue when the budget is rammed through in the next few days.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it a privilege for me to speak to the motion. I am so proud of that my party is forcing a debate in Parliament over such a critical

issue that does not just affect a few people in our society, but will have an impact on the full population.

There seems to be many sides to this debate. I have been intrigued by some of the arguments I have heard today.

Let us take a look at some of the facts. The facts before us are very simple. I am sure my colleagues across the aisle will be able to understand them.

The fact is the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that there is no need to do this. He has examined the budget and there is no need to raise the retirement age.

Another fact is the report from the OECD also commends Canada and recognizes the health of our pension planning. It also does not see the need for any action to be taken.

Let us go on to people that my colleagues across the way will really respect, and that is their cabinet. Before becoming a majority government, their cabinet did not think there was a problem. In fact, when a study was done on the whole area of pensions, it did not propose any changes to raise the retirement age.

Let us get to the Prime Minister. He did not see this as an issue before the election. During the election, he made a commitment that his government would not touch pensions.

Then let us look at another fact that we keep having thrown at us, which is we are unaware of the changing demographics. I have been aware of the changing demographics for a long time, as have Canadians. I think high school students started to study the changing demographics in the 1970s and 1980s. That is one of the basic things we do.

I am one of the baby boomers, as are many of us in this room. We are proud of that baby boomer generation. There is this kind of mythology being pursued by my colleagues across the aisle that taxes are only being paid by those who are working. They use numbers that only so many people will be working and this many people will not be, but they forget to say we are a nation that has been built on immigration.

When we have shortage of workers, we bring people in from other countries, just as many of us have come. Many of the cabinet ministers have roots in other countries as well. Their ancestors came as immigrants. In the same way, Canada will continue to rely on immigrants for our nation building. We are very proud of that. When those people arrive, they pay taxes because they become Canadians and they work here.

Also retired people pay taxes. Let us not say this huge number of people, the baby boomers, are going to retire and then assume that we are not going to be collecting taxes from them. I can assure members that we tax our seniors above a certain income as well.

When we look at all of this, we begin to realize that my friends across the aisle are trying to mislead the public. We absolutely understand, now that the government has clarified, after months and months of silence, that it is going to be bringing in the 65 to 67 in a gradual manner.

*Business of Supply*

I have met with seniors. They know they will not be impacted, but they are worried about their children and grandchildren, and so they should be. They know what is like to work and to save. They see their young children and grandchildren unable to get decent-paying jobs for years and years. They see their young children ending up with huge educational debt.

• (1255)

Now they are being told, “By the way, you are going to have to work longer.” I have heard my colleagues say it does not mean people have to work longer; they are just not going to get OAS, but unfortunately, not everybody is independently wealthy, as some of my colleagues may be, and these people actually rely on OAS. The people who rely on OAS are the ones who are the most vulnerable in our society. If we had a mandatory state-run pension fund, there would not be a need for OAS. Even when OAS was implemented, it was done to lift seniors out of poverty.

It is also hypocritical. There are MPs sitting in the House who we know are going to be drawing fairly good pensions. I absolutely believe MPs, like other Canadians, should get pensions, but surely it is a bit hypocritical of us to sit in this hallowed House and start attacking other people's pensions when we are aware of our own situations. An hon. member who spoke recently is 32 years of age, and after only seven years in Parliament, he is already sitting on an annual pension of \$33,000, which he can start collecting at age 55. At the same time, we are telling the most vulnerable citizens, the ones who do not have private pensions or huge investments and dividends, that they now have to work until they are 67. Where is the fairness in that?

Canadians are very fair-minded people, and they are looking at the hypocrisy of this situation. Once again I wonder why the government is moving on this agenda at this time. I believe it is ideologically driven. It is trying to force people to save money. I have constituents in Newton—North Delta who are in their 40s and 50s and who would love to be able to save for their retirement, but they are working two or three jobs just to make ends meet for their everyday household expenses and to put their children through school. This is going to have an impact on people who have not been privileged to work in steady jobs or have pensions from work-related sources. We are talking about hundreds and thousands of Canadians who do not have access to those kinds of pension plans. The government is punishing those who are already disadvantaged. It is punishing hard-working Canadians.

I met with a young woman in my office the other day. I say “young”; she was in her 50s, but to me, at this stage, 50 is very young. She was telling me how she is a single mom of three. She has two children in university and is able to work two jobs full time because of the way she divides up her week, but she said she still hopes she can find something more. I had to ask her how she could do this. That is when she burst into tears and said she now also has the government telling her she cannot retire at age 65 and has to work until she is 67. She said, “I do not think I can last until I am 60. I am exhausted.”

We also have to think about all the people who have disabilities. What are we going to be saying to them? As it stands now, at the age of 65, they get to switch over to OAS. That is what happens. Now

we are telling them they are going to get nothing at that stage. If they get something, then we will be downloading more costs onto the provinces. One of the basic principles Canadians value is that we look after each other. Surely we want to be judged as a society by how well we look after our young, our sick, our disadvantaged and our seniors.

• (1300)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are very few issues that have had the type of impact that this issue has developed across the country when the government made the decision to increase the age of eligibility for OAS from age 65 to 67. Overwhelming numbers of Canadians across the country, of all ages, have looked at the government's actions and are really starting to challenge the government. They are saying this is just not right.

Canada as a nation has great wealth, and to be treating our seniors with such lack of respect when it comes to retirement has caused a great sense of disappointment. These programs have been in place for many years. Liberal administrations from the past have put in programs such as the GIS and the OAS, and Canadians have grown to rely on these programs.

I ask the member to provide confirmation on this particular point. As a direct result of the government's action, because of this policy change, there is no doubt that more seniors will be living in poverty in the years ahead. Would she not concur with that fact?

• (1305)

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his very well thought out question. It does not take rocket science. Actually, I think children in grade 1 would be able to understand that with this legislation, there will be more seniors living in poverty.

Whether I speak with elementary school kids, secondary school kids, people at my town hall meetings, or those who have come to raise concerns with me when I am grocery shopping or standing by a soccer field, this is what I hear from them. They do not want to see their seniors having to struggle the way they are seeing some of our seniors struggling in my riding. I know they are struggling in my riding. We are seeing that right across.

That reminds me that the budget officer actually said there was enough money in the system to make improvements for our seniors right now. The government, based on that, has decided to make it worse for seniors. Why do they not like seniors?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her impassioned speech. On March 10, a public consultation on old age security was held in the riding of Joliette. Many people came out to learn more about this issue, even though the consultation was held late on a Saturday afternoon. Some people also wrote to us.

*Business of Supply*

I would like my colleague's opinion. It is scandalous to cut retirement income without offering an alternative solution. Millions of people will end up living in poverty. How does my colleague propose we help these people? They are quite worried.

[English]

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, I think that is a question that a lot of Canadians are asking: what are the policies of our current government? Is it a race to the bottom when it comes to wages for working people? Of course, now we are going to be allowing foreign temporary workers, but employers can pay them a lot less and get away with it. In the same way, the government is saying that it is okay to force seniors to work longer.

By the way, there are many seniors who will want to work longer, and that is their option right now. We are not saying that people should be forced to retire.

Old age security is not \$30,000 a year, but a very small amount of money, something like \$500 a month. When we really look at it, it is less than \$7,000 a year, and now the government is saying people have to wait two more years. I do not know about others, but some of my constituents started to work when they were 18 or 19 and feel they are already done by the time they are 55. Their bodies are telling them they are done.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to promote the reasonable and necessary action our government is taking to ensure a sustainable old age security program. We are making these changes to give Canadians certainty in their retirement planning by ensuring this cherished social program will be there for future generations.

I will be sharing my time today with the hon. member for Calgary Northeast.

To begin, let me answer the question the opposition members still do not seem to understand: why are changes to the OAS program necessary? The answer is quite simple: these changes are being made to ensure the sustainability of the OAS program. If we do nothing, the costs of the OAS program are projected to rise dramatically, from approximately \$38 billion now to \$108 billion in 2030. How do we know this will happen? Canadians are living longer and healthier lives.

In 1970, life expectancy was 69 years for men and 76 years for women. Today, some 40 years later, it is 79 years for men and 83 years for women. What is more, the oldest members of the baby boomer generation, the largest in history, turned 65 last year. The impact of these boomers' retiring over the next two decades, combined with the increase in life expectancy of Canadians, will result in twice the number of seniors in Canada.

The OAS program is the Government of Canada's single largest program. Financed from general government revenues, OAS provides benefits to most Canadians 65 years of age and over.

The maximum annual OAS pension currently stands at \$6,481, and it is adjusted on a quarterly basis, based on increases to the consumer price index. Additional support for low-income seniors is provided through the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS, which has a maximum annual benefit of \$8,788 for single seniors and \$11,654 for senior couples. Low-income spouses or common-law

partners of GIS recipients and low-income survivors may also receive support through the allowance and the allowance for the survivor programs.

To provide some idea of the program's scope, 4.9 million individuals are currently receiving benefits. This will double to over nine million by 2030.

Let us look beyond the program's vital statistics to examine its past and where it is going.

The old age security program was established at a time when Canadians were not living the long, healthy lives they are now living. Projections show that the cost of the program will grow from \$36 billion in 2010 to \$108 billion in 2030. That same period will see the number of working-age Canadians per senior fall from 4:1 today to 2:1 in 2030. This compares to the 1990 ratio of five working-age Canadians per senior. That is quite a shift.

OAS is the largest single program of the Government of Canada, and it is funded 100% by annual tax revenues. Let me clear on this point. The benefits that were paid out this year to our deserving seniors came exclusively from the taxes that were collected this year. This is why the ratio of workers to retirees is critical to understanding why we must act now to ensure the sustainability of this program.

Today we spend 13¢ of every federal tax dollar on the old age security program. If we do not make changes now, in about 20 years that share will grow to 21¢ on every federal tax dollar spent. That is exactly why the changes announced in budget 2012 are necessary: to ensure that the OAS program remains on a sustainable path. These modifications will ensure that the OAS program remains strong and is there for future generations, as it is for seniors who currently receive these benefits.

What will this mean for Canadians? First and foremost there will be no reductions to seniors who are already collecting OAS benefits. These changes will not begin for another 11 years. Starting on April 1, 2023, the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS will gradually increase from 65 to 67, with full implementation by January 2029. Anyone who is 54 years of age or older as of March 31, 2012, will not be affected.

• (1310)

In line with the increase in age for OAS and GIS eligibility, the ages at which the allowance and allowance for survivors are provided will also gradually increase from 60 to 64 today, to 62 to 66 starting in April 2023. Regarding the allowance and the allowance for survivors, anyone who is 49 years of age or older as of March 31, 2012 will not be affected.

Let me stress again that this will occur in 2023, 11 years from now. The 11-year advance notification and the subsequent 6-year phase-in period will allow more than ample time for those affected by these changes to make the necessary adjustments to their retirement plans.

*Business of Supply*

The government will ensure that certain federal programs which are currently providing income support benefits until 65 are aligned with the changes to the OAS program. We are taking this step to make sure that individuals receiving benefits from these programs do not face a gap in income at the ages of 65 and 66.

We are also examining the impact of the OAS program changes on CPP disability and survivor benefits.

We have also committed to reimbursing the provinces for the net cost of raising the OAS eligibility so that there will be no additional cost borne by the provinces. This is in stark contrast to the previous Liberal government, which changed many programs and left the provinces to pick up the tab.

I would like to take a moment to focus on some of the great OAS program modifications announced in budget 2012 which have received far less attention so far.

To improve flexibility and choice in the OAS program for those wishing to work until later in life, the government will allow for the voluntary deferral of the OAS pension for up to five years starting on July 1, 2013.

We should think about the people I spoke of earlier, those who are enjoying longer, healthier lives and who may be considering extending their careers. This is a trend we are already seeing when it comes to the average age of retirement. This measure will give these individuals the option of deferring their OAS pension to a later time, and as a result, they will receive a higher monthly amount. However, I should add that GIS benefits which provide additional support to the lowest income seniors will not be adjusted.

The details of these actions are spelled out in the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity bill which was introduced this morning and will implement various provisions of the budget.

Our government will also be improving services for seniors by putting in place a proactive enrolment effort that will eliminate the need for many seniors to apply for their OAS benefits. This measure will reduce the burden on many seniors of completing applications for benefits for which the government knows they have qualified.

As an added bonus, this automatic process will reduce the government's administrative costs, which I would observe is what sets our deficit reduction strategy apart from our predecessor's in that we are improving services to Canadians while reducing the cost of administration. Proactive enrolment will begin next year and will be fully implemented by 2016.

In summary, it is the responsibility of the federal government to think of the future and to act in the long-term interests of all Canadians. Sadly, the opposition has refused to acknowledge the realities of our aging population in order to play political games.

Private sector economists, financial institutions and former Bank of Canada governors have confirmed that we must act now to make the OAS program sustainable. That is exactly why I cannot support the opposition's motion.

● (1315)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, those who support increasing the OAS eligibility age from 65 to 67 say that the new rules will not be applied right away and that people will have enough time to prepare for the changes. I guess they mean from an economic standpoint.

However, think about those who do physical labour, construction workers, steelworkers who work outdoors, winter and summer, those who work on their feet their whole lives at a grocery store, and those who spend their lives at a factory job, on a concrete floor. At age 65, these people are already absolutely exhausted. It is hard for them to work that long.

Has the government considered any measures for helping those who are already physically exhausted to prepare for the change in retirement eligibility from 65 to 67? The government should not wait 10 years to come up with a plan to help them, because these people will not be in better shape in 10 years than they are now.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Mr. Speaker, there is advance notice of 11 years and a 6-year phase-in period with respect to the changes. This would allow time for Canadians who would be affected to make the necessary changes to their retirement plans.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have raised this question previously with other members of the governing party and I will put the same question to the hon. member.

She stated that she is thinking of future generations. The obvious question to ask is, did her government consult with younger generations? Did the government, in consulting, present a variety of alternatives? Did her government do an analysis of which sectors of the economy, which members of society, in particular women, who are the highest rate of Canadians living in poverty, would most likely be hurt by making them wait two more years to receive their pension?

● (1320)

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer that question by referring to a comment made by our colleague across the way, the hon. member London—Fanshawe, who said, "Action now is critical. We need a plan in place. We need the structure in place to deal with this dramatic shift in our country's demographics".

We agree with that comment. We agree because we know that we must work hard to ensure that OAS, Canada's largest single program, remains strong and is available to those future generations, not just for those who are approaching retirement but for those who will be retiring later. That applies to women and men. We are going to ensure that the program is available for future generations of seniors.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in my hon. colleague's opinion, what would happen if we did not implement this OAS sustainability plan? What would the future implications be?

*Business of Supply*

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. This is a very serious issue, one which we are taking very seriously.

Today we spend 13¢ of every tax dollar on the OAS program. By 2030, this will grow to 21¢. If the changes are not made now, this program is not going to be sustainable for future generations.

The former governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, said that we are up against a wall. That is exactly the truth. We have to do something now to protect those future generations. This is a vital program that is cherished by all Canadians. We must work to ensure it is sustainable for future generations.

**Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to debate the motion on old age security moved by the member for London—Fanshawe. I would like to begin with a quote from the hon. member whose motion we are debating today:

Issues facing seniors are only going to intensify as more Canadians reach their senior years. Action now is critical – we need a plan in place, we need the structures in place to deal with this dramatic shift in our country's demographics.

I am pleased that she understands why the government needed to act in a reasonable and forward-thinking way to secure the financial future of our seniors. However, I must admit I am a little puzzled, given the text of this motion, as I can only assume from her enlightened comment that she will be supporting this government's plan to "deal with this dramatic shift in our country's demographics". Again, those are the words of my hon. colleague who moved this motion.

It is for this reason that on March 29 in the economic action plan 2012, the Government of Canada took the first necessary steps to ensure the OAS program remains sustainable for generations to come. The demographic challenge we are facing will leave Canada with the lowest ratio of working-age Canadians to seniors in our nation's history. Our reasonable changes will not reduce a single penny from any senior's pension. The age of eligibility for OAS will gradually increase from 65 to 67 years starting in 2023 and will be fully implemented in 2029.

People who are close to retirement, that is, people 54 years of age and older as of March 31 of this year, will not be affected by this policy change. We are providing Canadians with a lengthy period of notice in order to adjust their retirement saving plans. Our changes will ensure OAS is put on a sustainable path so it is there when Canadians need it.

As David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada and former deputy minister of finance said, "We are at least 15 years late" in dealing with this issue. He said, "it's been well understood for a long period of time".

The demographic clock is ticking. There is no time to turn a blind eye to this issue. As legislators, it is our duty to look to the future and to take the necessary action now to ensure the long-term prosperity of our great nation.

This is not an issue of how much money will be saved, but rather of how we will ensure the viability of the OAS program in the long term. We want to ensure that these cherished social programs will be there for future generations when they need them most. Thanks to

the changes we are proposing, Canadians can have confidence that OAS will continue to be sustainable for generations to come.

The facts on OAS are clear. The number of Canadians over the age of 65 will increase from 4.7 million to 9.3 million over the next 20 years. Consequently, the cost of the OAS program will increase from \$36 billion per year in 2010 to \$108 billion per year in 2030. OAS is the largest single program of the Government of Canada and it is funded 100% by annual tax revenues.

Let me be clear. The benefits that were paid this year to our deserving seniors came exclusively from the taxes that were collected this year. This is why the ratio of workers to retirees is critical to understanding why we must act now to ensure the sustainability of this program. In 1990, the ratio of working-age Canadians to the number of retired Canadians was roughly 5:1. Today, this ratio has shrunk to 4:1. By 2030 it will be reduced to only 2:1.

If we do not make changes, 21¢ of every tax dollar will be committed to the OAS program by 2030. That is a huge increase from the 13¢ of every tax dollar the program costs today. This would represent about one-fifth of every federal tax dollar to fund a single government program. This increase in cost would have dire effects on other government priorities, such as health, defence and public safety.

• (1325)

The only other option would be to significantly raise taxes, an option that would cripple Canada's international competitiveness and, by extension, our prosperity as a nation. It is our priority to ensure that the Government of Canada continues to have the fiscal room to make the right choices for all Canadians now and in the future. The time for action is now.

All members in this place know that government debt, inaction and complacency can choke an economy. We must not allow ourselves to be forced into a situation where we are faced with a choice between the country's financial security and our commitment to aging Canadians who have worked long and hard to build this great country. Our actions in the past amply demonstrate our commitment to seniors. I will give some examples of what our government has done for seniors.

We increased the guaranteed income supplement, commonly known as the GIS, in 2006 and again in 2007 for a total of 7% over and above regular indexation. In budget 2008, we also increased the GIS earnings exemption from \$500 to \$3,500 so that GIS recipients who work could keep more of their hard-earned money. Under budget 2011, our government introduced the GIS top-up for those most in need. This represents an increase of \$300 million annually.

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As of July 2011, seniors who were eligible for GIS received additional annual benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples. This represents the biggest increase in the GIS in 25 years. It is improving the financial security of more than 680,000 low income seniors across Canada.

We also made it easier and more straightforward for older Canadians with low incomes to access the benefits by introducing automatic GIS renewal. All they need to do is file their annual income taxes. We are providing more tax relief for seniors and pensioners, saving them \$2.3 billion per year.

The results are clear. The incidents of poverty among seniors in Canada has dropped from a rate of 29.4% in 1978 to 5.2% in 2009, one of the lowest rates of low income amongst OECD countries.

As I have just demonstrated, the Government of Canada is taking concrete steps to help seniors. We are committed to retirement security for Canadians and we have done much more than the previous Liberal government did to reinforce that security over the past few years.

It is precisely because we want to protect the old security program that we are introducing these modest changes. Nearly every OECD country has taken steps to ensure sustainability of their public pension systems, including the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden and Japan. We are not alone and we are not waiting to take action.

Unfortunately, all we are seeing is wilful ignorance from the members of the opposition. It is particularly concerning that the Liberals intend to support this motion. It was their own finance minister, Paul Martin, in the mid-1990s who proposed changes to the retirement income system to ensure the long-term sustainability of these benefits. Unfortunately, the Liberals lack the principle to ensure the long-term interest of our seniors and our country. That is why Canadians have rejected their failed approach and elected a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government.

We have a duty to our constituents and our country to rise above petty partisan politics and the short-term mindset of perpetual campaigning. This is why I reject the partisan nature of this motion and will be voting against it.

I urge my colleagues across the way to think beyond their narrow self-interest and do what is best for the long-term prosperity of our nation and to support the government's common sense approach by voting against this motion.

• (1330)

[Translation]

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, people I care about who are not quite 50 and have children used to work for companies that have closed their doors. These people have had to find new jobs, jobs that often pay much less. They are very worried about how they are going to manage to save enough money for retirement when their children are heading to CEGEP and university.

I would like to know what the government is doing for them. They will not even be able to retire at 67 because they will not have had the means to prepare for retirement.

[English]

**Mr. Devinder Shory:** Mr. Speaker, of course I would like this program to be sustained. It is a key program. However, the fact is that the number of Canadians over 65 collecting OAS will increase from 4.7 million to 9.3 million in the coming years if we do not act. The fact is that this program will only be implemented in 11 years and will be fully implemented by 2029, 17 years from now, which is enough time to plan for the future.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would challenge the member on a number of his points. However, suffice it to say that at the end of the day there are hundreds of thousands Canadians across this land who are very upset with the government. They believe the government has deceived them.

In the last federal election, the Conservatives did not say a word about increasing the age from 65 to 67 and now they have brought down this policy that will have a profound impact on seniors across this land. Ultimately, it will lead to more seniors living in a poverty. This is something the Liberal Party does not support and we have taken the position that it should be reinstated back to the age of 65.

I wonder if the member will be bold enough to take this to the doors in the next election and say that the Conservatives want people to retire at 67 as opposed to 65. Based on the responses I get from my constituents and other Canadians, the government has made a bad mistake here. I would advise the member—

• (1335)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. The hon. member for Calgary Northeast.

**Mr. Devinder Shory:** Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member who Canadians are upset with. The result of last year tells us very clearly who Canadians were upset with.

The hon. member says that we are cutting from seniors. We are not cutting from seniors. The fact is that no reduction, not a penny, is being made to seniors' pensions.

An OECD study entitled, "Pensions at a Glance 2011", states:

If life expectancy continues to increase, as most forecasts show, then significant increases in the effective retirement age are required to maintain control of the cost of pensions.

We are taking action to ensure this program is sustainable and remains sustainable.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

I am happy to speak today to the New Democratic opposition day motion to have this Parliament oppose the increase in age of eligibility for old age security.



*Business of Supply*

As I travel throughout my riding and speak with constituents, there is no issue that is more important than the matter of income security for our seniors.

A caring society must take care of our seniors.

However, earlier this year, in front of billionaires in Switzerland, the Prime Minister first broke the news that the Conservatives would raise the age when Canadians can retire and receive their old age security from 65 to 67. Predictably, an uproar ensued. Is it any wonder the Prime Minister wanted an ocean between himself and some upset seniors?

Economists have flatly rejected the Conservatives' claim that today's OAS will become unsustainable. At the peak of the baby boom retirement wave, the share of GDP spent on OAS will increase by less than 1% over today's level and then decline again.

What this really is about is priorities. The Prime Minister will ask Canadians to work two more years without OAS to pay for his skewed Conservative priorities, including the failed F-35 fighter jets, his costly prison agenda and more corporate tax giveaways.

The Conservatives are playing with numbers and manufacturing a crisis. The stated rationale is that the change would put the OAS program on a sustainable path. The Conservatives are using a temporary increase in OAS and GIS costs as an excuse for permanently cutting back on a remarkably effective and affordable social program.

The independent Parliamentary Budget Officer says that Canada can afford to let its seniors retire at 65 with the country's old age security pension intact.

While old age security and guaranteed annual income expenditures will grow with more seniors, so, too, do government revenues. By 2030, the size of the economy will be more than double and budgetary revenues will double. The burden goes up and then goes down, so there is no crisis.

Do members know who is really concerned about these changes besides our seniors? Younger families are concerned. The Prime Minister is asking future generations to bear the weight of his upside down priorities.

We need to remember that the OAS is part of our heritage and it is sustainable.

The NDP has long championed public pensions. Founding members of the CCF, which later became the NDP, J.S. Woodsworth and Abraham Heaps, pressured the Liberal government of the day to introduce Canada's first public old age pension in 1927. Since then, we have pushed to make these plans more effective, as well as being instrumental in the introduction of the GIS and the CPP. The Canada pension plan is in good shape. Not only can we look after our seniors, we must.

The NDP wants to expand the CPP through an increase in premiums and raise the guaranteed income supplement for seniors living in poverty. We need to remember that the age of eligibility is an important tool to prevent poverty among the most vulnerable seniors, including many with disabilities. It means that 50,000 social assistance recipients would be forced to live in poverty for two more

years if the age requirement were changed. The lost income to Canadian seniors from this change will be significant. It will mean a loss of roughly \$30,000 to the poorest seniors over these two years and roughly \$13,000 over these two years for Canadians who only receive OAS.

Currently there are nearly five million seniors collecting OAS and 1.7 million seniors collecting GIS. One in three Canadian seniors already receives the GIS.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

I have spoken to the residents of a number of communities in the Nickel Belt riding. Their main concern, no matter what their age, was retirement security and pensions.

After three years of economic turmoil, the Conservative government increased the amount of old age security benefits by a measly \$1.50 a year, despite the fact that 225,000 seniors live below the poverty line. The cost of living is rising and bills are piling up. Now that they are being forced to pay HST on heating oil, many seniors are no longer able to make ends meet.

The Prime Minister's plan is not only inappropriate, it is insulting. It is our seniors who, through their hard work, made Canada a wonderful country. They deserve to live with dignity. We can take care of our seniors and put measures in place for future retirees. There are solutions, but the Conservatives do not have the political will to implement them.

I am very concerned about the problems that seniors are facing, whether it be with regard to retirement security or access to home care or health care. I am determined to put forward concrete, practical and achievable solutions because our seniors deserve nothing less.

[*English*]

Let us be clear about the OAS and its importance to Canadians. Unlike the CPP or private savings, the OAS is a universal pension that does not depend on a retiree's previous labour market participation or participation in a registered pension or savings plan. In the words of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the OAS and GIS are the basic building blocks of the public universal system, which makes up the anti-poverty part of the system.

*Business of Supply*

This delay in receiving OAS until age 67 will not only increase poverty in general, but will be particularly felt by senior women, especially those who are alone. Many senior women were not part of the paid labour force earlier in their lives. OAS and GIS are particularly important retirement instruments for them. Senior women are less likely than senior men to draw income from the CPP, private pension plans, RRSPs or employment earnings. New Democrats will not support the Conservatives' mismanagement of the economy, which will end up harming seniors. The eligibility age for OAS and GIS should be kept at age 65.

[Translation]

The OAS and GIS are quite sustainable and are actually projected to decrease in cost relative to the size of the economy in the long run. During the last election campaign, the Prime Minister hid his plans to cut support for seniors; however, the NDP has always been clear. We want to improve retirement pensions, not weaken them.

The NDP has met with seniors' groups to talk about the effects that this measure will have on seniors and to discuss ways to oppose the Conservatives' ill-considered cuts. The best option for Canadians would be to enhance the CPP, as the NDP has been saying for a long time. A modest increase in premiums would make it possible to fund the NDP's project, which involves doubling CPP benefits for all Canadian workers. This would provide real and sustainable retirement security for Canadians.

•(1345)

[English]

What is the agenda of the Conservatives? Why was this policy announced in Europe and not in the 2011 election campaign?

The Conservative 2011 election platform stated, "We will not cut transfer payments to individuals or to the provinces for essential things like health care, education and pensions". On June 7, 2011, the Prime Minister stood in the House and said, "This government has been very clear. We will not cut pensions". So much for the promise of the Conservatives. Not campaigning on this crucial issue is simply unacceptable, but the Conservatives not only hid their agenda, they misled Canadians by repeatedly claiming they would not cut pensions.

The real issue is whether, as a society, we care for our seniors. New Democrats believe this is a priority for Canada.

**Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the demographics are clear. We have heard a tremendous amount of thoughtful comment today on the position of OAS and its sustainability long term.

Let me read a quote by David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, who stated:

—we're at least 15 years late in getting started in raising that age of entitlement for CPP, OAS and the normal expectation as to how long people would work in the private sector with private-sector pension plans. That's absolutely clear, and because labour participation rates will start to fall later this decade, we're up against the wall.

This is not a partisan voice or a Conservative voice. This is someone of eminent qualification and respect. Would the member opposite please comment on David Dodge's comments.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle:** Mr. Speaker, if I am not mistaken, I believe David Dodge was appointed by the Conservatives.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Liberal, Liberal.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle:** Anyway, the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer, and I stress independent, says the complete opposite. He says that OAS is quite sustainable. All of our research says the same thing, that it is quite sustainable as it is today. The only other voice, the so-called economist, the Prime Minister, says that it is not sustainable.

It is so easy for the Prime Minister to cut pensions when he and his front bench are not affected. If he wants to get serious about cutting pensions and raising the age of eligibility, he should start by cutting the pensions of his front bench members and raising the age where they can collect pensions.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we should be very clear on this. It was the Conservative government that in essence created this fictitious crisis. There is no crisis facing our seniors in terms of numbers and so forth. This is all something which the Conservatives have made up.

The bottom line is Canadians as a whole believe in our old age supplements and pensions and want the government to leave it alone, to leave it at age 65. There is no justified need to increase it from 65 to 67.

Tens of thousands of Canadians from across the country have signed petitions, emailed or called. They are trying to send a very strong message to the government, and that message is very simple: what it has done is wrong. They are asking the government to reduce it back to the way it was. There is no reason to increase it from 65 to 67.

I take it that my colleague to the right of me agrees with that assertion.

•(1350)

**Mr. Claude Gravelle:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly do agree with that statement. This is a crisis that has been forced upon us by the Conservative government.

If we want to talk about crises, maybe we should talk about the F-35s. We should talk about building prisons that we do not need. We should talk about \$16 orange juice. Those are crises. However, the OAS is not a crisis. It is manufactured by the Conservatives.

I can assure my colleague that when the NDP becomes government in 2015, we will lower the age back to 65.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with regret and a lot of bitterness that I rise today to denounce the Conservatives' plan to increase the eligibility age for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement from 65 to 67 years of age, even though the plan is financially viable.

*Business of Supply*

I said that I am rising with regret because, just like us, the majority of Canadians believe that the Conservatives should never have started this debate. On March 29, when the 2012 budget was tabled, the government sparked shockwaves among the elderly and Canadian workers; yes, shockwaves, nothing less.

The Conservatives are using a temporary rise in the cost of the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs as an excuse to make cutbacks in this remarkably effective, affordable, and essential social program.

The Conservatives' plan is to gradually increase the eligibility age from 65 to 67 from 2023. The measure will be fully implemented by January 2029. Thus, on March 29, as they watched this government deliver an irresponsible budget, Canadians aged 54 and under learned that, after having worked for several decades for the benefit of our country, they will have to wait two long years more before being able to think about a well deserved retirement.

The NDP has been standing up for these public pension plans for a long time. Early last century the CCF, the NDP's predecessor, put ongoing pressure on all governments of the day and got them to introduce the very first public old age pension plan in Canada in 1927. Since that time, we have fought tirelessly to make this plan more effective, and we played a key role in getting the guaranteed income supplement and the Canada pension plan adopted.

Currently, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement are major sources of income for the elderly, especially women. Approximately 5 million seniors receive old age security benefits and 1.7 million seniors receive the guaranteed income supplement. For approximately 510,000 seniors, that is 12% of Canada's elderly, the old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits account for over 75% of their total income. Imagine if you were suddenly deprived of 75% of your income; I do not know how you would get by.

Women account for 80% of the people who derive over 75% of their total income from the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs.

If they did not have access to old age security benefits and the guaranteed income supplement, approximately 100,000 newly-retired Canadian seniors would slip below the poverty line. The poverty rate for seniors would more than quadruple, increasing from 6% to 25%.

Is that really what the Conservatives want for our seniors? Is that how they reward the people who built our nation? I would really like to know. That is not what Canadians want and it is not what we are all about. The men and women of this country want their seniors to have decent living conditions.

That is not a priority for the Conservatives. They prefer to increase the eligibility age for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement by two years and erode the living conditions of our seniors.

Therefore, we must ask the following questions: how will 65-year-olds survive in 2029? Why are the Conservatives increasing the age of eligibility? According to their arguments, the increase will make the old age security program sustainable. However, that is false.

Old age security and the guaranteed income supplement are very viable. In fact, it is expected that the cost of these programs will diminish in the long term relative to the size of the economy.

Professor Thomas Klassen of York University is an expert in pension plans and retirement. He is one of the many experts who do not agree with the change in the eligibility age. He said, "I haven't heard any academic argue that there's a crisis with OAS, which is why I was surprised a few days ago when the Prime Minister seemed to say there was a crisis...there's got to be a lot more evidence that there's a problem, and I don't see that evidence."

Let us talk about the evidence. The government's most recent actuarial report indicates that old age security and the guaranteed income supplement represented 2.7% of GDP in 2011. By 2030 it will be 3.16%, but then it will fall to 2.3% of GDP in 2060, which is below the current percentage.

● (1355)

The gradual increase in the costs of the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs until 2030 is due to the baby boomers retiring. We all know this; it is no surprise to anyone. All of the actuarial reports on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement have been saying it since 1988. I was three years old; that is a long time ago. Some of my colleagues here were not even born yet.

The Conservatives therefore cannot claim not to have been aware of these rising costs during the 2011 election campaign. That was one year ago.

The Conservatives, moreover, never addressed that subject during the election campaign. No Conservative candidate ever said anything about wanting to make seniors work two more years in order to survive. Yes, that is what I said: to survive.

The loss of income resulting from the Conservatives' plan to raise the eligibility age will be a deciding factor in how Canadian seniors are to live. It will result in losses of about \$30,000 a year for the poorest seniors over those two years, and about \$13,000 over two years for Canadians who receive only old age security.

The Conservatives do not think this is a problem, because they think Canadians just have to work longer.

Some workers are physically unable to continue working after a certain age.

Twenty-five percent of retired people say they retired for health reasons. For Canadians with an annual income under \$20,000, that proportion rises to 38%.

That means that about 25% of seniors retire involuntarily. Those Canadians are quite simply not able to work two more years.

What the government is telling us with this insane plan is that the poorest and most vulnerable Canadians will have to work longer than the others, in spite of their health problems or their physical condition.

*Statements by Members*

A few days before the budget that sealed the fate of workers under the age of 54 was tabled, I held a public forum in my riding on the old age security and guaranteed income supplement programs with my colleagues, the members for Pierrefonds—Dollard and Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who at that time were the critics for seniors and pensions. I met with more than 70 worried people, very worried people. They included young and not-so-young people, all of them upset about what the Conservatives intend to do. At that point, however, there was still hope.

In my riding, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, there are a lot of jobs in agriculture and industry. Those jobs are physically very demanding. We cannot ask workers who are 65 years old, who have worked at physically demanding jobs all their lives, to keep working two years longer before they are eligible for a program they are entitled to and have contributed to all their lives.

One person especially touched me when he told me how sometimes it was not the will to work that was missing, it was the body that had limitations. That man and all the people who were there said they believed that other solutions could have been considered, so as not to keep creating a gulf between rich and poor, as the Conservatives are so fond of doing.

Those people, like the financial experts, are asking the Conservatives to rethink their position on raising the age of eligibility.

But the Conservatives do not listen to advice they do not like, and they do not listen to Canadians.

That is why the NDP will continue to stand up so that Canadians of all ages—and yes, I am saying all ages—can live with dignity.

•(1400)

[English]

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to first thank the member for her very impassioned speech. I will give her a second to wipe her crocodile tears.

Our government proposed in the budget to increase the GIS for Canada's most vulnerable seniors by 25%; her party that voted against that 25% increase, the single largest increase in Canadian history.

I would like to ask her to stand in her place right now and apologize to Canada's seniors for depriving them of a 25% increase last year, forcing them to wait a full year to receive it.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin:** Mr. Speaker, that makes no sense, and I do not see why I should apologize.

Every time I ask a question in the House, they say that the NDP voted against it, blah, blah, blah.

Of course we will vote against measures that are stupid and discriminatory and that do not lift Canadians out of poverty. I will not apologize.

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The time for government orders has expired. When we return, there will be four minutes remaining in questions and comments.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Kenora.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### RECOGNITION OF SERVICE

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate a hard-working constituent for her decades of outstanding service as a nurse in Sioux Lookout.

Debbie Whalen, a native of Sioux Lookout, received her nursing degree at Lakehead University in 1973 and returned to her hometown to start her career. She worked in many areas of nursing, as well as serving in various executive positions for the Ontario Nurses' Association Local 81, including several terms as president.

In 2010 Debbie made the move to the new Meno Ya Win Health Centre in Sioux Lookout, which offers the most extensive health services of any hospital in the town's history. On May 11, after 39 years as a nurse in Sioux Lookout, Debbie is retiring.

As a former nurse in Sioux Lookout zone, I know first-hand the scope of her responsibilities in serving one of the largest areas with remote populations in this country.

We are proud of Debbie's service and appreciate her. We hope she enjoys her well-earned retirement.

Debbie's nursing career is just another example of what is so great about the great Kenora riding.

\* \* \*

### CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR DISASTER

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today in the House to mark the occasion of the 26th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine. This nuclear explosion impacted the lives of millions in Ukraine as well as in Belarus and the Russian Federation.

The devastating environmental consequences of radioactive contamination, the health impacts—particularly childhood thyroid cancer—and the socio-economic costs are all tragic results of a tragic and preventable accident.

Canada and the global community must be guided by the memory of the tragic Chernobyl disaster to take all necessary action to ensure such a catastrophe never occurs again.

*Statements by Members*

As a director of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, I stand together with my constituents, my colleagues in the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group and my New Democrat colleagues in commemoration of this disaster, in remembrance of the victims and in solidarity to take all necessary action to prevent any such disaster from occurring in the future.

\* \* \*

**INTERMOUNTAIN SPORT FISH ENHANCEMENT GROUP**

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to present Canada's National Recreational Fisheries Award to the Intermountain Sport Fish Enhancement Group at their annual banquet in Dauphin, Manitoba.

Created in 1989 by DFO, these awards recognize Canadians for their achievements in protecting and enhancing recreational fisheries.

The Intermountain group has established a Camp Fish youth mentoring program, with a stocked trout pond for youth fishing and education. They have created fish passage projects that facilitate access by fish to vast new areas of spawning habitat, thus ensuring healthy fish populations.

The recreational fishery in my riding is truly world class because of the fisheries conservation work done by these dedicated volunteers.

Groups such as the Intermountain Sport Fish Enhancement Group are Canada's real environmentalists, because they roll up their sleeves, get down to work and make a better environment for us all.

Our government is proud to recognize the efforts of those who make such an important contribution to conservation and recreational fishing in Canada.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**DAFFODIL MONTH**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every April, the Canadian Cancer Society undertakes a campaign to fund its fight against cancer. People across the country are wearing daffodil pins.

This year, I am pleased to be working with other extraordinary ambassadors, including Natasha St-Pier, Marie Turgeon, AngeLo Cadet, Steven Guilbeault and my colleague from Bourassa on Quebec's Daffodil Month campaign. Together, we have raised thousands of dollars and counting.

Money raised during Daffodil Month really changes things. It helps the Canadian Cancer Society fund life-saving research, make reliable and up-to-date information about cancer available, provide community support services, implement prevention programs and lobby the government for laws and public policies that protect the health of Quebecers.

I salute the work of the volunteers and organizers. Above all, I salute the courage and determination of the 93,000 Canadians diagnosed with cancer in 2011.

● (1405)

[*English*]

**YOM HA'ATZMAUT**

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, 64 years ago Israel achieved its long-promised independence as millions of Jews, many of them Shoah survivors, returned to their aboriginal homeland to build a democracy in the desert.

In those six and a half decades, they have built one of the most technologically, democratically, culturally and educationally advanced nations on earth.

It is the only place in the Middle East where it is safe to be a woman, gay, Christian or Baha'i.

I have prayed at the Western Wall, celebrated Shabbat in Judea and Samaria, and witnessed the sun set over Jerusalem.

With these fond memories in mind, I proudly wish my Israeli friends happy Yom Ha'atzmaut.

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**DAFFODIL DAY**

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Canadian Cancer Society's Daffodil Day.

Every three minutes cancer claims another Canadian, and April is the month to fight back. While treatment and therapies have never been better, we must all continue to do our part to prevent, empower and inform Canadians about this disease.

Every one of us knows someone who has been affected by cancer. My partner of 24 years was one such person, and his memory is very much a part of the work I do. I know I am joined by my colleagues and all Canadians in remembering our friend and our great leader, Jack Layton.

For more than 50 years, Canadians have worn the bright daffodil to honour and show support to those living with cancer and to remember those who have died. This Friday, April 27, let us all commit to strive for a healthier world to reduce the risk of cancer.

\* \* \*

**TERRY FOX MILE 0 SITE**

**Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it was April 12, 1980, when Terry Fox dipped his artificial foot in the Atlantic Ocean off St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, to begin his journey across Canada to aid cancer research.

His Marathon of Hope, a 5,400 kilometre run on one leg, meant running a marathon every day for 143 days, perhaps the most outstanding feat of athleticism displayed by anyone ever.

*Statements by Members*

Two weeks ago, on the 32nd anniversary of the Marathon of Hope, I was in St. John's with the Minister of the Environment, responsible for Parks Canada, and Terry's family. Together we officially opened the Terry Fox Mile 0 site, featuring a bronze statue of Terry with a stunning view of St. John's harbour.

Terry Fox is a personal hero of mine and an inspiration to millions of people all around the world. He was an ordinary young man who showed extraordinary courage and determination. The Terry Fox Mile 0 site is a fitting tribute and a place where one can come to reflect and be inspired by this great Canadian.

I invite all Canadians to go to St. John's to see this magnificent tribute and read the inscription on the nearby cairn, which states, "This is the place where a young man's dream began and a nation's hope lives on".

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**WHEELCHAIR ATHLETE**

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House today to recognize Josh Cassidy, who hails from Burgoyne in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Josh is on the Hill today for the Rolling Rampage event. He recently raced in the men's wheelchair division of the 116th Boston Marathon, winning and also setting a new world record.

Shortly after he was born, Josh was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a cancer of the spine and abdomen, which resulted in the amputation of both of his legs.

Josh has been committed to working hard and has overcome many obstacles. Because of this, he beat the world record in the wheelchair division of the Boston Marathon by two seconds. He finished an astounding 3.14 minutes ahead of the second place contestant. Josh has firmly established himself as the frontrunner for the London Summer Olympic Games.

Josh is a shining example of what hard work can do if one puts one's mind to it. I congratulate him and wish him all the best in his future races. Constituents in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and indeed all Canadians are proud of Josh's accomplishments.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**WORKPLACE SAFETY**

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, if people were to travel to our community of Hamilton, Ontario and go to the corner of Main and Bay Streets, they would see a very stark monument.

It was made from a sheet of steel and has on it a visibly injured worker clinging by his fingers. This is a monument to workers injured or killed on the job or those suffering from occupational disease. It was erected on April 28, 1990.

The purpose of the monument's casting was not only to commemorate the loss of workers' lives but to remind us all of the risks taken by workers each and every day when they go to work.

Every day workers go to work expecting to return home to their families, but all too often they do not. In this modern age rush for productivity, mistakes are made, and workers trying to meet the new realities of the modern workplace often pay the ultimate price.

April 28 is not just a day for workers to stop and remember those who are dead, but also for all of us to recommit to fight for safer workplaces for all Canadians.

\* \* \*

**ISRAEL**

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today we celebrate the 64th anniversary of the State of Israel.

*Yom Ha'atzmaut*, as it is called in Hebrew, marks the day in 1948 when modern-day Israel was born out of the ashes of the Holocaust. Israel remains to this day the first and only pluralistic democratic nation in the Middle East.

Israel is one of Canada's greatest friends. We have a free trade agreement, knowledge exchange, and collaboration in science, technology and innovation. More importantly, we share the values of freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

While other nations deny Israel's very existence and the right of the Jewish people to a homeland, our Prime Minister has said:

Israel can rest assured that we will uphold its right to exist as an independent Jewish state as we continue in our efforts to promote peace and security in the region.

I would ask all members to stand with me in recognition and celebration of Israel's 64th independence day.

*Chag Ha'atzmaut Sameach.*

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING**

**Mrs. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on April 28, Canadians will mark our National Day of Mourning to honour all workers killed or injured at work.

This initiative was led by the Canadian Labour Congress and was officially recognized by our institutions with the passing of the Workers Mourning Day Act, which had been introduced by the former NDP member for Churchill, Rod Murphy.

This is an opportunity for us New Democrats, and for all members of this House, to show solidarity with victims, as well as their families, friends and colleagues. Every day, three working Canadians lose their lives on the job. This reminds us of the importance of creating safe and healthy workplaces.

More importantly, this reminds us of something that is crucial: we must never compromise when it comes to the health and safety of our workers—never.

[English]

### JAN KARSKI

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a true hero, Jan Karski.

In 1939, Karski joined the Polish Home Army as a liaison officer. During the war and at great risk to his own life, Karski was smuggled, in disguise, into a Nazi German concentration camp in eastern Poland where he saw with his own eyes mass extermination taking place.

Scarred by what he had seen, Karski delivered an impassioned plea on behalf of Poland's Jews to the top Allied officials in November 1942 and to President Roosevelt himself in July 1943. Unfortunately, his pleas went unanswered.

At a time when so many were silent, Karski, a righteous among the nations, spoke out, and so it is fitting that this year he will posthumously be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in the United States.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

### LAKELAND MILLS SAWMILL

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on April 28 we mark the National Day of Mourning, the day we remember those killed or injured while in the workplace.

Our thoughts and prayers will continue to be with those affected by Monday night's explosion and fire at the Lakeland Mills sawmill in Prince George in northeastern B.C.

We were all deeply saddened by the news of the workers who passed away due to their injuries, Alan Little and Glenn Francis Roche, and also those who continue to fight for their lives. These are people who went to work to provide for their families and to make our province and country a better place in which to live.

We are known in northern B.C. for our strength and resiliency, and after this devastating event, we will need to rely on these traits now more than ever. During this difficult time, I have seen our community come together and draw upon this strength, determined to support one another as we grieve this terrible loss.

I ask all members to join me in offering our condolences to the workers and their families who have been sadly affected by this tragedy.

\* \* \*

### WORKPLACE SAFETY

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every day men and women in Canada risk their lives for their livelihood. In supporting themselves and their families, at least three people are killed on a daily basis with thousands more injured in the workplace annually. More often than not, these tragedies could have been prevented.

We must be vigilant in ensuring Canadians and foreign workers in Canada have access to the training and equipment they need to be

### Statements by Members

safe on the job. Our workplaces above all else must be environments that foster safety for their workers, no matter the industry.

On behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada and our parliamentary caucus, I extend my deepest sympathies to the friends, families and colleagues who honour the loss of a loved one on this day, and I wish a quick recovery to all those who have been injured on the job.

\* \* \*

### WORKPLACE SAFETY

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the National Day of Mourning is a day to commemorate those injured and killed in the workplace.

Canadians know that far too many accidents on job sites are not accidents at all, but are entirely preventable.

Just in the past year, B.C. has witnessed tragedy at two separate sawmills. There was one in January in Burns Lake, which killed two and injured 19. Just this past week in Prince George in disturbingly similar circumstances, two more workers were killed and 22 were injured.

Don Dahr, my father-in-law, lost his father in the workplace when he was very young. He has dedicated much of his life to protecting workers in the workplace. He has often said that the rules and regulations that protect Canadians at work are written in blood.

When workers leave their homes and families to go to work, we must commit to them that we will do everything in our power to make sure that they return home safe at the end of the day.

\* \* \*

### NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the National Day of Mourning is marked every year on April 28. The Government of Canada officially recognized this in 1991 to commemorate those workers whose lives have been lost or who have been injured in the workplace. The National Day of Mourning has since spread to about 80 countries around the world.

This Saturday we will remember those who have lost their lives or have been injured in the workplace. These people are hard-working Canadians who went to work, provided for their families, and worked to make Canada a better place in which to live.

Even one workplace death or injury is too many for the family that is affected, which includes families of members of the House who have been personally affected by a workplace death.

The annual observance of the day hopefully will serve to strengthen the resolve of all of us to continue to establish safe conditions in the workplace.

My colleagues and I remember those who have lost their lives. We reaffirm our collective commitment to ensure that all Canadians can return home safe and sound at the end of the day.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING**

**The Speaker:** Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand that there is agreement to observe a moment of silence to commemorate the National Day of Mourning and to honour the memory of workers killed or injured at work.

[Translation]

I invite hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

●(1420)

[Translation]

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister left the door wide open to extending Canada's military mission in Afghanistan beyond 2014. He spouted rhetoric and stated that the government had not received this specific request, despite the fact that reliable military sources have told the media that a request was in fact received from the United States.

Is the Prime Minister saying that the United States has not made any contact whatsoever with Canada regarding the possible extension of the mission in Afghanistan?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I said that I have had no such contact.

I also said that our priorities remain the same, namely, to ensure that Afghanistan is safe so that it does not become a threat to our security and to ensure that Afghans themselves assume greater responsibility for their own security.

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister stated, "all of the military missions committed to under this government have come before the House". However, that is not the case, and he knows it.

The last extension in Afghanistan was authorized by the Prime Minister acting alone. In November 2010, he said to Jack Layton:

The government has never submitted missions that do not involve combat to the House of Commons. This is a training and technical assistance mission and that is why we are acting on executive authority.

Is the Prime Minister going to act unilaterally once again to keep our troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, as I said, the government has every intention of bringing military missions to the House of Commons. In this case, this is a training mission. It is important that we ensure that Afghanistan is safe and is not a threat to global security. It is important also that the Afghans are responsible for their own security. That is why we are there, to prepare them to assume the full responsibility for their own security.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, our troops have been in Afghanistan too long already.

Canadians have told us that they do not want another extension. They do not want a Prime Minister who vacillates on whether there will be an extension. They want a Prime Minister who respects the role of Parliament, period.

Canadians want a clear answer from the Prime Minister. Will he keep our troops in Afghanistan past 2014, yes or no?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have made myself very clear. Unlike the NDP, we are not going to ideologically have a position regardless of circumstances.

The leader of the NDP, in 1939, did not even want to support war against Hitler.

**An hon. member:** There was no NDP.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper:** Okay, it was the CCF, same difference. Parties do change their names from time to time.

Our position is we will do what is in the best interests of Canada.

\* \* \*

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let us speak about Reform Party policy. We know the Prime Minister likes to control his message. He would not let his Conservatives do something that he did not agree with.

Could the Prime Minister tell Canadians why he allowed his Conservative MPs to reopen the debate on abortion?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every private member can table bills and motions in the House. Party leaders do not have any control over that. This particular motion was deemed votable by an all-party committee of the House. I think that is unfortunate. In my case, I will be voting against the motion.

●(1425)

[Translation]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I see that there will be a debate in the House on Motion M-312, a Conservative motion. It is a debate on abortion. If a Conservative motion triggers a debate on abortion in the House, then the Conservatives have reopened the debate on abortion. Otherwise there would be no debate and no vote.

Why has the Prime Minister allowed the abortion debate to be reopened?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every member has the right to move a motion. Party leaders have no control over that. An all-party committee decides whether or not these motions are votable.

I think it is unfortunate that this all-party committee decided that the motion is votable. In my case, I will be voting against the motion.



*Oral Questions*

[English]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General, in committee today, said that he had “received letters from the deputy ministers of the departments indicating that the departments disagreed with our conclusions”. That is with respect to the F-35 contract.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister this: was he aware that such letters were being sent in, or were his ministers aware that such letters were being sent in to the Auditor General on behalf of the departments in question?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a standard procedure during an audit for departments to respond to the Auditor General. The Auditor General has reported on this matter in his report, as the leader of the Liberal Party knows full well. The government accepts the conclusions of the Auditor General and is acting on those conclusions.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I note that the Prime Minister did not actually answer my question with respect to his own personal level of awareness with respect to whether those documents were sent in and what they said.

The problem we have is that there does not appear to be anything called ministerial accountability left in the Government of Canada.

The Prime Minister refuses to take responsibility for the conclusions of the Auditor General's report, which are extremely critical of the lack of information provided to Parliament. His ministers refuse to take responsibility for the conclusions. His House leader says there is a big difference between what the departments have said and what the government itself is concluding.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister this: does he or does he not accept the conclusions of the Auditor General of Canada—

**The Speaker:** The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many ways to give the same answer. The government has clearly accepted the conclusions, and the government has been quite detailed about the steps it will take to implement those conclusions.

[Translation]

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if they accept the conclusions, then let us pay close attention to what the Auditor General clearly said. He clearly stated that when National Defence provided answers, its representatives knew that the cost was likely to rise, but chose not to inform parliamentarians.

So the question is very simple. If the Prime Minister accepts the conclusions, does he accept responsibility for misleading Parliament?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, those are not the Auditor General's conclusions.

This government accepted the Auditor General's conclusions. The Auditor General made a single recommendation, and the government agreed to it. The government also made a number of commitments to respond to the Auditor General's conclusions.

**ETHICS**

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Conservatives' version was that every expense was repaid. Today, it is that other expenses were repaid. I did not, however, hear the Conservatives condemn the minister's dubious choices.

International aid will drop to less than 0.25% of our GDP. That is in stark contrast to the minister's extravagant lifestyle. The minister's ethical choices are seriously out of sync with what she chooses to do when it comes to international aid.

Do the Conservatives believe that the minister's choices are appropriate, yes or no?

• (1430)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have answered those questions several times. Our government requires that travel on government business be at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer. That is why, under our government, travel expenses have dropped 15% compared to what they were under the former Liberal government. The minister repaid any inappropriate expenses.

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, after days of questioning, the Conservatives are finally realizing that the “mimosa minister's” expenses are inappropriate. She has now had to pay for her lavish stay in London because it was inappropriate.

If that was inappropriate, what about the more than \$21,000 it cost to travel by limousine? Make no mistake, the minister is not being asked to take a sleeping bag and her own finger sandwiches to international meetings; she is simply being asked to be vigilant and show some judgment.

Will the Conservatives issue clear guidelines on what they consider appropriate and inappropriate?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our expectations are very clear. Our government requires that travel on government business be at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer.

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** The only thing that is clear, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a minister who refuses to take responsibility for her abuse of the taxpayers.

If we asked the average Canadian taxpayers if it is appropriate for her to charge \$1,000 a day to ferry her one mile to and from work, they would say absolutely not. The House leader yesterday said it was perfectly appropriate. The minister refuses to stand up and tell us whether she thinks getting caught was good or bad for her career. The question of appropriateness should not be about getting caught; it should be about doing the right thing.

Will the minister stand up, apologize to Canadians and tell us exactly what expenses she is going to pay back? Why is she—

**The Speaker:** The hon. government House leader.

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said several times, our expectations as a government are very clear. We expect that ministers will conduct government business at a reasonable cost to the taxpayers. In practice, that has had very positive beneficial results to the bottom line. The fact is that government spending by ministers on travel is down 15% and on hospitality 33% lower than the government before us. That is what we are seeking to achieve. That is one of the reasons why the minister has repaid the inappropriate costs in this matter.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I like his discussion about their expectations. The expectations with the minister are pretty obvious. When she got caught racking up \$16,000 in limos, she was sorry. When she got caught racking up \$5,000 to joyride at the Junos, she was sorry. Now she has tried to stick taxpayers with \$3,000 for one mile. Is she sorry? We have not heard that from her.

She almost got away with it. This is a woman who needs her own personal third party manager. I have not heard what steps the Conservatives are going to take to keep this woman in line.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, our expectations as a government are quite clear. All ministers are expected to conduct business at a reasonable cost to save taxpayers' dollars. In practice it has worked, and it has worked very well. That is why travel expenses overall for government ministers are down 15% compared with our predecessors, and hospitality expenses are down by one-third.

The minister in this case has apologized. The member has not acknowledged that fact. She has repaid any inappropriate expenses. He seems to not want to acknowledge that fact. She has done the right thing, and I think we should thank her and accept her apology.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, using a limousine to go two kilometres seems appropriate for the Conservatives.

Eating foie gras and drinking champagne in their limousines have made the ministers in this government lose all contact with reality. Responsibility for this ethical decline rests entirely on the shoulders of the Prime Minister. When the example comes from the top, the others feel justified in doing whatever they like.

The information circulating at this time about the Old Port of Montreal Corporation is particularly disturbing.

Are the Conservatives going to agree to the NDP's request to have a parliamentary committee summon the officers of the Old Port of Montreal Corporation, to fully explore the allegations of mismanagement?

• (1435)

[English]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the committee decides to do is its business. I am pleased to inform the House that I think we are all alarmed at the expenses or the reports of these expenses. My office has been in

touch with the Old Port of Montreal board and chair and we have also been in touch with the Office of the Auditor General. We have asked the Office of the Auditor General to conduct an independent audit into these allegations.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**41ST GENERAL ELECTION**

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Conservatives is that they promised to do a better job, but they have been caught in the same scandals as the Liberals before them.

We can see this in the election fraud case. We learned this morning in the *Ottawa Citizen* that the investigation is being expanded and the net is tightening on the people who committed the fraud. Once again, the reports refer to calls made to people who were not voting Conservative to send them to non-existent polling stations.

The Elections Canada investigators are so motivated and want so much to get to the bottom of the story that they are taking their own personal plane to go to northern Ontario to look into it.

When are the Conservatives going to co-operate fully with Elections Canada?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after being caught making false allegations about this, the New Democrats had to apologize for what they said. They had to apologize because they had their facts wrong. The member should stand up in the House and reiterate the apology his colleague from Winnipeg Centre had to make outside the House.

The New Democrats have absolutely no credibility after the false allegations they had to—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

[English]

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely clear that only the Conservatives are under investigation for dirty tricks, and the parliamentary secretary knows that.

The parliamentary secretary knows that the investigation into voter suppression is getting wider. Investigators were in northern Ontario to interview people who were victims of this voter suppression scheme. These people were called on election day and directed to polling stations 20 miles away. We have examples from coast to coast to coast.

Will the parliamentary secretary finally acknowledge that this scandal goes well beyond Guelph?

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in this House, and it is surprising that the member is unaware of this, the NDP is actually under investigation for not just its 2011 annual general meeting, but also its 2009 annual general meeting, where it took tens of thousands of illegal donations, contrary to the Accountability Act, from large unions in this country. That was made very clear by the Chief Electoral Officer. The only thing holding up the investigation is the fact that the NDP is withholding the information that the Chief Electoral Officer would like to see.

With respect to the specific allegations made by the member, once again I will quote the Chief Electoral Officer. He finds it troubling—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for anyone concerned about electoral fraud, that answer does not cut it, nor does misquoting the Chief Electoral Officer.

When asked if this investigation was serious, what the CEO actually said was, “I think it is absolutely outrageous. This is totally unacceptable in a modern democracy”. When asked if the investigation goes beyond Guelph, he said, “If you ask me, it is ten provinces and one territory”.

The CEO knows it and Canadians know it. Why will the government not admit that the Conservatives are under investigation for dirty tricks committed during the last election?

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, now members opposite are misquoting the Chief Electoral Officer.

We need to be clear about the NDP's record on this. It has gone about a pattern of baseless allegations and has had to apologize time and time again. It is almost as though the member from Winnipeg needs a professional apology writer with the number of times NDP members have to apologize for the things they say outside this place.

What the Chief Electoral Officer did say was that he finds all of the sweeping allegations of wrongdoing with no facts to support them troubling. I would ask the member to provide her facts.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the facts are very clear. Only the Conservative Party is under investigation for electoral fraud.

The Minister of Industry was found guilty of breaking the Conflict of Interest Act and is being investigated for two other violations.

The Minister of National Defence provided misleading information on the F-35 and attacked the Parliamentary Budget Officer when he told the truth.

What sanctions did these ministers face? None, zilch, zippo, not even 20 lashes with a wet noodle. Nothing at all.

I have a simple question. How many times does a minister have to break the rules before he or she is forced to take responsibility for his or her actions?

• (1440)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's characterization of events and ministers is very inaccurate and is certainly inflated rhetoric. It is nothing new coming from him. He is continually inflammatory on these issues.

The fact is that this government is composed of ministers who have been doing outstanding work, and Canadians have been benefiting. The results are there: close to 700,000 net new jobs since the last election.

I know the members opposite are not interested in the economy, but Canadians are interested in jobs, the economy, economic growth, a prosperous future, reducing the debt and reducing the deficit. They see that with the budget implementation bill that was brought in today. Our economic action plan 2012 will continue to deliver good results for Canadians.

\* \* \*

**ETHICS**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of International Cooperation.

Could the minister tell us when she decided to pay back the additional costs for the limousine? Was it at the same time as she paid back the costs for the hotel and the spectacular glass of orange juice, or was it later on? Was it in fact after the debate took place yesterday with respect to the cost of the limousine?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our expectations have been clear. As I have said many times, we expect ministers to conduct government business at reasonable cost, which is why the minister has repaid inappropriate expenses. That is as it should be.

What also should be would be for the Liberal Party to for once take accountability for the \$40 million it took from taxpayers through the sponsorship scandal. I know it has paid back a million dollars or two million dollars, but there is still a fair bit outstanding on that big bill to the taxpayers.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today's answers on the Conservative election fraud scandal clearly show a false defence of diversion, distraction and distortion. The facts show a different picture. Only the Conservative Party was served a search warrant and is named in voter suppression calls. Elections Canada is now seizing phone records in Nipissing and only Conservatives' operatives have been named, including a high-level staffer in the Conservative war room.

Why will the Prime Minister not drop the charade, apologize to Canadians and call a royal commission?

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again we see the opposition making sweeping, baseless allegations. Virtually nothing of what the member just indicated is factual. The Conservative Party is not being investigated. There are no such search warrants. The Conservative Party has been operating and supporting Elections Canada in this from the outset. What we saw from the Liberal Party was denial and anything it could possibly do to cover up the fact that it made illegal robocalls, used fictitious phone numbers, used phony names and broke the law.

Why were the Liberals not front and centre saying what they—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**PENSIONS**

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources is contradicted by the OECD, which says, and I quote:

[English]

“There is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pension ages in the foreseeable future” in Canada.

[Translation]

She is also contradicted by the Chief Actuary and the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who predict that the cost of federal benefits to seniors relative to the economy will rise by only one percentage point by 2030 and then fall again.

Does the minister agree with those figures or not? Yes or no?

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there will be no reductions in seniors' benefits. In order to assure the sustainability of old age security, the age of eligibility will be gradually increased from 65 to 67 starting in 2023 and fully implemented in 2029.

Our government is committed to sustainable social programs and a secure retirement for all Canadians. Our changes will ensure that OAS is there for future generations of Canadians. They will have it when they need it.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**JUSTICE**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadian women of all political stripes have seen the hypocrisy of this Prime Minister, who promises one thing in public and then does the opposite in the House.

During the election campaign he promised not to reopen the abortion debate, but today he cannot even control his caucus and

prevent his ministers from saying that violating women's rights is a personal choice.

The Prime Minister has to do more than tell us he is going to vote against motion M-312. Is he going to send his backbenchers and his ministers a clear message to make them understand that the right to an abortion is not negotiable?

• (1445)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been clear on this subject: he will not reopen this debate.

[English]

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the facts are simple. Today in this House in the year 2012, because of a Conservative motion, we will be debating a woman's right to choose, years after this issue was dealt with.

The Prime Minister has told Canadians for years that he will not be reopening the debate, and here we are. Is this his Trojan agenda, his real agenda, for women in Canada? When will the Conservatives stop rolling the clock back on Canadian women's rights?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister spoke to this very clearly earlier in question period and I will simply restate it. The Prime Minister has made it clear that he will not reopen this issue.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, nothing at all is clear. The Conservatives are in the process of reopening the abortion debate, which is part of their overall attack on women's rights.

Their latest victim is the Women's Health Contribution Program. This assault on women's equality sends a clear message: if our research contradicts the Conservatives' ideology, we have to pay the price.

Yet this program is essential to research involving Canadian women.

What do the Conservatives gain by turning their backs on Canadian women's health?

[English]

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government's priority when it came to controlling spending was to protect front-line health services that were not being provided by these groups. This fund was established at a time when there were not too many programs aimed toward women's health.

Since forming government, we have invested over \$750 million toward women's programs. Shame on the NDP and the Liberals because they voted against it.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, based on that response, we gather that it is perfectly all right to make women pay the price for the government's damaging cuts.

*Oral Questions*

Does the minister understand that these groups may be forced to close their doors permanently at a time when we need to know more about women's health, not less?

The Centres of Excellence improve women's health outcomes, and that is something that we all benefit from.

Why is the minister arguing against the health promotion work of these groups, work that saves health care dollars? Will the minister reverse these cuts?

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC):** As I said, Mr. Speaker, this fund was established at a time when there were not many programs aimed toward women's health. We have spent more money than any other government in promoting women's health.

Our government continues to assist the provinces and territories in the delivery of health care. We will be transferring historic amounts over the next few years: \$40 billion by the end of the decade.

Again the NDP members voted against each one of those initiatives.

\* \* \*

**SPORT**

**Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we saw the Washington Capitals eliminate the Boston Bruins with a goal by Joel Ward in overtime of game seven. Every kid dreams of this kind of accomplishment.

Unfortunately, some racists turned to Twitter and unleashed outrageous and bigoted comments against the great hockey player.

Could the Minister of State for Sport please comment on our government's position with regard to racism in sport?

**Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government condemns these racist comments. This behaviour is disgusting and cannot be tolerated. There is no room for such discrimination in any environment, especially when it involves something as positive as sport.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**AIR CANADA**

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we are sitting across from a heartless government that refuses to enforce the law while Canadian workers are having trouble making ends meet. While the highly skilled employees of Aveos are on forced leave, Air Canada is relocating jobs to Germany, Italy, Ireland, Hong Kong, and the list goes on. Canadian expertise is being snubbed.

When will this government finally decide to enforce the law so that it becomes part of the solution rather than part of the problem?

• (1450)

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course the Conservative Party understands the impact that this has on workers, and it has already expressed its position very clearly. Legal opinions have been sought and provided.

These are business decisions. Aveos was a private company, and its owners made the decision to cease operations. This issue does not concern the government; it is a matter for a private company and its management.

I will make no further comment, since the issue is before the courts.

[*English*]

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, these might be two private companies, but they are bound by a very unique piece of legislation that ensures that this maintenance is done in Canada by Canadian workers.

The Aveos workers in my riding of Winnipeg Centre cannot understand why their federal government will not lift a finger to help save their jobs. We need a champion to fight for our jobs, not a rollover to just do whatever the companies want.

There is legislative protection for these jobs. Why does the minister not enforce it? Why does he not fight for Canadians and their jobs?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our position has been clear from the beginning. As this matter concerns two private companies, we do not interfere in private companies. It was not the government that closed Aveos. The Aveos owners closed the companies. We will not be contemplating a bailout.

I will not comment any further because this is before the courts.

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**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, job losses and food safety are serious and important issues, but the government is ignoring the facts. The facts are that food inspection stations are being shut down and front-line food inspectors are being cut. The facts do not lie.

The Conservatives are cutting front line services and this will cost farmers more and increase the risk to Canadians' health.

Will the minister stand up and admit that his government is firing food inspectors and closing inspection stations?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have explained to the House over these past two days, Canada has a very robust and superior food safety system. This is not just recognized here in Canada; this is recognized around the world.

Regarding inspection staff, since 2006 this government has been responsible for a net increase of over 700 new inspection staff within CFIA. Every time we have moved to enhance CFIA with additional funding, the hon. member and his colleagues have voted against it.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not true.

### Oral Questions

The minister never answers the question. Saving money on food safety puts Canadians' health in jeopardy. We want to know why the government is firing food inspectors and closing inspection stations. The government continues to keep Canadians in the dark about these cuts. Farmers who care about Canadians' safety are very worried.

Why does the minister want to hide the cuts from Canadians and Quebecers? It is crazy.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in a report on its ranking of countries, the OECD said, "Canada is one of the best-performing countries in the 2010 Food Safety Performance World Ranking study. Its overall grade was superior, earning it a place among the top-tier countries."

Every time we have taken measures to enhance and improve our food safety system, the opposition has voted against those measures.

\* \* \*

[English]

### GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians will be negatively impacted by the callous termination of the community access program, which in Guelph alone provided support for 34 public computers.

The cut will affect hundreds of thousands across Canada, especially in rural communities and particularly those most in need, who use these computers daily to look for jobs, access government websites or do research, because the cost of a computer or Internet access is not affordable for everyone.

Will the government please reverse its ill-conceived decision to terminate the community access program?

•(1455)

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the community access program was launched in 1995 and has successfully met its objectives.

The vast majority of Canadians are now connected to the Internet at home, while many more have access through their mobile devices. By this summer, more than 98% of Canadian households will have access to basic broadband service.

Federal funding will continue to support youth internships at community Internet sites, and this will provide young Canadians with vital skills and work experience needed to make a successful transition to the workplace, while contributing to job creation.

\* \* \*

### VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government recently announced changes to the veterans independence program to provide for upfront grants for grass cuttings, snow removal, and housekeeping services.

My question for the minister is this: will these payments be subject to income tax?

[Translation]

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear the hon. member acknowledge that 100,000 veterans are now going to benefit from a simple payment method, which will decrease the amount of paperwork for our veterans. Indeed, the same conditions will apply and our veterans will receive a payment twice a year, which will eliminate millions of transactions. We will continue to reduce paperwork for veterans.

\* \* \*

[English]

### EMPLOYMENT

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's addiction to temporary foreign workers is bad for our communities and bad for our economy.

In order to pander to their large corporate friends, the Conservatives are moving to massively speed up the hiring of hundreds and thousands of temporary foreign workers. This makes no sense, especially since Canada's youth unemployment rate is a staggering 14%—

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Newton—North Delta has the floor.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, Canada's youth unemployment rate is a staggering 14%.

Why are the Conservatives exploiting foreign workers to drive down wages right here in Canada?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the premise of the question is entirely false. The question itself is absolutely outrageous.

The reality is that there are large and acute growing labour shortages in many regions and industries in this country where employers actively seek to recruit Canadians to fill jobs that must be filled to do the necessary work, but qualified Canadians do not apply. When that happens, the businesses have a choice: either they go overseas to do their work, go out of business, or access people from abroad who must be paid at the prevailing Canadian regional wage. They are governed according to the same rules and protections as all Canadian workers.

That is not about exploitation; it is about opportunity both for overseas workers and Canadian industry.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservatives, the NDP is in favour of a fair system for foreign workers and our youth.

With the plan proposed by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, foreign workers will be paid 15% less than Canadians for equal work. The Conservatives want to exploit foreign workers, and this will lead to reduced wages for all Canadian workers.

Is this irresponsible and reckless measure part of the Conservatives' economic inaction plan for the 1.4 million Canadians who are unemployed?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. The reality is that, even in Quebec, there are labour shortages in several industries and several regions.

The member raises a good question: why do we have a youth unemployment rate of 14% in an economy that has hundreds of thousands of jobs available? There is a labour shortage. It is clearly a problem.

Should we tell businesses to shut down and close their doors, or should we help them to attract people from abroad who are eager to come to Canada, to work and contribute to our economy and, yes, at the same wage level as Canadians?

\* \* \*

[English]

#### HEALTH

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was pleased to hear the government announce reforms to the health care benefit packages received by asylum seekers. I know that many of my own hard-working, taxpaying constituents have raised concerns in past years about the inequality of such services. They have, in fact, pointed out occasionally that Canadian seniors did not have access to the generous benefits received by asylum seekers. Would the minister please explain to the House what these reforms are, exactly?

● (1500)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately many Canadians realized that there was a terrible inequality in that we were giving better health benefits to asylum seekers, including fake asylum seekers and illegal migrants who arrived in smuggling operations, than we were giving to hard-working, taxpaying Canadian citizens.

That is not right, which is why yesterday we announced changes to the interim federal health program for asylum claimants to say that the benefits they get will be no more generous than the health benefits that are available to taxpaying Canadian citizens. We want to indicate to asylum seekers that they will get essential care until their claim is rejected, in which case we expect them to respect our laws and leave Canada.

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#### AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a responsible government would not put the health and safety of its citizens at risk. The Conservative government chose to make massive cuts of \$56 million to food inspection and \$68 million to the

Public Health Agency, thus compromising food safety and endangering Canadian lives. Three cabinet ministers in the current federal government were in Mr. Harris's Ontario cabinet when massive public health and environmental cuts caused the tragic Walkerton incident.

Surely they warned the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food against his dangerous decision. Why did he not listen?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned already today, Canada is recognized around the world for having a superior food safety system. Our cost-saving measures do not reduce food safety. In fact, in this last budget we put aside \$50 million to enhance our food safety system. The opposition has already voted against that \$50 million, but the budget implementation bills will be in front of Parliament very shortly. They have the opportunity to now vote for this increased funding for food safety.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities said that the closure of the Economic Development Agency of Canada offices in Laval and Montérégie would not affect services. However, reducing the number of regional offices and service personnel will result in a poorer understanding of regional realities and needs. The government cannot take care of Argenteuil's economic development from Gatineau.

Why does the minister want to deprive the regions of opportunities and impair our regional economic diversity?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** So, Mr. Speaker, development can be managed from Argenteuil and Laval, but not from Gatineau? That is very interesting indeed.

None of the Economic Development Agency of Canada's regional offices have been closed. None of the offices in the Quebec regions have been closed. The Laval and Longueuil operations have been centralized in Montreal. They are all already organized into an urban community for transportation and plenty of other things, and they have already been working together for years.

That being said, the money will still be there for all regions of Quebec. We will remain very active in all regions of Quebec, and I will continue to visit all regions of Quebec.

*Business of the House*

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on March 29, 2012, our government introduced plans for jobs and growth, economic action plan 2012.

The plan is forward-looking in addressing long-term challenges and opportunities for Canadians. It is a plan that Canada's leading economists have applauded. Now our Conservative government is squarely focused on implementing it and its pro-job, pro-economic growth measures.

Can the Minister of Finance please explain how we are moving forward with economic action plan 2012?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

He is asking, of course, about the number one priority for Canadians, which is creating jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity. It is the first question this week on that subject. I have been so lonely over here. We have to get the opposition asking questions about what really matters to Canadians.

Today we introduced the first budget bill, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, to implement key measures from economic action plan 2012. This includes responsible resource development, helping build a fast and flexible economic immigration system, promoting the stability of the financial system and the housing market, and so much more.

**Some hon. members:** More. More.

• (1505)

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CANADIAN HERITAGE**

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' obsession with controlling information is such that they shred documents without even looking at them. We never know what the envelopes that arrive at the Prime Minister's Office might contain, except that in this case, they are apparently stuffed with historical documents that deal with politics, music and sport.

Is the information contained in the destroyed envelope the missing piece of the puzzle that is preventing the Prime Minister from finishing his famous book on hockey?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we always take care with those kinds of documents.

\* \* \*

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since the Conservatives came into office, we have watched them try to impose openly ideological measures and laws.

There are many examples, be it the firearms registry or their frequent attacks on the opposition parties, but their most nauseating practice remains the perpetual attacks against a woman's right to choose.

My question is quite simple. Is the Prime Minister aware that the creation of a pro-life parliamentary committee charged with circumventing the medical and legal arguments, as the member is proposing, in fact reopens the abortion debate? The Prime Minister should instead be reaffirming the right to choose, as Quebec's National Assembly and the Bloc Québécois did unanimously.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been clear. He will not reopen this debate.

[English]

**The Speaker:** That concludes question period for today. I think we will go to the Thursday statement first, and then I will hear the point of order. Then I understand there is a further intervention on the question of privilege.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

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**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great interest that we ask the government what the plan is for coming legislation. We know the ways and means has been adopted. Unfortunately, the budget implementation act is next. We are very curious as to the timing of this debate, how long the government is expecting it to take and if it remains committed and addicted to its recent penchant for time allocation. This addiction is worrisome in the democratic sense. It might like to invoke it on Motion No. 312, but it cannot.

It has now been two months since the unanimous motion giving more powers to the Elections Canada CEO passed through the House. It is an NDP motion trying to seek democratic reforms that are necessary for elections. I seek an update from the government on that important motion.

I also seek an update on whether the government will seek time allocation on the act that the finance minister just referred to, which strips away section 35 of the Fisheries Act, which is the core environmental protection Canada has relied on for many decades. Will we even be allowed to discuss and seek the potential of that act being restructured so it is actually reaffirmed and strengthened?

[Translation]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by welcoming the new House leader for the official opposition. I look forward to working with him. I anticipate a positive and constructive approach.

[English]

In terms of his question relating to the issue of the motion of the House dealing with the Chief Electoral Officer and concerns about whether the statute in place was appropriate for him to do his job, I believe that motion had an expectation of about half a year before the government was to respond. I anticipate we will fulfill that.



On his question about the budget, the government introduced Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act. The bill implements key measures from economic action plan 2012. Our plan is working, as we have already created nearly 700,000 net new jobs since the recession. Most of these are full-time jobs.

Canadians want to see a productive, hard-working and orderly Parliament, focusing on their priority, the economy. Thus we hope to have the bill come to a vote on May 14. That target will allow members to study the bill, which implements important measures from the budget that Parliament has already approved.

[*Translation*]

As hon. members are aware, May 2 will mark the one-year anniversary of Canadians electing a strong, stable, national, Conservative majority government, and it is only fitting that on this one-year anniversary, after members and caucuses have had close to a week to study the bill, we will debate our government's plan to continue creating jobs and economic growth in Canada. We will continue debate on Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, on Thursday, May 3, and Friday, May 4.

• (1510)

[*English*]

During the budget bill study week, before that debate starts, we will cover other business.

This afternoon we will complete debate on the NDP opposition motion.

Tomorrow we will start debate on Bill C-36, the protecting Canada's seniors act, which addresses the great concern of elder abuse. This bill is part of our government's efforts to stand up for victims. This is the end of what has been an important national victims of crime awareness week, where we saw the Prime Minister make an announcement of increased support for families of missing children. We also saw the introduction of Bill C-37, the increasing offenders' accountability for victims act, which follows through on our campaign commitment to double the victim surcharge that convicted criminals pay.

[*Translation*]

Monday, April 30, will be the second allotted day. In this case, I understand we will debate a Liberal motion. I would invite the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie to share with all members—and, indeed, with Canadians—what we will be debating that day, so that hon. members can prepare.

[*English*]

On Tuesday, we will finish third reading debate on Bill C-26, the citizen's arrest and self-defence act. Based on my discussions with the new opposition House leader, I am confident that we will complete that debate early in the morning.

Then we will move on to Bill S-4, the safer railways act, which was reported back from committee yesterday. Given the importance of improving the safety of our railways, I hope this bill is able to pass swiftly.

Since I anticipate a productive day on Tuesday, I will then call Bill C-36, but only in the event that we do not finish earlier—that is,

### *Points of Order*

tomorrow—followed by Bill C-15, the strengthening military justice in the defence of Canada act, a piece of legislation that has now been around for three Parliaments and should get to committee where it can again be studied.

\* \* \*

### POINTS OF ORDER

#### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in response to the comments made by my colleague for Timmins—James Bay during question period today, when he asked, “I have not heard what steps the Conservatives are going to take to keep this woman in line”. I realize this may have been said in the heat of the moment, but it is very rare to refer to anyone in the House by gender. I fear that the ease by which the statement escaped the member's lips reflects his actual feeling toward women parliamentarians.

I would call on him to show some respect and apologize to all female parliamentarians in the House.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, you know I have great respect for your judgment and I will certainly listen to whatever decision you make on this. I also recognize your desire to not turn these issues into debates. However, the question at hand had to do with serious questions asked day after day about a minister's refusal to take accountability. Therefore, the simple question with respect to the refusal of a minister to stand up to speak and take responsibility is this: is there a plan to keep that minister in line?

If I said “woman”, I certainly would retract that and say “minister”. Is there a plan to keep that minister in line? That is a legitimate question. I can remove the word “woman”, but I would say this: where is the plan to keep that minister in line? She has broken the trust of taxpayers repeatedly. I would like to see that minister stand in the House and explain if there is a plan.

**The Speaker:** It seems that the member has addressed the particular concern.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, because the member for Timmins—James Bay seems to be playing word games and not simply apologizing, I would like to draw this fact to your attention: whether we are speaking in English or French, sexist comments are unacceptable in this House, period. We may use colourful expressions and have strong opinions, but there is no place in the House for sexism.

*Privilege*

[English]

The expression “keep this woman in line” is very sexist and a patriarchal attitude implying that it is the role of men—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I heard the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay address the issue at hand. He indicated to the House that if he had used the word that caused offence, he would withdraw it and replace it with the word “minister”. I do not see the need to continue discussing it.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre has a further intervention on the question of privilege.

\* \* \*

• (1515)

**PRIVILEGE**

NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to reply to the comments made by the government House leader with respect to the question of the incompatibility between the government saying that it accepted the findings of the Auditor General and accepted his conclusions and the unwillingness of the government to accept any degree of ministerial accountability and any degree of responsibility for providing disinformation, misinformation, inadequate information over a year and a half with respect to the most important procurement that the Government of Canada has ever made, most important in terms of the sums of money involved.

It is a classic case where the government House leader again adopts the same line that was used during the break by the Minister of National Defence, saying that all we have here is a difference of accounting techniques between the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General and the Government of Canada, that this is simply an accounting issue and has nothing to do at all with respect to ministerial accountability or ministerial responsibility.

To quote the comments that were made by the government House leader:

As we can see, this issue boils down not to whether Parliament was deliberately misled about the costs of the F-35, as the leader of the third party might like us to believe, but to the best way to account for the costs of purchasing replacement equipment.

This is a false statement by the government House leader. It is not what the issue is about. It does not describe the problem. It does not recognize the findings and the conclusions of the Auditor General. It does not in fact refer to the answers that the House has been given since the summer of 2010 with respect to this question of the purchase of the F-35s.

It is a fact that it was a finding of contempt by the House with respect to the refusal to provide adequate information to the finance committee and to the House of Commons that led to the contempt motion which led to the election.

The evidence is overwhelming, and it is overwhelming even today as the government responds to our questions, that in fact the contempt continues. This is a contempt that has still not stopped. The government is still not prepared to come clean. The government is still not prepared to provide us with adequate information. The

government is still not prepared to accept responsibility for what has taken place. That is the basis of the question of privilege.

The privilege is very clear. Ministers systematically, since 2010, gave the House information which has proven to be incorrect, inadequate, partial and, in some cases, untrue.

As I am being heckled by members opposite, Mr. Speaker, let me simply refer you, Sir, and the House, once again, to the comments of the Auditor General of Canada, because these comments are very clear and it is very clear that we are not dealing here with an accounting question. We are dealing here with information that has simply not been provided to the House and with this absurd situation where the government says, “We accept the conclusions of the Auditor General”, and I can read out the conclusions of the Auditor General, but then nothing happens as a result.

No minister is held to account. Nobody is responsible for misinformation or disinformation being given to the committees of the House of Commons. No one is held accountable for the fact that Parliament was supposed to get information on this issue, but did not receive information on this issue. The government, to this day, continues to show not just disdain for the questions that are posed and refuses to give answers, but contempt for the House and, indeed, contempt for the entire process in simply not giving us the information which it has, which the Auditor General says it has and which it is not prepared to provide.

• (1520)

Let me refer you, Mr. Speaker, to the report of the Auditor General.

On page 28, paragraph 2.71 states:

We have a number of observations regarding the life-cycle costing for the F-35. First, costs have not been fully presented in relation to the life of the aircraft. The estimated life expectancy of the F-35 is about 8,000 flying hours, or about 36 years based on predicted usage. National Defence plans to operate the fleet for at least that long. It is able to estimate costs over 36 years.

Further on in that paragraph, it is stated:

However, in presenting costs to government decision makers and to Parliament, National Defence estimated life-cycle costs over 20 years. This practice understates operating, personnel, and sustainment costs, as well as some capital costs, because the time period is shorter than the aircraft’s estimated life expectancy. The Joint Strategic Fighter Program Office—

—the office in the United States—

—provided National Defence with projected sustainment costs over 36 years.

That clearly implies that the Minister of National Defence knew what those 36-year costs were. The entire time the House was debating this issue, he refused to come forward.

Paragraph 2.72 states:

Second, the following expected costs were not accounted for:

Replacement aircraft. National Defence considers 65 aircraft the minimum number needed to meet its training and operational requirements. Based on past experience, National Defence expects to lose aircraft in the course of normal usage. Based on National Defence’s assumed attrition rate, in order to maintain the fleet of 65 aircraft, Canada may need to purchase up to 14 additional aircraft over the next 36 years. National Defence did inform the government of the need to consider the requirement for attrition aircraft at a later date. The cost of replacement aircraft is not included in the life-cycle estimate for this project and will be treated as a separate project in the future.

In other words, all of the costs which were presented by the Government of Canada to the Parliament of Canada with respect to this issue did not include the question of replacement costs. In other words, this House was misled. We were not given the full information to which we were entitled. We were given answers by the Minister of National Defence which did not in fact respond to the need for life cycle all-in costs. We repeatedly asked the minister for all-in costs and he repeatedly told us they were \$9 billion plus \$7 billion, a total of \$16 billion. That was the number he gave us. That is a false number. It is an inaccurate number. It is an incorrect number. It does not in any way add up to what the real costs of this are.

In paragraph 2.72, the Auditor General states:

Upgrades. It is expected that over the life of the aircraft, Canada will need to invest in various upgrades to the F-35 fleet, both in software and hardware. These costs were not known when the 2008 and 2010 budgets were established, but have since been estimated to be more than CAN\$1.2 billion over 20 years.

We have not been provided with that information.

The Auditor General went on to say in paragraph 2.76 on page 30:

We also have significant concerns about the completeness of cost information provided to parliamentarians. In March 2011, National Defence responded publicly to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report. This response did not include estimated operating, personnel, or ongoing training costs.... Also, we observed that National Defence told parliamentarians that cost data provided by US authorities had been validated by US experts and partner countries, which was not accurate at the time.

Let me repeat that:

Also, we observed that National Defence told parliamentarians that cost data provided by US authorities had been validated by US experts and partner countries, which was not accurate at the time.

In other words, inaccurate information was given to the committee that was studying this question. It is further stated in that paragraph:

At the time of its response, National Defence knew the costs were likely to increase but did not so inform parliamentarians.

I say to my colleagues who are sitting patiently on the other side of the House that if they were sitting on this side of the House, they would be up on their feet asking, "Where is the accountability?" They are the ones who brought in the Federal Accountability Act. They are the ones who asked, "Where is the accountability?" We are asking a simple question. When Parliament is misled, when Parliament is given inaccurate information, when Parliament is provided with information that the government knew perfectly well was not correct, where are we supposed to go, except to this place and say that a government which persistently gives us inaccurate information is a government that has been in contempt of Parliament.

● (1525)

I do not see how you have any other conclusion to draw, Mr. Speaker, except that the information provided to Parliament was inaccurate. All you have to do is compare the Auditor General's report to the answers that have been given in this House by the Prime Minister of Canada, by the Minister of National Defence, by the Associate Minister of National Defence, and then ask how the answers given compare and compute with the report of the Auditor General of Canada. The answer is that they do not. They do not compare and they do not compute. It is really striking to me that even today the Auditor General said that he got letters from the officials, the deputy ministers in the departments which he was

### Privilege

criticizing for their lack of due diligence, saying that they objected to the conclusions in the report.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has said there is a difference between what the deputy ministers say and what the Government of Canada says. That is news to me. That is a novel doctrine of constitutional law. It is a novel doctrine of administrative practice. The Prime Minister says it is normal practice for deputy ministers to object. Do they object to something without the approval of the Prime Minister? Do they object to something without the Prime Minister's Office knowing they are objecting? It is inconceivable.

We are in a ridiculous *Alice in Wonderland* situation. We have deputy ministers who do not agree with the Auditor General because he finds them and their departments responsible for what has gone wrong. We find a Prime Minister who says that he accepts the conclusions but that there are no processes of accountability for what has happened in the past. It is the worst abnegation of ministerial responsibility we have seen. The government and the Prime Minister are refusing to take responsibility for what has taken place. What has taken place is that the government is refusing to admit that it provided to Parliament information which was inaccurate, inadequate and did not in fact deal with the seriousness of the situation.

Hence, the contempt that was found in March 2011 continues today. There is no way we can accept the conclusion of the government and the excuse it has given. Conservatives have gone on talk shows and elsewhere and said that this is simply an accounting issue, that it has to do with other things.

There are so many examples in the Auditor General's report. He refers very explicitly to the fact that the estimates provided by the government with respect to maintenance are based on the notion that somehow the same maintenance costs will be there for the stealth fighter as were there for the CF-18, which is like saying that the maintenance costs for a Maserati will be exactly the same as the maintenance costs for a Ford Fairlane. I say to my friend, the Associate Minister of National Defence, he knows that is not true. I am not suggesting he has a Maserati or a Ford Fairlane. I am just suggesting that the government has to come to grips with telling the truth to Parliament.

The Conservatives have not told the truth to Parliament and they cannot simply turn the page and say, "Oh well, that was then and this is now. We're not going to take any responsibility for what has taken place in the past, we are simply going to talk about the future". This is a place of reckoning.

[Translation]

The House of Commons is the place where people have to speak the truth. If we cannot believe what ministers, deputy ministers or prime ministers say, if we cannot believe them, the trust that exists in the House will be completely lost.

That is the situation we find ourselves in today. This is why we raised a question of privilege: we do not have truth and accountability. This is the problem, this is the situation, and that is my response to the replies from the government House leader.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for his further comments on this question.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

## OPPOSITION MOTION—PENSIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** There are four minutes left for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Beauséjour.

[Translation]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** I would like to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot on her speech. I share many of her concerns about the government's policies. I would like to ask my colleague two simple questions.

Does she agree with me that the fiscal and financial reasons put forward by this government to justify this ideological increase do not stand up? Does she agree with me that the government must not create a false financial crisis to justify an ideological decision?

I definitely share my colleague's concerns about these measures and the implications they will have for people who do physical labour, like the people who work in the fish plants in my region, in Acadia, for example, or others who do physical work. I think the idea of just staying in the labour market for two more years is completely unreasonable.

• (1530)

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I am going to answer his first question—he had two questions.

The government has decided to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67. That is a completely unjustified decision on its part, given that we have concrete evidence that the system is sustainable.

On the question of physical labour, as I said earlier in my speech before question period, working two more years is completely unthinkable for many people who do physical labour, in agriculture or industry, for example, because of health and physical condition issues. We have to consider those workers and people who have paid into the system for their whole lives and who are simply entitled to take their well-deserved retirement at the age of 65.

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech and the answers she provided. On this side of the House, we believe, as all the experts do, that the system is sustainable.

Could the hon. member perhaps elaborate on the fact that experts have said that our system is sustainable?

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin:** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier during my speech, many experts agree that the system is sustainable.

Yes, it will be used more in the coming years since the baby boomers will be retiring, but this does not come as a surprise. We knew this was going to happen. We planned for it. Use of the system will then drop and return to normal, as all the experts predicted.

As I also said earlier during my speech, we were aware that many baby boomers would be retiring. We have been aware of it since 1988. That is almost 25 years. We saw it coming. People should be allowed to retire at 65. It is that simple.

[English]

**Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

I welcome this opportunity to reply to the motion as presented by the member for London—Fanshawe on the government's proposed changes to ensure the sustainability of the old age security program.

The OAS is an important feature of our social security system. Together, with the guaranteed income supplement, it helps alleviate poverty among seniors by providing a modest base upon which they can build their retirement income.

Our changes will ensure that OAS is put on a sustainable path so that it is there when Canadians need it most.

Younger generations expect us to ensure that the system is sustainable so they, too, can count on this program. That is a responsibility this government takes very seriously.

Demographic changes are putting pressure on our retirement income system and on many other programs the government supplies. This has been clearly documented by a number of experts. The number of OAS pension beneficiaries is expected to almost double, from 4.7 million in 2010 to 9.3 million by 2030. As a result, the costs of the OAS program are projected to rise dramatically, from approximately \$38 billion now to \$108 billion by 2030.

On February 27 of this year, on CBC's *The National*, economist, Patricia Croft, said:

The fact of the matter is Canadians are getting older, the demands on the system are getting greater, and the costs are going up.

We will not turn a blind eye to the numbers that could present a looming crisis. Instead, the government will take action. We are not a crisis-management government but a government that has the prudent foresight to plan and avoid issues before they become crisis issues.

The OAS is the largest single program of the Government of Canada and is funded 100% by annual tax revenues. The benefits paid each year from our system to deserving seniors come exclusively from taxpayers through the taxes collected each year. That is why the ratio of workers to retirees is critical to understand why we must act to ensure the sustainability of the program.

In 1990, the ratio of working age Canadians compared to the number of retired Canadians was roughly 5:1. Today, the ratio is 4:1. By 2030, it will be reduced to only 2:1.

*Business of Supply*

If we do not make these changes to the OAS program, there are only two alternatives to address rising costs: either by raising taxes or by diverting funds from other government programs and services. We will not remain complacent when facing today's emerging problems that threaten to become crises in the future.

We have a proven track record in helping the most vulnerable seniors, including the GIS top-up announced in budget 2011 for which, I might add, both the Liberals and the NDP voted against. We are committed to ensuring that social programs remain sustainable for future Canadians.

The issue of the demographic shift is one that is well-known to world leaders. Thankfully, Canada has the foresight to explore changes now, well in advance of any future crisis.

In less than two decades, close to one in four Canadians will be over the age of 65, a jump from one in seven today. By the year 2030, every fourth person we see will be over the age of 65. This is a reality we are moving toward in Canada. It is inevitable that Canada is becoming much greyer. However, the choices we make today mean that our future does not have to look grey.

Meanwhile, the number of Canadians below the age of 65 will almost remain flat. By 2030, the picture this paints is a country with the same number of workers but twice as many seniors.

• (1535)

The annual cost of the old age security program is projected to increase from about \$36 billion in 2010 to \$108 billion in 2030. Today, 13¢ of every federal tax dollar is spent on old age security. If no changes are made, in about 20 years that will grow to 21¢ or one-fifth of all federal tax dollars spent.

The total cost of benefits will become increasingly difficult to afford for tomorrow's workers and taxpayers. Today, there are four working age Canadians for every senior. By 2030, the ratio will be 2:1. Is that the legacy we want to pass on to future generations? Can we burden them with that tax load?

Our government is committed to undertaking the transformation needed to position Canada for long-term growth and prosperity over the next generation, and yes, we are committed to taking the necessary steps to ensure the sustainability of old age security.

As members know, there is no reserve fund for OAS. The numbers speak for themselves. Today, OAS is the largest statutory program and by 2030 it will represent almost 20% of all federal government spending. This is not a short-term problem. It will affect many generations to come. As a government, it is our responsibility to future generations to ensure that we take responsible action.

This is what the economic action plan proposes. Starting April 1, 2023, the age of eligibility for the OAS pension will be gradually increased from 65 to 67 with full implementation by January 2029. That means that younger Canadians have been given substantial notice with a reasonable adjustment period.

The second date I mentioned is also important. The change in the age of eligibility will not be fully implemented until January 2029. That means that the change will be phased in gradually over a period of six years. We believe this will prevent any hardship to Canadians.

I want to reassure all Canadians that despite the opposition's fear-mongering and over-the-top rhetoric, there will be no reduction to seniors' pensions with this legislation. This is an important point to make. The people who are close to retirement, those aged 54 and over as of March 31 of this year, will not be affected by this policy change.

We have made a clear commitment to the people of Canada and we intend to keep it. We are strengthening the long-term sustainability of the OAS system as a whole.

I encourage the members across the way, particularly those of the Liberal Party who were in fear in the nineties when Paul Martin was finance minister, to summon the courage to do the right thing. They may have missed the chance in the nineties to ensure the long-term sustainability of the OAS but they now have the opportunity to make it right.

I encourage the members of the NDP to listen to the words of the member for London—Fanshawe in a press release on December 5 of last year when she stated:

Issues facing seniors are only going to intensify as more Canadians reach their senior years. Action now is critical — we need a plan in place, we need the structures in place to deal with this dramatic shift in our country's demographics.

I encourage NDP members to heed their colleague's advice and support our government's common sense approach by voting against this motion. I will be voting against this motion.

• (1540)

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member said that it will affect many generations to come, that the government's goal is to prevent hardship, that there will be no reductions to pensions, among many other things.

I would like the member to explain, perhaps, how making people who work tough manual labour jobs work for two more years is preventing hardship. I would say that is inflicting hardship on them.

No reductions to the pension while making them work for two years longer means they will get two years less pension. How is that not a reduction or a cut? That will be a cut of \$12,000 per year with close to \$30,000 in actual cuts.

For many generations to come, yes, but if we look at the actuarial tables, they do reach a height at 2013, but then they actually goes down. We will have less seniors retiring after that and the cost will go down. Maybe the member could explain why the government does not take that into account.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Colin Mayes:** Mr. Speaker, the member is looking at the downside of things. The upside is that, fortunately, because of modern health, we are healthier and live longer. I would like to work into my late sixties just because I am a healthier person. That is a fact with all seniors in Canada. We need to look at how this program will be sustainable for the seniors who are living longer.

When we look at the figures the member just mentioned, the experts are saying that because of the fact that we are healthier and living longer, it is just not sustainable at the current age for eligibility.

• (1545)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in fact, the experts are not saying that at all. They are saying that it is sustainable.

Is my colleague aware of three studies that have been done? One study by the Chief Actuary and one study by the PBO showed that the cost of the OAS will only increase by 1% between now and 2030 and then it will go down. The OECD study about Canada concluded, “There is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pension ages in the foreseeable future”.

Is my colleague aware of these studies? If not, will he commit to read them? If he does, will he let us know what he thinks about them?

**Mr. Colin Mayes:** Mr. Speaker, the experts are saying that if the OAS system stays on its present path it will not be sustainable.

When the problems with the CPP arose, his party, when it was in government, had to deal with that. The experts at the time said that it was not sustainable, that it would not be there for future generations and that the government needed to increase the premiums. The member's government at the time listened to that information and made the adjustment, which was a wise thing to do at that time.

We are doing the same thing right now with OAS. We are listening to the experts, looking at the projections and realizing that we need to take action now so that this program will be sustainable for future generations.

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member's analysis.

When I was at a pension conference earlier this week with about 20 different countries, they all applauded the fact that Canada was looking at this pragmatically. Many of them wished that they had done this earlier. Many of the European countries have already done this. Australia, some of the African countries and the Caribbean countries are all feeling the same pressures.

I know my hon. colleague is a family man with grandchildren. I would like him to explain to us how he could dare tell his grandchildren that he did not help prepare for their futures as well. I am sure that he will answer positively that he is helping them prepare to enjoy the retirement system, the OAS system, that we have into the future.

**Mr. Colin Mayes:** Mr. Speaker, the prudent planning of our government is to ensure these programs are available for future generations.

My colleague is absolutely right. I wanted to be here today and make the right decisions for my grandchildren so that when they retire they will have the same opportunities to have the benefits that will be put away for them to retire in dignity.

I support the government's policy. It is thinking for future generations.

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to respond to the motion from the member for London—Fanshawe on our government's plan to raise the eligibility for the old age security program from 65 to 67 years of age.

We cannot hand over our problems to the next generation and expect it to solve them. That is the irresponsible course of action that the opposition is arguing in favour of with this motion today. Sadly, this would not be out of place if it were a Liberal motion. In the mid-1990s, then finance minister Paul Martin attempted to bring forward his plan to ensure the sustainability of the old age security program. Unfortunately, the Liberals lacked the principle to do the right thing at that time. I am hopeful they will see the time is now to correct that inaction and to join with us in making these common sense and reasonable changes.

In 2010, annual OAS costs were \$36 billion. If nothing is done, in less than 20 years the program costs will triple to \$108 billion. In other words, from 13¢ of every federal tax dollar to 21¢ will be the jump in cost. However, this is not an issue of how much money will be saved but, rather, whether we will make the choices now to ensure the very sustainability of the OAS program over the long term. This is what these changes are about: making sure the system will be there for future generations when they need it.

The aging of our population is forcing us to confront a new reality. In 1970, the average man lived to be 69 and the average woman lived to be 76. Today, life expectancy is 79 for men and 83 for women. That is good news, but it also means that without changes Canadians will be collecting retirement and social benefits for a much longer time than they did when the OAS was first introduced, at a time when seniors will comprise a larger proportion of Canadian society. The Chief Actuary forecasts that the number of OAS recipients will double from 2010 to 2030, from 4.8 million to 9.3 million. In the same time period, the ratio of working-age Canadians relative to the number of seniors is expected to fall. Right now, there are four working-age Canadians for every senior. By 2030, that number will shrink to two working-age Canadians to every senior. This is a critical ratio, as OAS benefits are paid out of the taxes collected in a given year.

Currently there are four working-age Canadians to support every senior and, as I said, in 20 years there will only be two, so not only are program costs rising, but there will be fewer taxpayers available to pay for the social programs seniors will be relying on.

*Business of Supply*

These numbers are not new. The reality of an aging population has been known for quite some time. The result will be less financial room for other government priorities, such as the Canada health transfer, the Canada social transfer, public safety and children's benefits. Can the member for London—Fanshawe please tell us which of these programs she would cut?

The *Edmonton Journal's* editorial board has this to say:

...we should thank...[the Prime Minister] for having the courage to start the conversation. It would have been far easier to pass the buck to his successor a few more years down the road.

Unfortunately, that is exactly what the previous Liberal government did. It simply passed the buck. We can see the result of that. In five out of six elections since the Liberals formed government, Canadian voters returned fewer and fewer Liberals to this place than were here before. This is also why Canadians decided to elect a strong, stable national majority Conservative government.

● (1550)

They understood that under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Canadians would be guaranteed a principled government that would act to ensure the long-term prosperity of our great country.

Let us clear about one thing. Our proposed changes do not affect current OAS or GIS recipients. These individuals will not lose one cent. We will gradually raise the age of eligibility for OAS from 65 to 67 starting on April 1, 2023. That is 11 years from now, and the change will be phased in gradually over a period of 6 years. We believe this will prevent any undue hardship to Canadians. People who are close to retirement, that is people age 54 and over as of March 31 of this year, will not be affected in any way by this policy change.

I would also like to highlight two other changes to the OAS program that were announced in budget 2012: proactive enrolment and voluntary deferral.

Starting in 2013, we will begin the proactive enrolment of many seniors for their OAS benefits. This will largely eliminate the need for eligible seniors to apply for OAS benefits. It will also ensure that more seniors receive the benefits to which they are entitled. This measure will reduce the application burden on many seniors and reduce the government's administrative costs.

On July 1, 2013, our government will provide Canadians the choice to voluntarily defer their OAS pension. This will permit individuals to delay receiving their OAS pension by up to five years in exchange for an enhanced monthly pension for the rest of their life. This will provide increased choice to Canadians as to when they wish to retire and will allow Canadians who do continue working to increase the size of their monthly benefit after they stop working. To be clear, the amount received by those who delay their OAS will be the same over the life of an individual as those who begin receiving their benefits as soon as they are eligible.

We will also ensure that certain federal income support programs that currently end at age 65, including programs that are provided for our veterans and low-income first nation individuals on reserve, are aligned with changes to the OAS program. This will ensure that individuals receiving benefits from these programs do not face a gap in income at ages 65 and 66. We will also compensate the provinces

for the net cost to their social programs caused by the increase in the age of eligibility.

To be clear, these proposed changes will not affect the Canada pension plan, as the CPP and the OAS are two separate programs, and there is no reduction to seniors' benefits. The Chief Actuary has confirmed that the CPP is financially sound and fully sustainable for the long term. The changes proposed to the OAS program will secure the retirement benefits of future generations making the program sustainable for the long term.

The numbers tell us that we have to confront our fiscal and demographic realities to serve the best interests of all Canadians both now and in the future. If we do not reform the OAS, there are only two other solutions: either to raise taxes or to divert funds from other programs and services.

I do not think it will come as a surprise to members in this House that our government remains committed to our low-tax plan for jobs and economic growth. That is why we are proposing these modest changes to ensure the OAS is put on a sustainable path so it is there when Canadians need it most.

Canada's prospects are bright. Among the G7 countries, Canada has posted the strongest growth in employment, with 693,000 jobs created since the depth of the recession.

● (1555)

Thanks to the strong leadership of our Prime Minister and our Conservative government, Canada is in the enviable position of having the financial flexibility to phase in these changes over a lengthy period of time.

Sadly, we are witnessing more narrow-minded political games from the opposition. Its reckless approach would jeopardize the very sustainability of the OAS program and demonstrates a willful ignorance of the reality of our aging population.

I urge the member and her party to listen to what she has said in the past and support our government by voting against this motion.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech, even though we have fundamentally different views.

I would like to ask him a question. It must be amazing to live in the Conservative universe, where there is no poverty and there are no low-income workers.

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The Conservatives are saying that the changes will be gradual and that people will have time to set some money aside. What money? A person who earns minimum wage or \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year is not able to buy \$2,000 worth of RRSPs. Not everyone has wealthy friends who are able to plan their own retirement.

The reality is that people are having trouble making ends meet. There are workers who have to go to food banks. What would he say to these people? This is an attack on the most vulnerable members of our society.

• (1600)

[English]

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, this government has done a tremendous amount for the lowest-income people in this country, including our lowest income-seniors, with the largest increase in the guaranteed income supplement in 25 years. We take those issues very seriously, and we act.

The other bill the member may want to support when it comes back concerns our new registered pooled pension plan, which is directly designed for the lowest-income people to have a new, flexible retirement pension plan tool that they can contribute to. It is flexible. If they work at Tim Hortons today and McDonald's tomorrow, it is portable. They can take that pension plan with them. We encourage all Canadians to take advantage of that great program when we establish it.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for recognizing that the Liberal government fixed the pension plan, but he must also admit the conservatives are fixing the OAS in a way we do not need in Canada, increasing the age to 67, as other countries are obliged to do because they are not being as prudent as the Liberal government has been.

The OECD said that the cost of government spending for pensions in Canada, the seniors' benefits, is 4.5%, while the OECD average is 7.4%. When the aging population is at its peak in Canada it will be 6.1%, still below the average today.

It is why the OECD concluded, and this is my question, there is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pension ages in the foreseeable future in Canada. Is the member aware of the study by the OECD? Will he commit to reading it, if he is not?

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, I followed quite closely and with some humour, over the years when the Liberals were in government, how many issues they avoided and pushed to the back burner, ignored and sloughed off, and they never got the job done.

What is happening? The Liberals totally ignore demographics. They totally ignore the fact that people are living longer. They totally ignore the fact that the senior population is growing much more rapidly than any of the other population demographics in the country.

The Liberals can ignore it. We are acting on it. They are living in la-la land. We are getting the job done.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Mississauga—Streetsville for his great intervention today and for laying out the mathematics and the reality of what is facing Canada in the next 30 years.

We had seven workers for every senior in 1975; today we have four working Canadians for every senior. By 2030, we are going to have two working Canadians for every senior. The opposition is suggesting that it is going to be sustainable.

I am wondering if the member would agree with me that the only way it is sustainable is if those two working Canadians for every senior pay a lot more personal income tax to support seniors under the OAS system.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. We are addressing the reality. We are not ignoring the reality of where we are going. The fact is that by 2030 there will only be two working people paying taxes to support OAS for every one person collecting it. I think my 12-year-old daughter in grade 7 can figure out the math as well as anybody.

Let us be realistic here. We are acting in a prudent, responsible way. People my age and younger are being given ample notice about this gradual change. I think we are acting in a fair and responsible way.

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, ample notice about getting hosed does not change the fact that we are getting hosed.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

I am very happy to rise today to speak in support of this motion.

In this year's budget, the Conservative government laid out plans to raise the age at which Canadians can receive old age security from 65 to 67, claiming, and claiming yet again today, that it is not sustainable because of our aging population. However, economists flatly reject this claim. At the peak of the baby boom retirement wave, the share of GDP spent on OAS will increase by less than 1% over today's level, and then decline again.

There is a clear battle of priorities. Stephen Harper will ask Canadians to work two more years—

**An hon. member:** Please; it's the Prime Minister.

**An hon. member:** I'd want to say his name, too, buddy.

• (1605)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Mr. Speaker, my apologies. The Prime Minister will ask Canadians to work for two more years without OAS to pay for his skewed Conservative choices, including failed F-35 fighter jets, his costly prisons agenda and more corporate tax giveaways.



*Business of Supply*

The budget was about choices, and the government made choices that will punish hard-working Canadians for the government's own fiscal mismanagement. An alarming report shows that the Prime Minister's Conservatives have turned their backs on Canada's most vulnerable citizens.

The report also found that the number of seniors using food banks is on the rise. Tens of thousands of the people who built our country cannot afford enough groceries, and that is simply unacceptable. In a country as wealthy as Canada, there is no excuse for letting our most vulnerable citizens go hungry. It is an issue that should have every Canadian concerned and every politician promising action and then delivering, as our proposals in the last election to actually raise OAS and GIS in order to lift every senior out of poverty would have done.

However, the government failed the grade there. It is leaving struggling families and seniors out in the cold. It refuses to raise the guaranteed income supplement enough to lift every senior out of poverty, while at the same time it is giving tax breaks to rich CEOs instead of helping families. Now it will make seniors wait an extra two years for OAS.

I have heard the talking points from the government on this issue. It is saying that it cannot sustain OAS in the long term as it is. The stated rationale is that the change puts the OAS program on a sustainable path. The Conservatives are using a temporary increase in the OAS and GIS costs as an excuse for permanently cutting back a remarkably effective and affordable program when in reality the program is actuarially sound and totally financially sustainable.

The government wants to keep telling Canadians this change will be insignificant, but we know that the lost income to Canadian seniors from this change will be very significant. It will mean a loss of roughly \$30,000 to the poorest seniors over two years, and roughly \$13,000 over these two years for Canadians who receive only OAS.

Unlike the CPP or private savings pillars, the OAS is a universal pension that does not depend on retirees' previous labour market participation or their participation in a registered pension or savings plan.

In the words of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives,

The basic building blocks of the public universal system are Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, which make up the "anti-poverty" part of the system.

and that is what the government is cutting.

We know how important programs like the OAS and GIS are to the thousands of Canadians who depend on them on a daily basis. The guaranteed income supplement is frequently cited as a major factor in reducing the level of poverty among seniors in the recent decades.

In October 2011, there were nearly five million seniors collecting OAS and 1.7 million seniors collecting GIS. One in three Canadian seniors receives the GIS because many senior women were not part of the paid labour force earlier in their lives. The OAS and GIS are particularly important retirement instruments for them. Senior women are less likely than senior men to draw income from the CPP, private pension plans, RRSPs or employment earnings. This

makes universal programs like OAS and GIS particularly important to female seniors. The median income for senior women is about two-thirds the median income for senior men.

OAS and GIS are paid from general government revenues. This is in contrast, of course, to the CPP, which is funded through equal contributions from employees and employers. Last year the government spent \$27.2 billion on OAS and \$7.9 billion on GIS; combined, these two programs comprise 13% of overall government expenses.

I do not think I need to delve more into how important these programs are to Canada, so I will explain to the House how it is that they are sustainable, since this is the big issue and question for the government.

• (1610)

Essentially, the government wants to restructure the entire Canadian retirement system because of an affordable short-run demographic change, that being the gradual retirement of the baby boomers, who began to retire in 2011. It has cited that the cost of OAS will increase from \$36 billion in 2010 to \$108 billion in 2030. This is true, but simply citing the base cost does not account for the growth of the Canadian economy, the rate of inflation and population growth. When examined alongside these factors, this is a modest and affordable increase in cost.

The government's latest actuarial report on indicated that OAS accounted for 2.37% of GDP last year and will rise to 3.16% in 2030. Then it will begin to fall. It will be 2.35% in 2060, below today's levels. The previous actuarial report, released in 2008, showed that this cost would actually drop below 2% by 2075, when children born now start to retire. This figure was curiously not included in the most recent actuarial report. At some point I would like to ask the Minister of Finance why that is.

The most recent report clearly indicates that the growth in cost is driven largely by the retirement of the baby boomer generation and does not describe any long-term issues of sustainability. Therefore, in the long run the current system is clearly affordable and will be a smaller share of the budget than it is today.

I would like to now go into a few of the studies that have been done in regard to this issue. A major 2009 study conducted for the Department of Finance, entitled *Canada's Retirement Income Provision: An International Perspective* and written by the head of the OECD pension team, Edward Whitehouse, found that Canada's pension system faced no sustainability problem. He wrote:

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The analysis suggests that Canada does not face major challenges of financial sustainability with its public pension schemes... Long-term projections show that public retirement-income provision is financially sustainable. Population ageing will naturally increase public pension spending, but the rate of growth is lower and the starting point better than many OECD countries.

In 2010, the finance committee studied Canada's retirement income system. None of the reported recommendations, not even the Conservative recommendations, even hinted that OAS or GIS were unsustainable or recommended raising the age of eligibility.

I would like to ask any member of the government why it is wilfully ignoring, to quote the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, their own ministry of finance's reports.

When compared to other countries, we actually spend very little on our public pension system. According to the OECD, total public social expenditures on old age benefits as a percentage of GDP are estimated at 4.2% in Canada. The equivalent average in OECD countries is 7%. Crisis countries, such as Italy, spend 14.1%. Canada spends one-third of what Italy does of GDP on public retirement. Austria, France and Greece spend roughly 12%. Germany, Poland and Portugal spend roughly 11%. Comparisons to the troubled eurozone are therefore not appropriate and are only being used to create fear that our time-tested Canadian programs are unsustainable. Even the United States spends more than we do on old age benefits, at 6% of GDP.

It should be noted that Canadian public pensions are not overly generous and in fact are very sustainable.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on his remarks. He has made a lot of good points that outline how sustainable the OAS system is, as is. It was looked at when the Liberals made the Canada pension plan sustainable, and it was found to be sustainable at that time.

The government is really trying to create a false argument here by turning to demographics and going to the war of the ages. It is because it has its priorities wrong. That is why it is trying to use this to extend the age to 67. The previous speaker talked about no one over 54 being affected. However, I would ask the member this: is it not true that this could be considered grand theft for those who are under 54, because the government has its priorities wrong and is really stealing money out of other pockets of those who are now in the working generation under 54?

•(1615)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Mr. Speaker, with regard to the language used as to what this means, I started off my speech by saying “hosed”. The member is saying “grand theft”. We could use all kinds of colourful language to describe it, but the fact is that in two years, going from age 65 to 67, Canadians are going to lose \$30,000 if they rely on OAS and GIS, because the gateway to GIS is through OAS. If the age for OAS is raised from 65 to 67 years, as a consequence, Canadians will not be able to access GIS until they are 67 years old.

Yes, it certainly impacts Canadians under the age of 54. I have to say that just because people are under the age of 54 now does not mean that when they are about to retire at 65 years, after having worked at a tough labour-intensive job they are going to be any better off or somehow better able to cope with that and work for two years longer.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, according to top economists, the OAS and GIS are easily sustainable and are actually projected to decrease in cost. What we should be doing is taking practical affordable measures to lift every senior out of poverty by expanding the GIS, not by slashing OAS.

Does the member agree with me that the changes proposed by the government will not make one iota of difference to poverty for seniors and particularly women seniors?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Mr. Speaker, as a surprise, I will disagree with my colleague because it will impact people, but it will impact them negatively. It will certainly not improve the poverty situation. It is not going to mean that there will be fewer seniors who need to access food banks in order to fill their bellies. It is not going to make any improvements in terms of the affordability of prescription medication or deal with inflation over time. It will have a significant negative impact on seniors down the road.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to speak to the opposition motion moved by the hon. member for London—Fanshawe. I want to express my gratitude to the official opposition for putting it forward and my intention to vote for this motion.

My question goes to one of the points the member made. We have not seen any credible evidence to this point regarding changing the eligibility age for old age security to age 67 that is buttressed by empirical evidence. Would a future government put it back to age 65? That is the age at which Canadians for so long have expected it and when people really need it, particularly, as he mentioned, if people have been doing hard physical labour and are really ready to retire.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member to the debate and accept, on behalf of the member for London—Fanshawe, her thanks.

It is going to have a tremendous negative impact. The crux of this motion is to call on the government to roll the age back to 65 years. There has been no empirical evidence or studies from economists to show that our system is in crisis, but of course, that has never stopped the government from putting something forward in the past.

•(1620)

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Service Canada; the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, Health; the hon. member for Beaches—East York, National Defence.

The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased not just to be able to follow the excellent speech by my colleague from Scarborough Southwest, but also to speak to the opposition motion, because this matter has been a serious concern for several months, since we unfortunately heard the news being announced abroad.

Since we began working on this file and talking to our constituents about it, I have had the pleasure of having a visit from two members of our caucus— the members for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin and Pierrefonds—Dollard—who have done an excellent job on this matter. They visited my riding to attend a town hall I organized on old age security, the guaranteed income supplement and raising the retirement age.

The government is claiming that the opposition is fearmongering. But our constituents are bringing their concerns to us and we want to voice them in the House.

In raising their concerns, our constituents made many very pertinent points that contradict the government's illogical arguments.

I will use this opportunity to share some of these points. As I represent these people, it is very important that I express their opinions.

I would first like to talk about the guaranteed income supplement, which is also affected. Very little has been said about it. However, raising the retirement age from 65 to 67 affects not only old age security but the guaranteed income supplement as well. Although the GIS is an important tool for seniors, it is not adequately funded. According to the comments we received, many seniors live below the poverty line. As our late leader, Jack Layton, said so well during the last election campaign, it would cost very little to raise seniors' income above the poverty line by increasing the guaranteed income supplement. We have to bear this in mind.

There are several aspects to the guaranteed income supplement, but when my two colleagues and I met with Canadians in the beautiful city of Beloeil, they specifically spoke about the steps required to obtain the guaranteed income supplement. You do not receive it automatically. Paperwork must be completed. It is funny, because the government always says that it wants to cut back on paperwork. Yet, there is a lot of paperwork to fill out. You have to make sure that you check the right box and do not make a mistake, otherwise the process becomes very complicated. In some cases, constituents have to seek the help of their member.

What the people present highlighted may seem separate from the issue of raising the eligibility age, but on the contrary, it is very much related. The reason for this is simple: any discussion about the complications involved in accessing the guaranteed income supplement makes you realize that raising the eligibility age only adds to the problem. That is the message people were trying to get across. The situation is already not ideal for these people, and the NDP has for some time wanted to address a number of problems with the pension system. There are already a lot of problems, and the government simply wants to add more complications and more problems. My colleagues' and my constituents find that unacceptable.

Since the beginning of this debate, my colleagues have quite eloquently discussed the idea of a private pension plan. This issue was also raised at the forum. For example, it is perfectly commendable to invest in an RRSP. I congratulate those people who are able to do so, and I encourage them. However, it must be acknowledged that there are also people for whom this is impossible.

I would like to see my colleagues opposite tell the former employees of Nortel to invest in an RRSP. We saw what came of the situation and we know the losses that these employees suffered. I would like to see the Minister of Transport tell the former employees of Aveos to invest in an RRSP. They no longer have jobs. They lost their jobs, and we have seen this government's contempt for their plight. All of this is interrelated. This issue is very much relevant. This is what our constituents told us.

● (1625)

The government wants to raise the age of eligibility. It wants to make it harder for people to get old age security and the guaranteed income supplement, and at the same time, it is not helping people who need jobs invest in other ways that would enable them to retire.

I have other examples that people shared during the town hall, and if I have time, I will share them here. I would like to talk about another very important subject though. As a young MP, I feel that this is a very important issue.

There has been a lot of talk about people over the age of 50, and I would like to thank my colleague who made that point earlier today. Many people under the age of 54 will be affected by the government's policy, people who are now 53 or 54 and who are nearing retirement.

People who work as labourers—work that can be very physically demanding—cannot really remain in the workforce beyond the age of 65, if they even remain in the workforce that long to begin with. I do not want to reiterate all of the points my colleagues made because, as I said, they explained their points very well. However, some jobs are so hard on people's bodies that they have to retire earlier.

Other situations could force someone to retire at or before age 65, for example, certain family situations. Accordingly, further raising the age at which people can take advantage of the services they have paid for is a bad idea.

This is another important point. I do not wish to make too many asides, but this is an important aspect that some people pointed out to us. People have paid for this system, whether it be young people, people close to retirement or people who have already retired. They have invested in the system and are entitled to receive their fair share.

To come back to what I was saying, we are talking about people who are not in a position to invest in private pension plans for all kinds of reasons. As I said, it is great if people can, but that is not the case for everyone. The Government of Canada, however, should govern for everyone and take everyone's needs into account.

*Business of Supply*

I did not hear any ideas about educating young people about investing in their retirement. They already have debt when they are in school. Students with debt are not thinking about investing in their retirement. They are thinking about completing their studies, finding a job and paying back their debt. Of course, those three things unfortunately take priority over investing in their retirement. These are things that the government should be taking into account, but unfortunately, it is not.

Some young people do not even have a job and are unable to do post-secondary studies. We have reiterated that a number of times in this House in our questions to the government, our speeches and our contributions to the debates. The youth unemployment rate is astronomical compared to that of the general population. If memory serves me correctly, the youth unemployment rate is twice as high, at roughly 14%. At that rate, it is safe to say retirement investment is not the priority for young people. Their priority is to find a job in order to have the means to invest in their future.

Even if they manage to find a job, there is a good chance that it will be part-time and pay minimum wage. I am not disparaging those jobs. They have their place. People have to try to find a job, but at the same time—we cannot deny it—when people work part-time, for minimum wage or both, they are not really thinking about how to invest in RRSPs. They are not really capable of doing so.

Even if they meet with a financial advisor at a bank, financial advisors do not accept clients who earn less than a certain amount. In that case, young people are unable to find the necessary help, help that the government is not willing to give them.

I am running out of time. I would just like to reiterate that I am very pleased to have been able to share what I was told at a town hall we organized on this issue in my riding of Chambly—Borduas. It was a very useful exercise. I am very pleased to have been able to share these concerns and those of future generations who will be extremely adversely affected by this ill-conceived policy of the government.

• (1630)

[*English*]

**Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite mentioned that this vow concerned them. It concerns us as well, which is why we need and must do something to protect OAS.

My constituents in London North Centre understand that we must do something now in to ensure that Canadians will be able to collect in future years.

“The fact of the matter is Canadians are getting older. Demands on the system are getting greater. The costs are going up”. That is from Patricia Croft, economist, *The Bottom Line*, CBC *The National*. She also said, “Just about every other G20 country has raised the retirement age. Why should we be any different?”

Could the member opposite indicate why he refuses to look at simple demographics and understand what is going on?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Matthew Dubé:** Mr. Speaker, I have listened to experts like the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Before the members on the other

side express their contempt, I would like to point out that very recently, in another matter, we saw that his calculations were not all that bad. They even support the calculations done by the Office of the Auditor General, which is highly respected. It was one of those officials who told us the system was sustainable. Actuarial calculations have also shown this.

If the system is sustainable, I am wondering why these changes need to be made. Certainly there is demographic change coming, but the experts said this system was still sustainable. I am sure those experts are educated and intelligent enough to take that demographic change into consideration. I therefore support my party's position, which is the right position for our fellow Canadians.

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Chambly—Borduas on his speech. It was very important. In particular, he has highlighted a serious problem of disparity between generations, which, as he pointed out very clearly, does not erase the problems associated with certain occupational groups.

Before I became a member of Parliament, I had the pleasure and honour of being a warehouse labourer for many years. I saw some of my fellow workers develop major physical problems. It was very easy to predict that some of my co-workers would be unable to keep going to the age of 60 or 65 if they continued doing the work they were doing.

Given that some of our young people are also going to be facing health problems that will prevent them from working until they are 60 or 65 or even 67 years old, I would like my colleague to talk a little more about this unfairness to certain generations, in spite of the fact that it has been widely shown that the system could have been sustainable.

**Mr. Matthew Dubé:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

In fact, when we talk about health, the same thing applies to both young people and people closer to retirement.

It has been said, but I am going to say it again, because it is a very important point: when someone does physical labour, work that is physically very demanding, they are not always able to do it, if I refer to the things I heard said at the town hall held in my riding, which I mentioned earlier. I had the opportunity to speak with one of my constituents who had in fact worked at a job that was very demanding physically and who was no longer able to work and had to retire.

Just before retiring, he lost his job. Now he is looking for another job so he will be able to retire. The only jobs available to him are jobs that are also very demanding physically. I am not denigrating those jobs, as I said, and it is very important to point this out, but when someone over the age of 50 loses their job, is no longer able to make an adequate living, and is also approaching retirement age, it is absolutely appalling for the government to bring in a policy that is going to do them even more harm.

*Business of Supply*

•(1635)

[English]

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

I have the privilege of representing a wonderful riding, the riding of Etobicoke North, the community where I was born and raised. We are proudly one of the most multicultural ridings in the country and I invite everyone to experience our diversity, gifts and richness. Sadly, we also have our challenges. Recent statistics show that almost 20% of our residents are not yet citizens. Our families face family reunification challenges and language and job barriers. Almost 25% of our families are headed by single parents who work two and three jobs just to put food on the table. Almost 20% of our riding is engaged in manufacturing, the second highest percentage for the entire country.

I am sharing this because we need real investment in our families and in our community, particularly during tough economic times. What we do not need are broken promises.

The Prime Minister campaigned in the last election, saying that Conservatives would not cut the rate of increase to transfers for health care, education and pensions, and that was job number one. It is time for the Prime Minister to practice what he preaches and demonstrate to Canadians that he is committed to protecting their pensions.

Since being elected, no other issue, a move that would cost our seniors tens of thousands of dollars in support and impose additional financial burdens on the provinces, has caused such outrage in my community. Single moms ask how the Prime Minister can do this, that he promised not to touch pensions. They have children and have to work. How will they pay for their children's education? They have no money to put away for retirement. What will happen to them?

Humber College students are saying that once they graduate they will have no job, that it is not fair. They ask how the government came up with the number, that is just arbitrary. They ask why they are being treated differently by their country. Grandparents come in wanting to know why their grandchildren are being targeted by the Government of Canada.

It is not just my community. Canadians from coast to coast are outraged and demand that the government take its hands off their pensions. Results of a poll for *Global News* indicated that 74% opposed reforming old age security and an astounding 81% of women were against the idea of raising the age of eligibility. Another survey showed 70% of Canadians felt that our country's social programs and seniors' benefits were not overly generous and 68% disagreed with increasing the retirement age.

Since the government is refusing to listen to the voices of Canadians, perhaps it will listen to a recent poll by CARP, which regularly asks its members how they would vote if an election were held tomorrow. The day after the Prime Minister's speech about pensions, support for the government dropped 10%.

I want to be very clear. The government raising the age of eligibility from 65 to 67 years of age is not necessary and it is not

needed to maintain the sustainability of the old age pension. Let me explain.

Experts from the OECD, leading universities and the government itself have all said that our OAS program does not face major challenges and there is no pressing need for change.

Moreover, Canada's Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that the OAS is sustainable beyond the year 2082. Payments today cost 2.4% of our national GDP. When the baby boomers max out in 2031, that percentage will climb to 3.1%, but then drop off again. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's findings show, contrary to what the government has been saying, that there is no coming OAS crisis.

It has been said, "They're trying to create an artificial crisis when the figures clearly show the pension system is sustainable. I think the government lacks credibility".

The reality is that Canada's pension system is in far better shape than the European's and there is no need to raise the retirement age. Edward Whitehouse who researches pension policy on behalf of the OECD and the World Bank found, "The analysis suggests that Canada does not face major challenges of financial sustainability with its public pension schemes", and "there is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pensions in the foreseeable future".

•(1640)

Thomas Klassen, a York University political professor, who co-authored a 2010 report on Canada's pension system, said:

I haven't heard any academic argue that there's a crisis with OAS, which is why I was surprised...when the Prime Minister seemed to say there was a crisis...I think there's got to be a lot more evidence that there's a problem, and I don't see that evidence.

Kevin Milligan, a University of British Columbia economics professor, is also of the view that there is no OAS crisis.

The House of Commons finance committee studied the pension issue in 2010. Mr. Whitehouse appeared as a witness and discussed his research. He said:

—Canada's pension system is looking good on the measures of adequacy. It is also looking good on measures of financial sustainability...Canada does not face the same financial sustainability problems as many other OECD member countries do, particularly in Europe and among the east Asian countries, Japan and Korea, whose populations are aging most rapidly.

At the end of its study, the committee's final report did not recommend raising the age of eligibility for OAS or reducing benefits.

In stark contrast to this evidence, the Prime Minister continues to repeat that Canada's aging population threatens social programs. Specifically he has said:

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—everybody understands that there are demographic realities that do threaten the viability of these programs over the longer term. We will ensure that these programs are funded and viable for the future generations that will need them.

Yet again, research and evidence is being overshadowed. This is part of a growing theme with the government. Instead of listening to non-partisan experts, the government will do everything to shut down the facts that contradict ideology. The truth is that the Conservatives are trying to balance their books on the backs of Canadians and to pay for their extreme ideological agenda.

Professor Klassen said that he suspects the federal government has concluded that reducing OAS costs is an easy way to save money over the longer term because it can be done without negotiation with public sector unions.

Canadian workers have paid taxes their entire careers, expecting that these benefits will be available to them when they turn 65. Raising the age for OAS will mean that some seniors will have to stay longer in the workforce, whether they are physically up to it or not. More than half of old age pensions go out to seniors earning less than \$25,000 a year. Seniors poverty rates could rise by one-third. That is just not right, not in a successful country like Canada.

Expert evidence is that OAS will not cause the federal budget to crash. Instead of pushing through something during this session of Parliament, the government should publish a white paper that lays out a problem that needs to be solved, along with a range of possible solutions that Canadians can consider.

My constituents in Etobicoke North want real options for improving their pension outlook for the next several decades. Only people who depend on OAS to stay out of poverty will have to put off retiring. Higher income earners, those whose OAS is already clawed back through their taxes will not be affected. I wonder if the government members really think this is a fair and equitable solution.

I am absolutely opposed to the idea of raising the OAS eligibility and find the unnecessary changes reprehensible. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has made it clear that the economy is strong and that this is a false crisis. Canadian voters were misled since the Conservatives never mentioned they would make cuts in the last election campaign.

• (1645)

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one of the obligations we have in this chamber is to be factual in the statements we make. In my colleague's speech, she said that this initiative would cost our seniors tens of thousands of dollars of support. Nothing could be further from the truth. She knows that.

This initiative will not impact one senior by 1¢. This initiative is not even beginning to be implemented until 2023 and will not be fully implemented until 2029, 17 years to be able to plan adequately for future retirement.

I cannot understand, quite frankly, how the Liberals can support this NDP motion. Everybody knows that sooner or later other people's money runs out. There is just not enough to go around.

How long will the member ignore the reality that today we have four workers for every OAS recipient and by 2030, we will only have two? How can this possibly be sustainable for the long term?

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I am always factual. I always depend upon the evidence. I have stuck to the evidence from the OECD, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and some of our top university professors, who all say there is no crisis in this country. Let me give members some more evidence.

The well-respected Don Drummond, a former senior federal finance department official who is now advising the Ontario government, has said Ottawa will have to give Canadians “a hell of a lot of notice” before changing the eligibility year for OAS. He suggested a 20-year time period, if not 25 years. He said:

If you're 47 years old today, your life cycle of earnings is kind of set right now by what you've already done. It's not giving you a heck of a lot of time.

That is evidence.

This is about our future, our children and our grandchildren. The government is changing the rules.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I couldn't believe it when I heard the member from Kitchener tell seniors that at some point they are going to run out of spending other people's money, as though they were living off the taxpayer, that is, of course, unless one is the Minister of International Cooperation.

I would like to make a comparison. Her joyride in a limo at the Junos cost \$5,000, which is more than many seniors get in the guaranteed income supplement. It is a sense of entitlement that a minister like that can hit taxpayers for \$5,000 for one night at the Junos to pretend she is Eddie Van Halen. Meanwhile the Conservatives are telling seniors, “You know what? We're tired of you having other people's money.” What an insult to the seniors who paid into that system their whole lives.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague explain what she thinks of the Conservatives' sense of entitlement.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to repeat that these changes are absolutely reprehensible.

I recently attended an inaugural CARP meeting in Etobicoke. Over 300 people came out. They were worried about the cuts to OAS. They were worried about their children and their grandchildren. They were also worried about their health.

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I have a question I would like to pose to the government, which inherited a legacy of balanced budgets, but took us into deficit before the recession ever hit and now is trying to pay off the deficit on the backs of Canadians. If the government really believes our aging population is a problem, why does it not recognize, for example, that dementia is one of our greatest health and economic threats? Currently it costs \$15 billion a year and in 30 years it will cost \$153 billion. Some 1.1 million Canadians will be affected. The World Health Organization is asking for every country to develop a nationwide dementia strategy. The government is not taking action because it is a cost. You are trying to make savings on the backs of Canadians.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before I resume debate, I just want to remind all hon. members that their comments ought to be directed at the Chair rather than at their colleagues in the House.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the most unpleasant traits of the Conservative government is its refusal to have an intelligent debate about the impact of its policies on Canadians. Instead of responding to objections, it carries on as though there were none. I will use the example of pensions, which is the subject we are discussing today. The Liberals will support the NDP motion.

The government says that because of the aging population, Canadians will no longer be able to afford the old age security program unless eligibility is gradually increased from 65 to 67. We should remember that this program provides \$540 a month in benefits to recipients with an annual income of no more than \$70,000. The Conservative government says that Canadian taxpayers are not rich enough to guarantee a monthly income of \$540 to seniors who are 65 and 66. This is a very serious decision that the government is making. Forcing sick, tired or disadvantaged Canadians to work two more years for a government cheque of \$540 a month is cruel, unless there are legitimate reasons for doing so.

The following is a series of questions that the government has not tried to answer today any more than it has previously. First question: why another broken promise? Aging is a well-known phenomenon. All the relevant information was available during the last election campaign. Why did the Conservatives and the Prime Minister hide their intentions? Can we have an answer?

Has someone in the government read the studies by the Chief Actuary, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and the OECD, which show that despite an aging Canadian population, funding for the old age security program is sustainable today and in the future? If a minister has read these studies, what does he or she think of them? What does the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development think of them? And what about the finance minister? And the Prime Minister? Why does he refuse to ever answer this question? Canadians are entitled to an answer.

The government is always bandying about the same figures. The annual cost of old age security should increase from \$36.5 billion to \$108 billion by 2030. How much does the government hope to save

by pushing the retirement age back to 67? According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the cost in 2031 will be \$98 billion, regardless. If we accept the government's twisted logic, the retirement age would have to be pushed back not to 67 but to 70, even 75, to keep the cost of the program at around \$40 billion. This logic is twisted because the government is not taking into account the growth of the economy. The government's figures need to be considered in relation to the size of the economy, which is also going to grow over the next two decades.

The Office of the Chief Actuary of Canada estimates that the cost of federal benefits for seniors, in terms of the gross domestic product, the GDP—which is currently at 2.2%—will peak at 3.1% of GDP in 2030, before dropping.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer essentially came up with the same figures: the cost of federal benefits for seniors will reach 3.2% in 2036, before dropping.

Does the government agree with those figures? If the cost of old age security is not expected to go up by more than a percentage point over the next 20 years relative to the size of our economy, then the program is sustainable in the long term.

The government keeps saying that other OECD countries have raised or plan to raise the retirement age and that Canada should therefore do the same. However, the government is ignoring the following argument: those countries have been more generous than Canada toward their seniors and have not engaged in the same kind of careful management and had the same foresight as we have. That is why those countries can no longer fund their public pension programs.

In Canada, the Liberal government had foresight and engaged in careful management. That is why the pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement will remain viable for years and decades to come.

In an oft-cited report entitled “Canada's retirement-income provision: An international perspective”, the OECD estimates that public spending on Canada's pensions amounts to 4.5% of GDP, which is much lower than the OECD average of 7.4% of GDP.

● (1650)

The OECD forecasts that in 2060, public spending on Canada's pensions will represent 6.2% of GDP. In relative terms, 50 years from now, benefits for seniors will cost Canadian taxpayers less than they cost the average OECD taxpayer now.

The OECD concludes that pension plan viability is not a major concern for Canada. It adds that no foreseeable financial pressure justifies raising the pension eligibility age:

● (1655)

[*English*]

—there is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pension ages in the foreseeable future.

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[Translation]

Are the Office of the Chief Actuary, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the OECD all wrong? If the government thinks so, then it should say so and prove it. Let the government stop evading the question. I challenge my Conservative colleagues to show that I am wrong about these studies, which they probably have not read. I invite them to read those studies.

We would like some answers, please. Canadians are entitled to some answers. Otherwise, Canadians will have to assume that the government knows it is wrong and wants to penalize Canadians by making them work two extra years in the future for no good reason.

The Liberal opposition is committed to taking a responsible approach and maintaining the OAS eligibility age at 65 through the sound governance and foresight that have characterized Liberal governments of the past and will characterize Liberal governments of the future.

[English]

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the interesting thing about this debate is it concerns the demographics of the baby boom. The baby boom in Canada did not sneak up on us. We have seen it coming for decades. Knowing that the population is aging and will peak with people who were born in 1964, one of the first things the Conservative government did when it took office is it cut the GST by two percentage points. Each point took \$6 billion of revenue out of the federal coffers. That is \$12 billion of federal revenue gone. It then cut corporate income tax, which took another \$10 billion a year at least. There were approximately \$22 billion taken out of the \$280 billion annual budget. The Conservatives did this knowing that we have, according to them, a looming demographic challenge.

In addition, last fall I challenged the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to increase the number of people we let into Canada every year from the current 250,000 to approximately 300,000 to deal with the demographics that we are facing, in that we will need more people to support older people. The government said no.

Knowing that there is a demographic challenge coming, why would the government refuse to increase the number of immigrants coming to our country to support retirees? Why would it cut federal revenues at a time when we need that money to support old age security? I would ask my hon. colleague to comment on whether he thinks that is an example of prudent fiscal management and sound government planning.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, even with the mismanagement of the Conservative government, the experts—the OECD, the PBO and the Chief Actuary—conclude that the OAS is sustainable for the coming decades. We do not need to editorialize very much about the bad management of the Conservatives. The OAS remains sustainable, thanks to the sound and prudent management of the Liberals. That is what we did. We made sure that the OAS would remain sustainable for the future for Canadians.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the comments from the opposition today. I have a quote from David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada. He said:

—we're at least 15 years late in getting started in raising that age of entitlement for CPP, OAS and the normal expectation as to how long people would work in the private sector with private-sector pension plans. That's absolutely clear....

He also said:

I would just hope that not everybody on the opposition side of the House is crazy. There's lots of people there that understand full well that there's a big problem here.

My question for the member opposite is this: is he crazy or is he saying that the former governor of the Bank of Canada is wrong?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** What is very sad, Mr. Speaker, is that we have had a day-long debate, and the Conservatives quoted only one expert. It is always the same quote.

[Translation]

They are parroting the same quote.

[English]

This quote is not substantiated by a study. It is the opinion of somebody we all respect, but it is only an opinion.

Is the Conservative government telling Canadians that it will penalize their future on the basis of one quote by one expert when my Liberal colleagues, my NDP colleagues and even the Green Party have an avalanche of studies? Everybody has quoted a lot of experts and studies, but the Conservatives have only one quote and they repeat it again and again.

I would ask my colleague to read the OECD study and—

● (1700)

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order because I cannot let this pass. We have been quoting experts all afternoon, not just one.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** That is a point of debate rather than a point of order.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, I challenge my colleague to quote these studies and table them in the House.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver East.

I will begin by acknowledging the good work that the member for London—Fanshawe has done in bringing this matter before the House for a very serious and timely debate. The motion we are debating today reads:

That this House reject the government's plan to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement from 65 to 67 years even though the current system is financially sustainable.

I believe it is very important for us to talk about this and to raise the issue with all Canadians about where the government is taking the future of our country. The government says that current seniors will not be affected but it fails to mention that seniors in 2023 will absolutely be affected.



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I will focus on my own riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan, which is a very beautiful place to live. It is also a very attractive place for seniors because in parts of my riding housing has been affordable up until this point and many good services are available to seniors. We have a higher than provincial average of seniors living in Nanaimo—Cowichan. Because of that, over the last several weeks I have held a series of round tables and panel discussions. I want to read into the record some of the comments that seniors had from one end of my riding to the other.

Before I do that, one of the things that was raised by seniors in the discussions was that the government had the wrong focus in wanting to raise the age of eligibility to collect old age security and guaranteed income supplement from 65 to 67. They say that the government should instead be focusing on other priorities. For example, the fact that today the maximum allowable amount of old age security and GIS combined is \$15,270. In many parts of the country, and in my riding in particular, it is very difficult to actually live on that amount of money given the rising costs of fuel, food and all the other expenses.

I want to take members on a tour through my riding. In February, we had a round table in Lake Cowichan and many seniors, caregivers, family members and business people attended. I will read just a couple of the comments that came out of this.

With regard to pensions, seniors said that many seniors were asset rich and cash poor, meaning that they often had a house and property but very little income. In fact, what income they had was eaten up by the fact that they had to pay for maintenance and taxes and often were forced to sell their homes.

They also said that communities needed increased accessibility for those with mobility challenges. There could be joint co-operation between all levels of government to put into place adequate sidewalk ramps and automatic doors to businesses. For example, they had suggestions, not just criticisms. They suggested a retrofit tax credit or grant to business owners to continue to keep businesses accessible to seniors and their families.

They also reminded us that seniors are actually the boomerang generation in this day and age. Children are coming back to live with their parents because they cannot get adequate jobs. Of course, the NDP has a long history of calling on a job strategy that creates liveable-wage jobs in our country.

The people of Lake Cowichan also said that it was no surprise that demographics were changing. Everyone in this House has known that the baby boomers are aging, but all levels of government have not adequately planned for supporting a growing senior population.

We had another round table in Chemainus in February, where the seniors pointed out that overlapping federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions leads to complications in providing health care for seniors. Although health districts do coincide with regional district boundaries, they do not match up with federal government boundaries. Seniors often access health care services from a number of different communities that are not connected. This leads to breakdowns in communications and unnecessary confusion and delays. That is a very important issue, because by the time seniors reach out for help, they are often facing a crisis. We need to

coordinate those services that are available and the information that is available for seniors.

• (1705)

In my riding in British Columbia, we had a serious flood a couple of years back, and one of the things the seniors pointed out was that our emergency infrastructure, as it relates to seniors, was inadequate. There are few mechanisms in place to help seniors in the case of a natural disaster or even extreme weather conditions. A number of years ago, we ended up with 48 inches of snow over a couple of days, and seniors were trapped in their homes.

In Chemainus, seniors pointed out that we needed to look at existing infrastructure and volunteer resources in the community and consider how we could build on this work to better serve the needs of seniors. It may be easier to build it within existing organizations, but they pointed out the ongoing cuts that the federal government has made to organizations that support volunteer organizations.

In Ladysmith in March, we had a lively discussion around transportation. However, the seniors there pointed out that although the government touts that there are tax credits available, many seniors do not pay taxes because they do not have enough income. They suggested that perhaps the government might want to look at the livability, the amount of old age security, GIS, CPP to which people have access. They also pointed out that it becomes a challenge for a couple with regard to housing when one of them has to move into long-term care and the other individual is left to maintain the home, because a large percentage of the couple's income may be used to pay for long-term care.

Mill Bay Shawnigan Lake is another very beautiful part of the south end of my community. Seniors there pointed out that seniors' poverty was on the rise and was expected to continue on an upward trend. They said that OAS rates have not kept pace with the cost of living. Many seniors do not have private pensions but rely on our public retirement system for their retirement security, which is inadequate.

One problem they identified and which others have spoken about is that the federal government does not have a standard measure of poverty. Depending on which day of the week it is, we will have a different discussion, whether it is low-income cut-off or some other measure, so it allows us not to have a consistent conversation.

They also say that many seniors are forced to retire due to health problems or disabilities without adequate financial support. This also contributes to their concerns about raising the old age security age from 65 to 67.

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They also say that old age security and GIS payments are spent in the community in which they are paid. If people live in Shawnigan Lake Mill Bay, the odds are they are shopping in the local grocery stores with their old age security and GIS because they do not have transportation to go to any other part of the community.

In Gabriola, another beautiful part, they point out that there is no public transportation and that seniors are at the mercy of their neighbours and friends to drive them around. They often have to go off-island to get services. They also point out that it is very difficult on the money they get to afford medical expenses like glasses, food and dental care. They say that any potential changes to old age security not only affects seniors but also young people in terms of finding employment because older workers will be forced to continue to work longer even though their health may be an impediment to that. They also say that the gap between the rich and poor is a fundamental issue, which is exacerbated by government policies. It is up to people to hold their governments accountable and seniors should not be expected to move away from their communities, where they have often lived their entire adult lives, in order to access services.

In Duncan in March, we had another round table where we talked about the fact that rental housing affordability was a very serious problem for many seniors. In parts of my riding, very little rental housing has been built for a number of years.

They also pointed out that 80% of elder care was provided by families and friends. It is estimated that \$25 billion worth of care is provided by families. However, there is a real cost to this. It is not just these volunteer hours. The fact that people are doing caregiving duties also means that sometimes they need to reduce their own work hours, which will ultimately affect their pension. This is a loss of income for poorer families. There is increasing pressure on families to do this elder care because there are not other resources available. Sixty-one percent of family caregivers say that they experience stress as a result of their caregiving duties and stress has been linked to a number of other health problems.

In Nanaimo, we talk a lot about the fact that respite care, residential care and other services are not available, as well as transportation.

There are recurring themes throughout this. However, the government's response to dealing with our aging population is to change the age of when we can collect pensions, instead of dealing with things like health care, housing, adequate pension incomes and with all of the other issues that are facing seniors and their families.

I did not have time to talk about the fact that seniors are often the caregivers of their grandchildren because their families are in dire financial straits.

If the government is serious about doing something for seniors, it needs to address some of these serious issues that seniors across this country and in Nanaimo—Cowichan are talking about.

• (1710)

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I noted that the NDP opposition motion today conveniently left out the fact that the proposed changes to the OAS will not be

implemented until 2023, in the initial stage, and not fully implemented until 2029.

I heard my colleague indicate that she conducted a number of round tables throughout her riding to hear from seniors. I ask if she was careful to point out to those seniors that these projected changes to the OAS will not affect any current seniors or anyone who is approaching that, presently 54 years of age or older. Has she taken the time to point out that these changes will not affect the seniors who she was meeting with at that time?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely did point that out to my constituents, and I mentioned it in my speech. What the seniors said is that the government is penalizing young people because seniors would have to stay in the workforce two additional years, from age 65 to age 67, before they retire. That would mean younger people cannot move into some of those other positions.

Seniors have also pointed out the fact that this is a downloading to the provinces. What they see happening is that it would put an increasing tax burden on the province's workers because they will have to pick up the costs. What happens to those seniors who at age 65 cannot work any longer and have to go onto the income assistance system? That is an extra cost to the province. The young people who are working in the province of British Columbia will have to contribute to those costs.

Of course I brought it up. That is the responsible thing to do.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech and the way she mapped out the realities for seniors in Canada today.

Sometimes I wonder if the members opposite live in a Pleasantville world where seniors have all sorts of disposable cash to shoot around and therefore we can bump up the eligibility for OAS.

We have a serious issue in Canada around affordability, but we also have a serious issue with the current government, which cannot seem to get its fiscal issues together.

My hon. colleague has mapped out and provided economic reasons as to why this plan absolutely does not make sense. For a modest increase in premiums, we could double CPP.

Could my hon. colleague could give us a sense of some alternatives to what has been proposed here?

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

[English]

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SUBSECTION 223(1) OF THE CRIMINAL CODE****Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC)** moved:

Motion No. 312

That a special committee of the House be appointed and directed to review the declaration in Subsection 223(1) of the Criminal Code which states that a child becomes a human being only at the moment of complete birth and to answer the questions hereinafter set forth;

that the membership of the special committee consist of 12 members which shall include seven members from the government party, four members from the Official Opposition and one member from the Liberal Party, provided that the Chair shall be from the government party; that the members to serve on the said committee be appointed by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the membership report of the special committee be presented to the House no later than 20 sitting days after the adoption of this motion;

that substitutions to the membership of the special committee be allowed, if required, in the manner provided by Standing Order 114(2);

that the special committee have all the powers of a Standing Committee as provided in the Standing Orders; and

that the special committee present its final report to the House of Commons within 10 months after the adoption of this motion with answers to the following questions,

(i) what medical evidence exists to demonstrate that a child is or is not a human being before the moment of complete birth, (ii) is the preponderance of medical evidence consistent with the declaration in Subsection 223(1) that a child is only a human being at the moment of complete birth, (iii) what are the legal impact and consequences of Subsection 223(1) on the fundamental human rights of a child before the moment of complete birth, (iv) what are the options available to Parliament in the exercise of its legislative authority in accordance with the Constitution and decisions of the Supreme Court to affirm, amend, or replace Subsection 223(1).

He said: Mr. Speaker, an Oriental proverb says that the beginning of wisdom is to call all things by their right names. It is in the hope of reaching such wisdom that I propose a study of Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being. Perhaps that ancient definition made sense when leeches and bloodletting were standard medical practices, but does it make medical sense in the 21st century?

Our knowledge has come a long way in 400 years. We now know when a child's organs from heart to liver and fingers are fully formed. We can detect when a child's brain functions. Parents watch in real time as their child reacts to stimuli and sucks his or her thumb. None of this was possible 400 years ago when the law struggled to describe who was human.

Why is any law defining a human being so important? Why devote time and attention to this question? Why does it matter that such laws are crafted with great care and with utmost honesty?

It is sad to even ask this question. It is sad that it is not obvious why our law defining a human being must absolutely be an honest law based on cogent evidence and sound principle.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, the government will often talk about the need to increase productivity in this country. We would absolutely agree. If it is interested in increasing productivity, one of the measures it might want to look at is the kind of support it provides to caregiver families, because families who are having to look after aging parents are having to take time off work when mom or dad needs to go into the hospital or get to a medical appointment. They are reducing their work hours because they simply do not have the funds or resources available to utilize services such as respite care. We know it is far more productive and efficient to keep seniors in their homes longer. Providing home support to seniors actually affects the acute care system because there are many seniors taking up acute care beds because they cannot stay in their own homes. Therefore, we could actually improve economic productivity by looking after the caregivers. We could reduce health care costs by taking seniors out of the acute care beds.

There are a lot of answers out there if the government would only pay attention to the seniors who brought forth some very good suggestions as solutions.

● (1715)

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will just ask this. The Conservatives constantly stand up and say they received a strong mandate from the Canadian people. They did not receive a mandate from the Canadian people to make changes to old age security, because they never campaigned on it. To use it in their favour, they have to take the corollary with it.

I ask my hon. colleague to comment on this. If a demographic boom or bulge was seen coming from decades away, if we all saw it coming, why does she think the Conservatives did not have the courage to tell the Canadian people that they were intending to make them work to the age of 67 to get old age security, if in fact it is truly necessary?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, we saw the premier of the day in British Columbia, Gordon Campbell, lie to the Canadian people before he implemented the HST. I am not using that word in the House in terms of the government.

However, if the Conservatives saw the demographic bulge coming, they did not talk about their planned change to the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. Why were they afraid to tell Canadians what they planned on doing? That is hardly a mandate when they actually do not tell people what is on their political agenda.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, April 30, 2012, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

The hon. Chief Government Whip.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

*Private Members' Business*

The reason it is so important is that powerful people can strip vulnerable people of all rights by decreeing that they are not human beings. The only way to protect the inalienable rights of all is to protect the inalienable rights of each. As the wise and courageous Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".

If basic rights can be denied to even one vulnerable person, they can be denied to anyone. Here is the way the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts it:

...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...

That is why we should never accept any law that decrees some human beings are not human beings. No policy justifies it. No ideology justifies it.

Here is what our 400-year-old definition of a human being says:

A child becomes a human being...when it has completely proceeded, in a living state, from the body of its mother....

How many Canadians believe that birth is a moment of magical transformation that changes a child from a non-human to a human being? Very few; most Canadians know that our existing definition dishonestly misrepresents the reality of who is a human being.

In the 1850s, nine highly educated, civilized judges of the U.S. Supreme Court decided that African Americans were not persons under U.S. law. If members had been in Congress then, would we not have put up our hands and said that is wrong?

In the early 20th century, nine highly educated, civilized judges of the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that women were not persons under all Canadian laws. If members had been in Parliament then, would we not have put up our hands and said that is wrong?

Now in the 21st century, we discover that we have a 400-year-old law that decrees some children are not human beings. Why not put up our hands and say that is wrong? We should never accept any law that decrees some human beings are not human beings.

If we accept a law that decrees some human beings are not human, the question that must be asked is: Who is next? This question was recently answered for us. Professors Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva told us who they think should be next in an article published in the respected *Journal of Medical Ethics* online. These are serious academics affiliated with respected universities.

● (1720)

If we accept their premise that it is acceptable to decree that some human beings are not human persons, their logic follows, inevitably. They point out there is no difference between a child before birth and a newborn. Since we have already decreed that a child before birth is not a human person and a newborn is no different, then, they say, we can and should decree that a newborn infant is also not a person. Here are their very own words:

—the same reasons which justify abortion should also justify the killing of the potential person when it is at the stage of a newborn.

This might sound like a spoof, but it is not. It is a serious conclusion from serious academics. It is completely logical if it is acceptable to decree, without regard to biological reality or

principles of human rights, that some human beings are not human beings.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

The Giubilini-Minerva article shows why it is so important that Parliament reject any law that says some human beings are not human beings.

[*English*]

This is not merely an academic question. In Canada every year, the deaths of 40 to 50 infants who are born alive and later die are classified as "termination of pregnancy".

[*Translation*]

The great author, Émile Zola, was once charged with treason for defending the fundamental human rights of a French soldier. What he said expresses my concerns about subsection 223(1). He said, "I denounce to the conscience of honest people this pressure brought to bear upon the justice of our country."

[*English*]

Motion No. 312 simply calls for a study of the evidence about when a child becomes a human being. It does not propose any answer to that question. In fact, it directs the committee to make no decision and no recommendation but merely to report options.

Now, those who believe that the moment of complete birth does somehow transform a child from a non-human into a human being should have enough confidence in their own belief to expose it to an examination of the evidence. What have they to fear from the full flood of light? Why oppose a mere study?

Zola's words apply again, and I paraphrase them. The reason they oppose a mirror study is "they dread your good sense, they dare not run the risk of letting us tell all and of letting you judge the whole matter". Again using Zola's words, I have had to "fight step by step against an extraordinarily obstinate desire for darkness. A battle is necessary to obtain every atom of truth." As Zola said I say, "It is on your behalf alone that I have fought, that this proof might be put before you in its entirety, so that you might give your opinion on your consciences without remorse."

[*Translation*]

When we consider a child before birth, do we see a new human life, with a beating heart and 10 human fingers? Or do we see the child as an object and an obstacle, even a parasite? Will we at least consider the evidence?

[*English*]

If the evidence tells us that a child is a human being before the moment of complete birth, will we close our eyes to the truth simply to justify abortion? Do we need to pretend a child is not human until the moment of complete birth in order to justify abortion? We do not. Even if a child is found to be a human being, it is arguable that the mother's rights will outweigh her child's rights.

• (1730)

[Translation]

When the rights of two people conflict, it is never, ever acceptable to deny that one of them is a human being.

[English]

Madam Justice Bertha Wilson, in the 1988 Morgentaler case throwing out Canada's abortion law, said the following:

The precise point in the development of the foetus at which the state's interest in its protection becomes "compelling" should be left to the informed judgment of the legislature which is in a position to receive submissions on the subject from all the relevant disciplines. It seems to me, however, that it might fall somewhere in the second trimester.

Those are her words. Clearly, this eminent jurist with impeccable feminist credentials believed that it was wrong to refuse all recognition whatsoever to children before birth. Clearly, she felt it is Parliament's duty to remedy that, a view shared by other courts subsequently.

In fact, almost 80% of Canadians think our law already recognizes the interests and rights of children after the second trimester. They are not aware that our 400-year-old definition of human being actually strips away such rights. When informed, over 70% of Canadians say they believe our law should recognize the rights of children at least during the third trimester of their development.

This consensus is greater than on any other issue today. Canadians across our great country are beginning to know from their own experience and to care about the truth that a child is a human being before the moment of complete birth. In other words, Canadians know that subsection 223(1) is dishonest.

Do we want a Canada where any person or group can arrange a dishonest law to decree that some human beings are not human beings as subsection 223(1) does? That is not the Canada Canadians want. If members search their hearts, that is not the Canada they want either.

If we care about the truth, we will courageously follow the facts wherever they lead. Canadians expect parliamentarians to embody that courage, that strength, that principled quest for the truth. Will we be seen as bold for the sake of truth, or as fearful? We can trust Canadians to embrace the truth with us.

Justice Wilson suggested that Parliament inform itself from the relevant disciplines. Motion No. 312 asks Parliament to do exactly that.

Once the committee delivers its report, Parliament can act on it or take no action. Whatever it chooses, Canadians will at least have the benefit of being informed by 21st century information from all the relevant disciplines as recommended so many years ago by Justice Bertha Wilson. It is Parliament's duty to do that much at least.

A great Canadian once said:

Those who talk the talk of human rights must from time to time be prepared to walk the walk....Heaven forbid that we should fail to do that of which we are capable when the path of duty is clear....Canada is not that kind of nation.

Members should not concern themselves with fearful imaginings but look solely at the dishonesty of subsection 223(1). Members

*Private Members' Business*

should cast their vote to expose that to the light of scientific evidence. Canadians will thank them for it.

[Translation]

Please, let us bring Canadians together on this—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. Perhaps the hon. member can close there.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Madam Speaker, since I will have the opportunity to reply to the hon. member, I will simply ask him a question.

The hon. member likes to quote Justice Wilson. There is nothing more extraordinary than hearing lawyers sharing quotes from the same decisions, the same judges.

What the member opposite seems to be forgetting is that Justice Wilson also said, in the context of the 1988 Morgentaler decision, that section 251 of the Criminal Code limits a pregnant woman's access to abortion and violates her right to life, liberty and security of the person within the meaning of section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in a way which does not accord with the principles of fundamental justice.

The impression that I got from listening to the hon. member's entire speech was that, in the beginning, he was trying to make us believe that his motion, Motion M-312, was a serious one and that he really wanted to conduct a comprehensive study. Yet he already has all the answers.

I would like to ask him this question. Is he waiting for answers regarding his motion or does he have them already? Has he already answered his own questions?

• (1735)

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** Madam Speaker, I have enjoyed working with the hon. member on the justice committee. I always enjoy having a respectful dialogue and exchange of views with any Canadian, any parliamentarian and particularly another lawyer.

The only point at which my views have been inserted into the motion is that it is true I have concluded that the point of complete birth is not a rational or a reasonable point at which a child suddenly transforms from a non-human into a human being.

I have some information about what I think will be the evidence that might be heard if and when the committee undertakes this study, but I am quite content to allow the witnesses to come, providing the evidence is heard. The committee can report back to Parliament.

I am not asking the committee to choose what evidence to believe or not to believe, but simply to report the options back to Parliament. Whatever my views are on that, I hope that Canadians, in the end, will overall be informed. What have we to hide from? Why would we be afraid to let the evidence come out?

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, my conscience tells me that we must respect the social harmony in this country. My conscience also tells me that we must respect women's rights. Finally, my conscience tells me that we must respect the right to be pro-choice.

*Private Members' Business*

In this speech, there was a lot of talk of honesty and dishonesty. What I find dishonest about this speech is that, in reality, what the member wants to do is re-criminalize abortion. If he wants to be honest, why does he not just say that that is what he wants to do?

What is more, his own Prime Minister has said that he will vote against this motion. Is the hon. member really just trying to reopen a debate that has already taken place? In this country, we want social harmony and respect for women's rights.

[*English*]

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** Madam Speaker, I honestly want what the motion asks, and that is for a respectful dialogue and an open-minded study of the evidence.

I would like all Canadians to be informed about this. Whatever views one might have about the issue of abortion, it surely must be helpful to know whether or not a child actually is a human being before the moment of complete birth. Knowing that will inform our discussions, make them more fruitful, and help us to reconcile Canadians of differing views on these issues.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I find it infinitely unfortunate that we are talking about this subject. That being said, my speech will be very respectful.

In the hon. member's speech, one fundamental element stood out by its absence, and that was women's rights. In fact, I think the word "woman" was used only once in Motion M-312. The word appears only once in the entire text, even though pregnant women are at the heart of this matter; there is no getting around it.

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

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** We were very respectful during the member's speech, so I would appreciate the same level of respect. We listened carefully to what he said, even though we sometimes found it hard to hear.

What the member is trying to do is involve us in what he calls a "conversation on the fetus". Wow. When I was elected in 2011, if someone had told me that I would be here on April 26, 2012, having a "conversation on the fetus", I would have asked what planet this was.

It is all based on a false premise. According to my colleague's basic premise, which is false, this provision is 400 years old. We are starting from certain comments that have been made.

It is like saying "thou shalt not kill" or something like that. Certainly, I could go back to the Old Testament and suggest we re-examine the issue of first degree murder, because that commandment has been around for so long and perhaps it is time we re-examined the concept.

However, it is even more false than that. We need to come back to the basics of his motion, which seeks to review the definition of subsection 223(1) of the Criminal Code, which establishes when a child becomes a human being. According to the Criminal Code, which was created in 1892 and not in 1600:

223. (1) A child becomes a human being within the meaning of this Act when it has completely proceeded, in a living state, from the body of its mother...

It is clear, within the meaning of the Criminal Code, that the child must be born alive. This has nothing to do with whether one is for or against abortion. It is in the homicide section of the Criminal Code.

At first I was not sure what the member wanted to do. I thought that perhaps he was sincere and that he wanted to form a committee—as though there were not enough of them—to hear from a multitude of leading scientists.

This is the first time that the Conservatives have shown an interest in anything scientific. It had to be something to do with the fetus and abortion or something that goes against women. Congratulations. Nonetheless, the Conservatives have decided that we will hear from a multitude of people working in medical science, who will talk to us about the fetus and show us different things.

The Conservatives pretend to be interested in the answers, in listening and hearing them. A committee usually hears both sides of the argument, but that is not the case here. Let us make no mistake. This is a direct attack on a woman's fundamental right to choose.

Whether you are for or against abortion, one fact remains and it is not 400 years old: the Morgentaler decision, the Daigle decision, in fact all decisions on various aspects of the issue gave a central place to a woman's inalienable rights concerning her body. The Conservatives really have a hard time accepting this concept. It is an aberration for them.

What we have to say is that it is fine if they do not like our views on this matter. But I do not wish to impose my views on anyone. They are mine alone. It is not my place to tell a pregnant woman what to do. Perhaps she was raped, but no matter what the reason is, it is none of our business. Perhaps the Conservative members would never resort to abortion. Good for them. I recognize that they have this right. But who are they, the men sitting opposite, to judge?

● (1740)

I use the word "men" because that is who I see in front of me. I do not mean it in a pejorative or sexist way. They can object as much as they want, but that is what I see before me. Ah, excuse me, I do see one woman, no, two women. That is excellent, lovely.

Having said that, it is not up to us to say what a pregnant woman should do. I would like to remind my colleagues opposite that case law has established that when a woman is pregnant, her fetus is a part of her body. I do not want to start lecturing about medicine and science, but it is part of her body. Often, the rights of one may be in conflict with the other's.

That is why I asked him the question. If my colleague had been smart, he would have said that he intended to wait for the committee's findings, and he would have won me over a little. But no, we know what he thinks. At least he has the courage of his convictions and was not afraid to say that he is categorically against abortion because he believes that a fetus is a fully fledged human being. Which is why he said, "a human being is a human being," a phrase he trots out constantly at all his press conferences and elsewhere.

That is the definition that my colleague subscribes to. The problem is that section 223(1) of the Criminal Code stipulates that the fetus is not a human being. This definition makes sense.

*Private Members' Business*

Imagine what will happen. We will end up criminalizing abortion again. Think about it. If a child becomes a human being from the moment of its conception or two or three weeks thereafter, will someone in this chamber then turn around and say that we are going to kill a human being? No way. That is the problem. It will mean that we are once again criminalizing abortion, but it will not stop there.

Imagine the pregnant woman for a moment. For a government that claims that the state must be as small as possible, in its simplest form, in all senses of the term, imagine the government now taking an interest in the way in which a pregnant woman experiences motherhood and pregnancy.

If the fetus, a human being according to what the mover of M-312 tells us, is protected, and if we accept his theory, are we going to have to start delving into the lifestyle of a woman who has alcoholism or addiction problems, for example? We have a Charter of Rights. It may gall our friends opposite to no end, but thank heaven that we have this Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Sometimes, when I see this government, with its 39% of the votes cast by 62% of the electorate, telling us that this is what we have to do and trying to interfere in people's lives, in how they live their lives, in what they believe in their innermost selves, in what affects them personally, it scares me to death.

I have talked with colleagues from every party. The even greater fallacy in their argument is when we come to the question of an abortion at eight or eight and a half months in a pregnancy. For heaven's sake, the people listening to us have to know that under most of the protocols at all the various hospitals in the provinces, no one is performing great numbers of abortions after the twentieth week of pregnancy. I will say again that this is a decision that must be made by the woman and her doctor. If there are any such abortions, it is often because there may be a medical problem for the pregnant woman, who could possibly die from it.

So let us stop scaring people and abide by the Charter and the decisions, not the ones made 400 years ago, but the ones made in 1988 and 1990 and 2000 and so on. Let us stop these constant attacks on the women of Canada.

● (1745)

[English]

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My colleague referred earlier in her speech to the fact that there were no women on this side of the House. First, I would like to point out that in fact there are. Second, she knows it is inappropriate for anyone to refer to the presence or absence of members in the House. I would ask her to correct the record.

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Madam Speaker, that will be the only apology I make today.

It was perhaps not appropriate, but at the same time, I found it rather odd to see a motion that affects women that was mainly...

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

● (1750)

[English]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I believe the record has been corrected.

This is a difficult debate with strong disagreements. I would ask for respect on all sides of the House and I will tolerate nothing else.

The hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise to speak against Motion No. 312.

Motion No. 312 calls for the creation of a special committee that would evaluate subsection 223(1) of the Criminal Code, which currently states:

A child becomes a human being within the meaning of this Act when it has completely proceeded, in a living state, from the body of its mother...

The motion asks for a special committee of parliamentarians to review the legal definition of personhood in Canada.

The definition of fetal personhood, under related Supreme Court jurisprudence, is closely linked to the legal status of abortion. Therefore, the Liberal Party does not support any legislative action that would reopen the debate on abortion or might criminalize abortion. If passed, Motion No. 312 can reverse the hard-earned rights of women by restricting their access to safe and legal abortions. The Liberal Party will oppose this motion.

During the 2011 election campaign, the Prime Minister promised that his party would not change the laws on abortion. He said, and I quote, "As long as I am Prime Minister, we will not reopen the debate on abortion. We will leave the law as it stands."

The Conservative Party has a troubling history on the issue of election promises. We may recall that in 2004 the leader of the opposition, now the Prime Minister, noted that the death penalty and abortion were not issues for the first Conservative government, yet in November 2007, halfway through the Conservative Party's first term in government, he broke that promise when his party refused to seek clemency for Ronald Allen Smith, a Canadian on death row in the United States. By refusing to seek clemency for Mr. Smith, the Conservative Party reversed the long-standing practice of seeking clemency for Canadians on death row abroad. The Prime Minister and his government were also in contravention of the United Nations convention to abolish the death penalty, to which Canada is a signatory.

With Motion No. 312, the party is now reversing the Prime Minister's promise not to reopen the debate on abortion and to leave the law as it stands. It is clear that the government obviously cannot be trusted to keep its word on any questions of fundamental justice.

By allowing this motion to stand, the Prime Minister can tell Canadians that the neutral stance of this motion on legal personhood does not open up the issue of abortion, that it is merely asking for a clarification on the definition of personhood and whether the law, as defined in subsection 223(1), is outdated. This is shameful. The government is being disingenuous, and so is the Prime Minister, obviously thinking that Canadians are simpletons.

*Private Members' Business*

The discrepancy between the opinions of the member for Kitchener Centre and what he said in the House today and the neutral stance of his motion should be noted by the House. Today, on April 26, in the *Metro Ottawa*, the member for Kitchener said that this motion opens up the abortion question. He said, "If we reach a conclusion on when a child becomes a human being, then all of the other issues that are so complicated about abortion can be discussed with that honest conclusion as a bedrock foundation".

We are being disingenuous in the House when the hon. member stands up and makes a speech saying that this is being honest and this is about a neutral motion. It is not being honest and it is not about a neutral motion. That is a cause for concern for us in the House, because if the intention of the member for Kitchener Centre had been honest, he had choices. He says that subsection 223(1) is outdated. If he believed the Criminal Code is outdated, he had the choice to directly amend the Criminal Code and propose a bill to do so, but he did not do that. The member said that section 223(1) is unjust because the definition of personhood in that subsection does not include the fetus. If he believed that the section was unjust, then he could have brought forward a bill to redefine personhood directly.

The Prime Minister should not have given the member the back door and the opportunity to waste the time of the House to use Motion No. 312 as a back door to recriminalize abortion. However, again, the history of the Prime Minister and the government is to always use a back door for contentious issues.

One can recall the private member's bill on gun registry from the member for Portage—Lisgar. It was an issue the Prime Minister had said he would not deal with, and there we had a private member. Then we had the private member's bill from Ken Epp, who is no longer in the House, about the unborn victims of crime, which was again about abortion.

• (1755)

We see this backdoor trial balloon by which contentious issues would be floated forward to see what the public would say, and if it became too hot to handle, it would be withdrawn or it would be voted against by the government. We are seeing this same kind of dishonest, disingenuous behaviour in this House in that now we see that the committee will be asked to look at medical evidence of fetal personhood.

In fact, medical evidence speaks to the viability of the fetus and how long the fetus can exist outside the maternal environment. That is defined very clearly. We do not need a committee to see what the viability of the fetus is—how long it can live outside the fetal environment, the times, the ages, et cetera. It is all very clear, internationally and nationally. It means that if the fetus is born before viability, it will only exist with a great deal of technology to help it to do so.

What is surreptitious about this bill is that the medical definition of "fetal viability" does not define personhood. Nowhere does it and nowhere can it, because the Supreme Court is very clear as it ruled unanimously in the case of *Tremblay v. Daigle*. It stated:

The task of properly classifying a foetus in law and in science are different pursuits. Ascribing personhood to a foetus in law is a fundamentally normative task. It results in the recognition of rights and duties—a matter which falls outside the concerns of scientific classification.

This is echoed again in the 1999 Supreme Court decision, *Dobson (Litigation Guardian of) v. Dobson*, in which Justice Cory, writing for the majority, asserted that

the Court should not impose a duty of care upon a pregnant woman toward her foetus or subsequently born child. To do so would result in very extensive and unacceptable intrusions into the bodily integrity, privacy and autonomy rights of women.

I want to draw a couple of scenarios.

Let us imagine that this committee is formed. Let us imagine that this committee redefines "personhood" as it is now said and goes against all of the Supreme Court rulings to date. What is going to happen? The age of medical fetal viability, we now know, is very clearly stated at 20 weeks; after 20 weeks, are the government and the state going to put a woman in jail if she does not wish to maintain that pregnancy within her person? Are they going to put her in jail and force her to keep this child until term? That outcome is not only ludicrous but also goes against every human right we can think of. It is shades of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* all over again. This is absolutely unacceptable to even imagine.

So that is what is going to be proposed. Are we going to force a woman? A child has to be carried and is in the woman's body until it comes out of the woman's body. It is totally dependent on the maternal body to keep it alive. Are we going to do this? Are we going to lock women up and force them to carry a child to term?

The Constitution speaks very clearly on the woman and the security of her person. The Constitution and the Charter are the umbrella under which all laws are written and interpreted in this country. The Supreme Court declared in 1998 the entirety of the country's abortion law to be unconstitutional, noting that

Forcing a woman, by threat of criminal sanction, to carry a foetus to term unless she meets certain criteria unrelated to her own priorities and aspirations...asserts that the woman's capacity to reproduce is to be subject, not to her own control, but to that of the state.

Essentially, therefore, it is a breach of the woman's rights to security of the person.

We have seen over and over that the Supreme Court has shown that the security of the person is paramount and is above every other piece of law, and because, as it is said, that the woman's capacity to reproduce cannot be subject to anyone's control but her own, it is a breach of the woman's right to security of the person. That kind of idea, as seen Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, would be absolutely ludicrous right now.

However, would we want to look at the issue of whether the government believes it can then tell physicians what they can or cannot do?

Our own government has said recently, on the issue of CCSVI, that the government should not be dictating guidelines to the medical profession, so then what is the use of this debate in the first place, if nothing that comes out of debate is going to be anything but unconstitutional?



*Private Members' Business*

• (1800)

Today we see committee budgets cut by 30%, yet we want to waste the government's time and everyone's time and recreate a committee to do something that is, at the end of the day, totally untenable and unconstitutional.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I offer my response to Motion No. 312. The issue before us, in essence, is on what it is to be human. This has been debated as long as man has existed. Scientists, theologians, philosophers and doctors have all offered opinions.

The House of Commons, however, is not a laboratory. It is not a house of faith, an academic setting or a hospital. It is a legislature, and a legislature deals with law, specifically, in this case, subsection 223(1) of the Criminal Code.

The purpose of Motion No. 312, which we are considering today, is to open to question the validity of subsection 223(1), which asserts that a child becomes a human being only at the moment of complete birth. If the legal definition of when one becomes a human being were to be adjusted so that a fetus is declared to be a legal person at some earlier stage of gestation, then the homicide laws would apply. As a necessary consequence, aborting fetal development anywhere in the potentially new adjusted period would be considered homicide. Thus the ultimate intention of this motion is to restrict abortions in Canada at some fetal development stage.

It should be noted that subsection 223(1) currently states that a child becomes a human being when it has completely proceeded in a living state from the body of its mother, irrespective of whether it has breathed, whether it has circulation separate from its mother, or whether the umbilical cord has been severed.

The effect of subsection 223(1) is to indicate the point in time at which homicide laws would apply. If someone intentionally injures a child before or during its birth such that it dies after becoming a human being, then the criminal law treats that as a homicide. This is set out in subsection 223(2).

According to section 238 of the Criminal Code, when an injury is inflicted on a child in the act of birth and that injury prevents the child from becoming a human being, it is an indictable offence and is punishable by a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

I would note as well that this offence, killing an unborn child in the act of birth, section 238, does not apply if a person acts in good faith to preserve the life of the mother and in so doing causes the death of the unborn child. That is set out in subsection 238(2).

For clarity, I wish to point out that section 223(1) provides a legal test as to when Canada's criminal homicide laws apply to the death of a child. I say again, it is not a medical test, as Motion No. 312 suggests. It has always been part of Canada's criminal law, and it reflects the well-established legal principle that the law does not recognize a fetus or unborn child as a legal person, possessing rights separate from its mother, until it is born alive.

The Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed this interpretation for the purposes of the Criminal Code. The Supreme Court has also declared that the right to liberty guarantees a degree of personal

autonomy over important decisions intimately affecting private life. The decision of whether or not to terminate a pregnancy is essentially a moral decision, and in a free and democratic society, the conscience of the individual must be paramount and take precedence over that of the state.

This does not mean, however, that abortion is unregulated in Canada. Abortion is regulated through provincial governments' responsibility for the delivery of health care services in conjunction with the medical profession. All provincial and territorial colleges of physicians and surgeons have declared that abortion is a medically necessary procedure, and delivery of this medical service is regulated accordingly.

Abortion is a very serious and long-lasting decision for women, and I want all women to continue to live in a society in which decisions on abortion can be made, one way or the other, with advice from family and a medical doctor and without the threat of legal consequences. I do not want women to go back to the previous era where some were forced to obtain abortions from illegal and medically dangerous sources. This should never happen in a civilized society.

Whether one accepts it or not, abortion is and always will be part of society. There will always be dire situations in which some women may have to choose the option of abortion. No matter how many laws some people may want government to institute against abortion, abortion cannot be eliminated. It is part of the human condition.

• (1805)

I cannot understand why those who are adamantly opposed to abortion want to impose their beliefs on others by way of the Criminal Code. There is no law that says that a woman must have an abortion. No one is forcing those who oppose abortion to have one.

Within the free and democratic society of Canada, if one has a world view based on a personal moral code that is somewhat different from others, then live according to those views as long as they are within the current laws. On the other hand, citizens who are also living within the reasonable limits of our culture and who may not agree with another's particular moral principles should not be compelled to follow them by the force of a new law.

As we know, Motion No. 312 is sponsored by a private member, not the government. I can confirm that as a member of the Conservative caucus for nearly eight years, the Prime Minister has been consistent with his position on abortion. As early as 2005 at the Montreal convention and in every federal election platform since, he has stated that the Conservative government will not support any legislation to regulate abortion. While the issue may continue to be debated by some, as in the private member's motion here tonight, I state again that the government's position is clear: it will not reopen this debate.

*Private Members' Business*

I am sure we all recognize that the issue of abortion raises strongly held and divergent views within and outside Parliament. However, I firmly believe that each of us should be able to pursue our lifestyle as long as it is within the boundaries of law and does not interfere with the actions of others. Trying to amend the legal rules governing abortion, as is intended by this motion, will not improve the situation. It will only lead to increased conflict as the attempt is made to turn back the clock.

Society has moved on and I do not believe this proposal should proceed. As well, it is in opposition to our government's position. Accordingly I will not support Motion No. 312. I will vote against it and I recommend that others oppose it.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Madam Speaker, today I would like to begin by expressing how honoured I am to be newly appointed critic for the Status of Women for the NDP.

It is an honour to follow in the footsteps of my colleagues, such as the member for Gatineau, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, the member for London—Fanshawe, Judy Wasylycia-Leis, dynamic women such as Dawn Black, Alexa McDonough, Audrey McLaughlin, Margaret Mitchell, Rosemary Brown, Grace MacInnis and so many others.

It is an honour to speak out on behalf of our party, the NDP, that has always been at the forefront of fighting for women's rights and gender equality. In that fight for gender equality, as Status of Women critic, I would like to put out a warning for the Prime Minister, that in the House and in fighting for gender equality, I will be using the f-word, yes the f-word, feminism, the approach that sees and understands well that women and men must be equal and that women of my generation will be taking that word back to say that we do not want to go back; we want to move forward.

Since 2006, consecutive Conservative governments have rolled back the clock on gender equality. They removed the word "equality" from the Status of Women mandate. They eliminated the court challenges program and pay equity legislation. They have cut advocacy, services, research and have shown nothing but inaction when it comes to violence against women and, most notably, violence against aboriginal women.

Every step along the way, Conservative governments have sought to silence women's voices and every step along the way, they have sought to destroy the foundations of our work to achieve gender equality.

Perhaps the most pointed attack on women has been in the area of reproductive rights. Here we are again today, debating a Conservative motion that essentially would reopen the debate on a woman's right to choose.

The reality is that the issue of abortion was settled in 1988. In 1988 the Supreme Court of Canada struck down Canada's abortion law, ruling that it was unconstitutional. The justices found that the law violated Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because it infringed on a woman's right to life, liberty and security of person. That was 1988, almost 25 years ago, a generation ago.

This decision came about after years of work from women who, from across the country, sent the message that women ought to have the right to choose, that women ought to have the right to decide

their future, that women ought to have the ability to define their destiny.

That fight also took place in the House of Commons. Our leader in 1987, Audrey McLaughlin, spoke out clearly, saying:

—limiting the right to the "personal care and control of one's body" is a violation of a most "basic and fundamental right", that of "reproductive choice."

As Ms. McLaughlin and others have pointed out, abortions, if they are not performed legally in medical facilities under the direction of a physician, will happen in much less favourable circumstances. As ugly as it may seem, women must not be forced to return to those ugly circumstances of using coat hangers, vacuum cleaners or putting themselves in the hands of quacks. "It is an ugly reality", Ms. McLaughlin said, "but it is a reality."

There were caravans, protests, lobby meetings, speeches and debates, and the issue was settled in 1988. When Canadians have been asked, time and time again a majority have supported a woman's right to choose. Here we are in 2012, seeing the government reopen the debate on abortion. It has not been truthful about it either. Time and time again the Prime Minister and members of his party have said that they will not reopen the abortion debate. The Prime Minister declared:

As long as I am prime minister we are not opening the abortion debate...The government will not bring forward any such legislation and any such legislation that is brought forward will be defeated as long as I am prime minister.

● (1810)

That comes from an article in the *Globe and Mail*, from Wednesday, December 21, 2011.

An article written around that same time quoted the Prime Minister as saying, "As long as I'm prime minister we are not reopening the abortion debate".

This is the Conservative Party's Trojan horse agenda. During an election, and even here in the House of Commons, the Conservatives tell Canadians one thing. Then, as a minority government and now as a majority government, we see what they truly mean.

If the Prime Minister did not want a woman's right to choose to be debated, we would not be here tonight. What is interesting is the Conservatives felt the need to tell Canadians something else so those same Canadians would vote for them. They waited until they won a majority to then uncover their hidden agenda.

I believe the Conservatives have some lessons to learn from their sister party in Alberta, the Wild Rose Party, which despite predictions that it would win a majority government, ended up with no more than a few seats. Why? Because it scared people. Its members talked about conscience rights and turning the clock back on the rights of women, same sex rights and so on. The more people heard from the party, the more they turned away.

Interestingly, a number of Conservative MPs very openly showed serious support for the Wild Rose Party. Maybe they can watch closely enough to learn a lesson. Canadians will not stand for a failed attempt to have our rights turned back. Women will not stand for the rolling back of the clock on women's rights. My generation will not stand for going backward.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Yesterday I was inspired by the many young women who organized and came together in front of Parliament to stand up and speak out for our right to choose. Like me, many of these young women, some of whom were not around in 1988, were very young when this decision was made. We know from history books of the women and men who fought hard to have a woman's right to choose respected. We have read in our history books how Canada slowly, through the work of so many people outside and inside Parliament, became a model for the world with respect to gender equality.

We have all known that we have to go much further, but the reality is we are only going backward under the government.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

That is my message as a young woman, a woman who belongs to a generation that has to fight to protect its rights and make sure that the situation in Canada is what it should be, now and in the future.

With its approach to Canada, the government is turning back the clock on the rights of women, minorities and aboriginal peoples. In this evening's debate, we have to say that we oppose an agenda that would take Canadians backwards.

Nevertheless, I am hopeful, and I am glad to belong to a party—the New Democratic Party—that is united in its opposition to Motion M-312 and to reopening the abortion debate, a party that stands for moving forward on women's rights and gender equality.

[*English*]

I have a message for the Prime Minister and his party on behalf of our caucus and on behalf of women and men from across the country. My message is that this issue has been decided. A woman's right to reproductive choice is a human right. In Canada, in 2012, a woman's right to choose is not up for negotiation.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

SERVICE CANADA

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise here in the House to come revisit a question I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on February 6. I will be coming back to this question frequently over the next few weeks during our adjournment proceedings, because my question deserves an answer. Yet I have received none from either the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development or the Minister of Industry on the situation regarding the consolidation of EI processing sites, and particularly the relocation of the EI processing centre from Rimouski to Thetford Mines.

I will begin by giving a brief history. The consolidation itself was announced five years ago. So, people have known for five years that there would be some kind of consolidation of EI processing services across the country. It was not necessarily a very wise decision, but that is what the government decided. That is the direction it has chosen to take.

In 2009, we found documents, including internal memos, that showed that the decision regarding Quebec had already been made. Only 6 out of 25 EI processing centres would remain, including the EI processing centre in Rimouski.

That decision was confirmed by a number of other documents. The matter was settled. However, in August 2011, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development mentioned in a press release that there would indeed be a consolidation and that the number of employment insurance processing centres would be reduced to six. We already knew that, but of the six remaining centres, Rimouski was out and Thetford Mines was in. This is particularly troubling because Thetford Mines happens to be in the riding of the Minister of Industry, the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

A few days later, in the local papers in the riding of the Minister of Industry and hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, the minister himself made a statement indicating that this was very good news for his riding and his municipality. According to the minister, this good news came as a result of his presentations to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and the fact that the centre was located in a nice building with qualified people. I do not doubt that, but the decision had already been made in 2009 and had been announced many times.

We have a situation here where we have a Minister of Industry and a Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development who, without any process, any opening, or opportunity for anyone to be able to intervene in the matter, decided behind closed doors to change the location of an employment insurance processing centre. And we have a minister who brags about his role in the transaction.

As the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, I too could have made presentations to the minister if the process had been open, if there had been a fair process for such a transfer, but there was not.

What we have here is an arbitrary, unilateral decision by the minister, with a suggestion by the Minister of Industry, to change the location of the employment insurance processing centre and ask the 37 people who work there to move to Thetford Mines.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

There are people who left Saguenay, Rivière-du-Loup and other parts of Quebec to go and work in the employment insurance processing centre in Rimouski because they were told that it was going to remain there. They have thus already had to move once to go to Rimouski. They were happy in the riding, in Rimouski, which is a very beautiful city. Now, they are being asked to move to Thetford Mines. Why? It is just because the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and the Minister of Industry decided that is how it should be.

On February 6, in the House, I asked how the process was done, why the decision was actually made and why the government, which is currently so set on trying to reduce spending—as we saw in budget 2012—was going to now close the employment insurance processing centre in Rimouski. The closure of this centre will result in the loss of 37 jobs for the region and the government will have to pay, among other costs, over \$1.2 million in rent for a building in the riding that it will no longer be using. All this at a time when there are major delays in the processing of employment insurance claims.

I would therefore like an answer. Why did the minister make this decision without a competitive process behind closed doors?

• (1820)

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to respond to the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques on the modernization of services at Service Canada.

We are continuing to work hard on behalf of Canadians toward eliminating the deficit and returning to balanced budgets, all the while improving services to Canadians.

As part of improving services, last August we announced that Service Canada will continue to modernize employment insurance by increasing the automation of EI claims from 44% fully or partially automated at the beginning of 2010-11 to 70% fully or partially automated by the end of 2012-13, and we are on track.

We have increased automation, improved online services, and implemented a nationally managed workload distribution system. This system also allows us to move more quickly and effectively to the next available agent in one of our processing sites across the country.

Historically, the EI program was designed and administered entirely as paper-based and managed locally. This was a very manual and time-consuming process. Beginning in 2005 we started modernizing EI claims processing by increasing automation because Canadians told us they wanted more efficient services, better value for their money, and the convenience of online services.

As the level of automation increases, as more applications are received online, and as more records of employment are submitted electronically, we will be able to deliver improved and more cost-effective services. This is our vision, to build a more efficient and effective delivery system for employment insurance for today and for generations to come and at a lesser cost to Canadians.

We are working hard on behalf of Canadians to improve the services we deliver. This is a government working smarter.

• (1825)

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Madam Speaker, I cannot help but smile because the answer the parliamentary secretary just gave me is light years away from the question that I asked.

The question is simple. I am not questioning what the government did. The government has already made its decision. It made cuts and consolidations. That is not the question.

The question is about closing the employment insurance processing centre in Rimouski, which is going to be moved to Thetford Mines without a proper process. This is a completely arbitrary decision. I am not asking the parliamentary secretary what the government wants to do in terms of budget cuts and consolidations. We know that is happening.

What I want to know is how she can justify moving an employment insurance processing centre and 37 jobs in my riding to the riding of the Minister of Industry, who boasted that he lobbied to have the centre moved. How can she do this with a straight face when there was no competitive process and the decision was made completely arbitrarily?

I would like the parliamentary secretary to answer this question directly.

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, Service Canada has moved to a national service delivery model, one workload, one process, one workforce. This means claims can be processed by the next available agent in one of our EI processing sites across the country. They no longer have to wait for a local agent to be available. This has been successfully implemented for some time now and has created the platform for further automation. With continuous improvements in the way we do business, Service Canada will continue to work to better respond to clients' needs in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Canadians told us they wanted more efficient and cost-effective services. They wanted the convenience of 24/7 online services. As the level of automation increases, as more applications are received online, as more records of employment are submitted electronically, we will be better able to deliver improved cost-effective services.

Modernization at Service Canada will give Canadians in every region of the country better access to employment insurance and a host of other Government of Canada services. We will all benefit from this.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

[Translation]

## HEALTH

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Madam Speaker, obesity has become a major public health issue in Canada. In 20 years, the country's rate of obesity has gone from 7% to 25%. This problem has enormous health costs and definitely has an impact on the economy. It has now been proven that certain trans fats present in processed foods contribute to the risk of obesity and are extremely harmful to heart health.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, almost 60% of Canadian adults and 26% of our children are overweight. Obese adults between the ages of 25 and 35 are six times more likely to develop high blood pressure, which affects vessels in the brain, heart and kidneys. Trans fats are also associated with breast cancer, as shown by a French study conducted by a team at Inserm and another at the Institut de cancérologie Gustave-Roussy.

Researchers measured the levels of blood markers indicating the presence of trans fatty acids from food in several hundred women. They then compared this consumption to breast cancer cases developed by these same women. The surprising result was that women who consume large quantities of these fatty acids are twice as likely to develop a malignant breast tumour. That is alarming.

Furthermore, trans fats have only been present in our food for the past 50 years. Thus, it is only now that we can measure their impact and their harmful effects on health, and recognize the high risks.

Artificial trans fats are used for pastries, in foods served in restaurants and in processed foods sold in grocery stores. The agri-food industry decided to use them because they improve the texture of food and reduce production costs. However, they have no nutritional value and can be replaced by other natural fats such as butter or oil.

In 2005, the federal government set up a trans fat task force, which recommended a trans fat limit of 2% of total fat content for all vegetable oils and spreadable margarines, and 5% for all other foods.

In 2007, the government adopted all of the recommendations and gave the industry two years to voluntarily reduce trans fat content in its products. Some companies complied, but others did nothing. In 2009, the current Minister of Health promised to do more. But we recently learned that the plan to draft regulations was aborted. In February, a research centre obtained documents under the Access to Information Act showing that in 2010, for no apparent reason, the minister ordered the regulatory plan scrapped.

The absence of federal regulations has resulted in myriad approaches across Canada. How is the industry supposed to comply with standards when the standards are not clear and are not enforced uniformly from one province to the next?

It has been shown that many foods still contain high levels of trans fats. The trans fat content in baked goods, such as cookies, croissants, brownies and pies, exceeds Health Canada's standards by 33% to 75%.

Meanwhile, companies such as Biscuits Leclerc in Quebec are making the necessary effort to eliminate trans fats from all their products. If companies like this one can do it, then it is not too heavy

of a burden for the industry, as the minister claims. However, the lack of regulations is not very fair to those companies that are making an effort to devote time, money and research to develop healthier products, when others are still offering unhealthy products.

Should the minister not respect her own commitments and the recommendations of experts and, above all, protect the health of Canadians?

● (1830)

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to reassure Canadians and members of the House that Health Canada is committed to finding the most effective way to reduce Canadians' consumption of trans fats. It is working to ensure that consumers have the information they need to make informed healthy choices for their families.

As we know, consumption of trans fats affects blood cholesterol levels in a negative way, which could lead to increased levels of cardiovascular disease. Health Canada has taken every action to help Canadians reduce the amount of trans fats that they are consuming. We have also helped to reduce the amount that is in the food supply.

I am pleased to say that through mandatory nutrition labelling and voluntary trans fat reduction, Canadians' intake of trans fats has reduced by more than 60%, to approximately 3.4 grams per day. Almost 75% of prepackaged foods have met their targets.

Canada was the first country in the world to implement mandatory labelling for trans fats. Nutritional labelling regulations came fully into force in 2007 and included requiring trans fats to be declared in the nutrition facts table on most prepackaged foods. The new Canada's Food Guide released by Health Canada in February 2007 also included information on the importance of limiting trans fats and saturated fats in one's diet.

Despite this work, Health Canada recognized that in order to meet our public health objectives for Canadians to have consumption levels that would fall below the WHO recommended amount of two grams per day, more concerted efforts would be necessary. In June 2007, Health Canada announced that it would adopt the trans fats task force's recommendations of limiting trans fats to 2% of total fat in vegetable oils and soft spreadable margarines and 5% in all other foods.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Health Canada committed it would work with the food industry to achieve trans fat reductions within two years. The trans fat monitoring program was launched to monitor the food industry's progress and tracked certain food products and segments of the food industry which historically had high levels of trans fats in their products. Overall, the results obtained from the monitoring program indicate that through the voluntary approach industry has made progress in reducing trans fats of their products while not increasing saturated fats. Regulations and more red tape are not always the solution.

As noted, Canadians' intake of trans fats has been reduced by 60% since the mid-1990s. Needless to say, more needs to be done. More reductions are required to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

The monitoring program also highlighted that there are still some challenges in trying to reduce the trans fat content of some food products for a variety of reasons. Therefore, Health Canada continues to engage industry and stakeholder groups to determine how to address these challenges. The goal is to achieve the overall objective of reducing trans fats in Canadians' diets to an acceptable level.

Most recently, the department sought the advice of a food expert advisory committee composed of health professionals, patients, consumers and industry groups on this issue. The committee recommended that Health Canada continue the voluntary approach to the reduction of trans fats while additional monitoring is conducted to determine the current levels of trans fats in foods available for sale in Canada.

I would like to assure the House that this government's first priority is to protect the health of Canadians when making decisions about the reduction of trans fats in the food supply.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** Madam Speaker, it is true that many companies have made an effort to decrease the trans fats in their products, but once again, some companies are continuing to use a lot of—too much—hydrogenated oil in their products.

That is why Denmark, Switzerland, California and many American cities have adopted regulations for trans fats. For example, in 2008, New York City decided to ban trans fatty acids in its 24,000 restaurants. Those that did not abide by the regulation were subject to fines. The restaurant chains quickly adapted to this new regulation. If these restaurants can offer their New York customers food without trans fats then why do they continue to offer Canadians foods that are harmful to their health? It is because the federal government is doing nothing.

How much is the government's inaction costing us? It is costing us dearly. A recent analysis conducted by the Public Health Agency of Canada showed that the total cost of obesity is estimated to be \$4.3 billion—\$1.8 billion in direct health care costs and \$2.5 billion in indirect costs. It is completely irresponsible.

Canada is still refusing to legislate this even though the Minister of Health made commitments in this regard in the past.

What is the Conservatives' priority? Is it to please the industry, which is exerting pressure, or to protect the health of Canadians as they should?

[*English*]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, the government's first priority is protecting the health and safety of Canadians. Health Canada has pursued several approaches, including mandatory nutrition labelling to decrease trans fat levels in Canadian foods. Through mandatory nutrition labelling and a voluntary program, Canadians' intake of trans fats has reduced by 60%. Health Canada's Food Expert Advisory Committee, which includes members from the health profession, patients, consumers and industry groups, recommended that Health Canada continue to encourage the voluntary trans fat reduction efforts. Health Canada will continue to assess the most effective ways to reduce Canadians' consumption of trans fats and is actively engaging industry members to identify and analyze technical barriers to reducing trans fats.

## NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am here tonight to continue the ongoing discussion of the F-35 and to talk about developmental delays and their impact on cost estimates for the F-35.

Those developmental delays are taking place because the joint strike fighter program is in a shambles. This has been identified in the recent report from the Auditor General. More significantly, we have the word of the program's executive officer, U.S. Vice-Admiral Venlet, who has acknowledged that the program's high degree of concurrency was “a miscalculation”. The program is already in its fifth procurement plan. The first procurement plan projected 1,600 F-35s in the skies today. As it is, there are only 63 prototypes flying.

The concurrency issue impacts directly on program costs. Already, the program has incurred nearly \$400 million to correct deficiencies in the few aircraft that have been built. More problematically, as stated by the Government Accountability Office, design changes are expected to “persist at elevated levels through 2019”.

The technology of this plane is still in its infancy, and rigorous testing is still at least three years away. Nobody knows, therefore, what this plane will ultimately cost. The AG's report commented on this. It says:

...many costs are not yet reliably known or cannot yet be estimated. These include the basic...flyaway cost of the aircraft, the cost of Canadian required modifications, and the cost of sustainment.

What we do know, only, is that the price is rising rapidly and that this is a fact that, according to the AG's report, has been hidden from parliamentarians. Further, we know that the government has treated its underestimates as maximums.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Thankfully, the United States joint strike fighter office is transparent with its costing. We know also that it provides all of this costing to the Department of National Defence. Recent figures from the Pentagon show a 5% increase in acquisition costs and a 10% increase in operating and support costs, just since last year. The total F-35 program cost is now \$1.5 trillion, with significant cost risks still ahead when more complex software and advanced capabilities are integrated and tested. Given that the F-35 full capabilities as advertised depend on three times as many lines of software code as the F-22A Raptor and six times as much as the F-18 Super Hornet, these risks cannot be overstated. However, herein lies one of the many advantages of an open, transparent and competitive tender for replacing the CF-18. It would reveal just how far from the truth about the F-35 the Canadian public has been held to date, particularly regarding cost.

Not only was the Minister of National Defence's \$15 billion life-cycle estimate \$10 billion shy of his department's own 20-year life-cycle estimates, but the department's own \$25 billion hidden estimate, I might add, is billions of dollars shy of the life-cycle estimate based on the 36 years that the department plans to operate these planes. It remains to be seen, first, what the 36-year life-cycle cost estimate actually is, second, who knows about that 36-year life-cycle cost and, third, who has been involved in hiding the 36-year life-cycle cost that the Auditor General acknowledges that the Department of National Defence has.

● (1840)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for giving me the opportunity to reassert the facts about the CF-18 replacements.

As my colleague is well aware, we need to replace our fleet of aging CF-18s, which have been a tremendous asset to the Canadian Forces. The commitment to purchase a CF-18 replacement fleet was clearly spelled out in the Canada First Defence Strategy.

Our government has set a budget for replacement aircraft and we will work within that budget. As of this moment, we have not signed any contracts to purchase replacement aircraft.

As my colleague is aware, we have announced a seven-step plan to guide responsible replacement of the fleet for our brave men and women. This includes a secretariat to oversee that this important procurement meets the high standards of accountability and transparency.

I will take a moment to outline seven important points regarding the secretariat. The funding envelope allocated for the acquisition and replacement of the fighter jets is frozen. The Government of Canada will immediately establish a secretariat within the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada. The secretariat will play the lead co-ordinating role as the government moves to replace Canada's CF-18 fleet. A committee of deputy ministers will be established to provide oversight for the secretariat.

The Department of National Defence, through the new secretariat, will provide annual updates to Parliament. These updates will be tabled within a maximum of 60 days from receipt of the annual costing forecast from the joint strike fighter program office

beginning in 2012. The Department of National Defence will also provide technical briefings as needed through the secretariat on the performance schedule and costs. The Department of National Defence will continue to evaluate options to sustain the Canadian Forces fighter capability well into the 21st century.

Prior to project approval, the Treasury Board Secretariat will first commission an independent review of DND's acquisition and sustainment project assumptions and potential costs for the F-35, which will be made public. The Treasury Board Secretariat will also review the acquisition and sustainment costs of the F-35 and ensure full compliance with procurement policies prior to approving the project.

Industry Canada, through the new secretariat, will continue identifying opportunities for Canadian industry to participate in the joint strike fighter global supply chain, as well as other potential benefits for Canada in sustainment, testing and training, and will provide updates to Parliament explaining the benefits.

Canada has not purchased any replacement aircraft and has not signed any contract to do so. Canada will only proceed with replacing the CF-18s when all the steps I mentioned are complete and the development work is sufficiently advanced.

We are working with nine partner nations in the JSF program to develop an adaptable and sustainable multi-role fighter aircraft that will meet the challenges of the 21st century. By taking part in this revolutionary program, we are ensuring that the RCAF will be totally interoperable with its allies well into the future.

The JSF program is a success for Canadian industry and will offer opportunities for Canadian industry for years to come.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague across the aisle for staying late on a Thursday night to respond to my questions but she has proven herself just as adept as her other colleagues across the aisle at avoiding responses to these matters.

I would point out that, in the Auditor General's report, he identifies that the joint strike fighter program office provides National Defence with projected sustainment costs over 36 years. These are called bilateral cost breakdowns. These have been received by the Department of National Defence for some years.

I also note that the government has committed in this House to abide by the recommendations of the report and has agreed and committed to making the estimates and actual costs of the F-35 available to the public. Will my friend across the aisle undertake to do just that with the bilateral cost breakdowns that are already in the possession of her government?

● (1845)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, as I mentioned before, the JSF program is a success for Canadian industry and will offer opportunities for Canadian industry for years to come.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

More than 3,100 aircraft have already been ordered and Canadian companies will have access to contracts for all of them. If more F-35s are ordered, Canadian industry will also be allowed to bid on these contracts. Already, 65 Canadian companies have signed contracts worth over \$435 million.

The Government of Canada is committed to procuring the fighter that best meets the Royal Canadian Air Force's requirements at the

least cost. As a government, we owe it to our pilots to provide them with the proper equipment to ensure mission success.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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