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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 6, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 6, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

PETITIONS

DARFUR

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by almost 100 constituents from towns in my riding in Alberta, including Camrose, Meeting Creek, Ohaton and Killam.

These petitioners share our government's concern about the violence in Darfur, Sudan, and the displacement of millions of people. They are calling on our government to continue to take action to find and implement a solution that would end the violence in Sudan.

I have received representations from many people in my riding in the past year concerning this matter. I am very proud of my constituents for taking the action to express their views. I am most proud of the younger generation who signed this petition, and who are making themselves aware and doing something about the way they feel and what they think about the disturbing situation in Sudan.

I am pleased today to present this petition.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House:

- (a) women's equality is a matter of human rights and, since the Court Challenges Program was a useful tool in achieving that end, it should be reinstated;
- (b) to provide a legitimate and necessary voice to the needs of women, research and advocacy should be restored to the government's Women's Program;
- (c) an adequate supply of high quality childcare spaces is essential to ensuring women's participation in the workforce and the government should take the necessary steps immediately to create 125,000 spaces as it promised;
- (d) since access to government services is essential in rural areas and the government's closure of 12 of 16 regional offices of Status of Women Canada further isolates rural women, the government should take immediate steps to improve access for our most isolated Canadians;
- (e) there is a growing need in Canada for a national housing strategy designed to assist the most vulnerable in our society and to treat them with the respect they deserve; and

that, therefore, the House condemn the irresponsible and self-serving actions on November 28, 2005, by the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois which led to the installation of a government that is hostile to the rights and needs of vulnerable Canadians.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to bring to your attention the Liberal motion that is before the House for debate today.

The last paragraph reads as follows:

—the House condemn the irresponsible and self-serving actions on November 28, 2005, by the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois which led to the installation of a government—

I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to Beauchesne's Sixth Edition, citation 923(4), which states:

It has been ruled that on an amendment to motions on allotted days, the conduct of an opposition party may not be brought into question.

This citation is from a Speaker's ruling which can be found at page 22998 of the *Debates* from February 18, 1983.

Business of Supply

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that we are dealing with a very analogous situation here. If it is true that an amendment to an opposition motion cannot bring into question the conduct of an opposition party, then the very same should be true for the main motion itself.

There are other abnormalities in the motion which also should be taken into consideration. While it is standard practice to use opposition motions to express a loss of confidence in the government, it is quite another thing for an opposition motion to express a loss of confidence in the opposition or, at least in this case, two of the opposition parties.

The other flaw in the motion is that while it condemns the two other opposition parties for installing this government, the Liberal Party, that is the sponsor of this motion, votes or does not vote and in recent days undervotes in order to keep this government in power. Therefore, the motion is also a condemnation of the Liberal Party itself.

The hypocrisy of the motion is obvious and probably has no bearing on its admissibility, but the procedural acceptability of this motion must be reviewed by the Speaker.

In addition to its flaws, as outlined in the Speaker's ruling of February 18, 1983, the motion raises other questions. What if this motion were to pass? Would the opposition be obliged to resign? I would like an answer to that before the House votes on this question because, if it is true, the government may just support it.

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader has raised a number of arguments, some of which have some procedural bearing. Perhaps some clearly do not. I am prepared to look at the matter and I will come back to the House later this day if there are serious reservations that the Chair may have about the motion.

In the meantime, this motion has been selected for debate and points of order were not raised about it prior to today. I think the House will proceed with it for the moment and, as I have indicated, I will come back to the House.

I do not think the words of the motion express a lack of confidence in the opposition. The word was "condemn". While the minister may have some ground to suspect that he lacks confidence in the opposition, I do not think it is based on this motion.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, on that very point, I know you are a long time student of the rules and practices of Parliament. On the issue of opposition day motions, it is that word "condemn". It is that magic word that has been held on previous occasions to be the mark of a non-confidence motion.

Were this motion to actually express that it condemns this government, that would be seen as a non-confidence motion quite properly by the government. So, it is that use of the word "condemn" that usually is the trigger for a confidence motion.

That is why the use of it here in this case serves as a lack of confidence in the opposition itself, as I was raising, which is a very unusual situation to deal with here. That is why I think it requires your attention.

The Speaker: I thank the government House leader for his diligence in this matter. I also note that what makes me reluctant to

give a ruling immediately is the fact that I am going to want to look at this motion.

He suggested that an amendment was out of order because it condemned the opposition. Of course, in those days, in 1983, anyone could move an amendment. So I can see where it might be out of order for a government to move an amendment to an opposition motion that condemned the opposition. I am not sure if it was the amendment on which the ruling was made and not the main motion.

My understanding of the practice, and I am going off the top of my head, is that oppositions can do pretty well whatever they want on an opposition day, so the House is sort of, if I can say, stuck with dealing with it.

I am not suggesting that we are stuck today or anything like that, but we will now proceed with the motion before the House.

The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

•(1010)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me today to speak to this motion. In two days we will be celebrating International Women's Day, but there is nothing to celebrate when it comes to the actions of the government with respect to women.

There is a very disturbing pattern with the Conservative government when it comes to intimidating and shutting down those who believe anything that is contrary to its own right-wing ideology, whether it be cutting funding, changing regulations, libel chill, bullying, and others that come to mind.

The government has failed Canadian women in several ways. Just to name a few, they are: child care, access to government services, failure to sign the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people, cutting off funding for research and advocacy, tax policies, affordable housing and pay equity. This is a pattern pushing women down, setting them back a considerable amount of time.

The theme for International Women's Day is "Strong women, Strong world". The government is not helping women become stronger in this country. It is not removing the barriers that exist for women entering the workforce or to save money.

The government is doing nothing to help women become strong in this country. Let us look at some of the things that have happened in the last little while. Early education and child care is a major example. The first thing the government did was cut \$5 billion from a national child care program which had been agreed upon by all provinces in this country.

The government cancelled those agreements outright. The moneys that were flowing were also eliminated which meant it started to dismantle some of the existing infrastructure that was being paid for by the initial \$1 billion investment made by the Liberals.

The government promised, after having done all of that destruction, to deliver 125,000 child care spaces, but it never did. Nothing ever materialized. This disproportionately affects women as we all know, especially single mothers with restricted incomes.

Business of Supply

Child care in my riding of Beaches—East York is backed up. I hear constituents every day. A new child care and youth centre opened last fall called Enderby. Within days there were waiting lists. One of my constituents, a mother, had lost her job because she was not able to secure full time child care for her child.

Then we say: “but we want people to work, we want people to be self-sufficient economically, and we want to help women’s economic security”. How? How are we helping this woman and her child?

There is a child care crisis in our country and the government talks and promises, and talks and promises, but nothing ever materializes.

That is quite destructive and I do not think I have to go too far because I have seen the people in my riding who are desperately looking for child care and cannot find it. It costs them a tremendous amount of money, \$1,300 or more per month, for a child care space if they do not have subsidy.

Let us look at another area, such as access to government services. Here again, the government says it wants to serve women, but it shut down 12 out of 16 regional Status of Women Canada offices across this country.

I met with rural women not too long ago who told me how they are very desperately isolated in their communities. They have no access to government services. If there is domestic violence in the home against a woman, there are next to no shelters to go to.

They pointed out that poverty is not just in the big cities, it exists in rural Canada. Many farm women, as well as their husbands, have to work off the farm in order to make ends meet. There is no training and services, and yet, what does the government do? It shuts down regional offices.

If people live in Newfoundland, they have to go to Moncton to access an office. Do members know how far that is? Of course, the assumption is that everyone has Internet, which is not true.

Again, the government has isolated and trapped these women, especially the poorest, and especially those who may be facing violence and difficulties in their lives. They need access to these services and they have been cut off.

•(1015)

The government keeps talking about caring about women’s equality and women’s conditions and yet it has cut off services, to, I presume, save some money because I do not see any other reason for this. The government has left only four offices for the entire country. This is a large country and it is far to travel and women in rural Canada have no way of accessing these offices.

Women talked to me when they heard about the offices closing. They were stunned at the government’s sheer vendetta against the Status of Women Canada. This is how they saw it. It now seems to be the voice of REAL Women that is setting the policy. I have seen that from the standing committee a number of times. It probably told us that it had met with the minister. In fact, the Minister of Finance only consulted with two organizations, one of which was REAL Women prior to the budget process.

Let us look at what happened just recently. Canada failed to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

My colleague from Winnipeg South Centre has been very vocal on this. The Conservative government’s vote against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples last year was a stain on our international reputation. It marked the first time Canada voted against a human rights document. It has sent a message to aboriginal women in Canada that the Conservative government will pick and chose when it will apply and respect human rights in this country.

For women, the declaration contained gender equality and non-discrimination clauses. The government’s refusal to support the declaration shows a blatant disregard for the struggles of aboriginal women in Canada to achieve equality. Canada’s aboriginal women deserve better.

It is not too late for the Conservative government to reverse its ideological opposition to the United Nations declaration and to send a message to aboriginal women that their rights are human rights.

I will give a very quick example with respect to aboriginal women in terms of other areas where the government has acted.

The court challenges program, which I will come to again later, was cancelled by the government. One specific example is the McIvor case. This is an aboriginal woman who, with the support and the assistance of the charter challenge fund, was able to fight for her rights that were being discriminated against under the Indian Act. She was able to go to the Supreme Court of British Columbia and win. Now that the government is appealing that decision to the Supreme Court of Canada and there is no charter challenge program, this woman cannot fight for herself anymore because she no longer has the ability to fight. Again, this is a wonderful picture: the great big government with all of its resources and this single aboriginal woman who it is afraid to give a penny to just in case she might be able to fight for her own rights in this country.

The charter challenge program was set up so that those people who were not wealthy could defend themselves and fight for their rights just as much as those who have money so that there would be equal opportunity of rights in this country for everybody, but it seems that it is selective.

The next thing the government did was cut off funding for research and advocacy. This was one of the very first acts of the government. For decades, groups, NGOs, volunteer groups and women’s organizations have been funded to conduct valuable research and advocacy work, work that gave women rights. The rape shield law was changed because of work by these organizations. Our right to vote happened because women were courageous and fought. Our rights in the Constitution would not have happened had there not been women who organized and fought to ensure that women’s equality were entrenched in the Constitution.

When it comes to violence against women, yes, there are programs that assist women who may need assistance but there is not enough money, nowhere enough shelters and, as I mentioned earlier, the problems for rural women.

Business of Supply

● (1020)

The women who are lucky enough to get a program to help their specific situation may help but there is no money available to change the conditions, the policies, the environment, the culture and the violence these women live with. That is no longer possible because we cannot get money for research and cannot advocate research money.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women has had many hearings recently. We have been studying the human trafficking of women and children, economic security of women and violence against women. Do members know who comes before us? It is women's organizations that have done research and are advocating and informing the standing committee on these issues so we can make sensible recommendations to the House. In future, these organizations will no longer be there because they have already started to shut their doors.

The irony in all this is that the government will fund \$500,000 worth of lobby money to the Conference of Defence Associations lobby group, a group that will lobby the government for contracts for arms and military equipment but it will not fund women's advocacy organizations that fight for women's rights. How sad is that?

The government has clearly not been doing any gender based analysis on its budgets because most, if not all, of its social provisions in the last several budgets have been done through the tax policy, which are very detrimental when it comes to women because women hardly benefit from them.

If the government were to do a gender budgeting analysis, it would ignore the results. I suspect that it did not do a real one at all.

When Kathleen Lahey, a professor at Queen's University, came to our standing committee of the House of Commons, she noted that the \$1,200 that was supposed to be for the universal child care program, which is money given to everyone, misses the women and families who need it the most.

First, the \$1,200 is taxed back in the hands of the person who receives it. A single income family is likely to keep most of it but if both husband and wife are working they get much less. A single mother gets much less so they are lucky to get half of it and still there are no spaces for child care and no infrastructure. The income itself does not really help anyone financially to do anything. As an income support, it is too low and, as a child care measure, it is laughable, quite frankly. It seems to me that this program was designed specifically to damage or hurt.

To be more specific, let us look at a low income single mother for instance. If her children are under six, then she gets maybe \$50 of the \$100 a month that is supposed to go to her for child care. First, there are no spaces, and second, child care spaces cost upwards of 20 times that amount. It is not a child care program no matter how many times the Conservative government refers to it as universal child care. There is nothing universal about it because there is no access. It is income support and it is taxed back. The people who suffer the most from this are women.

Our side of the House, the Liberal Party, did have and still has a program called a child benefit program. It was described as the most

significant social policy in decades when it was introduced but the current government had to play around with that too. It eliminated the young child supplement. Not only do low income women not have child care, because the \$1,200 does not work, but they also lost the young child supplement. Since the Conservatives have been in power they have done nothing to increase the child benefit program. So much for their interest in eradicating child poverty, assisting families with children and assisting women who generally suffer the most in these areas.

● (1025)

Continuing with the tax policy way of doing things, let us look at pension splitting. Pension splitting has been touted as the biggest thing but it only benefits about 12% of seniors and only those seniors who have very large pensions, who tend to be men and not women. If both husband and wife have worked throughout life and saved probably the same amount of money, they do not benefit very much because as one gets lower on the income scale one saves very little. If someone is single, there is nobody to split with anyway. The largest group of poor people in our country as seniors are women who are not able to split with anyone. Of the seniors in this country, 1.7 million are not helped by this at all. This, again, is a scheme that helps wealthy Canadian seniors who, I guess, are happy and have no problems. However, low to middle income seniors in general are not helped and women in particular are completely left out in the cold.

Again, this is another tax measure that does not work and certainly not for women.

We have said that the government cannot deliver. Five thousand dollars is the next one in the most previous budget. Now we have a \$5,000 tax-free savings account, which supposedly will help seniors to save money. First, they need to have \$5,000 to save and a lot of seniors do not have \$5,000. A lot of poor mothers, single moms and women do not have that much money. This account will be a good top-up to the RRSP for the people who have it but it certainly does not help the average woman in this country who, by the way, earns about \$38,000 a year according to the data that I have seen. While there are women who earn a lot more, that is the average income and many other women are below that.

The government does not understand that it cannot deliver social programs through the tax system because it does not work. Maybe it is doing that purposely, and that has been my conclusion. It has spent all this time emptying the cupboard and now the cupboard is bare, and it has left women behind in the process. It has spent billions of dollars.

The GST cut will help people who have lots of money but for the average income family chances are they will not save a lot of money, but they will have lost a lot in investment that could have happened, some of which I have already mentioned.

Lisa Philipps of Osgoode Hall Law School, who appeared before a Senate committee that is studying the gender budgets, said:

Business of Supply

...one must always consider I think is the impact on men and women as individuals. In other words, we need to get beyond the household-level analysis, which is the standard analysis that's done by tax policy-makers. There's an assumption that if you deliver a tax cut to a household, all members of the household will benefit equally. I would disagree with that. I think giving a tax cut to the breadwinner does not guarantee that women will get a share of it.

That is why we have asked that it not do just do a gender budgeting analysis, but then listen to the results because if the policy then does the exact opposite of what the results show, and the results obviously show that women are being left behind, then that is a real problem.

In 2004, 38% of women did not have a high enough income to even pay income tax. These women will not benefit from any Conservative tax credits at all. The importance of gender budgeting should not be understated because it is very important.

On the issue of affordable housing, the government has not put any money into housing at all. I just want to quote the Ontario minister for municipal affairs for Ontario who said:

Under [Minister of Human Resources and Social Development] watch, funding for affordable housing will steadily go down, starting this fiscal year, because he has refused to even consider a new program.

On affordable housing, who are affected the most? Women, low income families, middle income families and women are affected the most. Our 30-50 plan is one that works.

•(1030)

As I have to wrap up, I note that I would have liked to talk about pay equity. One of my colleagues may do that for me today or perhaps I can do it through questions.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to listen to some of what I guess we could call a diatribe from the Liberals this morning to see what they are thinking about the budget. Of course, we know what they did about the budget. What they did about the budget was that they did not bother showing up to vote. That is what we know for sure, which really leads us to think two things.

One is that the hon. member does not really believe anything she just said. She said it is a terrible budget for women, an awful thing, a catastrophe on every level and a disaster no matter how we cut it. One possibility, I guess, is that she does not really believe it, but of course we have to believe hon. members, so she probably does believe it.

What that means, then, is that she believes it but is putting her own self-interest and the interests of her party ahead of the interests of women. That is also credible and I think probably true as well. The Liberals think more about their own political skins than they do about the actual people they say they represent. That is why they do not show up to vote. That is why we have spent eight months here and on every critical vote they do not bother to come. They just do not show up, but they say they care.

That leads me to my point. If saying "we care" got the job done, the Liberals would have had it all solved already. Jeepers, they care. They care about everything. They care from dawn to dusk. They care in the media. They care in their speeches. They just do not do anything about it.

For example, yesterday we announced five more shelters to help aboriginal women and protect them against violence. Why five more shelters? Because there is a need for them. Why? Because the Liberals did not put them in place. That is why we had to move in and help with five more shelters for first nations ladies: because it was a need that was obvious and that is why we filled it. We cannot match the Liberals for rhetoric, but as for getting the job done, certainly.

The Liberals talked about Indian residential schools settlement for a very, very long time. How much money did they pay out?

An hon. member: Nothing.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Nothing. Not a dime, not a cent, not a penny, not a bit. Why? Because they talk a good line but they just do not get it done.

The Liberals talked about a specific claims tribunal. Why? Because it is necessary. We moved ahead with it and the tribunal will have \$2.5 billion in a process that first nations want to see happen. That is because we did it while the Liberals talked about it.

Finally, on the issue of human rights, the Liberals talked about the rights of indigenous people at the United Nations. For 30 years, the United Nations has been saying to this country to remove the prohibition that precludes first nations from being protected in their basic human rights here in Canada. People do not know this, but there are no human rights on reserves because the Liberals, for the past eons, said it was just not a priority. That is something we have corrected. We had to fight tooth and nail, as we did—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I hate to interrupt the minister in full flight, but I have given him a full three minutes to ask a question and we have other people rising. The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

•(1035)

Hon. Maria Minna: First, Mr. Speaker, I find it extremely disturbing that the gentleman opposite considers women's issues a diatribe. That tells me a great deal about what his party thinks about women.

He bragged that his party did the residential schools settlement. It was all done already by us. All the Conservatives did was write the cheque. Had our government not fallen, it would have been done nonetheless.

The Conservatives eliminated the child care program. How can they talk about having solved child care?

Yes, they are funding some shelters for women on reserves. There are never enough shelters. No question about it, that is great, but they have shut down the voices of women. Women cannot speak to fight. Providing shelters is important, but we also need to change the culture of violence in this country. For that kind of stuff, the Conservatives will not allow any advocacy, so it does not really work at all.

The Conservatives say that we did not solve child care. There was \$5 billion. It was solved. They cancelled it. Why does the hon. member not tell us why they felt the need to destroy something that was working in this country and was helping families and women?

Business of Supply

Again, the Conservatives are not doing anything on housing. There was a housing program, which—

Hon. Chuck Strahl: There is \$1.4 billion.

Hon. Maria Minna: No, that is not true. The program was cancelled. The money is going down and no new money has been put in.

The hon. member can say it is a diatribe, but at the end of the day the Conservative government has done more destructive things than I have seen in a long time. Quite frankly, I do not think the Conservatives can brag too much.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is really a very interesting point that the member opposite has raised, because this is about what the current government has not done and what is not in the budget.

I need to remind people that there were 18 Liberal women who helped the 2008 budget pass on March 4. These were: the members for London West, Brampton West, St. Paul's, Oakville, Guelph, Brampton—Springdale, Laval—Les Îles, Vancouver Centre, Mississauga East—Cooksville, Thornhill, Nunavut, Churchill, Sudbury, Beaches—East York, Winnipeg South Centre, Don Valley East, York West and Newmarket—Aurora. They all said this budget should pass.

Therefore, I am astounded at what I now am hearing from an opposition member who passed the budget.

I have worked on child care through three cabinet portfolios in previous times. I was very encouraged at one stage that child care might actually come about.

Now those Liberal members say that the government was dissolved 46 days before they wanted it dissolved. Now they say that in those 46 days they were going to secure child care. In 46 days? That is a miracle.

Those members opposite say they were going to clean up the environment in 46 days. That is another miracle.

They were going to alleviate the living conditions of aboriginal people in 46 days. That is another miracle.

I would really like the member to tell me, having been there all that time, why the Liberals waited until the last 46 days to do those things.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can be very smug all she wants. The facts—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Maria Minna: And self-righteous, I am sorry, but the facts are these. The NDP had a deal with the Liberals and for the first time in 30 years that party had some real power. The NDP members decided to throw it away because they decided they wanted an election. Why?

On the table were programs that were already in place: child care, Kelowna, and the environment. Those members chose. They wanted an election. Why they did that, I do not know, because they knew that if the Liberals lost the vote the Conservatives would come in. If

NDP members believed that the Conservative Party would keep all those programs, they were fooling themselves.

Now, today, those members want another election. The NDP wants elections all the time. If there were an election, I do not think the NDP would form the government. If the NDP does not form the government, that means it is the Liberals or the Conservatives. If the Conservatives come back, all this stuff is off the table again. What does the NDP really want to accomplish with another election, except to continue the existing—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. A final comment or question, the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are witnessing a rather sad spectacle in the House this morning, just a couple of days before International Women's Day.

When I started to read the Liberal motion, I thought that perhaps they were actually taking an interest in the status of women in our society. There are several things in this motion that the Bloc could easily go along with, such as the reinstatement of the court challenges program that the Conservatives abolished.

However, at the end of the motion, in its pathetic conclusion, we see that the Liberal Party can stoop pretty low. In fact, it is using this motion to criticize the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. This is a sorry way to use women, who deserve the dignity of a non-partisan debate in this House.

It is really pathetic that the Liberal Party is associating such a ridiculous partisan issue with women's issues, especially since what they are accusing the Bloc Québécois and the NDP of is standing up to this government, a government that has schemed and stolen from Quebecers and Canadians for years.

I would like to know whether the member, as a woman, thinks it is okay for her party to stoop to the level of turning this into a completely partisan issue.

[*English*]

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, I can say that for a long time my party has fought for women's rights. I myself have spent a good many years, both before my election and since then, in fighting for women's rights, for child care, for the child tax credit, for income support for children and for housing.

We Liberals had that in place. Obviously, after the election it disappeared. I am continuing that fight. I am continuing to try to convince the government of the day to actually reinstate some of those programs.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have a motion similar to the one we attempted yesterday to provide adequate opportunity for debate on the Afghanistan motion. I think we are a little better placed today to get the consent we were seeking. The motion has been changed a bit. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of the House, on Monday, March 10 and Tuesday, March 11, 2008, commencing at the hour the House would normally adjourn and ending at midnight, the House shall consider Government Motion No. 5 provided that during the debate, no quorum calls, dilatory motions, or requests for unanimous consent will be receivable by the Chair; and when no member rises to speak, or at midnight, whichever comes first, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day without the question being put.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for St. Catharines.

I rise today on a motion introduced on this opposition day, to speak to a number of issues related to the status of women in Canada, and specifically to talk about what our government has accomplished.

Our government is taking the necessary steps to support projects that help improve women's lives.

I am happy to remind this House that in budget 2008, our government announced that we would develop an action plan to advance equality for women in Canada by improving their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life.

I am proud to say that we have made changes to Status of Women Canada to modernize the organization. We have updated the women's program, with special focus on the terms and conditions of that program.

The mandate of the women's program now reads as follows: "to advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life". The program supports projects that improve the status of women in key areas such as women's economic status and violence against women and girls.

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Our government wants to achieve real results for Canadians by addressing situations and issues that they consider important. That is why our government streamlined operations at Status of Women Canada and its regional offices and increased their accountability.

How did we do that? We also allocated additional resources to the important work the organization is doing for Canadian women, their families and their communities.

My hon. colleagues in this House will recall that in 2007, our government gave \$10 million in additional funding to Status of Women Canada for 2007-08 and put in place a new funding mechanism for the women's program.

In this way, our government increased the grants and contributions budget of the women's program by 76% to a record high of \$20 million.

With this additional funding, Status of Women Canada is now better equipped to distribute grants and contributions under the women's program and get more results for women. We believe that money must be made available to groups that are helping women in their communities. That is what helped us streamline the women's program.

The women's program is operating much more efficiently and cost-effectively thanks to its four points of service. Through this program, we are funding projects that reach women right in their communities, where they need it most.

As a result of an initial call for proposals from the women's community fund within the women's program, \$8 million over three years will fund 60 projects reaching more than 60,000 women across Canada. Here are a few examples of projects funded by the women's program.

Two weeks ago, in Iqaluit, I announced that the YWCA of Canada will create three points of service in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon, where culturally appropriate health services will be offered, along with entrepreneurial job training, child care programs and programs for the prevention of violence against women and children in aboriginal and northern communities.

The organization Femmes Équité Atlantique will tackle the obstacles facing Acadian and francophone women aged 16 to 30 and over 50 living in minority language situations in the Maritimes.

The organization Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie will offer leadership training to 600 women all over Quebec and mentor some 100 women in Quebec who wish to actively participate in the democratic process.

The Planned Parenthood Association of Edmonton will provide support and services in the area of reproductive and sexual health to some 100 immigrant and refugee women living in Edmonton.

● (1045)

Another call for proposals by the women's community fund met with unprecedented success. We received more than 300 proposals.

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This overview confirms that the existing regional offices of Status of Women Canada ensure that implementation of the women's program is far-reaching and truly effective. Status of Women Canada is continuing to serve women throughout the country, in both rural and urban areas, from these four offices, which now operate at maximum efficiency. Electronic communications allow us to properly serve our clients.

Streamlining the operations of the women's program has resulted in much greater efficiency in many respects. A two-tiered application process is now in place. The women's program accepts general funding applications throughout the year. Specific calls for proposals are launched periodically.

We want to work together to improve the lives of Canadian women. This means that more projects and more funds must directly help women in their communities in an effective and responsible manner. In order to achieve this objective, we carefully reviewed all aspects of the work of Status of Women Canada.

Changes are not restricted to the women's program and regional offices. All Status of Women Canada operations were streamlined. Staff is concentrating on the clearly defined priorities of the organization—women's economic security and prosperity and the elimination of abuse—so that they may take full advantage of the funding we are providing.

I am pleased to point out that in the 2008 budget our government announced that we would soon be preparing an action plan to advance equality of women in Canada by improving their social and economic conditions and increasing their participation in democracy. That demonstrates true respect for Canadian women.

• (1050)

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about a very long list of programs that have opened, or are opening, across the country. I have no problem with these. Projects on the ground that help individual women survive and improve their conditions are absolutely admirable. There is no question that these were done before.

However, these programs will never meet the needs of all women who desperately need services. They will only serve some women. In one case I think the hon. member mentioned 600. In my riding alone, I met with a group of women last week from a number of communities. They are looking for work because none of them have jobs.

These projects will never serve every woman who needs help. Organizations that do advocacy look at domestic violence. They look at access to services for women. They identify the policy differences and then they lobby. The government has eliminated the lobby process.

Will the government fund the research and advocacy of organizations? These organizations identify the needs of women and identify solutions. They then communicate those solutions to standing committees and governments across the country to ensure the conditions for women change overall?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, and I cannot say this enough, we are working to give funding directly to women in need, to all Canadian women across Canada, including women in Quebec. We want to deal directly with them.

We have proven a number of things. With all due respect to my colleague, it is by working directly with women that we understand their needs. And they need funding to be available.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the opposition has been calling for the court challenges program to be reinstated by the government for a long time now. We have never really gotten an answer from the hon. member on that.

I would like her to explain to this House how the court challenges program worked, what the government thought was wrong with it and why it abolished the program.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, as hon. members know, the court challenges program matter is before the courts and I will not answer that question.

Nonetheless, it always makes me laugh to see that the Bloc Québécois is now interested in official language minorities when we know full well that that very party has never lifted a finger for francophones outside Quebec. I do not owe the Bloc Québécois any explanation—especially when it comes to this.

[English]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of the member. I want to ask her some specific questions about the record of her government in terms of a commitment to the equality of women and the promotion of women's social economic justice.

As part of the Conservative government's fat trimming, it cut \$5 million from Status of Women Canada, which was about 40% of the operating budget of that department. These cuts were made with no consultation or debate. Yet on the same day it made the cuts, the government announced a \$13.2 billion surplus for 2005-06.

Just what is the Conservative agenda for women? It appears to be one of cuts, no commitment to child care, no commitment to the real actions, like pay equity, which would improve the lives of women in our country?

• (1055)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, our record is this: our government grants \$20 million a year to projects that have a direct impact on women and girls, which is a record for Status of Women Canada.

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Furthermore, several Canadian government programs are directly related to women, such as the official languages minority communities program, the aboriginal peoples' program, particularly the national women's organizations component, the women's multiculturalism program, the Justice Canada crime prevention program, programs funded by Health Canada, and the Citizenship and Immigration Canada immigration settlement and adaptation program. We have several other programs.

Whenever we present a budget and we want input from women, the NDP always votes against those budgets.

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the opposition day motion suggesting that the government should amend the criteria of the women's program of Status of Women Canada to give access to groups engaging in research, defending rights, or simply lobbying government.

First, permit me to make one thing clear. The Government of Canada does not make funding decisions based on who an organization is; it does so based on what the organization actually does. This is certainly the case with the women's program of Status of Women Canada. The program provides funding for projects by not for profit and for profit organizations, and the projects must provide a direct benefit to women and their specific communities.

As a result of these funded initiatives, our government is increasing equality for women and their families by improving their economic and social conditions and their participation in the democratic life of our country.

The women's program and regional operations directorate takes the lead within Status of Women Canada for funding community based action that addresses issues directly related to equality for women.

The women's program was established in 1973. Since that time it has provided funding to women's organizations and other equality seeking organizations in our country.

Over the past several years the women's program has experienced a number of changes. Those changes were based on a move toward an increased focus on accountability and seeking quantifiable results for the funding projects.

The program has undergone reviews, renewals and various changes. They have been implemented to improve the operations of the program itself, as well as its capacity for results focused action and accountability.

The women's program is working effectively for women in all their diversity and in every corner of our country.

The program's mandate is to advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their equal participation in democratic life. Similarly, the program's objective is to "achieve the full participation of women in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada".

The women's program does this by providing assistance to organizations to carry out projects at local, regional and national levels in key areas, such as women's economic status, women in

leadership, violence against women and girls, and programs that directly impact the lives of women from multicultural and first nations communities. This work must be done in an accountable and transparent way.

Our government is proud of our support and our work for the women's program. I do, however, find it ironic that the party opposite chose such a motion for today's topic. On the one hand it provides us with the opportunity to highlight the great work that we are doing for women in this country. On the other hand, and perhaps those members have forgotten, it was the Liberals who chose to vote against our budget in 2007.

The Liberals voted to take away the \$100 child care benefit. They voted against more money for Status of Women Canada. It was members opposite who gutted gun crime legislation, weakening its specific intent. And they say that they stand up for women in this country?

It is this government that has increased the budget of the women's program to \$20 million, an increase of 76%, the highest level of funding it has ever received. The increased grants and contributions are making a real difference in the lives of Canadian women facing challenges. As a result, the women's program is now better funded. It is stronger, more relevant, and more accountable than ever.

This government has also given the program the flexibility it needs to address issues of concern to women from coast to coast to coast. That is important because the concerns of women are as diverse as the women of Canada themselves.

These concerns can be very different and very specific, depending on the community and our country's great geography. Indeed, our recognition of the diversity of the women of Canada underpinned an important announcement yesterday that will benefit aboriginal women.

• (1100)

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians announced that five new shelters will be built in five new communities across Canada. They will be built to help address violence against first nations women and their families.

This initiative builds on our government's one-time investment in 2006 of \$6 million to meet the urgent operational needs of the existing 35 shelters. These five new shelters to be built in five provinces are the result of our further investment in 2007 of almost \$56 million for the first nations family violence prevention program. Construction, I am happy to say, will begin this summer.

Initiatives like this, along with our government's support for women's programs, underscore our commitment for women. By using funding priorities, Status of Women Canada ensures women's program resources are invested where the need is the greatest and where there is a clear potential to make a correct, direct and concrete impact. This means that while all proposals receive due consideration, priority will be given to those that fall within the 2007-08 funding priorities.

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Through its funding and services, the women's program enhances knowledge and engagement in advancing gender equality. Because of that support, a growing number of organizations are achieving their objectives and making a difference for their communities and for their regions in Canada.

The following issues have actually been identified as women's program priorities in 2007-08: first, women's economic security and prosperity; second, women's health, both non-medical and clinical; third, women's safety; and fourth and probably most important, eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

In addition, as of April 2007, this government diversified the women's program. It now offers two components: the women's community fund and the newly created women's partnership fund. Let me explain both of these.

The women's community fund focuses its support on eligible organizations to support projects at the local, regional and national levels. To qualify, projects must address the economic, social and cultural situation of women in their specific communities. The women's partnership fund, on the other hand, focuses its support on eligible organizations to carry out partnership projects at the local, regional and national levels.

The fund seeks to build partnership projects between the Status of Women Canada and eligible non-government recipients and public institutions to jointly address the economic, social and cultural situation of women in our country. Applications to the women's partnership fund are accepted throughout the fiscal year.

Clearly, the women's program is fulfilling its mandate and achieving its objectives. As a result of the efforts of our government, it is meeting the needs and it is meeting the interests of women all across our great country.

• (1105)

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member and I know he was reading his notes on the women's program. Essentially, what has happened since his party became the government is that no research or equality seeking advocacy is allowed under the current terms and conditions of the women's program.

One might ask why that is necessary. It is necessary because all of the good programs that someone can put in place to help with the problem do not help with the fact that we have to get over those hurdles, to knock down those hurdles so we actually get to equality, that we get the change in the system. The government has cut off the advocacy aspect. The research has been cut off, research that could help the advocacy to get real equality, to get real economic prosperity.

Has the member ever read the terms and conditions of the women's program? Does he understand what the difference is in the changes that his government has brought about?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, obviously the member for London West is here on behalf of women and certainly to advocate for them. I might say though that the word "advocacy" itself, if used in the proper context, is not a bad word, but the fact is in the context of this program, it represented lobbying.

The one important component of what the program is offering in its present state after we changed it is the fact that it will go to programs that actually are implemented, that actually allow women to use the funding for its intended purpose, and that is to deliver programs.

To simply fund organizations with taxpayers' money, regardless of what those organizations may be, to simply lobby the government is not an appropriate expenditure of funds. It is not an appropriate expenditure of taxpayers' dollars. It is obvious because we have been able to take the money that was used for lobbying and invest it in programs where we are seeing sustainable and great benefits for women in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for St. Catharines for his comments. I heard him talk about "changes". A number of times, he said that there were policy changes or program changes. I also noticed that the member for Beauport—Limoilou spoke about "streamlining". When I hear the word streamlining, I think of cuts to spending or programs.

A number of my constituents have spoken to me about the closure of Status of Women Canada offices. The member for Beauport—Limoilou touched on this. I would like the member to speak about the closure of these offices. I would also like to know what positive things the Conservative government did before closing these Status of Women Canada offices.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his attention to my speech and I appreciate his question. The answer falls along the same lines as the answer to the previous question.

The fact is that this government is not interested in funding lobbying efforts. What we are interested in is funding programs that work, and in this specific circumstance, programs for women.

The member asked for a couple of examples. There are a number: the funding under the official languages program for linguistic minorities, the aboriginal representative organizations program, the multiculturalism program, the crime prevention program at Justice Canada, and the programs funded by Health Canada.

Our government has funded and is implementing a program that makes sense, that actually can be implemented and used by women and organizations across this country within their communities, not to go to offices to meet with staff, to determine lobbying efforts and to travel to Ottawa to try to convince the government to give them more money to fund more lobbying. Those days are over and they are not coming back.

•(1110)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying that I will share my time with the member for Laval, the Bloc's status of women critic. I am counting on you, Mr. Speaker, to let me know when I have one minute left, since I have only 10 minutes and I would like to be able to fit in as much as possible.

Since the Conservatives were elected in 2006, the members of this House have been able to see how this government completely ignores the women of this country. I am very tired of rising over and over to make the government and the minister listen to reason. Unfortunately, I do not think they care at all about we have to tell them about women.

The budget tabled on February 26 gave us a good idea of what the Conservatives think about women and their problems. With just five short lines in a document of over 400 pages, the Minister of Finance and his Prime Minister clearly showed that if women want a government that understands their everyday reality, they should show their dissatisfaction at the next election.

I would like to clarify some things about my Liberal colleague's motion.

Women's equality is a matter of human rights and, since the court challenges program was a useful tool in achieving that end, it should be reinstated.

The court challenges program was certainly perceived by the government as a thorn in their side, an obstacle to their medieval policies. It comes as no surprise then that the Conservatives got rid of the program at the first opportunity. Think of the negative impact this has had on women, francophone minorities outside Quebec and the first nations.

Ever since the program was abolished, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for its reinstatement. In the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, a majority of witnesses have underscored the importance and unique nature of the program. During those sessions, the witnesses told us that the program served the public interest and they explained its benefits to certain women's groups, including aboriginal groups, members of minority groups and disabled people. According to the witnesses, this is essentially an affirmative action program for vulnerable people in Canada. I will provide some examples of the benefits described by the witnesses.

The program helped women challenge unconstitutional federal legislative provisions and the government's inaction; the program offered marginalized people a way to challenge discriminatory practices, guarantee their rights to equality and defend their human rights; and the program assured an approach that is both methodical and respectful of the law. The government cannot now tell us that this program was no longer useful.

To provide a legitimate and necessary voice to the needs of women, research and advocacy should be restored to the government's women's program.

The Conservative version of the women's program has been so stripped of its meaning and means that unfortunately it is now just a

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shadow of its former self. Once known throughout the country as a practical tool to promote women's rights and a lever for research into their situation, today it is just a colourless, odourless shell.

With the changes made to the women's program, it has become so difficult to qualify for funding through that program that many groups, especially in Quebec, no longer bother to apply, since they know from the outset that their applications will be denied.

The research conducted by these groups is essential if the government wants to understand the reality facing everyday women, as well as the repercussions that these ultra-conservative policies have had on women over the past two years. By changing the access to funding guidelines for the women's program, the Conservatives have made sure that they will never again have to deal with a study demonstrating that their policies are bad for women.

Although the Bloc Québécois asked the minister to apologize for her dismissive attitude towards women's groups, the minister instead accused us of playing petty politics.

•(1115)

Pay equity, combating violence against women, abortion rights and economic security: is that playing petty politics?

The Liberal motion states:

(c) an adequate supply of high quality childcare spaces is essential to ensuring women's participation in the workforce and the government should take the necessary steps immediately to create 125,000 spaces as it promised;

On this issue, I must say that I disagree completely with my Liberal colleague. Once again, when it comes to child care, Canada lags way behind Quebec.

For almost a decade now, everyone in Quebec has had access to child care services for \$7, regardless of their economic status. Furthermore, this issue of child care falls under provincial jurisdiction, and everyone knows how vehemently we, of the Bloc Québécois, oppose any interference by the federal government in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

After the Conservatives were elected in January 2006, they began issuing cheques for \$100 per month per child—a fine example that this government, like all federal governments before it, could not care less about respecting provincial jurisdiction. Had it taken the Prime Minister's speech about respect for Quebec to heart, this government would have transferred the money for this measure to Quebec so that we could improve our own child care system. The Bloc Québécois will always denounce federal meddling, especially with regard to our child care centres.

An OECD report stated:

There are...positive developments...to underline: The extraordinary advance made by Quebec, which has launched one of the most ambitious and interesting early education and care policies in North America. —none of [the Canadian] provinces showed the same clarity of vision as Quebec in addressing the needs of young children and families—

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The Liberal motion continues:

(d) since access to government services is essential in rural areas and the government's closure of 12 of 16 regional offices of Status of Women Canada further isolates rural women, the government should take immediate steps to improve access for our most isolated Canadians;

This government decision clearly proves that it does not have a clue about the difficulties many women in this country experience even today. How can the minister believe that she has a true understanding of the realities facing women when there are only four offices from coast to coast? The truth is simply that the minister does not wish to know about the distress of women in certain areas because that would force her to acknowledge that her Conservative government's actions, since coming to power, have definitely been mediocre.

From the very day that the 12 Status of Women Canada offices were closed, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for them to be reopened, especially the Quebec office. It is unbelievable that a Quebec minister and MP supported the closing of the organization's office in the Quebec capital. Knowing the importance of this office to women in the regions of Gaspé, the Lower St. Lawrence, the North Shore, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Chaudière-Appalaches and Quebec City, we realize that the Conservatives have no consideration for women in Quebec regions.

The Liberal motion continues:

(e) there is a growing need in Canada for a national housing strategy designed to assist the most vulnerable in our society and to treat them with the respect they deserve; and

that, therefore, the House condemn the irresponsible and self-serving actions on November 28, 2005, by the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois which led to the installation of a government that is hostile to the rights and needs of vulnerable Canadians.

My goodness. It is clear from this part of my Liberal colleague's motion that even after being defeated in 2006 and spending two years in opposition, the Liberals are just as contemptuous and still have that culture of entitlement.

I would like to remind the House of why the Bloc Québécois decided to throw the Liberals out in November 2005.

Between 1993 and 2001, the Liberal government completely withdrew from funding new social housing. As a result, in Quebec, the homeless and people without adequate housing were deprived of nearly 43,000 social housing units.

The Liberal government's reduction of federal transfers to the provinces for income security had a direct impact on the poorest members of society in Quebec and Canada.

The cuts made to employment insurance by the member for LaSalle—Émard, the former head of the Liberal Party, forced hundreds of thousands of people onto welfare.

• (1120)

The federal government's withdrawal from funding social housing pushed tens of thousands of people onto the streets.

The Liberals' refusal to negotiate an agreement on parental leave hampered Quebecers' efforts to balance work and family.

The Liberals' refusal to amend labour legislation in order to allow a real preventive withdrawal program created two classes of workers in Quebec.

The Liberals' refusal to substantially increase old age security meant that thousand of seniors were left to live out their days in poverty.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I will close with a brief message of hope for women in Quebec and around the world. On the eve of International Women's Day and as the Bloc Québécois deputy critic for the status of women, I would like to express my profound gratitude to those who, through their commitment and sacrifices, have led the way towards equality and better living conditions for us all.

Still today, we must remain vigilant so we do not lose what we have gained. We must also continue our struggle to defend our place in today's society.

In recognition of International Women's Day, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I promise that we will spare no effort to ensure that we and future generations can live in a world of peace, liberty and, above all, equality.

[English]

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the member opposite, and I would like to ask her a question.

In the province of Quebec child care is \$7 a day, and that model has been looked at by many people. What does she think the Conservative government's message is to women? I work with woman who is a single mom, holds down a job and has an eight year old. She receives this joyous gift from the Conservative government of \$100 a month.

In the province of British Columbia that \$100 a month will allow her to have before and after school care for maybe eight days in a month. Then the eight year old goes home, by herself, after school. She is also by herself before school. The \$100 a month, this generous child care gift, does not provide even half a month of before and after school care, never mind full time care.

What is the Conservative government's message to that women. What should I tell her it is?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for the little story about her friend.

Last year, the member for Laval, who is the Bloc's status of women critic, and I toured the province. We met with a number of women's groups and organizations in Quebec to learn about the financial situation women are in today. It is not a pretty picture. It does not look good. It is still primarily women who are the heads of single parent families. It is still primarily women who earn less than men. It is still primarily women who are the poorest members of society. It is still primarily women who have unstable employment. It is still primarily older women who are the worst off and poorest members of society.

I feel privileged and proud that Quebec has a universal early childhood day care and education system, available to all women and families regardless of their financial situation. As the hon. member said, the Conservative government's measly \$100 will not help families, either socially and economically, in obtaining long-term child care services for their children. The Conservative government's actions do not correspond to the realities and needs of women and families today.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker from the Conservative Party talked about a mandate of economic prosperity for women, but meanwhile the Conservatives will not enact pay equity legislation.

I know Quebec has a very good one and I am wondering if she could tell us a little about the experience in Quebec with respect to pay equity legislation and whether it is successful or not.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell my Liberal colleague that, once again, Quebec is showing its openness. It is ahead of its time when it comes to implementing measures and programs that correspond to reality. Quebec is also very aware of issues related to the status of women and women's equality.

As for the pay equity legislation my hon. colleague has referred to, once again, Quebec has shown that it was very aware of and concerned about the place of women in Quebec society.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want first to congratulate my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle, who did such a good job of explaining the Bloc Québécois' position on the Liberal opposition day devoted to the status of women. As well, I am very pleased that we are speaking on the eve of International Women's Day about the status of women, improvements in that status, and equality between men and women.

I am very sorry, though, that this is being done in connection with a partisan motion that ends on a partisan note and tries to stick it to colleagues in the NDP and Bloc Québécois for reasons that are not very clear in the motion. It is also very regrettable that the Liberal Party's motion intrudes on jurisdictions belonging to Quebec, the Quebec nation and other provinces. It is too bad that the Liberals are interfering once again in areas of Quebec's jurisdiction. That really is too bad.

All the women in Parliament are extremely fortunate and privileged to be here and to be able to further the well-being of our fellow citizens, especially women. On the eve of International

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Women's Day I think it would have been appropriate to make a grand gesture of solidarity, all the women together, to find a way to advance just one of the causes dear to women and to take just one step toward improving the status of women. Instead, we are busy here saying one party thinks this and the other party thinks that. That is really too bad.

It is even worse that International Women's Day is being marked so shortly after the passage yesterday of Bill C-484, an act to amend the Criminal Code (injuring or causing the death of an unborn child while committing an offence). I can hardly express how offended I feel, as a woman, by this bill. I am offended in several different ways.

First, this bill makes a pretence of protecting pregnant women and fetuses. In actual fact, it provides legal status to fetuses, which could even result in women who try to get an abortion being imprisoned as vile criminals. This is a bill that deprives women of control over their own bodies. What upset me the most is the fact that, even though the women in the party that introduced this bill were opposed to it, the people who voted in favour were mostly men. That is a real setback for the status of women. I think the Conservative Party will set the status of women back in several ways.

Among them are the cutbacks to Status of Women Canada on the pretext that the money does not go directly to women. Nothing could be more misguided. The need is still there. Status of Women Canada is an agency that teaches women how to fish rather than just giving them fish. I suspect the government knows very well what it is doing. On the pretext that the money does not go directly to women, it is eliminating the regional offices of Status of Women Canada.

Something else really shocked me. On one occasion, I had to sit in for one of my colleagues on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I was amazed to see that the main witnesses were two experts on the status of women representing Status of Women Canada. They had come to share their expertise with this government, particularly with the representatives of the Conservative government, who were asking them for opinions and advice and who were drawing on their expertise, all the while saying, in public, that Status of Women Canada was not doing its job.

I was enormously shocked, and I still am. I cannot come to terms with the fact that Status of Women Canada has had its budget slashed and Bill C-484 has been passed. I know it will be studied in committee, and I hope it will never get out of committee.

• (1130)

As labour critic, I am going to talk about women's working conditions. There was a question from the member for Beaches—East York concerning pay equity. I have to say that women in Canada generally have incomes lower than men. There is still a lot to be done regarding the status of women.

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In 2003, the average annual income—income from all sources before taxes—for women aged 16 and over was \$24,400. That included income from employment, transfer payments, investment income and other pecuniary income. It amounted to only 62% of men's income, which averaged \$39,300 in the same year.

In Quebec the Pay Equity Act of 1996 has remedied the wage gap within the same company where it results from gender-based discrimination against people employed in predominantly female job classes. That law affects all women in Quebec, with the exception of the just under 10% of women covered by the Canada Labour Code.

Although section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act provides that an employer who establishes differences in wages disparities between male and female employees who are performing work of equal value in the same establishment is committing a discriminatory practice, there is still a wage gap between men and women at the federal level.

The Bloc Québécois is calling for the existing pay equity model, which is based on complaints, to be replaced by a separate, proactive new pay equity law that would make pay equity a fundamental human right, consistent with the situation in Quebec, so that there would no longer be two classes of women workers in Quebec.

On the subject of two classes of women workers in Quebec, I would like to talk about the anti-strikebreaker law. This is another thing that results in two classes of women workers in Quebec. It is the same two classes—women who come under the Quebec Labour Code and have access to a number of reasonable privileges, and women who come under the Canada Labour Code, who work in banks, ports, airports, communications and telecommunications, who are less fortunate. Not only do they not have pay equity, but they also do not have protective reassignment or anti-scab legislation.

This morning, the Minister of Labour said that Canada ranked first among G-7 countries in the number of person days per worker lost due to labour disputes. I would like to remind the minister, as I have told him on several occasions in our discussions on the anti-scab bill, that from 1992 to 2002 in Quebec, out of 1,000 employees, 121 person days were lost, while in Canada, there were 266. The main reason, if not the only reason, is that Quebec has anti-scab legislation that works and that changes the employers' negotiating strategy. It gives unionized and non-unionized workers a means of applying pressure to match that of their employers. The anti-scab legislation also means that women who work in Quebec and are covered by the Canada Labour Code are in a more difficult situation than those who are covered by the Quebec Labour Code.

I would now like to address the question of protective reassignment. Women who work in Quebec under the Canada Labour Code have only the employment insurance program, which is not working well and needs improvement, as coverage when they must withdraw from a work environment that is harmful to them or their baby. Thus, a pregnant or nursing woman must meet the eligibility criteria for the employment insurance program. When we know that, in 2001, only 33% of women paying into EI were eligible for benefits, this means that many women have no protection.

Moreover, women entitled to these benefits only receive 55% of their gross pay, whereas in Quebec, under the occupational health and safety act, expectant mothers receive 90% of their net pay. In addition, this forces pregnant women working under federal jurisdiction to mortgage their maternity and parental leave because weeks used before the birth are deducted from their total weeks of benefits.

In Quebec, pregnant or nursing workers are covered under the Quebec workplace health and safety commission, the CSST, which provides wage protection for the number of weeks deemed necessary by their doctor to ensure the safety of the woman and the child, without having to use up their weeks of employment insurance.

• (1135)

Determined to rectify the unfair situation of Quebec women in workplaces under federal jurisdiction, the Bloc Québécois introduced a bill on May 10, 2005, to provide these workers with the right to be benefit from the provisions of the Quebec plan.

In spite of Liberal opposition, the Bloc Québécois succeeded in passing the bill at second reading, but it was not adopted before the end of the parliamentary session and died on the order paper. We realize that it is only a matter of time.

In conclusion—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unfortunately, there is not enough time for the conclusion.

We will now move to questions and comments. The hon. member for Surrey North.

[*English*]

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the member opposite.

The minority Conservative government prides itself on fiscal accountability, making sure that every dollar is used in an appropriate way. That is fair enough. But by cutting back on the Status of Women offices, how will the Conservatives evaluate these projects that are to help the economic, cultural and social lives of women?

One of the major challenges to projects is the empirical evidence and qualitative, not quantitative, evaluation to see if they are indeed making a difference in the lives of women, not just how much money is being spent.

The government is so concerned that the money is used appropriately and that we are prudent. I am wondering how the member would see that kind of empirical evaluation being done with all of the cuts to Status of Women which previously carried out that work.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question, but I must tell her that I am not a specialist in program evaluation and the adequate use of public funding, in particular for Status of Women Canada.

Business of Supply

Of course the Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that the tax dollars of citizens, of Quebecers, should be put to good use. That money must be used to serve the interests of the voters and taxpayers. It is not our money we are managing here in Parliament, but money that belongs to Canadian and Quebec taxpayers. Their money and taxes should be used to reflect their values. One value that is important to the Quebec nation is equality between men and women.

To help women in need in any way possible, this government must drop its hidden political agenda that is inspired by the right-wing women's group REAL Women of Canada. In any event, it is not by cutting funding to Status of Women Canada, nor by passing bills such as Bill C-484, that the government will be able to help defend the interests of Quebecers and promote their values.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government was talking about lifting women out of poverty. The best way to do that is for women to work.

I know that in Quebec the child care program is a very extensive one and a model we are all looking at, and tried to bring across the country at one point. Could the hon. member tell us how this particular program has helped women with respect to getting jobs, and has the number of women going to work actually been increased as a result of that program?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, we are very protective of our jurisdictions. We also know that employment is one of the jurisdictions of the Government of Quebec. The Government of Quebec therefore has responsibility for developing national programs and strategies—and by “national”, I mean “for Quebec”, of course—to create jobs and raise people out of poverty, and it does a very good job of this, as my colleague just said.

Currently in Quebec, as is likely the case in the rest of Canada and across North America, the poorest segment of society is not seniors, although they are not very well off either, but single parents, especially women, who make up the bulk of this group. They are one of the poorest segments of society.

The Government of Quebec has jurisdiction to develop national strategies in this area, and it will continue to do so.

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I thank the House for providing me with this opportunity to speak about the serious issues facing women in Canada. I will also be providing solutions in the action plan for women created by New Democrats with the help of civil society, the women of labour, our first nations sisters, and women's organizations across the country.

New Democrats believe our action plan can and will make a difference in the lives of women, their families and our communities because no nation can hope to fully realize its potential, create a strong economy or support successful communities when half of its citizens can be silenced by poverty, violence or powerlessness.

My Liberal colleagues opposite have raised a number of issues in regard to the shameful treatment meted out to women across the country. I am happy to address the points of their motion, but first I believe it might be helpful to take a brief look at the last 30 years of women's advocacy, to have a better sense of what Canadian women and their organizations currently face.

In 1979 the United Nations signalled to the world the necessity of an international bill of rights for women and the absolute need for a plan of action. Hence, there was the creation of the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, CEDAW.

Among CEDAW's 23 recommendations to improve women's rights around the world are requirements for signatory countries to ensure women's equal access to, and opportunities in, political and public life, education, reproductive health, employment, family law, child care and social security.

Canada signed CEDAW in 1980 and adopted its optional protocol in 2002. How have we done in the past 28 years? Unfortunately, the response by government to women's organizations working for women's equality has been less than stellar.

In 1995 the Liberal government dismantled the Canadian advisory council on the status of women and in subsequent years further eroded core funding for other women's organizations. It cut funds for women's shelters and transition houses, ended federal programs for affordable housing, cut funds for legal aid and disadvantaged women with punitive changes to employment insurance, and failed to bring forward proactive pay equity legislation and needed changes to maternity and parental leave benefits.

It does not end there. The current Conservative government changed the mandate of Status of Women Canada, cancelled the court challenges program, closed 12 regional offices, and removed lobbying, advocacy and research from the initiatives Status of Women Canada is willing to fund.

Both Liberal and Conservative governments have undermined women's equality. Both have attempted to still the voices of dissent.

One has to wonder what is so threatening about the work of these women's organizations that Liberal and Conservative governments felt compelled to close them down. Today's motion points out that the women of Canada deserve better. The reality is that Canadian women still face gender-based violence and poverty, and have trouble finding safe affordable housing and affordable child care.

Business of Supply

The lack of proactive pay equity must also be added to that list. Interestingly enough, what the motion fails to address is the Liberal failure to remedy any and all of these concerns. The Liberal government had 13 years of majority government to promote stable economic security for women, 13 years of majority government in which to implement progressive pay equity legislation, and what did it do? It cut spending to Status of Women and failed to implement any of the 113 recommendations from the 2004 pay equity task force report.

The Liberals also failed to bring forward a workable national child care act. In fact, after years of promises and eight consecutive surpluses, all Canadian families were offered was a mishmash of insecure options.

One former Trudeau aide called the Liberal child care policy a death bed repentance. It was a death bed repentance dished up on the eve of an election that was sparked by the damning findings of the Gomery commission, and just in case anyone has forgotten, Judge Gomery found the Liberals culpable in the disappearance of \$40 million taxpayer dollars.

Just for the sake of absolute accuracy, in the wake of the sponsorship scandal, the federal Liberal Prime Minister announced to Canadians that there would be an election in February 2006. Interestingly enough, that scandal ridden government did not survive a confidence vote and so the election took place one month earlier in January 2006.

• (1145)

Liberal government failures did not end with the lack of workable child care programs. Consider that the Liberals cancelled our national housing program, a program brought forward in 1971 by David Lewis and the NDP caucus. The national housing program provided the housing women so desperately needed if they hoped to escape poverty and violence.

Half of all Canadian women will experience criminal violence in either their homes, communities, workplaces or schools. Aboriginal women are five times more likely to die from violence than other Canadians and hundreds of aboriginal women have gone missing from their communities.

Clearly, we must redouble our efforts to achieve equality rights for women. To that end the federal NDP caucus launched the fairness for women action plan. It is a plan that not only reflects our long standing policies in support of women but also the workable achievements of NDP governments across Canada.

The solutions are obvious: stop funding the banks and big polluters with multibillion tax cuts and restore services to women. Our comprehensive action plan addresses six major areas of concern for Canadian women: fairness for women at work; better work-family balance; an end to violence against women; ensuring women's voices are heard; fairness for marginalized women; and equality for women around the globe.

Fairness for women at work means making equal pay for work of equal value the law. No excuses, no delays.

Increasing access to employment insurance because today only one in three unemployed women collects employment insurance benefits, down from 70% in 1990.

In the 39th Parliament the NDP introduced eight private members' bills to improve access to this vital income support and tabled a bill to reinstate the federal minimum wage, scrapped by the Liberals, and set it at \$10 an hour.

New Democrats have introduced a private member's bill that would ensure universal child care through our national child care act that would establish a network of high quality, not for profit, licensed child care spaces. This child care program would be protected in law.

Better work-family balance also includes improved parental and maternity benefits.

New Democrats believe that violence is best addressed by ensuring access to justice for women such as reinstatement of the court challenges program, restoration of funding to legal aid, community-led prevention strategies to end violence that are initiated and directed by women, and opening more healing centres.

Status of Women Canada, SWC, must become an independent department with full funding and its own minister. An effective status of women department must be able to research, monitor and advocate for women's rights, support the women's groups who are promoting gender equality, and offer program-based and core funding. It must also include the 16 regional offices that once existed.

There must be a recognition that too many senior and disabled women live below the poverty line. Seniors must have decent pensions and women living with disabilities must be able to participate in our society.

The New Democratic Party is committed to women's equality. We are very proud of the action plan we have developed and we will continue to work for its implementation because equality is fundamental to our future as a nation. It is far more important than tax cuts for big banks and big polluters.

All that remains is the part of the Liberal motion that makes reference to those who are self-serving. I would say to Liberal Party members who are afraid to face the electorate, who are guilty of convenient amnesia, who are forgetting it was the people of Canada who voted them out, and who are incapable of summoning up the courage to live up to election promises by sitting on their hands and pandering to this vile Conservative budget, that this is most certainly self-serving.

Business of Supply

I have an amendment to the Liberal motion. I move that the motion be amended by deleting all the words “that, therefore” and all the words after, and replace them with: “that this House acknowledge International Women's Week and call on the government to reinstate the court challenges program, restore funding to research and advocacy groups under women's program, reopen the 12 regional offices of Status of Women Canada, create a national housing program, provide resources for an early learning and child care program, implement proactive pay equity legislation, address violence against women, reform the employment insurance program to allow women better access to it, and recognize that women in Canada deserve fairness, affordability, equal opportunity, equal pay for work of equal value, a decent standard of living, and the freedom to live without fear”.

• (1150)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before ruling on the receivability of the amendment, it is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion.

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Beaches—East York if she consents to this amendment being moved.

Hon. Maria Minna: I do not, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member speaks, it would behoove her to stick to the truth. With all due respect, that would be very nice. She talked about fiction, and there is quite a lot of fiction in her comments.

The Liberals did not cancel the national housing program. It was Mulroney, and she needs to understand that. When she said that we stole the voices of women, it was the Liberals who reinstated the charter challenge program, which had been eliminated by Mr. Mulroney. She may have forgotten that.

• (1155)

Ms. Dawn Black: That is not true.

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, it is very true. The charter challenge program was cancelled by Mr. Mulroney and we reinstated it.

She also conveniently forgets that there was a huge deficit in 1993 when we came in, but we immediately got back to investing in people.

Ms. Dawn Black: On the backs of women.

Hon. Maria Minna: No. In fact, the parental leave program, which works very well, was introduced by the Liberals.

With respect to child care, we started to invest in child care in 2000, with \$2 billion, followed by another \$300 million or \$400 million the next year. Three years later, we invested \$5 billion. Mr. Harris in Ontario did not have child care. He called it “early years” because he refused to have child care. We had some difficulties in negotiating with the provinces. However, money was flowing to the provinces. Therefore, the national child care program was in place and it started in the year 2000.

Ms. Dawn Black: Not one child care space, not one.

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, there were many child care spaces, if you had bothered to check with your members across the country.

This is a comment rather than a question. When we speak, we ought to at least try to stick to the facts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I would just remind all hon. members not to speak directly to one another, but to address comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond. I have a good memory too. I remember that in 1993 the Conservative government, under Mr. Mulroney, did remove funding from the national housing program. However, I also remember that in 1993 a Liberal government was elected. It had every opportunity to restore affordable housing, and it did not.

In fact, in 1996 the Liberals cut the program entirely. It was only due to the fact that a few provincial governments provided affordable housing that people survived at all. Among those survivors were women fleeing violence, fleeing the lack of affordability and trying to raise their kids.

I also recall that when the Liberal government was elected in 1993, it had a little red book. In that book it promised that there would be a national child care policy program in place after three consecutive surpluses. After eight consecutive surpluses, no legal child care program was in place.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are words in the motion that are worthy of note and respect. In fact, the motion says that women's equality is a matter of human rights. I think most people in the House would agree with that.

The motion calls for an adequate supply of high-quality child care spaces. It says that this is essential. It talks about the need in Canada for a national housing strategy. Of course that is an essential program for Canadians and one that most Canadians lament losing.

We have had, until the last two years, 13 years of Liberal governments. Three of those governments were majority governments. Yet the Liberals never implemented a national child care program in our country. In fact, I remember the red book in the 1993 campaign, when the Liberals came to government after defeating a Progressive Conservative government. In that red book the Liberals solemnly promised to bring in 150,000 child care spaces. I remember them going across the country saying that.

Business of Supply

When the Liberals were defeated in 2006, the Liberals had not implemented any national child care program. Canada is one of the few developed countries in the world without a national child care program. Canada is also one of only two developed countries without a national housing program. The Liberals cut the national housing program when they had a majority government.

In the motion the members of the official opposition are trying to blame the opposition parties in the House of Commons for their defeat in the 2006 election. The reality is the people of Canada became very tired of Liberal scandals. The Gomery commission came out with a great report, documenting Liberal scandal and corruption.

Canadians became tired of Liberal inaction on the items that they had promised election campaign after election campaign. Canadians were the people who defeated the Liberal government.

I want to highlight what a few Liberals have said about their defeat in 2006. One quote says that the Conservatives won “because Canadians believed they had to take power from the Liberals”. Who said that? It was Liberal candidate Bob Rae, who is running in a byelection right now.

Another quote, after the fall of the Liberal government in 2006, is by the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. He said, “There are aspects of our party that are sick as hell. We are a deeply factionalized and divided party. The test of things will be to find a leader who can bring us together”.

This quote is from ex-Liberal aide, Tom Axworthy. He said that the Liberal government's national day care program was “a deathbed repentance”.

The hypocrisy in this motion is staggering, when the Liberals blame the opposition parties for their defeat in 2006. The hypocrisy of the official opposition is absolutely overwhelming, and Canadians will see through it.

Let us look at the Liberal record on women during the 13 years the Liberals were in government. We had no child care, no pay equity, no national housing program. They made changes to the employment insurance program, which disenfranchised women and made it much more difficult for women to access benefits under employment insurance. That is what the Liberal government did.

In March 1997 the then secretary of state for the Status of Women, the member for Vancouver Centre, eliminated program funding for women's organizations. The Liberals disbanded the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Program funding for women's organizations was cut by more than 25% over the 1990s, while the Liberals had majority governments.

● (1200)

It is not only the Liberals who have impacted negatively on the lives of Canadian women. The Conservative government cut an additional \$5 million to Status of Women Canada. It has eliminated any funding for research and advocacy for women's equality rights. It reduced the Status of Women Canada budget by 38.5%. The government has even removed the word “equality” from the mandate of Status of Women programs and taken out the whole *raison d'être* for women's struggle for equality in our country.

We can look back also at the years when the Liberals had majority governments and see what they did with respect to social programs.

Starting in 1996, the Liberal government cut over \$25 billion from transfers for health, education, social assistance. The Liberals eliminated the Canada assistance plan in their 1995 budget. They changed employment insurance and based it on eligibility of hours worked rather than weeks worked, which disproportionately hurt women.

In their 1996 budget, the Liberals ended the federal role in social housing by cutting it out totally. We see the devastation on the streets of every city and community in Canada. Homeless people are living and sleeping on the streets. Twenty years ago, people would have said that would be impossible in a country as wealthy as Canada, and now we see it every day in every region across the country. The Liberals cut any federal role in social housing in Canada.

What did the Liberal government do with the surpluses it started to register in 1998? Did it reinvest in education? Did it reinvest in housing? Did it reinvest in women's programs? No. Did the Liberals invest any of it in child care? No, they did not. They allocated over \$1 billion to tax cuts, while programs that benefited women, children and the disenfranchised in Canada were left out.

In 1993, and I remember this well, the Liberals promised to create 150,000 child care spaces. After 13 years of government, three of them majority governments, they created none. We still have a crisis in Canada with child care. In fact, my son and daughter-in-law have just had their first child. They were searching for child care in the Vancouver region. A little over a week and a half before they were due to start back to work they found an adequate and proper child care space for my granddaughter. I hear from members of my community all the time about their struggle to find child care for their children, and I now know about it first-hand.

What have the Conservatives done on social programs? They have a sorry and sad record too. They have posted a massive \$13 billion surplus, \$5 billion more than they expected last year. Yet none of that has been put into social programs. That is a shame on our country. It saddens most Canadians to see their fellow citizens living in poverty when the government could have helped.

I have one final point to make for the official opposition members who have brought forward this hypocritical motion today.

On March 4, the Conservative budget was passed, with the assistance of 18 Liberal women members of Parliament, representing London West, Brampton West, St. Paul's, Oakville, Guelph, Brampton—Springdale, Laval—Les Îles, Vancouver Centre, Mississauga East—Cooksville, Thornhill, Nunavut, Churchill, Sudbury, Beaches—East York, Winnipeg South Centre, Don Valley East, York West and Newmarket—Aurora.

Business of Supply

•(1205)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that with the option today to make a speech, to speak to issues that concern women and to move forward together to build some sort of support for the programs that have been cut, to reinstate them and to deal with this issue, what we heard here was a tirade, much of which was not actually based on fact.

I would like to answer very clearly with regard to this issue. It has been said over and over by the hon. member's party that it was the Liberals who cut national social housing. I would like the hon. member to go back into the books and check it out, because that was done under Brian Mulroney's Conservative government.

In 1995, when the Liberals had in fact gone a long way toward getting rid of the Mulroney deficit, we actually did not bring social housing back in at the time because there were other priorities, such as health care and homelessness, which we decided to deal with. The Liberals then began to bring in a national housing program by signalling a national housing interest, by creating a minister of state for housing beginning in about 2000, and by putting \$2 billion into second-stage housing for women who were victims of violence, as well as moving to bring in the SCPI program, which everyone has lauded.

When we speak of hypocrisy, it is really interesting to hear this hon. member talking about child care and all of these issues, which our government brought in, which they say they supported and then—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I will have to stop the hon. member there. The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to address the whole issue of housing in this country.

Ten per cent of women who seek shelter are turned away due to lack of space in shelters for battered women in this country.

Canada is one of only two developed countries that does not have a comprehensive national housing strategy. The official opposition had the opportunity for 13 years while in government to ensure that we did have a national housing strategy and neglected to do anything about it.

It is true that the previous Mulroney government cut funding for social housing projects, but it was the Liberal government that eliminated the program altogether and took no action to reinstate a national housing program in this country.

•(1210)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it really frustrating in this place when misinformation is persistently put forward. If we want to have a debate, let us at least deal with some facts. It was not the Liberal government that eliminated the funding and eliminated the program.

Shortly thereafter, as soon as we were able, we were back into housing and homelessness. In Ontario, \$602 million was announced for housing, and in fact it was announced in my riding, to partner with the Government of Ontario. We were doing this right across the country. We were back into housing quite aggressively.

I also hear this constant cry about child care, but if that party truly wanted to keep child care in place, then why would it vote us down? Those members had power with us. For the first time in 30 years, that party had the power to actually influence government policy. It did not have to go to an election. Now the NDP wants to go to an election yet again. What for this time? What is it going to accomplish with another election? Will it bring child care to them or not? It will not do any of that.

With all due respect, I am tired of hearing misinformation in this House constantly.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, perhaps it is important, then, to look at the timeline of the defeat of the Liberal government in 2005. In April of that year, the member for LaSalle—Émard said to Canadians on television that he planned to call an election in nine months.

The New Democratic Party agreed in the House to support the Liberals for the three months it took to rewrite the 2005 budget. We took \$4.6 billion in Liberal corporate tax cuts and redirected that money into transit, housing and post-secondary education.

In 2005, my leader went to the leader of the government and asked for a working agreement on health care funding. The Liberal prime minister of the day refused.

On November 28, the Liberals lost a vote in the House of Commons. The so-called early election occurred only six weeks before the Liberal prime minister said he was going to call an election.

Now the Liberals say they were going to secure child care in 46 days. That is where—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mount Royal.

It is rather sad that we need to deal with ideology on one side and ideology on the other. The Liberal Party feels like a party that is caught in the middle of a sandwich. The thing about ideology is that it leads to a great deal of rhetoric on either side and very little action.

Ideology is at the root of why the Liberal Party had to bring forward this motion today. I think the ideology of the Conservative government is that women are a special interest group. That ideology has been repeated many times in the House in the past. Those of us who have been here a while know what has been said.

This ideology says that people who advocate should never be funded. That is ideology, because anyone who has watched and followed the rise of human rights will know that it is advocacy that brings forward the issues which show that a particular group is in fact discriminated against or is vulnerable in our society. Advocacy is key to moving forward good public policy and good public legislation that will in fact bring about equality for these groups.

Business of Supply

Women in this country are still facing enormous barriers to equality: equality of access to justice, equality of access to housing and equality of access to equal pay for work of equal value. There are still many challenges that women face. To disallow and stop funding groups that bring forward this kind of advocacy is a disservice to women in Canada.

As well, the ideology of dumbing down any kind of fact or research is another ideology that we are forced to deal with in regard to the government today. It has cut the research funding for Status of Women Canada. As the minister who brought in that research funding in 1997, I have to tell members that many important pieces of research in this country came out of that program.

It was the first time that a government brought together academic research and what we call in vivo research, which is community research, and put them together to create answers, not only about how the law deals with things on a piece of paper, but with people on the ground and the reality of their lives, people who know how to make public policy that will actually work, have effect and bring about the changes they want.

This resulted in research that told us about the trafficking of women within this country. It brought out research that told us about the barriers that women face when they are being trafficked and what we could actually do, based on evidence, that would allow this to change.

This research brought forward the issue, which most people did not realize, about the inequality of women who are farmers in this country. For starters, because they live on farms and the farms are their homes, they are not seen as actually being in the paid workforce. Therefore, access to child care was denied them. Even the ability to deduct from taxes any child care they paid for was not allowed, because they were not considered to be "working women".

There was huge disparity, discrimination and lack of understanding of the reality of women who farm in this country. The research project, working with the University of Saskatchewan, brought forward an extraordinary amount of information and knowledge about this and decisions on what we could do to create public policy that would help farm women in this country.

Because of research and advocacy, women were able to bring forward the issues that affected them in the hope of good government, government that realizes it has a role to play in improving the lives of its citizens. That is now gone. The ability to do that is gone. That is very disappointing for women in this country.

I think that at the heart of this ideology is a lack of understanding of the role of women in society and the reality of women's lives in society. A good example is the cancelling of the court challenges program. Ideologically, Conservatives do not like the court challenges program. Mr. Mulroney cancelled the court challenges program.

When the Liberals became government in 1993, one of the first things we did was to bring back the court challenges program, because access to justice is fundamental to equality in this or any country. It is key to have the ability to have access to the courts and bring forward the legal arguments when people are discriminated against for various reasons.

●(1215)

The court challenges program allowed women in this country who were poor, who were visible minorities, who were immigrants and who were voiceless, vulnerable people with no money, to have access to courts. It allowed them that ability to have access to courts to bring about equality for them. I am going to give two examples of how the court challenges program helped women.

One example is that of Baker v. Canada, which involved a challenge by Ms. Baker, a Jamaican-born woman who worked illegally in Canada as a domestic worker for a number of years. After the birth of her fourth Canadian-born child, she suffered postpartum psychosis and was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. After undergoing treatment at a mental health facility for one year, she applied for landed immigrant status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Her application was denied and she was ordered deported.

Here was a woman with no money to be able to access justice. As a result of the court challenges program, she was able to go to the Supreme Court of Canada, which found at the outset in reviewing the fairness of the decision-making process that the immigration official showed an "impermissible bias" against single mothers and women with a psychiatric history. In Ms. Baker's case, this meant that when deciding whether she, as a mother, might remain in Canada on humanitarian grounds, the immigration officer should have given very serious consideration to the impact of that decision on her existing children in Canada, who were all young children. That is a good example.

Another example is that of a woman, 61 years old, who had to take time off work to look after her terminally ill stepson and then her chronically ill mother. During seven years, she was unable to work. We know that the CPP seven year dropout provision, which recognizes that the ability for women to bear and have children does constitute a barrier to pensionable earnings at the end of a lifetime, does allow a dropout for up to seven years, which does not count in the calculation of pensionable earnings for women if they do so to take care of a child under the age of seven. In this instance, the child was not under the age of seven, but he was terminally ill, and obviously the mother was not under the age of seven, but looking after her mother was key to this woman's family functioning and because that was what she could do.

With the assistance of the court challenges program, this woman appealed to the CPP review tribunal and went on to appeal to the Pension Appeals Board. She got no for an answer. She was just about to utilize the court challenges program to go to the courts of this land when the program was terminated. This woman now has no access to justice because she is too poor to afford a lawyer and take her case to court.

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When we talk about people with no voice and no money, the court challenges program gave access to those people. Let us look at the fact that by cancelling the court challenges program the Conservative government actually slammed the door shut on women and minority groups in this country. It then decided to bar and nail down the windows by denying funding for advocacy, because, as a result of this, the National Association of Women and the Law, a group that has taken on cases for women who were discriminated against and needed access, had to close its doors. Therefore, women have no court challenges program and no access to associations to help them.

The very nature of women, the very nature of the fact that women are anatomically and physiologically different, creates very specific barriers for women in having access not only to justice but to work. We know today that not only what we used to call poor families but also middle income families are two paycheques away from bankruptcy. Therefore, the women and both parents have to work.

With the cutting of the national child care program that the Liberal government negotiated with the provinces, these women who must work to make ends meet are therefore denied access to good, quality developmental care for their children. This is hitting people when they are down. Nothing has been done by the government to understand even that simple basic issue.

I still continue to say that the NDP was very irresponsible when it brought in the current government, knowing for sure that it would cut all of those policies.

Gender-based analysis is an important issue. It tells us that men and women are different and that they face different barriers. Therefore, in standing and speaking to this motion, I want to say that it is time for the Conservative government to recognize the uniqueness of women's lives and to do something to help them.

•(1220)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was listening very intently to the comments of my hon. colleague from Vancouver.

At one point she talked about the opposition parties putting the government into power. There is a remarkable delusion going on within the Liberal Party, and frankly the logic escapes me when looking at today's opposition day motion.

In the course of events, the prime minister of the day, the member for LaSalle—Émard, announced publicly, in a tearful plea on television to Canadians, that he would call an election if Canadians gave him a little more time, and in the course of events, Canadians had their opportunity of an election some weeks before the former prime minister's chosen date. However, he did not have the actual power in this case to call the election.

We all went to the polls. The Liberals went to an election and appealed to the voters. It is how a democracy actually functions. At the ballot boxes across the country the Canadian electorate sent the Liberal Party of Canada a clear message, which many Liberals admitted was just and we have the quotations here. The Liberals had lost the confidence of the Canadian people.

What escapes me is the delusion being perpetrated through the debate today that somehow the New Democrats were out there

rigging the ballots or somehow influencing each and every voter to tell the Liberals that they would not get to govern again.

There is a break in the logic and reality, so I would ask the member if she could please try to connect those dots.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, it does not surprise me that the logic escapes the hon. member, because many times I have sat in this House and listened to the most illogical suggestions coming out of that party.

However, it is simply that timing is everything. We hear in this House people saying to bring down the government, et cetera. We were on the cusp. We had just signed the Kelowna accord. A new national housing strategy had just been put through to cabinet. There had just been an agreement with the provinces for child care. Timing was everything.

The point is, if those members were responsible, they would have said, "Let us get these things finished, signed, sealed and delivered, and then bring down the government".

Nobody is arguing that one should not have taken down the Liberal government. That is not the point. The point is the timing. The timing was absolutely irresponsible. There were many things in the balance.

When members of that party speak about how disappointed they are that all these things are gone, what we do know is that they really did not stop to think before they acted, and that is what I mean by being illogical.

•(1225)

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member had a lot of things to say about the previous government's commitment to women. I wonder if she could explain why it was that her government in fact made systematic reductions to funding for Status of Women, and it was this government that actually increased it.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, actually that statement is made repeatedly, and I always think that when people repeat things over and over, they think that even if it is not a fact, people will believe it, and they are absolutely right. One can repeat misinformation and the more it is repeated, the more people believe it.

This is not so. I was the minister at the time when we put in an extra \$11 million toward assisting in issues such as gender based analysis across every department. We brought this forward because we knew that the lens through which we looked at the disparity that gender brings to equality was key. That was an extra \$11 million put into the programs. We brought in the research project, which took an extra amount of money as well.

There was new money put into those issues so that overall, there was an increase in funding. We certainly did not close down regional offices, which not only denies women access to funding but denies them access to support in every single region of this country.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of the motion.

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Fifteen years ago at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the clarion call was that women's rights are human rights and there are no human rights which do not include the rights of women. Indeed, the women's movement energized the conference, not only with their advocacy of women's rights, but with their compelling concern for human rights as a whole.

Fifteen years later, on the eve of International Women's Day, it is regrettable to note that not only are women's rights not seen as human rights, not only is the promotion and protection of women's rights not a priority on the national and international agenda, but discrimination against women remains, as UNESCO characterized it then, as a form of gender apartheid, while violence against women is a pervasive and persistent evil.

Accordingly, what I would like to do in support of the motion is to identify the indices of this gender inequality which, taken together, constitute this gender apartheid, so that we can thereby monitor, combat and redress the gender equality at both the domestic and international levels.

The first index or measure of gender inequality is the absence of an equal voice in our parliaments, governments and public decision making. For example, women make up 50.4% of the Canadian population, but occupy only one-fifth of the seats in this House of Commons. Indeed, as the UN demonstrated, Canada ranks 30th in the world in terms of the representation of women in parliament.

Indeed, the current governing party fielded the fewest women candidates in the last election. Only 10% of its candidates were women. This is a policy choice, for while in the 1970s 15% of Norway's parliament was made up of women, Norway then undertook active measures to increase women's active participation and it is now 40%. Simply put, women's political participation is a policy determinant that countries and parties can make and influence. Moreover, empirical studies have also demonstrated that increased female participation results in greater parliamentary attention to gender equality, family policy and an enhanced social policy, such as a national child care strategy.

The second index is the mainstreaming of gender analysis in public decision making, a case study of which is the mainstreaming of gender analysis in the budgetary process. Yet a gender analysis of the budget is utterly absent. The budget, along with the fall economic and fiscal update of the government, simply ignores the needs of Canadian women. Even in notional terms, the word "women" is mentioned only six times compared with 119 times for corporations.

Moreover, while the centrepiece of the budget is the tax-free savings account, this emerges more as a gift to the wealthy rather than securing the needs of women, most of whom will not be able to take advantage of this program. Simply put, of the 11 million women who filed taxes in 2005, 41% paid no taxes, while women working full time earned only 70% of what men working full time earned, a datum that the budget ignores, and a figure that is even worse for women of colour and aboriginal women.

In a word, the Conservative government's budgetary choices to use the surplus for huge tax cuts, debt reduction, a guaranteed annual increase for military security spending, which we are not necessarily opposed to in that regard, but with no budgetary gender analysis of

the wage disparity between men and women, with no analysis of the prejudicial impact, particularly on vulnerable women, means there is less money for the government to provide the necessary government services that women need and demand. Indeed, \$1 billion was cut with respect to the provision of social services.

This leads me to a third index, the gender disparity in income security, or insecurity, including the feminization of poverty. Over one-third of single women over the age of 65 live in poverty. Women not only earn less than men for work of equal value, but almost 50% of households are headed by single parents who are poor, mainly women, while child care remains beyond the financial reach of many.

Indeed, in terms of the ratio of male to female earned income, the wage gap, Canada ranks 38th in the world. Even in female dominated professions such as teaching, nursing and clerical work, men still earn more on average. Yet the government responded no to the recommendations of a multi-year federal task force on pay equity, and no to the endorsement of pay equity recommendations by the all party Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

The fourth index is the intersectional dimension of the disadvantaged situation of women. As the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women put it, "Proactive poverty elimination must be based on recognizing the interconnected barrier that makes certain groups of women more vulnerable than others". For example, Statistics Canada reported that 37% of women of colour are low income, compared to 19% of all women.

• (1230)

Therefore, all policy initiatives to combat gender inequality in general and the incidence of poverty in particular must factor into consideration the phenomenon of intersectionality, the unique circumstances, and systemic inequality of ethnocultural, racialized and immigrant women.

In particular, the reality of aboriginal women often includes acts of racism and sexual violence, extreme poverty, lack of access to adequate housing, chronic health problems and the like. Simply put, aboriginal women are the highest at risk population in Canada. The systemic discrimination that they endure is based on both their aboriginal status and their gender.

The fifth index is the lack of provision for early learning and child care and its corresponding prejudicial fallout for social and economic gender inequality. As the 1984 Royal Commission on Equality and Employment put it, "Child care is the ramp that provides equal access to the workforce for mothers". Twenty-four years later, that ramp is yet to be built.

What is needed is a reaffirmation of the Liberal government's commitment to provide a comprehensive system of early learning and child care across the country, including: honouring the bilateral agreements that the previous government signed with the provinces and territories; increasing federal funding for child care to 1% of gross domestic product; reinvesting the \$1,200 per year in the universal child care benefit to the Canadian child care tax benefit; and directing the value of the spousal credit to the spouse who remains at home.

The sixth index is the need for a comprehensive, coherent and coordinated housing policy. Canada is the only country without a national housing strategy. Over four million Canadians are in need of affordable and adequate housing, a disproportionate number of whom are aboriginal women, single older women, single mothers and recent immigrants. Accordingly, any housing policy must address the needs of the most disadvantaged and poorest women in Canada, while advancing women's equality.

The seventh index is the persistent and pervasive phenomenon of violence against women, a multi-dimensional assault on women's equality and security. It can be physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, financial, including stalking as well, in that regard. I might add that women in a word cannot achieve equality if they are subjected to violence in their daily lives. The opposite is also true; women's inequality increases their vulnerability to violence and limits their options for leaving abusive relationships.

Accordingly, a sustained and coordinated effort involving all levels of government is necessary to successfully combat violence against women and the resultant inequality. Volume two of the Liberal women's caucus "Pink Book" sets forth measures that can be taken for an immediate and significant impact.

The eighth index is international violence against women. Indeed as women's rights leader Charlotte Bunch put it a decade ago, and the situation has only worsened since, vast numbers of people around the world suffer from starvation and terrorism, and are humiliated, tortured, mutilated and even murdered every year just because they are women.

In particular, we need to make the combating of the trafficking of women and girls, the new global slave trade and the fastest growing criminal industry in the world, a priority for us both domestically and internationally. We need to combat this pernicious, persistent and pervasive assault on the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, this commodification of human beings, where human beings are regarded as cattle to be bonded and bartered, and which only a comprehensive strategy of prevention and protection of the victim and prosecution of the perpetrators can combat.

We also need to protect against the growing violence against women in conflict situations, as dramatized by the targeting of women and girls in the genocide by attrition in Darfur, or the dramatic incidence of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A ninth index is the differential access to justice, in particular, the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable of women. Regrettably, the government has either dismantled the very initiatives which helped secure equal access and gender equality,

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or has absented itself from the initiation of programs that would promote and protect access to justice.

The government, for example, dismantled the court challenges program which constituted an attack on the charter of rights itself, thereby silencing the voice of women, for equality rights have no meaning if women cannot access and exercise them.

As the Canadian Bar Association president, J. Parker MacCarthy, put it:

For those who are too vulnerable and disenfranchised to obtain fair treatment from the system on their own, it's often the only access they have.

Regrettably, the government has not only dismantled a program to promote universal access to the exercise of charter rights in general, and equality rights in particular, but it has been silent on the need for a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid system for Canada, the absence of which prejudicially impacts the rights of women and those vulnerable among them.

Indeed for women the results of legal aid cuts have been devastating. A woman's need for legal services is overwhelmingly in the area of family and civil law, precisely where most of the cuts were made. Accordingly, in the absence of adequate legal representation, women are losing the right to custody of their children, giving up legal rights to support and assistance, and are victimized through litigation harassment.

● (1235)

Astonishingly, the government did not use its \$13.5 billion surplus in order to alleviate the whole question of the absence of sustainable legal aid.

Number ten, and the final one, the government has compounded existing regional disparities with gender disparities. Since access to government services is essential in rural areas, the government's closure of—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member's time has expired.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague. I have known him for several years, and having seen him when he was a university professor emeritus, I am little surprised.

The Bloc could have supported the motion as introduced by the Liberal Party, because the Liberals are standing up for exactly the same things as the Bloc Québécois when it comes to the status of women.

But why does the motion we are going to vote on end by saying that Canada is in this situation because the NDP and the Bloc defeated the member's own government, in which he was a minister in November 2005? Is it not the Liberal Party's own fault that it is no longer in power today?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I am not just a member of Parliament. I am also a citizen. As a citizen, I respect the voters' decision. It was their decision.

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Nevertheless, something else contributed to the government falling at that time. Some of the other opposition parties helped make it happen.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague across the aisle in respect to some concerns he had with respect to gender-based analysis being conducted on a number of measures.

I know that the member, being a former minister of the Crown himself, will know that the work that is done in the public service or the Treasury Board for the PCO, in respect to the kind of gender-based considerations that are carried out on programs, that these are issues and considerations that are continuing to be advanced as we heard even recently in testimony before our own Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

So I am confused by his assertions in that regard. I wonder if he could clarify because in fact these considerations are becoming increasingly integrated into the decision making of the government.

• (1240)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to give some examples of what I mean by the absence of gender equality mainstreaming and gender analysis in the budget. For example, when the minority Conservative government announced an unprecedented \$1 billion cut in federal social spending on September 2006, women and other vulnerable groups disproportionately bore the burden. A kind of mainstreaming of gender analysis might have prevented this outcome.

As well, in the fall of 2006, the Conservative government, in a series of decisions, removed equality as a main goal of the women's program at Status of Women Canada. It cut \$5 million from the operating budget of Status of Women Canada.

It changed the rules of the women's program to eliminate equality-seeking organizations from qualifying for funding. It changed the rules of the women's program to prevent groups from advocating on behalf of women. It changed the rules of the women's program to allow for profit groups to apply for funding.

It gutted the research and policy capacity of Status of Women Canada, etc. and, as I mentioned, closed 12 of 16 regional Status of Women Canada offices that in fact impacted prejudicially on the equitable distribution of social services to rural areas in this country. Any mainstreaming of gender analysis would have avoided all those outcomes.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the government member say that these were all incorporated and so on. In the budget, it is my understanding that at last count corporations were mentioned 109 times and women were mentioned 7 times. I am puzzled by how that would in any way suggest to women that there had been a gender analysis and that they had been considered equally as it relates to the budget. I wonder if the member would like to comment on that.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I heartily concur with the remarks as made. I thought I included that in my initial presentation, that notionally there was limited reference to women in the budget in comparison to the number of times corporations were mentioned.

There was the absence of any reference to the wage disparity between men and women, the absence of any remedial approach as in the form of pay equity, and the absence of reference to the consensus among members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women regarding the compelling need for pay equity.

All that suggests that no gender analysis was done and that in fact women, frankly, were marginalized in the budget, and vulnerable women in particular suffered from that marginalization.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to highlight the significant accomplishments of the Government of Canada toward increasing women's participation in the life of our country. We are justifiably proud of these accomplishments.

The women's program of Status of Women Canada is important in achieving results for women. We have created two new components: the women's community fund and the women's partnership fund. Through these funds we can better support the work of women and other Canadian organizations.

We have also renewed and updated the terms and conditions of the women's program, tailoring the program to be more responsive to the needs of Canadians and more effective in achieving results. The mandate of the women's program now is to advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions, and their participation in democratic life.

The objective of the women's program now is to achieve the full participation of women in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada. The government has increased the women's program budget to \$20 million, an increase of 76% over its highest level ever.

The response from women's groups has been overwhelming. Last year a second call for proposals resulted in an increase in the number of projects put forward of nearly 30% of the first call. These projects promote women's economic security and prosperity, health and safety, and aim at ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

The government is deeply concerned about the challenges facing first nations, Inuit and Métis women. We have taken concrete action to increase aboriginal women's participation in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada and to eliminate systematic violence to which they are particularly vulnerable.

Last June the government partnered with the first national aboriginal women's summit which brought aboriginal women together with federal, provincial and territorial partners to discuss the issues, identify solutions and plan for future action.

The government is achieving results for aboriginal Canadians, including the resolution of the issue of matrimonial real property on reserve, the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and addressing family violence.

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We are now working with the Native Women's Association of Canada and federal partners to target specific issues for reporting at the second summit in July 2008 in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. These include: adapting police training to target the treatment of aboriginal women and girls, and adapting youth training for girls in violence prevention.

Status of Women Canada also maintains its ongoing commitment to the sisters in spirit initiative, administering the funds to the Native Women's Association of Canada through to 2010. Sisters in spirit is a research, education and policy initiative to increase public knowledge and understanding at a national level of the impact of racialized and sexualized violence against aboriginal women.

The Government of Canada has taken other steps to address the concerns of aboriginal people, including the collaboration with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation on the selection process. It announced on March 4 that new shelters will be located in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, a commitment of a total of \$2.2 million.

Second, included with the June 2007 announcement there was funding of almost \$56 million over five years for family violence prevention programs and services on reserve. These funds are in addition to the \$6 million announced in October 2006 as a one time allocation to the family violence prevent program of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Third, there was the creation of legislation to enable first nations people to assume meaningful control over on-reserve elementary and secondary schools in British Columbia, and finally ongoing work to improve living conditions in the north for first nations and Inuit people through better housing.

• (1245)

Since taking office our government has taken action to make our streets and communities safer through legislation to restrict conditional sentences such as house arrest for serious crimes. We have also increased mandatory penalties for serious gun related crimes, yet members opposite worked to weaken this legislation.

We have raised the age of consent from 14 to 16 years to protect our youth, including girls and young women from adult sexual predators. This applies to sexual activity involving prostitution, pornography, or where there is a relationship of trust, authority, dependency, or any other situation that exploits a young person.

The issue of trafficking in persons remains a serious and growing concern for women and girls, both in Canada and throughout the world. Budget 2007 allocated \$6 million to combat child exploitation and trafficking.

The Vancouver Olympics in 2010 are on the horizon. We recognize that international sporting events can create opportunities for trafficking, particularly in the sex trade. As a result, our government is examining measures to avert traffickers from the Vancouver event.

In May 2006 the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration released guidelines for immigration officers that addressed the unique needs of victims of trafficking. The guidelines are designed to help victims

of trafficking escape the influence of their traffickers and recover from their ordeal.

In June 2007 the guidelines were updated to further strengthen the ability of the government to protect and assist victims of human trafficking while ensuring the integrity of the country's immigration system. This initiative is yet another reflection of the Government of Canada's ongoing commitment to strengthening overall efforts to combat human trafficking through prevention, prosecution and protection.

Today more women are in the workforce than ever before, which contributes not only to their full participation but also to their economic security. The increased participation of women in the paid workforce has been a significant social trend in Canada in the past quarter century.

Our government's "Advantage Canada" plan to better secure better paying jobs and solid growth for Canadians is good news for working women and their families. Furthermore, tax relief and a further 1% cut to the GST will put more money into the pockets of women.

Many rural women will welcome the government's support for Canada's supply managed system, which will deliver stable, predictable and bankable support for farm families.

A busy and vibrant organization, Status of Women Canada is on the cutting edge of advancing the participation of women, and is a vital part of many of the ways the Government of Canada works for the women of Canada, their families and their communities.

In budget 2008 we committed to the development of an action plan for women, an opportunity to provide focus and strength to an already robust organization.

Unlike the parties opposite that have voted against our budgets to increase funding to help women across this country and have worked to weaken important, tough on crime legislation to protect women and their families, or have just worked to stall these important pieces of legislation, our government is achieving real results for women.

In the end, this will make a difference for all Canadians as we strive to improve the lives of women aiming for real results, and creating lasting and positive change.

• (1250)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question about aboriginal women.

The Liberal opposition had 4,478 days to ensure safe drinking water, safe housing, affordable food, and good living conditions for aboriginal people, particularly pregnant moms, nursing moms, and moms who were trying to provide some kind of healthy environment for their children. After those 4,478 days there was virtually no difference in any of that. These moms, of this matriarchal society, hold families together.

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The Conservative government is now telling us about all these wonderful things that have happened. I would like to know from the hon. member, why many aboriginal people, particularly those vital women who hold families together in communities across the country, still do not have safe drinking water, still do not have safe housing, still do not have proper heating except some heater that will set their house on fire, and still do not have proper schooling?

The Conservative government has been in power for two and a half years. Why did these conditions not change during the 4,478 days that the Liberals were in government? If aboriginal women are of such concern to the Conservative government, why, over the last two years, have the conditions not changed either?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, in my remarks I certainly indicated some of the key initiatives where the Government of Canada continued to work with aboriginal groups, in a cooperative fashion, to address all the concerns.

The government dedicated and committed record amounts of dollars in support of housing, not only on reserve, but off reserve, working together with leaders in the aboriginal communities to have these things come about.

What I find is curious, and I know the member pointed out some of the deficiencies and I share her curiosity, is why the previous government did not get on with some of this work.

The fact is the member had the opportunity to support the government in its commitment to women by increasing the amount of funding for Status of Women Canada to its highest level ever. Why did she not support us on the budget?

• (1255)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about the fact that there were now more women working in the labour force. Previously one of his colleagues talked about the fact that one of the priorities was economic prosperity for women.

I do not understand how, in saying that, the hon. member can justify the government cutting back or eliminating the national child care program. The early learning and child care program facilitates women to get into the labour force and stay in it.

As I said earlier, in my riding women have come to me. They have lost jobs because they do not have child care spaces. The \$1,200 does not work. It is not a child care program. It does not absolutely nothing to create spaces.

Also, the pro-active pay equity legislation was supposed to be tabled in the fall of 2005. The government has said no to it entirely. Again, women only earn 71.1¢ to the dollar. When we talk about women's prosperity, that is a major issue.

I fail to see how the government intends to help women with prosperity in the workplace.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada made a commitment to child care across the country, which would put choice in the hands of parents. I point out that the amount is some \$10 billion, virtually double what the former Liberal government committed to this same end.

In addition to that, we are working together with provincial and territorial governments to create new child care spaces. In the coming year alone, some 37,000 new day care spaces will be created, thanks to the cooperation by the ministers of our government.

On the pay equity question, the Minister of Labour has been very clear. More resources have been put in play and are directed toward those federally regulated and public service type positions, the only area of jurisdiction that our pay equity legislation can provide. He is addressing that. More inspections are being done. We are putting more work into pay equity as well.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to address the opposition day motion.

At the outset, I must reiterate the deep and demonstrated commitment of our government in promoting the full participation of women in the life of our country. We have demonstrated this through our commitment in budget 2008. While details will be worked out in due course, what is key is the government's emphasis on equality of women and its commitment to the development of the action plan, a commitment that the members opposite voted against.

Yesterday morning, our Prime Minister welcomed several Afghan women parliamentarians to a caucus meeting, where one of the visiting women spoke about her experiences in government in Afghanistan. These women are an inspiration to all Canadians, true role models of courage and determination, as they work in their home country to build democracy and advance the full participation of women.

It is particularly fitting that we can be inspired by such esteemed visitors during International Women's Week, March 2-8, which culminates in the highlight, March 8, of International Women's Day.

This year's theme "Strong Women, Strong World" refers not only to the empowerment of women to bring about positive changes, but also to the importance of women as caregivers, educators, policy makers, leaders, international peacemakers and stewards of this world. The contributions of grassroots, community based women's organizations, working with and for women, their families and their communities, embody the very heart of this theme.

Our government is justifiably proud of the many concrete ways in which we support the important and valuable work of these organizations.

Through the work of the women's program of Status of Women Canada, we are delivering real results. Through the government's careful and strategic streamlining and refocusing of the program, we have repositioned Status of Women Canada as an instrument for promoting the full participation of women.

How have we done this?

We have done this through the delivery of programs that have direct benefits for women across Canada, women in all communities, women of diverse backgrounds, all women. We have also done this through leadership and partnership with others across the federal government and in other levels of government responsible for social and economic policies and programs.

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Women's program is now more effective, more focused and more results driven. This is in large part due to the government's decision to restructure the program into two new components.

First, the women's community fund is focused on projects at local, regional and national levels that support women directly in their communities, for example, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada that works to empower aboriginal women to increase their leadership skills and become key agents in violence prevention in their own communities, both on and off reserve.

Second, the women's partnership fund is a new element of the women's program, supporting collaborative projects involving partners, such as public institutions and non-governmental recipients, to build partnerships that improve the economic social and cultural situation of women. The partnership fund provides an ideal opportunity to increase engagement by other federal departments and levels of government through projects that directly impact the situation of women. For example, in February, YWCA Canada received funding for its northern extension initiative, benefiting women and children in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

In October 2007 the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages announced \$8 million over three years in funding for 60 projects across the country, through the women's community fund for the first call for proposals, issued last June. These projects will positively impact over 260,000 women and girls by addressing barriers, educating them about violence prevention, helping them increase their financial literacy and encouraging cooperative peer support networks.

• (1300)

In November the minister announced a second call for proposals for the women's community fund, with the focus on projects that promote women's economic security and prosperity, health and safety and those aimed at ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women. All projects, without exception, must support the advancement of all women in Canada.

With the newly added convenience of online application forms, the women's program can reach more organizations than ever. With the funding of the women's program now being at its highest level ever, the number of proposals receiving funding and the number of new organizations accessing funds is growing. The best news is that the number of women expected to benefit directly increases also.

I must underscore that our government does not fund a who is who of Canadian women's organizations. We care what the organization does, not what it is or who its members are. Funding through the women's program is available to organizations that work to bring women together, to work together for positive and lasting change, to improve the economic and social condition of women and to facilitate their participation in the democratic life of Canada.

Our government keeps our commitments to Canadians. Our track record on this speaks for itself. For example, we have taken action on the issues facing aboriginal women, including addressing poverty, protecting and advancing human rights and addressing violence against aboriginal women. A number of these issues contribute to our government's agenda for aboriginal Canadians, including the

resolving of the issue of matrimonial real property on reserve, repealing section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and addressing family violence.

As announced in last week's budget, over the next year we will develop an action plan that will advance the equality of women across Canada, through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life.

These are but a few of the many ways which our government has shown its enduring commitment to the women of Canada.

Unlike the members opposite, who claim to stand up for the best interests of Canadian women but voted to take away choice in child care, who for 13 years in government promised new child care spaces and delivered none and who worked to weaken or stall important tough on crime legislation to protect Canadian families, we are getting things done.

The government has increased the budget of the women's program to \$20 million, an increase of 76%, its highest level ever. I am pleased to say that budget 2008 states that our government will build on this achievement through the development of an action plan that will advance equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life.

Our government is concerned with problems that directly affect vulnerable women, economic security and prosperity, health and the elimination of every form of violence. Since January 2006, our government has helped aboriginal women with property after divorce and has reinvested \$5 million for initiatives that go directly to help women in their communities.

Through our government's visionary action, Status of Women Canada is stronger and more effective, working better for the people of Canada, women and men alike.

• (1305)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really sad to hear the hon. member say that Liberals have never given women choice and that her government across has. In all of its budgets, it has done exactly the opposite.

Business of Supply

When we look at early learning and child care, \$1,200 a year does absolutely nothing. It creates no spaces. In fact, it is not \$1,200. It is tax in the hands of the receiver. Most women, especially low income women, receive probably half that. The hon. member knows it does absolutely nothing to create child care spaces or give women choice. If there are no spaces, there is no choice, and I see in my riding of Beaches—East York all the time.

The other tax measure, pension splitting, does not support women. A ton of money is spent, but it benefits only 12% of seniors. Most women who have lower incomes and/or are single do not benefit from that one bit. There are 1.7 million seniors who do not benefit from that program at all.

As for advocacy, the member says that the United Nations' motto this year is "Strong Women, Strong World". When it comes to empowering women, the United Nations has taken the voice away. It will not fund organizations that work with the country and the government to change policy that would impact and help all women. This is a real—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I am not really sure that I heard a question, but I will respond to some of the comments of the member opposite. I have worked for a couple of years on the Status of Women committee with the member. We have had these conversations many times.

Certainly the child care issue is one that we definitely disagree on. This government did give Canadians choice in child care. That is exactly what is happening. We are delivering choice and support to parents with the universal child care benefit of \$1,200 per year in direct support for every child under six years of age. That was over \$3.7 billion in 2006-07 to help parents with the cost of child care.

Certainly the \$1,200 is not meant to create a child care space, and anyone who jumps to that conclusion definitely is not listening to the program, but as well as the \$1,200 per year for children under age six, we have invested \$250 million per year to assist provinces and territories in creating new child care spaces. We are giving choice to parents and families for child care.

• (1310)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can recall the 1993 election campaign, in which the official opposition campaigned on creating 150,000 child care spaces and made a solemn commitment in its first red book to do that. All these years later, we still have no national child care program in Canada. The Liberals did not do it. The Conservatives refuse to do it.

The member who just spoke talked about choice in child care and about how her government is reinstating the old family allowance plan, essentially, in providing some funding directly to families who have young children. However, how does that create choice in child care if we do not have the spaces? It is well documented there is a dramatic shortage of child care spaces. Working families are panicking when parents need to get back to work and cannot find an adequate child care space for their children.

Specifically, can the member tell me how a pre-tax income of \$100 a month helps families find an affordable, accessible child care space for their kids?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, certainly we know that the record of the previous government was not one of creating new child care spaces. We know that did not happen. We also know that last year the Liberals voted against \$250 million for the provinces to create new child care spaces. That was in our budget.

In our party, we do have a record of delivering choice and support to parents. The universal child care benefit is extremely well received. I have comments on a weekly basis from young parents in my riding who support it. We also know that choice in child care does not mean that everyone has to be in a institutionalized child care space. There are choices. The universal child care benefit provides that choice.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to be splitting my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

I find it really interesting to listen to the rhetoric that goes in these debates. As for the fact that we are even having this ongoing discussion about child care spaces, which certainly we on this side of the House understand the importance of, and in regard to the fact that we are listening to the hon. members of the NDP, if they had not voted against our government, we would probably have all of those spaces or a good portion of them in place. I have real difficulty in listening to the rhetoric that is going on, knowing that it is exactly why we do not have something that is very important when we get into the whole issue of child care.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this important debate today.

For the benefit of Canadians who are watching at home and my constituents in the riding of York West, I want to repeat the motion so that what we are talking about is clear:

That, in the opinion of the House:

- (a) women's equality is a matter of human rights and, since the Court Challenges Program as a useful tool in achieving that end, it should be reinstated;
- (b) to provide a legitimate and necessary voice to the needs of women, research and advocacy should be restored to the government's Women's Program;
- (c) an adequate supply of high quality childcare spaces is essential to ensuring women's participation in the workforce and the government should take the necessary steps immediately to create 125,000 spaces as it promised;...

As we have heard, we continue to hear about this. The motion continues:

- (d) since access to government services is essential in rural areas and the government's closure of 12 of the 16 regional offices of Status of Women Canada further isolates rural women, the government should take immediate steps to improve access for our most isolated Canadians;...

This is an important motion because, as we can see, it tries to outline a variety of problems that women in Canada have currently. The motion continues:

- (e) there is a growing need in Canada for a national housing strategy designed to assist the most vulnerable in our society and to treat them with the respect they deserve; and

that, therefore, the House condemn the irresponsible and self-serving actions on November 28, 2005, by the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois which led to the installation of a government that is hostile to the rights and needs of vulnerable Canadians.

Business of Supply

This motion says a lot. I would like to make a few brief comments on the important points here, as put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

First of all, I think we need to be reminded, and to remind Canadians, that we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that protects equal rights in our country's highest laws. But in order for it to be truly effective, Canadians must have access to those laws. The court challenges program provided that critical access for many people in giving them an avenue for being able to defend themselves.

The elimination of the court challenges program was an attack on an important tool that many Canadians, not just women, could exercise and use to defend their charter rights. Mounting a charter challenge is tremendously expensive. The court challenges program helped individuals and organizations cover that expense. Many times they were victorious and were proven right at the end of the day. If they had not had the court challenges program to assist them, that would not have been possible.

We clearly know that the government and the Conservatives do not want anyone to challenge them. Every time somebody tries to do so, they shut them down in intimidation or with threats of lawsuits. That was a common practice of previous Conservative governments, even under the previous prime minister, Mr. Mulroney.

When the Conservatives are not threatening those who oppose them, they are busy doing nothing to improve the lives of Canadian women. To follow on what our speaker said, if they are doing anything, it is very little. It certainly does not reach the needs that are there. In fact, the Conservatives continue to clearly demonstrate a total disrespect and disregard for many women and the challenges they are facing as we move forward.

We can talk about the need for women to enter the workforce. The biggest obstacle, as I understand it from many of the women in York West, is the inability to access child care. There are hugely lengthy lists in Toronto for subsidized day care. These women want to go to work but are compelled to be home with their children because there is no safe place for their children to go and the \$1,200 does not cut it. As for anybody saying no to that \$1,200, sure, if I am sent a \$100 cheque, I am going to take it, but it is not going to provide me with a day care space for my child.

● (1315)

When we talk about investing in early learning, we are not talking about babysitting. We are talking about investing in early learning and providing opportunities for our children to get the best start possible. A lot of evidence shows that early learning contributes immensely to the development of children.

I represent a very multicultural riding. A lot of the children there could clearly benefit from having the opportunity to be in early learning centres, so that when they enter the formal part of education that benefit would be there for them. They would be better prepared, rather than going into junior kindergarten still struggling with a lot of the issues that they struggle with for many reasons.

I truly believe that the early learning program was a great social opportunity that was missed. The financial situation being what it is, I question whether we will ever be able to produce it. We certainly

are going to try, but it does take money. Those plans were there, and if we are starting to move into a deficit position, it will be some time before we are able to produce that kind of program again.

Our government had invested \$5 billion over five years for the creation of a Canada-wide system for early learning and child care. It was all based on the principles of equality, universal inclusiveness, accessibility and development.

My neighbour, the hon. member for York Centre, stickhandled that issue for some time and had managed to get all 10 provinces to sign on. It took a considerable amount of time to do that. We were moving forward with that system, and it would probably be up and running in all of the provinces at this point if we were still in government, but we know what happened to the previous agreements.

We can thank the NDP for forcing the election of 2005-06, which led to the demise of child care in Canada and the destruction of what I believe was one of the best social programs ever that Canada would have introduced. When the NDP forced the winter election that nobody wanted, child care was one of the many programs that suffered due to its irresponsible actions.

We all know that the Conservative government was very quick to cancel all of those agreements and undo all of that good work, so I hope the NDP members are proud of themselves. I find it really quite funny when I listen to the rhetoric and hear them complaining because we do not have this and we do not have that. What I say is that they should enjoy what they got because they are responsible for it.

I also would like to draw the attention of the House to yesterday's announcement by the Liberal women's caucus. We gave the Conservatives a failing grade on women's issues, as their phony action plan was more of a non-action plan than anything else. It is nothing more than an empty gesture on a long list of failures by the government. Why has it taken two years to come up with an action plan?

The Canadian government also went to the meetings of the UN Commission on the Status of Women last week and claimed it had this grand plan when in reality there is no funding, there are no details, and there is no timeline, just a mention that it is going to create an action plan.

As we mark International Women's Day, it is clear that the Conservatives still do not take women's equality seriously. The Liberal women's caucus urges our Conservative government to stop turning back the clock on women and come up with a real and detailed plan now, not two or three years from now, but I am not going to be holding my breath to see that action plan.

Last week in New York at the meetings of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Canadian government delegation claimed it was taking a more focused approach to equality and announced that it was committed to this action plan to advance women's equality, but it provided no details for the implementation. More than 17 Canadian organizations representing women's rights also attended those UN meetings and reacted swiftly to the Canadian delegation's statement, calling it "All Words, Little Action, No Money for Women".

Business of Supply

International Women's Day is meant to be a time to celebrate, but this latest Conservative blunder is another grim reminder that there is much work to do in order to achieve women's equality. After all, who can forget that the Conservatives cut off funding to the women's groups that did advocacy work and that they closed 12 of the 16 Status of Women regional offices?

The Conservatives have squandered a generous surplus and still make cuts to programs that have been proven effective and have provided necessary tools for helping individuals and communities. Their funding cuts directly target women and other groups for which the Conservatives have traditionally shown complete disregard, but that is what we have come to expect, very sadly, from the government. If people are not members of its traditional base, they can be sure the government will turn its back on them and they are not going to get any assistance from it.

• (1320)

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to listen to several of the speeches this morning and there is a lot of talk about child care.

My recollection is that in 1993 the Liberals promised a national child care program and they did not deliver. In 1997 the Liberals promised a national child care program and they did not deliver. In 2000 they promised a national child care program and they did not deliver. In 2004 they promised a national child care program and did not deliver. In 2006 they promised it and did not deliver.

Do you really expect Canadians to believe that when we get into the next election—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member really does not want to be asking me whether I believe anything. He wants to be asking the hon. member whether she believes it. Perhaps he could rephrase his question.

Mr. Barry Devolin: That is correct, sir. When people in my riding tell me that they absolutely want the federal government to implement a national child care program, I disagree with them, but tell them if that is what they believe, they should vote NDP and not Liberal. While I disagree with NDP members on this, I actually believe that it is their intention.

My question for my hon. colleague is, how can she possibly think that Canadians will believe her party when it is promising the same thing for the seventh campaign in a row? This is the same as Lucy with the football, and Canadians are not going to be Charlie Brown any more. They know that this is not a promise that will be kept. Why does the hon. member think Canadians are going to believe that promise after being made seven times?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member has forgotten but when we came into power in 1993, instead of finding \$11 billion in surplus as the Conservatives did, we ended up finding ourselves with a \$42 billion deficit. It took a long time to pay down that deficit and to get the finances of the country under control.

All Canadians had to make a lot of sacrifices. Many things that we all wanted to be done were not done because we had to put the country's financial house in order.

We started working on being able to fulfill our commitment to child care, not because it was a promise we made, but because we

happen to think it is one of the most important social programs for Canadians.

It takes some time to do, because 10 provinces have to come on board to do it. Once we had the money for that program it was our full intent to do it.

We can certainly rest assured the NDP will never do it because that party will never be in power to have that opportunity.

• (1325)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party know no bounds, none at all?

Blaming the opposition parties for the Liberals' defeat speaks to their own sense of entitlement. That is what Canadians got fed up with.

In the 2006 election, 70% of Canadians voted for parties other than the Liberal Party. I think the official opposition needs a little history lesson. In April 2005 the Liberal prime minister of the day went on television and told Canadians that he planned on calling an election in nine months. On November 28 of the same year, the Liberals lost a vote in Parliament and Parliament was dissolved. That was only 46 days earlier than the Liberal prime minister had indicated the election would be. It just defies any kind of common sense.

Is the member trying to tell Parliament and the Canadian people that in 46 days the Liberals would have solved the child care problem in this country, solved the environmental crisis in the country, and brought in changes to the environment programs that would have cleaned up the environment? Is the member trying to tell us that the terrible record of Canadian governments in terms of aboriginal people in this country, that in 46 days the Liberals would have solved all those problems if the opposition parties had not brought the Liberal government down?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear. The reason we lost that vote and were defeated was directly as a result of the NDP and its constant philosophy about how important all these social programs are.

Now the NDP members have nothing to look at, nothing else to do but complain because the Conservative government is not doing anything, but they had better get used to it because that government is here for a little bit longer. You can rest assured there will be no child care program—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for York West should know better than to keep saying you this and you that.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North on a point of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the member for Trinity—Spadina be added as an Associate Member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion by the hon. member for Winnipeg North. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion. It is appropriate that during international women's week we are debating a motion about many issues facing women across the country.

We have heard from women from across the country over and over again who feel that they are losing ground. They are indeed losing the gains made by the women who have come before them over the last 35 years, gains that have come about as a result of the royal commission on women and many other initiatives.

We have a government that is targeting its policies, its programs, its tax credits and its grants and subsidies are going only as a favour to those groups who support that party. Indeed, I would say that in recent days we have heard representatives of those groups trumpet their success in affecting government policy, which is reason to give most of us here cause for concern.

The motion before us condemns two parties in the House for helping bring about a government that is hostile to the rights and needs of women and to other vulnerable Canadians. Having said that though, I have been a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women since its inception. I want to acknowledge that as an individual member of Parliament, it has been a pleasure to work cooperatively with three colleagues in particular on women's issues. The member for Laval, the member for Laurentides—Labelle, both in Quebec, and the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan and I have worked cooperatively in the best interests of women and we have tried to do what we think is right.

I know that the tactical decisions that are made by their parties are often not theirs but I would urge them in turn to speak to their leadership on the importance of ensuring a government that will act,

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that will speak and that will move forward on behalf of women and those most vulnerable in our country.

We know that Canadian women face many of the same obstacles as those in developing countries. One in five Canadian women lives in poverty. Canadian women still earn substantially less than men. In 2003, women's average earnings were 64% of that of men. More than half of all women in Canada have had some form of post-secondary education; however, Canadian women are still less likely than men to have a university degree.

Women accounted for nearly half of Canada's employed workforce. That is very important to note, particularly in light of the often overemphasis on family responsibilities. We have seen what the government has done.

On another issue I want to cite a very serious and less publicized incident where the Prime Minister broke his word. During the 2006 election campaign, the Prime Minister, as a candidate and leader of his party, signed the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, commonly known as the CEDAW pledge, which committed the government to act on promoting the equality of women. He has not kept his word, and I question, is it because the vice-president of REAL Women, in a discussion of the court challenges program at the status of women committee on December 4, 2007, said when commenting on CEDAW, that CEDAW is not to be taken seriously and she would not pay attention to what CEDAW says.

We heard today about the many setbacks women have faced, such as the court challenges program, child care or the lack thereof, the lack of funding for research and advocacy, in spite of the fact that many of the very knowledgeable presenters at the status of women committee base their information on the research undertaken through the funding previously available through the status of women. Where that will come from now remains to be seen.

We have heard about housing challenges. We have heard about the shutdown of services to women across the country. We have heard about unattached senior women being discriminated against. We have heard about the removal of the word "equality" from the mandate of Status of Women Canada. We have heard about the government's unwillingness to honour pay equity.

● (1330)

And as I was sitting here waiting to speak, I received word that the women's future fund is being cut and will no longer be available.

What we have seen from the government is a general disrespect for the realities of the lives of women, and I would add, a disrespect for the intelligence of women through a game of smoke and mirrors. I want to highlight two particularly egregious examples of this.

Business of Supply

The Minister for the Status of Women came to the status of women committee not too long ago and told committee members that she put the word “equality” back into the mandate of the women's program. I think the minister misrepresented the facts at that committee meeting. No change has been made to the funding requirements for the women's programs and that is what matters. Those are the guidelines they have to meet before they can apply and qualify for funding. Department officials subsequently confirmed that adding the word “equality” was only symbolic and that nothing indeed had changed.

Just yesterday there was more trickery for women, this time focused on aboriginal women. On Tuesday of this week, the Minister of Indian Affairs introduced a 52-page bill to address matrimonial real property on reserve, an issue that our party believes needs to be addressed. It is an important issue for women living on reserve. But yesterday the government knowingly asked the House to fast track this legislation through all stages, for the sole purpose of saying that during this week the Conservatives have finally addressed an issue of importance to women and aboriginal women in particular.

First, there is no respect for the committee members who had not yet been briefed on the legislation by government officials. In fact, I do not think the binders were yet in our offices. But more important, there is no respect for the women who were to be affected by the legislation.

Let me read from the Native Women's Association of Canada's press release:

The Minister of Indian Affairs...was well aware that NWAC did not support the legislative draft proposed after a lengthy meeting with him in December in which NWAC outlined the critical importance of systemic solutions, promotion of Indigenous legal systems and the need for nonlegislative solutions. These nonlegislative solutions are necessary to make the rights in the legislation real for communities.

Then the president of NWAC is quoted as saying:

As a result, we have not experienced our relationship with the federal Department of Indian Affairs of being one of partnership or even consultation but rather it feels like another experience of colonialism, or at best piecemeal, individually based solutions that will not result in real equality for the women we represent.

She then went on to say:

I promised Aboriginal women who participated in providing solutions to this issue that their voices would be heard. I worked hard to get their messages to government but those messages fell on deaf ears. I now fear that there is going to be more harm done to women than good. There is nothing in the legislation that addresses the systemic issues of violence that many women face that lead to the dissolution of marriages nor is there any money available for implementation. In the end, we end up with a more worthless piece of paper.

I want to speak to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, but I do not have the time. Let me just say that that document is another item of disrespect for aboriginal women who saw it as a great hope.

I wanted to speak of child care because in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre the waiting lists are 300 children long. They are not accepting any more.

We have heard much about choice, but I say that the only choice that parents have is to not go to work or not go to school. They have no choice.

I commend to all members a letter written by a woman named Tami Friesen, that was published in the *Edmonton Journal* Opinion section on November 26, 2007. It was on the issue of child care. I had hoped to have time to quote from it, but she underlines the essence of the issue exquisitely, if I might say so.

● (1335)

I hope that the women of Canada take note of what is happening to their rights, to their opportunities, both for themselves and their children.

In Winnipeg next week we are celebrating the accomplishments of five women who were trailblazers. Let me close with the words of the indomitable June Menzies when she said, “If you aren't constantly vigilant you go backwards”. We in this House must be constantly vigilant.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, would my colleague from Winnipeg South Centre take a message to the leadership of her party, as she asks us to do in our party?

Has she ever, in the period of time that the Liberals were in government, raised with her party the fact that they were the most right-wing, neo-Conservative government in the history of Canada and that their idea of social policy, their idea of addressing poverty in the inner city of the city that we share, was to cut, hack and slash every social program by which we define ourselves as Canadians?

The Canadian people tossed her party out of government, ran them out of government on a rail, virtually tarred and feathered them on the way out because they broke faith with the Canadian people. They not only broke their word and broke their social contract with Canadians to act in their best interests, they stole from them. They were corrupt.

I have listened to this self-serving opposition day motion of the Liberals today and it boggles my mind that they have the temerity to stand up with some revisionist history, and try to paint themselves as the champions of social justice and poverty fighters when they, who had it in their ability to do so, chose to do nothing.

I do not know if it was Dante, but somebody reserved a special corner of hell for those who had the ability to prevent evil, and chose not to do so and not to act.

The Liberals had the ability to make a big impact on child poverty, social inequity, women's rights and child care. Instead, when they were faced with surplus budget after surplus budget, they cut and hacked social programs, and chose to give tax cuts to their buddies on Bay Street and nothing to Main Street.

The area I represent in Winnipeg is the poorest zone in all of Canada. Believe me, in the 13 year tenure that the Liberal Party ruled this land it went from bad to worse. Child poverty: 52% of all the children in my riding live below the poverty line. It was 40% when the Liberals took over. Instead of using—

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• (1340)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre needs some time to reply.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, my colleague behind me says he really feels sad that we have to listen to that. I listened to the bluster and gamesmanship from that member. I know his riding. I know it well. I represented part of it, both as a member of Parliament and as a school board member. I have worked actively.

I can tell that member that I have worked with members of his community to effect programming in his riding that made their lives better. I have done it under a Liberal majority government and a Liberal minority government, and I have done it under this government. It is a lot of bluster from this member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague who just spoke. We are both members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I find all of this surprising. The Bloc probably would have supported the Liberal Party's motion today, because it is exactly in line what we have said, what we want and what we want to develop.

But I must also say that the question the NDP member just asked makes perfect sense. The Liberals were in power for 13 years, and we never saw so many cuts. It is not the Bloc's fault or the NDP's fault that they lost power. It is their own fault. How will they re-establish their credibility on the issues that caused them to lose power through their own fault?

[*English*]

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I, too, enjoy a positive working relationship with my colleague and I am pleased to answer his question. I do not think there is an issue of re-establishing credibility. This party has credibility, and has credibility on these issues.

Canadians know that this party signed agreements for a national child care program. Canadians know that the Liberal government brought in a homelessness policy. Canadians know that the Liberal government balanced the books of this country, only to see it mangled and perhaps obliterated by members opposite.

I do not think there is an issue of establishing credibility. It is an issue of responding to the needs of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I feel a little uncomfortable about the motion put forward here today. I find it somewhat unfortunate the women are being used, International Women's Day is being used and women's issues are being used to try to make this an opposition day, when the Liberal Party knows full well that the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Conservatives will all vote against this motion. I think that was their goal here today, but I find their actions very pernicious.

While the motion raises issues that we defend wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, issues that we really care about, we nevertheless find ourselves compelled to vote against it. I find that especially unfortunate, considering that most of the women who have spoken

so far are aware of what is at stake in terms of women's issues today. They know that the Conservatives made drastic cuts to all social programs for women. They also made significant cuts to both the court challenges program and the women's program.

When a party drafts such a motion and forces the opposition parties to vote against it, knowing full well that the members of those parties care about the issues identified by its premise, I think that is somewhat dishonest, especially since we know that the Liberal Party has recently been joining forces, almost openly, with the Conservative Party.

Refusing to vote against a budget and a throne speech is the same as adopting the positions of the party in power. In other words, one supports that party. If one does not vote against something, one is for it. And if one is for something, one supports the policies and positions of that party. Supporting the positions of the Conservative Party and then trying tacitly to denounce them is somewhat dubious as a position, I find.

Unfortunately, we are going to have to vote against this motion. I say unfortunately, because as a woman, I would like to tell my Liberal colleagues, my NDP colleagues and my Conservative colleagues—even though there are fewer women in that caucus—that the recent cuts, the adoption of Bill C-484 yesterday and the elimination of the court challenges program threaten all women in Quebec and many women in Canada. No matter what we said or did, the government boasted that 72% of women supported the adoption of Bill C-484. In my opinion, there was a huge amount of manipulation and disinformation with regard to this bill, and I think that is a shame.

We know that the member who introduced the bill had previously introduced bills designed to reopen the abortion issue. In addition, the e-mail that was received came from anglophones in English Canada, where the right has a much stronger presence. Most of these people are members of the pro-life movement. We did not receive any e-mail from women or other people in Quebec urging us to vote for this bill, because we know that it represents a direct attack on women's rights and a step backward in terms of women's freedom, independence and self-determination. I think that is a shame.

I think it is a shame that the Liberals are taking an opposition day so lightly when we have so few of them. Why waste them doing nothing? Why waste them on empty rhetoric? We cannot vote for this motion, especially since the Liberal Party is condemning the Conservative Party for what it has done, while in 2005, FAFIA, the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, denounced the Liberal Party for the cuts it had made, which set women back significantly. Ten years of federal budgets: double whammy for women. That is what FAFIA said in 2005 about the period from 1995 to 2005.

Business of Supply

●(1345)

We should add that the United Nations Human Rights Committee severely reprimanded Canada, on November 3, 2005, for its treatment of aboriginal and incarcerated women. That was before the last election, when the Liberals were still in power. It was not in 2006. However, we know that aboriginal and incarcerated women are not treated any better today.

We should not always blame the party in power. We need to take a hard look at ourselves and determine what we have done that was good and what was not so good, admit it and move on to other things.

This does not allow us to move on to other things nor to lend credibility to the file for which the Standing Committee on Status of Women is responsible. This gives absolutely no credibility to all the interventions made in this house to defend the cause of women. In fact, today's motion ridicules this cause.

Personally, I am very angry. I believe that women deserve better than a motion such as this one, which destroys all our attempts to advance the cause of women. It is already a difficult enough task with the Conservative Party. We have already taken enough steps backwards in the past year one political party is not aware of the potential impact of a motion on the entire Parliament and the outside groups following the debate.

When it comes to the cause of women, we should be united, not divided. There should be no partisanship. Otherwise we will make no progress and just spin our wheels. It is deplorable to use this cause for narrow political purposes.

I am getting worked up even though I know that the authors of this motion may not have realized its potential repercussions. If I get worked up it is because I sometimes find that there are too many leaders in a party, or not enough, that is to say that the actual leader is not doing his job.

Insofar as pay equity is concerned, I want to remind the House that women have been fighting for it for more than 20 years. It goes back not just to the Conservative government but to the Liberals as well. They try to cast blame on the Bloc Québécois and the NDP when all the Bloc members have done is to oppose any measures brought before this Parliament that did not seem right to them. That is the mandate we have adopted: to oppose any measures or programs that would be a setback to the status of women or injurious to anyone living in Quebec.

We cannot be blamed for doing our job. The day we stop doing it will be the day the voters throw us out. If some parties are losing their credibility and are being abandoned by some of their MPs and party members, it is not because the Bloc Québécois told the electors how to vote. It is because the party in question did not do its job, did not take the time to examine itself, make the necessary corrections, and admit its errors.

I must say, with all the humility I can muster, that I sincerely believe the voters will be as convincing in the next election as they were when they threw the Liberals out of Quebec. This time, though, the voters will be equally as convincing elsewhere. They will take into account the actions of the Conservative Party, which won only

36% of the vote, making it a minority government, but does whatever it wants regardless of what Parliament decides.

●(1350)

I doubt the voters will want to put this government back in power—at least, not out west or in the eastern provinces. Maybe in Alberta, because it gives them lots of money. Apart from that, though, the voters have not been fooled.

We should all work hard in this House for the well-being of our citizens and the people we represent. I hope we will have the courage and audacity to rise, oppose this motion and say what we think of it. If we pass motions like this in the House, we will only be diminishing ourselves as members of Parliament and representatives of the people.

My colleague from Laurentides—Labelle and I did a tour of Quebec in the spring and summer to meet with women's groups and all the groups that could tell us what women were concerned about in their daily lives with respect to the legislation and the various programs created here.

We met a lot of women's groups and they told us, without exception, how concerned they were about what this government was doing. All these groups, without exception, told us how happy they were that someone was finally showing genuine concern about their issues and preoccupations and how we could help them and work together with them to achieve as much as possible—under the circumstances, naturally.

All these women's groups were also opposed to the cuts the government had made, especially to the court challenges program, the women's program and social housing. When the government cuts social housing programs, it has a real, immediate impact on the lives of women.

The CMHC has made huge profits. It has a surplus of over \$11 billion. And not one penny of that is going towards building social housing or affordable housing, so that single mothers and their children can live in a safe environment.

Absolutely nothing is being done to help these women return to the labour force with more pride and dignity. In fact, access to EI has been cut for women. The various programs have been getting cut for several years now. There were several billion dollars in the EI account, but programs were still cut.

Unfortunately, such a motion reminds us that there are a number of problems surrounding the challenges facing women. It reminds us that there are also many problems concerning everything that women must do and can do to be able to move forward and gain more freedom. It also reminds us that there is pettiness in politics, and there is never room for pettiness. It should never exist, especially not on March 6, two days before March 8, International Women's Day, whose theme is "Strong Women, Strong World".

Where are the strong women in the Liberal Party who could have prevented this motion? Where are they? Strong women are women who would dare rise, speak, and tell their colleagues how they feel about something as low as what was introduced today. That is a strong woman. I am ashamed to know that today, there are women in this Parliament who have not shown their strength.

• (1355)

They let themselves be manipulated and tempted by a remote political objective, and I am disappointed.

I see that it is now time for question period. Mr. Speaker, if you tell me how much time I have left, I would be happy to—

The Speaker: The hon. member will have five minutes after question period to continue her remarks.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 23(3) of the Auditor General Act, the report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons for the year 2008.

[Translation]

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is known as a country in which we have laws that protect all equally and where citizens are compassionate and caring. However, one important change is needed to preserve that reputation. Canadians are surprised to know that in Canada a woman who has chosen to have a child gets no help from the law in protecting her unborn child.

The member of Parliament for Edmonton—Sherwood Park has introduced Bill C-484 to address this gap in the law. His unborn victims of crime act recognizes that a woman who has chosen to have her child and to give it birth has a right to protection for her child as well as for herself. Seventy-two per cent of Canadians support this legislation. I hope MPs here continue to support it as it works its way through committee and on to third reading.

Let us support the choice of the woman and the child she has chosen to keep.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently returned from the global forum on anti-Semitism attended by some 300 delegates from over 45 countries, including a significant number

Statements by Members

of parliamentarians, where the generic theme was, “We are witnessing today an old/new, escalating, sophisticated, global, virulent and even lethal anti-Semitism”.

In its common form, it refers to escalating anti-Semitic hate, Holocaust denial, boycotts, conspiracy theories and the singling out of Israel and the Jewish people for discriminatory treatment in the international arena. In its lethal form, it refers to state sanctioned global anti-Semitism and the racist anti-Semitic terror targeting Jews.

Silence is not an option. The time has come not only to sound the alarm but to act. For as history has taught us only too well, while it may begin with Jews, it does not end with Jews. Anti-Semitism is the canary in the mine shaft of evil.

Accordingly, I joined with U.K. parliamentarian John Mann to establish an international coalition to combat anti-Semitism, a coalition of scholars and activists, parliamentarians and civil society to monitor and combat this longest and most dangerous of hatreds. I trust colleagues will join us in this common cause.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME GALA

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is outraged by CBC's affront to Quebec artists, particularly to Claude Dubois, who was invited to receive an honorary plaque for his work from English Canada at the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame gala broadcast on Monday night. All the francophone artists were cut from the televised broadcast. Nothing can justify this insult to Quebecers and francophones.

The author of *Femmes de rêve* had accepted this invitation to receive this honour because he was assured that the event would be apolitical. It was so apolitical that only one of the two solitudes ended up being seen by television viewers. And yet, Claude Dubois gave Quebec the distinction of having one of the best record sales in Canada, selling 250,000 copies of *Duos Dubois*.

This is a prime example of how important Quebec is to the rest of Canada. That is how much the Quebec nation matters.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with sadness that we learned earlier that, despite massive support from many groups and individuals in his community, Mr. Kulenthiran Amirthalingan will be deported this evening to his country of birth, Malaysia.

Kulen called Montreal home and felt welcome in our country, which made no fuss about his sexual orientation, although unfortunately that is not the current situation in his country of origin.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

Amnesty International tells us that homosexual acts are illegal in Malaysia, that for simply being who he is, Kulen could, under section 377 of the Malaysian penal code, be sentenced to whipping and to imprisonment for up to 20 years. Yet the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada has refused to stop the deportation.

The masks are truly off. Kulenthiran Amirthalingam could become a victim of the Conservative government's indifference because of his sexual orientation and because of his ethnic origin.

As a Canadian who believes we can and must do better, I am ashamed.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: You should be ashamed of yourself.

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Macleod.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Macleod has the floor.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Outremont should control himself immediately.

The hon. member for Macleod.

* * *

● (1405)

*[English]***ORDER OF CANADA**

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I congratulate Ms. Irene Pfeiffer and Dr. Robert H.A. Haslam, two constituents of mine who were recently appointed Members of the Order of Canada.

Ms. Pfeiffer received her award in December for her volunteer contributions with health, women and community organizations.

Dr. Haslam received his award in February for his leadership in pediatric neurology.

Ms. Pfeiffer's and Dr. Haslam's commitment, hard work and enthusiasm have made a significant and lasting impact on the countless lives within my riding, province and our great country.

In light of their lifetime of distinguished service, I think it is entirely fitting that they be awarded one of the highest honours that a citizen of this country can receive. They are truly an inspiration to Canadians everywhere.

Please join me in congratulating Ms. Pfeiffer, Dr. Haslam, and all the other Canadians who have been awarded the Order of Canada.

*[Translation]***ARMAND BRUN**

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very sad to rise here today to pay tribute to Armand Brun, who passed away earlier this week.

Armand was a devoted educator who dedicated his life to francophone education in New Brunswick and who improved the lives of generations of young people in our province. He also worked on the Dr. Georges-L. Dumont Hospital Foundation to help cancer patients.

[English]

Armand Brun was an activist on social issues and served brilliantly as vice-chair of the National Council of Welfare. His commitment to helping those most in need was evident in my last conversation with him just two weeks ago. This worthy tradition is now carried on by Armand's wife, Carmel, his daughter, Natasha, and his son, André.

We will miss our good friend Armand Brun. He leaves behind a proud legacy of service to his community, to Shediac, to New Brunswick and to Canada.

* * *

NATIONAL GLAUCOMA DAY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Canadian Glaucoma Society, the Canadian Ophthalmological Society and the CNIB, I am pleased to declare today, March 6, 2008, to be National Glaucoma Day in Canada.

Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, nearly three out of every 100 Canadians over the age of 40 self-reported having glaucoma.

It is estimated that 60.5 million people worldwide will have glaucoma by 2010 and 8.5 million of those will be blind in both eyes.

The motto of this year's campaign is "Don't Get Blindsided by Glaucoma". Early detection is the key to treating the effects of glaucoma since more than half of these sufferers do not even realize they have the disease known as "the sneak thief of sight".

Canadians need to be much more vigilant about this disease. Those who are at high risk should have their eyes examined for the disease at least every two years by an eye care professional.

I ask all parliamentarians to join me in recognizing National Glaucoma Day.

* * *

*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, March 8 is International Women's Day and will be celebrated this year with the theme, "Strong Women, Strong World".

To mark the occasion, I would like to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the decriminalization of abortion. Indeed, on January 28, 1988, in the Morgentaler decision, the Supreme Court declared section 251 of the Criminal Code unconstitutional because it infringed on women's rights to life, liberty and security.

This decision helped reduce the number of clandestine abortions, which were causing serious health problems for women, often even leading to women's deaths. Since the Morgentaler case, not a year goes by when the rights of women to exercise autonomy and free will are questioned, jeopardized, limited and even threatened. The Conservatives are the masters of this, as evidenced by Bill C-484.

Vigilance is crucial with this backward-thinking government that has no other wish than to see the rights of women take a step back, even though they are strong women for a strong world.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 1 our Conservative government waived visa requirements for Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania and Hungary. This means that citizens from these countries will no longer require a temporary resident visa to visit family and friends in Canada. Canada has strong ties with each of these countries and lifting the visa requirements will help build better relationships.

Recently, the member for Etobicoke Centre has been trying to take credit for the Conservative government's hard work on this issue. The fact is that he and the Liberal Party had their chance, and guess what, they did not get it done.

In April 2005 that member put forward a motion on this issue. That motion stayed on the order paper for seven months. It stayed there until his government was thrown out of office. His motion was ignored by his party. The member for Etobicoke Centre and the Liberal Party did not get the job done.

I am proud to say the Conservative government got the job done.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we just cannot trust the Conservative government.

As NAFTA-gate reaches a boiling point it seems very clear to Canadians that the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Ian Brodie, deliberately leaked sensitive diplomatic conversations to CTV journalists. This first leak came just days before the crucial votes in Texas and Ohio, and triggered a firestorm in the American media.

Then there was a second leak. A Canadian diplomatic memo further hurt Barack Obama's campaign.

The Prime Minister is desperate and he is trying to sweep this issue under the rug. In fact, he has denied any involvement by his chief of staff.

Statements by Members

I see a pattern. The Conservatives tried to bribe Chuck Cadman with a \$1 million life insurance policy to trigger a federal election. Using his Conservative connections, the mayor of Ottawa tried to buy-off a rival candidate.

The Conservative government's actions are sleazy and deeply disturbing.

After NAFTA-gate, the world will think twice about trusting the Canadian government. Canadians already feel that way.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to mark International Women's Day, the Canadian International Development Agency has organized a day of special events in recognition of Afghan women.

After decades of suppression, denied education, freedom and rights, Afghan women and girls are beginning to realize a fuller life and future.

Today a panel of invited guests discussed the work being done by Canadians of all ages to support Afghan women and children. This panel included Alaina Podmorow, an 11-year-old constituent from my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country and founder of Little Women for Little Women in Afghanistan.

We are proud of the work being done by Alaina and her small army of little women who have motivated our community to work together to raise over \$30,000 to pay for Afghan teachers and school supplies.

She is a bright light in an otherwise challenging time as Canada and the Afghan people work together to restore peace and bring stability back to the country of Afghanistan.

I would like to thank Alaina and welcome her to the Hill.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as International Women's Day approaches I pay tribute to the women of Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma.

There are countless women in my riding whose hard work and daily participation in our community make life better for all of us.

It was indeed an honour for me and my staff to highlight a few of these women in our 2008 calendar.

Women make a valuable contribution in business, industry, the arts, education, social justice, environmental causes, community awareness, volunteering, and preserving our cultural heritage.

They represent us in our churches, families, labour unions and municipal government.

Statements by Members

I am proud to belong to the caucus with the largest proportion of women in it. Strong, creative women in leadership roles direct debate toward better decisions for working Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

I salute the women in my life, my family, my colleagues, staff and friends who teach me to embrace equality and the dignity of each human being.

It makes me proud to be a New Democrat. It makes me proud to live in Sault Ste. Marie-Algoma.

* * *

[Translation]

RÉSEAU AWARD

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the 20th anniversary of the Réseau award in Saint Boniface. This award is presented by the Réseau action femmes, a political action organization that seeks to improve the social, economic, cultural, educational and political situation of Franco-Manitoban women.

The Réseau awards are always handed out a few days before International Women's Day, and this year's theme was "Strong Women, Strong World".

The three winners this year are: Sister Olivine Fiola, in the education and social services category, for devoting her life to helping the hard of hearing; Josée Vaillancourt, executive director of the Festival du Voyageur, in the community category, for her commitment to Franco-Manitoban youth; and Mariette Mulaire, executive director of the Agence nationale et internationale du Manitoba, who received the award in the politics category and whose energy and influence have literally changed the way people perceive the economy in Manitoba.

Congratulations to the Réseau action femmes and our three winners. We are all very proud of you.

* * *

●(1415)

AFGHAN WOMEN

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since we will be celebrating International Women's Day on Saturday, I would like to share my concerns about women's rights in Afghanistan. The new Afghan government has been in power for six years now, and much remains to be done to improve the living conditions of women.

More women are committing suicide. Women are being raped by local commanders of fundamentalist parties. Women are being killed for expressing their political opinions. Islamic law still limits women's rights. All of these things show that there are still major obstacles to advancing women's rights in Afghanistan.

As a show of solidarity towards these women and to highlight International Women's Day, the Bloc Québécois is calling on the Minister of International Cooperation to continue what she is doing and provide more support for Afghan women who are fighting for equality.

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate International Women's Week, I want to recognize a new event in Winnipeg, the women who created it, and the five remarkable women who will be honoured at it.

The event, called "Spirit of Leadership: Celebrating Legacies of Vision and Action", will honour Marjorie Blankstein, whose community contribution has influenced 32 different organizations, most notably the United Way and the Winnipeg Jewish Community Council.

It will honour Yhetta Gold, whose work and volunteerism in the community has touched the lives of many, from youth, to seniors, to people with disabilities.

It will honour June Menzies, a groundbreaking proponent for women's equality rights in Canada whose words, "If you aren't constantly vigilant you go backwards", ring even more true today.

It will honour Bernice Sisler, best known for her work with numerous women's organizations, where she fought for reforms in family law legislation and pensions.

It will also honour Muriel Smith, the first woman in Canada to be named deputy premier and whose volunteer experience encompasses international, national, provincial and local organizations.

The vision of these extraordinary women helped lead us to the opportunities we share today.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, advancing women's equality means establishing a solid foundation for future generations. That is why, in the last budget, our government proposed the creation of an action plan for women.

Advancing the equality of women in Canada by improving their social and economic conditions and increasing their participation in Canadian democracy is this government's primary objective.

It is time to recognize that women have been making a huge contribution for a long time. Their contributions will probably change the face of our society, which will benefit us all.

This is what real action looks like. Here, we listen, we have dialogue, we take concrete action, while the Bloc Québécois talks and talks, but can never take any positive action.

We believe that equality is not just a symbol; it is our reason for being.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***ETHICS**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister was unable to answer my question, so let me help him. When asked about the million dollar insurance policy for Mr. Cadman, on tape the Prime Minister talked about “financial issues”, “financial considerations”, and “financial insecurity”.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he was talking about addressing Mr. Cadman's financial insecurity in exchange for his vote?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. I have been absolutely clear that what the party was talking to Chuck Cadman about was the financing of an election campaign. That has been absolutely clear, not just clear from me but clear from party officials and clear by the statements of Chuck Cadman himself when he was alive in 2005.

● (1420)

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's story is ridiculous. It does not hold up, and it shatters his credibility. He is the only one who believes it. He has been contradicted by Mr. Cadman's wife, daughter and son-in-law and by his own taped statement, and I quote: “The offer to Chuck was that it was only to replace financial considerations he might lose due to an election.”

My question for the Prime Minister is as follows. Why does he not tell the truth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Liberal Party and his followers keep changing the story in this case.

[English]

The Liberal Party said there was a meeting on May 17. That has apparently now been withdrawn. Those members claim that Chuck Cadman was not interested in running in an election. That is contradicted by statements at the time.

They claim that Dona Cadman was making allegations against me. She was very clear that she is not. They said that Chuck Cadman said he was bribed. It is on the public record that he was not. They claimed he was offered a life insurance policy, which is simply not credible.

I wish they would get their own story straight.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell members what is most shocking in this interview of the Prime Minister on the tape. It is when he speaks about his operatives who were going to make an offer to Mr. Cadman. The Prime Minister said on the tape not to “press it” on Chuck, that it will not work.

The Prime Minister says that it will not work. Never does he say that it is wrong, that it is illegal. Why not?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the credibility of the Leader of the Opposition's own behaviour on this is pretty clear. It is very clear that for months the Liberal Party has had no issues so it is resorting to smear and to allegations of scandal.

It is a party that, while it says we are guilty of corruption, votes to keep us in office. It is the same party that brings in a non-confidence motion against the NDP. It is a party and a leader who yesterday gave the Bloc and the separatists advice on how to win the next referendum. It is quite a show that he is running over there.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in July 2005, the Prime Minister is quoted in the *Calgary Herald* as saying, “I visited Chuck”, Mr. Cadman, “at his home in April, and I knew then that he was far more sick than the public realized”.

So before the May 19 vote, the Prime Minister knew that Mr. Cadman could not possibly be running in another election. If so, how can he continue to pretend that the Conservative offer to Mr. Cadman was a Conservative—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party is just wrong on this. He does not have to take my word for it. In the *Globe and Mail*, on page A7, on July 15, 2005, it was reported that Chuck Cadman was in fact planning on running again. The Leader of the Opposition is in fact wrong on this.

What has been demonstrated here by the Liberal Party is the old saying: “If you have the facts, argue the facts; if you have the law, argue the law; if you have neither, pound the table”. The Liberals can pound away. We stand by Chuck Cadman. We stand by the truth.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a ridiculous answer. Mr. Cadman won by a very comfortable margin as an independent. He did not need the Conservatives.

What is more, the Conservatives had already nominated their candidate, so they could not possibly have offered Mr. Cadman a Conservative nomination.

When will the Prime Minister admit, as he did on the tape, that the offer was for financial considerations?

● (1425)

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is wrong, wrong, wrong. Conservative Party rules regarding nominations for the 2005 campaign clearly stated that sitting members of the Conservative Party would automatically be candidates for our party.

Oral Questions

The opposition party's accusations are therefore completely false. The Liberals are constantly making up scandals to parade in front of Canadians. The fact is that our party agrees with the statements made by Chuck Cadman himself, who said that no such offer was ever made.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has a reputation for wanting to control and know everything. That is why I was so surprised to hear him say that he did not know the details of the offer made to Chuck Cadman. According to the government, the only offer that was made to Mr. Cadman was to have him rejoin the Conservative Party caucus.

Is the man who likes to control everything telling us that he did not know his party had invited Chuck Cadman to rejoin the caucus? Is that what he calls details?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said that we offered Chuck Cadman the opportunity to join the Conservative caucus, to get the Conservative nomination and to run as a candidate in his riding. I have said that, the members of our staff have said that and Chuck Cadman clearly said that in 2005.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Chuck Cadman may have said that in 2005, but the Prime Minister did not say that in 2005. Three months after May 19, he met with a journalist and he did not remember that Mr. Cadman had been asked to rejoin the caucus. He said he was not aware of the details, but—surprise, surprise—three years later he does remember that Mr. Cadman was invited to rejoin the caucus.

This is nonsense. He must stop telling tall tales and start telling us what he meant by “financial considerations”. We want to know what he meant.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Bloc Québécois keeps changing his story too. The Leader of the Bloc Québécois said that there was a meeting on May 17, 2005, and now that has been dropped. The Leader of the Bloc Québécois said that Chuck Cadman did not want to run in an election campaign, and that is contradicted by the facts in this case.

The only thing the Leader of the Bloc Québécois has today is an offer from the Leader of the Liberal Party to help rebuild the sovereignist movement in Quebec. He should accept that gift while he can.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's explanation makes no sense. Mr. Cadman was in no condition to campaign and, in any event, the Conservative candidate had already been chosen. Chuck Cadman did not need campaign financing, and that is not what the Prime Minister was talking about on the tape when he referred to financial considerations offered to Mr. Cadman.

Even though he does not remember all the details, what was the Prime Minister talking about, in general terms, when he referred to “financial considerations” on the tape?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have answered that question already. However, for the benefit of our Bloc Québécois colleagues, I will just say that if Mr.

Cadman had said he was going to join the Conservative Party as a member of our caucus, he would automatically have been the candidate in the riding of Surrey North.

I have what he said in English only.

[*English*]

I want to say this very clearly, again. When he was asked by Mike Duffy, “Conservatives were prepared to offer you an unopposed nomination if you would vote with them and also help you with the funding and so on”, Chuck Cadman said, “That was the only offer on anything that I had from anybody”.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to questions from reporters, the Prime Minister's Office categorically denied that Mr. Cadman had been offered a \$1 million insurance policy, but refused to say that no other financial offers had been made in exchange for his vote. On the tape, the Prime Minister clearly refers to “financial considerations”.

Does the Prime Minister's refusal to answer not prove that the Conservatives are concealing information that would show that an attempt was made to bribe Mr. Cadman?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are concealing nothing. We are simply saying that there were three things on the table when an offer was made to Mr. Cadman: first, that he join the Conservative Party; second, that he run as a candidate for our party; third, that we would help him win his seat again as a Conservative candidate. That was the offer.

That is my answer, and it is what the Prime Minister, Tom Flanagan, Doug Finley and Chuck Cadman himself said.

* * *

● (1430)

[*English*]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to have the most senior adviser in the Prime Minister's Office interfering in the American elections is extremely serious. Interference is now what the American Ambassador is calling it.

In answer to my question on Tuesday, when I asked the Prime Minister about the source of what they now refer to as the NAFTA-gate leak, the Prime Minister said, “it was not my chief of staff”. However, new reports indicate very clearly that it was Ian Brodie, the chief of staff.

Will the Prime Minister now apologize to the House, the American people and Senator Obama, and will he fire his chief of staff?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already said that the leak of information against the campaign of Senator Obama was extremely unfair. I have also said that it is completely contrary to the interests of the Government of Canada.

Oral Questions

I will not comment on rumours. I have said that we are doing a thorough internal investigation of this, led by the Clerk of the Privy Council. I will take whatever steps the Clerk of the Privy Council believes are necessary subsequent to that investigation.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no apology, no accountability, it sounds like no confidence as far as we are concerned.

[*Translation*]

American media, analysts, and political parties have said that the Government of Canada's actions clearly had an influence on the American elections. We know where the information came from: Ian Brodie, the Prime Minister chief of staff. That was where Canada's unprecedented interference in the American elections started.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and fire Ian Brodie immediately?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already said that the information leaked against Senator Obama's campaign was very unfair. I also said that it is completely contrary to the interests of the Government of Canada.

This is a very serious matter. I asked the Clerk of the Privy Council to conduct an internal investigation. He will do so in cooperation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. I plan on taking his advice and finding those responsible—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is dancing around this issue just like he did with the other one. Information was leaked against Democratic presidential candidates twice. The second one had to do with a Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade memo. Everything seems to indicate that the first leak came directly from the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he is refusing to authorize an investigation into the first leak because he is protecting his chief of staff?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the Clerk of the Privy Council will investigate this whole matter. We will act on the basis of the information we receive.

[*English*]

To be very clear, we will investigate this entire matter and take whatever action is deemed to be necessary, based on the facts we are able to discover.

I point out for the Leader of the Opposition that while he was throwing around wild accusations of scandal, the leader of the NDP was already on top of this issue.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the only defence of the Prime Minister that we do not know how to choose among all the scandals he has. It begs the question: When the Prime Minister said on Tuesday, "it was not my chief of staff", was the Prime Minister misleading the House, or was his chief of staff misleading him?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Neither, Mr. Speaker. The problem with the Leader of the Liberal Party is he is so busy chasing appointments that never happened, favours that were never given, lawsuits that were never cancelled, that when there actually is a serious matter and, as I said, a serious matter of improper information circulating about the campaign of Senator Obama in a way that was damaging and in a way that was completely unfair, he completely misses the story.

The leader of the NDP has asked solid questions on this. He deserves answers, and we are going to find those answers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, wonders never cease.

The Prime Minister said that he would find the person responsible for the NAFTA leak. He claims that it is all a big mystery. But it is no mystery.

He should pay a visit to his chief of staff.

Does the Prime Minister agree that he must dismiss his chief of staff, not only for having embarrassed his boss, but also for having shamed his country?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, wonders never cease. This was a party that put a vote of confidence against the opposition, not against the government.

As the Prime Minister has said, this is a very serious matter. For that reason, the Clerk of the Privy Council, with the Department of Foreign Affairs, has started an investigation. When the report comes in, we will take action, unlike that party, which did not get up to vote on its own non-confidence motion.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a disturbing pattern is becoming evident. The Conservatives cannot seem to stop tampering with elections: municipal, federal and now, God knows, even an American election.

There is evidence that the environment minister interfered in the municipal election in Ottawa. There is evidence that the Conservatives made a financial offer to trigger a federal election in Canada. We now find that their partisan games have gone international, with a clumsy attempt to skew the vote in Ohio.

The Ambassador calls this interference. When will this pattern of interference end?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have heard from the Liberal Party members is a series of wild accusations. What they considered to be a scandal was a patronage appointment that was never offered and never made, a court case that was never intervened in, a contract that was never handed out, a political effort that was never made.

I feel sorry for the deputy leader of the Liberal Party. I know he is a better man than this, but I know his leader has taken him in this direction.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of International Women's Day, we are outraged—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We are running out of time. The hon. member for Laval.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of International Women's Day, we were outraged to see this bill introduced by the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park, a bill that would make it a crime to harm a fetus, passed yesterday at second reading. It is worrisome because, by introducing such a concept, freedom of choice opponents in the United States were able to have abortion criminalized.

Since the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages voted against it, does she intend to defend her position in committee and is she prepared to do whatever it takes to convince her colleagues?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is firmly committed to protecting women from all types of violence and ensuring that perpetrators are accountable for their acts. That is why we introduced Bill C-2, the Tackling Violent Crime Act. We know that among 14 to 15 year olds, the individuals who are most likely to be victims are young girls.

We are taking action on that. We have an agenda that includes concrete protection for all Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the minister dare to rise or was her vote simply playing to the gallery?

Considering all the groups opposed to this bill, the minister now has the opportunity to tour Canada and Quebec and to prevent it from being adopted.

Will she use all the public forums available to explain the dangers this bill poses to women's rights, which led her to vote against it?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member noted, we had a free vote yesterday. I exercised my right to vote freely on the question. That being said, I have nothing to learn from the Bloc member about how I wish to deal with these issues.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has broken another election promise. During the campaign he said: "Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has more to do to meet its international obligations to women's equality."

Abolishing the court challenges program, preventing human rights groups from having access to the women's program, closing Status of Women Canada offices—is that how the Conservatives promote equality for women?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the way for a government to promote equality for women is to make a formal commitment in the budget, as we did in the latest budget, the 2008 budget. The Bloc members voted against that budget.

Having said that, in two years, we have accomplished more for Canadian and Quebec women than the Bloc has in 18 years. We know very well that, even in the next 18 years, the Bloc will accomplish nothing because from now on their watchword is "conversation".

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when we know that the Conservative budget dedicated only six lines out of 400-plus pages to women and that their election campaign mentioned the word "women" only twice, we quickly see that women are of little importance to that party.

While no new investments were made for women and while this pittance, this \$20 million for projects, was announced by the Conservatives with great fanfare, but actually came from the cuts in the Status of Women budget, how can the Conservatives claim to be promoting women's causes?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. The \$20 million that was announced have increased the number of projects we are able to fund for women. Yes, in our budget there are six very important lines dedicated to the women of Canada and Quebec. In the list of concrete achievements by the Bloc for the women of Quebec, there is not one line and not one word.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, apparently we always have to draw a picture for the Conservative government. Section 119 of the Criminal Code stipulates that everyone is guilty of an indictable offence who "gives or offers to a member of Parliament, any money, valuable consideration, office, place or employment...by that person in their official capacity".

Can the Prime Minister confirm in this House that no legitimate representative of his party committed an offence under the Criminal Code?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the type of offer the Liberals have been talking about from the start, an offer of a \$1 million to Chuck Cadman, is not a real accusation. The only offer made to Mr. Cadman was to express our desire to see him rejoin the Conservative Party and to run as a candidate for our party. That is the only offer that was put on the table. Mr. Cadman said so himself.

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government should get tough on Conservative crime.

Oral Questions

I have another excerpt from section 41 of the Parliament of Canada Act.

Every person who gives, offers or promises to any member of the House of Commons any compensation for services...rendered or to be rendered, is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year....

Would the Prime Minister not agree that this should be required reading for the members of his team?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that my colleague did not have that section of the Criminal Code memorized after sponsorship, but that she had to read it, fair enough.

The only offer made to Chuck Cadman was for him to rejoin the Conservative Party.

However, while I have a brief moment here in the House, I do want to thank my colleague, in spite of her heated words here in question period, which I know is the nature of question period, for demonstrating her confidence by standing down on the budget and letting it pass the other night.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Halifax West now has the floor. Order, please.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services has been shielding the Prime Minister against bribery allegations by claiming that the only offer to Chuck Cadman was to rejoin the party.

However, he told a different story in 2005. Back then, he told journalists that his party was trying to work something out so Mr. Cadman would not suffer financially. He indicated that serious financial considerations were on the table.

Will the Prime Minister admit the truth, that financial considerations were indeed offered to Mr. Cadman?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my mom used to tell me not to believe everything I read in the newspaper.

The only offer that was made to Chuck Cadman was the one that I have told a number of times in the House of Commons. The Liberals have interesting conspiracy theories on that side of the House of Commons, but the truth speaks for itself and this truth was spoken in the voice of Chuck Cadman who said that the only offer was the offer for him to rejoin the Conservative Party.

However, again I would like to thank the member for Halifax West for his support of the Conservative government on the budget as well. He is a good member and it was good of him to do that.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess we will never know if the parliamentary secretary was telling the truth in 2005 or if he is telling the truth today.

[*Translation*]

The parliamentary secretary is avoiding the question again.

Will the government admit, as the parliamentary secretary did in 2005, that when the Prime Minister spoke of financial compensation on the tape, he was talking about the benefits Mr. Cadman would have lost if the government fell? Yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are on quicksand and are sinking quickly. Their stories continue to change.

First they said that a \$1 million life insurance policy was offered. It is not credible and it is not true. They accused the Prime Minister of a crime and they were wrong. They declared that there was a meeting on May 17 and the book has since changed that, but the Liberals have yet to withdraw that accusation. They said that Chuck Cadman was not running again and in fact they were wrong.

It turns out that the only thing in the past week the Liberals have been right on was their support of the Conservative budget.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we approach International Women's Day, we are reminded of the challenges that women still face in some countries of the world. The situation of the women in Afghanistan, for instance, has significantly improved since the fall of the Taliban. However, there are still challenges to confront.

Could the Minister of International Cooperation tell this House what our government is doing to improve the situation of women in Afghanistan?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is making a difference.

Today I announced the Afghan fund for the advancement of women. This will strengthen and accelerate programming and policies that advance women's rights in Afghanistan.

I also announced support to ensure more female teachers are trained in Afghanistan. With our government's support, through Canadian Women for Women and Little Women 4 Little Women in Afghanistan, 500 more female teachers will be trained.

Eleven-year-old, Alaina Podmorow, head of Little Women 4 Little Women, is an outstanding example of how average Canadians are determined to make a better life for Afghan women and girls. I invite all members to come and meet this amazing young Canadian later today.

Oral Questions

• (1450)

[Translation]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ian Brodie, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, is behind the NAFTA affair.

The questions are simple. Who was the anonymous source who fed CTV the story involving Senator Obama? Who was the source of the diplomatic memo illegally leaked to the Associated Press?

Can the Prime Minister assure us that these people will be relieved of their duties? They are not worthy of holding positions of public trust.

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, this kind of leak of information is a very serious matter and is very unfair against the Obama campaign.

As the Prime Minister has indicated in the House, the Clerk of the Privy Council has started the investigation with the Department of Foreign Affairs. As soon as the investigation is done and, upon legal advice, whatever action is needed to be taken this government will take the action.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will not need to pull off a CSI-style investigation.

Associated Press received a Canadian diplomatic cable that was classified secret. He should start by reviewing the call logs in his own office and tell this House who the Associated Press spoke to when it called that office. That is simple.

What is not so simple is for the Prime Minister to do the right thing. Will the Prime Minister fire Ian Brodie because he cannot be trusted by Canadians?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated and as the Prime Minister has stated, the Clerk of the Privy Council has started an investigation into this matter. We consider this a very serious matter and that is why the investigation is going on with the Department of Foreign Affairs. Once we have the results and, upon legal advice, I can assure the member this government will act.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, PMO spokesperson, Sandra Buckler, misspoke about Afghan detainees.

Yesterday she issued another typically evasive denial about Mr. Cadman's insurance policy. It took six days for the Prime Minister's office to come up with that piece of fiction. Maybe the government can do better this time.

Did anyone representing the Conservative Party discuss any kind of financial consideration for Mr. Cadman or his family in relation to his vote, yes or no?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific

Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague from Vancouver Centre is a slight expert on misspeaking so I will be very precise.

There was the one meeting on May 19, 2005. At that meeting were three people, Tom Flanagan, Doug Finley and Chuck Cadman. All three of them said that the only offer that was put on the table was our desire to have Chuck run as a Conservative, to get re-elected as a Conservative and to continue his support of the Prime Minister.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Cadman's parliamentary life policy could have been worth about a half a million dollars in non-taxable benefits to his family. He was concerned that his family would not receive the full benefits if a snap election were called.

How was the Prime Minister going to deal with Mr. Cadman's financial insecurity, as he said on tape? What did he mean when he said, again on tape, that talks were to replace financial considerations Mr. Cadman might lose due to an election?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have answered this question a number of times about the only offer that was put on the table. I answered it last Wednesday, last Thursday and last Friday. I answered it on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and I am answering it today as we speak.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Zytaruk asked the Prime Minister about an insurance policy. The Prime Minister answered, "I don't know the details. I know there were discussions". Therefore, he knew that an insurance policy was involved.

Well, apparently not. The Prime Minister says that his party only offered help for Mr. Cadman's campaign, except Mr. Cadman did not think so. He told his family that he had received an offer of a life insurance policy. Why would he lie to them? Why would they lie to us?

We need to hear from the Prime Minister. These are his words, "I don't know the details. I know there were discussions". Could he tell us what they mean?

• (1455)

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the discussions were as I described.

However, while I have a moment here, I again want to thank the member for York Centre for his vote of confidence in our government in the passing of the Conservative budget.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern developing here. The Prime Minister stands—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: And a pattern of excessive noise as well. The hon. member for York Centre has the floor and we will have some order, please.

Oral Questions

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister stands on questions about Mr. Cadman or his family but not about the Zytaruk tape, not when they relate to his own words, not when he would have to explain what he knew and not when he would have to explain what is very difficult to explain.

This is fundamental. If what Mr. Cadman's family says is right, this is about buying a vote to bring down a government. This is as serious as it gets. I will ask the Prime Minister the question again and ask him until he answers. Those were his words. Could he tell us what they mean?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they meant exactly what we have said they meant, which was our desire to have Chuck rejoin the Conservative caucus and present himself as a Conservative candidate.

However, I want to again remind the House that budget 2008 is fantastic. It lowers taxes for families, invests in infrastructure, invests in health care, invests in our provinces, invests in agriculture and invests in the fishing industry. It is a fantastic budget. I would like to congratulate the finance minister: he shoots, he scores.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance system is a safety net that is full of holes. It discriminates against women: barely 33% of unemployed women have access to benefits. This is 11% lower than the figure for men. The Bloc Québécois put forward a motion to eliminate discriminatory provisions and establish a uniform eligibility threshold. That motion was adopted.

What is the government waiting for to improve employment insurance and eliminate discrimination against women from the program?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the member is absolutely wrong. Eighty-four per cent of people who are working full time today have access to employment insurance benefits across the country. We have an extraordinarily generous system. In fact, we acted in November to make it more generous by extending a pilot project to help seasonal workers. We have put in place other improvements to the system.

The fact is that this government is standing up for workers. It was the previous government that reduced EI benefits. It was the previous government that raided the EI fund to the tune of over \$50 billion. We will never do that.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, female workers in Quebec who are governed by the Canada Labour Code are covered only by the employment insurance program when they have to withdraw preventively because of pregnancy.

Considering that only 33% of women who contribute to employment insurance are eligible for benefits, many women have no protection.

What is the government waiting for to introduce a preventive withdrawal program comparable to Quebec's program, for women governed by the Canada Labour Code?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the steps we have taken to enhance the employment insurance program, a program which ensures that 84% of full time workers who pay into that program get support. That is extraordinarily important, but it does not end there.

This government has put in place a suite of measures to make sure that we help workers who are struggling in one sector to move to another sector. We have put in place new labour market arrangements and the targeted initiative for older workers. Today we invest more in training than any government in history. We are very proud of that. We see the potential of workers of all kinds. We want to make sure they get the best social program of all: a good job.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has deemed that Canada will seek clemency from Saudi Arabia for the death sentence imposed on Mr. Kohail.

● (1500)

[Translation]

Will the Prime Minister finally abandon his childish, ideological policy in order to save Mr. Kohail's life?

[English]

Does the Prime Minister not realize that the cherry-picking of cases on which to seek clemency jeopardizes the lives of any Canadians sentenced to death abroad and effectively handcuffs our diplomatic efforts?

Will the Prime Minister abandon the Conservative sniff test on the legal systems of other countries before seeking clemency and before this perverse and reckless policy puts another Canadian life in danger?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that this government will be seeking clemency in this case. I want to say that the Government of Canada stands ready to assist the family in pursuing its appeal through the justice system in Saudi Arabia. We are in very close contact with the family and will continue to provide consular assistance. We are monitoring this case very closely.

*Oral Questions***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate International Women's Week, the opposition is trying to deny the truth about how our government is making a difference in the lives of women. We have provided funding for organizations that work to create safer neighbourhoods, for example, and that mentor and train young women in marginalized communities through projects that provide them with real opportunities and get real results.

In fact, the Minister of Indian Affairs and the Minister of Status of Women recently announced that five new shelters will be built to help address violence against first nations women and their families. Can the minister remind the opposition of how our government is taking concrete measures to help women in ways that actually benefit them?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

This morning, as part of International Women's Week, I had the pleasure of announcing seven projects to help various women's groups across the country. For example, we announced money for female victims of violence, for aboriginal women and for other projects to increase women's participation in democratic life.

Our government is focusing on issues that affect women directly by funding practical projects that make a difference in women's lives.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon the Prime Minister has admitted that the head of the Privy Council Office is investigating the Prime Minister's Office. The problem is that the most senior adviser in the PMO, the Chief of Staff, is the reason for the investigation in the first place.

Could the government clarify for this House the degree to which the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff is involved in the PCO investigation and will he ask the Chief of Staff to step aside until the investigation is complete?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, this kind of information leak is completely unacceptable. For that reason, the Clerk of the Privy Council, with the Department of Foreign Affairs, is doing an internal inquiry. As soon as the results are available, and with legal advice, this government will act on that information.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I may have missed the answer as to whether the Chief of Staff would be stepping aside, so I wonder, when the Conservatives promised trust, openness, transparency, accountability and clean government, did they mean this? Did they mean stonewalling in the House of Commons? Did they mean refusing to tell the whole truth? Did they mean cover-ups and mistruths?

Are openness, transparency and accountability somehow really code for leak, hide and cover? How can working families trust this government if the Prime Minister will not fire the one person who we can confirm leaked this story?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government introduced the toughest accountability act ever in the country. We are very proud of that act. I will tell the hon. member again that an investigation is being conducted. As soon as the results are available, this government will act.

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MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister continues to attack the Premier of Ontario with the viciousness of a soon to be provincial opposition leader, but in the meantime, manufacturing jobs just keep flowing out of Ontario.

This is the same man who left us a \$5.6 billion deficit when he was a provincial minister. He was the architect of Walkerton, Ipperwash and the jailing of the homeless. In December, he achieved zero growth for the Canadian economy. Will he please stop helping Ontario?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I might point out for the benefit of the hon. member that the economy in Ontario actually is doing very well. I have been to a number of recent announcements and in particular in the aerospace sector, at the Diamond jet manufacturing facility.

Perhaps if she answered her phone it might be some good news relating to the Canadian economy. It might cheer her up.

• (1505)

The Speaker: I am sure the Minister of Industry would not want to urge the member to do something that is contrary to the rules. Cellphones are not to be used in the House.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the environment commissioner issued his latest report. Many of the problems identified were flagged for the Liberals years ago, but what did they do? Absolutely nothing on issues like species at risk, aquatic invasive species and protected areas for wildlife.

In fact, it takes time to clean up the environmental messes left behind by the Liberals, who were derelict in their duties. Can the Minister of the Environment please tell the House what this government is doing to address the great Liberal legacy of inaction on the environment?

Business of the House

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have received a report from the environment commissioner, who did a great job. We fully accept the report. It is a follow-up report to reports that were issued by his office in the early 2000s. It is really a follow-up report to find out whether the Liberals were successful at cleaning up their mess.

The report is good in five areas and it shows we have progress in nine areas. We are committed to do something more than talk about it. We are taking real action: action to clean up our great lakes; action to protect species at risk; and action to protect habitat for our species at risk and wildlife in this country. We are committed to getting the job done.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Ms. Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual my question has to do with the flow of business, over the time between now and the Easter adjournment. I wonder if the government House leader could designate the remaining opposition days that will need to be covered in that space of time, and also indicate precisely what he has in mind in terms of House business for the two days of the five next week that would not be opposition days.

I would inform him that if he has in mind designating Monday as an opposition day for the official opposition it would be our intention to use that day to provide extra time for members of the House of Commons to give the proper kind of participation and consideration to the motion with respect to Afghanistan.

There is a strong desire, certainly on the part of the official opposition and I think on the part of all members of the House, to have adequate time to consider this matter in a proper way. Therefore, if Monday is to be a Liberal opposition day, we would devote it to that very important public business.

I would also ask the government House leader a question with respect to Bill C-21.

There was a procedural issue earlier with respect to that bill, Mr. Speaker. You have now ruled that two particular amendments are in fact in order and therefore any procedural question has been removed with respect to Bill C-21. Therefore, I wonder when the House leader intends to bring that bill back for consideration in the House.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members of the House are aware, this week is confidence in the Conservative government week, and it is indeed turning out to be exactly that.

• (1510)

[Translation]

On Monday night, the House voted confidence in our government by rejecting a Liberal non-confidence motion on the budget by a vote of 202 to 7. Only seven Liberal caucus members bothered to show up to vote in favour of their own amendment.

[English]

On Tuesday night, this House again expressed confidence in the government by voting in favour of budget 2008. The budget is a responsible and prudent budget for uncertain economic times and I am pleased that the House supported it. This time, 11 members of the official opposition, the Liberal Party of Canada, decided to do their job and vote, thanks again to the Liberal whip imposing on her caucus a reverse two line whip, a new term that I trust the Clerk will include in the next edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Today is the Liberals' turn again. They have so much confidence in this government that they have only the other opposition parties to condemn. As a result, today the House will continue to debate the Liberal opposition motion, which expresses non-confidence in the opposition parties.

On Friday, the NDP will step up to the plate and propose another test of confidence, which I am sure the government will pass, completing confidence in the Conservative government week.

[Translation]

Next week we will address the extension of our military mission in Afghanistan.

[English]

The government's revised motion to extend the military mission in Afghanistan, announced by the Prime Minister on February 21, reflects the consensus that was built by the efforts of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. The result is a motion that will extend the military mission to 2011 and reflects what we can truly call a Canadian consensus.

[Translation]

The motion was thoroughly debated for two days last week and on Monday night. Today, I received consent to extend the sitting hours of the House next Monday and Tuesday evening, so we can continue debating this motion before voting on it.

[English]

Of course, we have also heard that the official opposition will kindly offer its opposition day on Monday for further consideration of the same question.

The government plans to hold the vote on the motion to extend the military mission in Afghanistan on Thursday, March 13. That day will also be the last day of debate on the motion. Certainly we will be able to say that it has been a matter of clear public discussion for well over a month. It will have been in the House for many hours and it will be an appropriate time to make that determination before the upcoming NATO meetings in Bucharest so the Prime Minister will have a clear mandate when he attends.

Speaker's Ruling

[Translation]

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of next week will be supply days. Wednesday will be the last day of debate for the supply period. The regular supply votes will follow.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the government House leader, did I miss Friday of next week? I was distracted and wonder if the House leader dealt with that.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, of course Friday of next week comes after Thursday of next week and at this point in time, we have not laid down government business for that one day. I would be pleased to answer the business for next Friday after Thursday's question next week.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

LIBERAL PARTY OPPOSITION MOTION—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised earlier today by the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons alleging the inadmissibility of the opposition motion currently being debated, standing in the name of the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

[English]

The hon. government House leader has raised a number of arguments, but has principally focused on two main points. First, he has argued that an opposition day motion cannot bring into question the conduct of an opposition party and, second, he has suggested that the use of the word “condemn” in relation to an opposition party brings the confidence convention into play, with the intended consequences on that opposition party.

On the first point, the Chair is extremely reluctant to intervene in view of the fact that Standing Order 81(13) and *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at page 724, make it very clear that such motions “may relate to any matter within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada” and that members “enjoy a very wide scope in proposing opposition motions on Supply days and, unless the motion is clearly and undoubtedly irregular (e.g., where the procedural aspect is not open to reasonable argument), the Chair does not intervene”.

[Translation]

As I stated in a ruling delivered on March 29, 2007:

Past interventions from the Chair have, accordingly, been rare, restricted to cases in which a motion is “clearly and undoubtedly irregular”. Speaking to this principle, Mr. Speaker Fraser declared that “the use of an allotted day ought not to be interfered with except on the clearest and most certain procedural grounds.” (Debates, June 8, 1987, p. 6820).

[English]

The government House leader's reference to a ruling from 1983, while interesting, speaks to a different era, when anyone, even the government, could move amendments to supply day opposition motions. In that particular case, it was a Progressive Conservative Party motion to which the New Democratic Party moved an

amendment that did not respect the Standing Orders in that it did not “relate to any matter within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada”.

Of course, Standing Order 85, which requires the consent of the mover for an amendment, now makes that kind of manoeuvre impossible. In the circumstances, it seems unreasonable to extend this 1983 precedent to a motion which clearly has as its central theme a subject matter which falls squarely within the jurisdiction of Parliament.

[Translation]

The Chair does recognize, however, that it must remain vigilant in these matters. As I indicated in the March 2007 ruling referred to earlier, the original purpose of opposition motions was for “...airing grievances before voting supply to fund the Crown's programme”. At that time, I went on to suggest that perhaps the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs could review the relevant Standing Orders to consider whether revisions to their wording might be helpful in realigning current practice on opposition motions with their original mission.

Almost a year has elapsed since I made that suggestion and I will reiterate that request again today.

● (1515)

[English]

On the second point raised by the government House leader, specifically the use of the word “condemn” and its significance, the Chair has considerably less sympathy with the argument being presented. I refer the House to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at page 37, where it is stated:

What constitutes a question of confidence in the government varies with the circumstances. Confidence is not a matter of parliamentary procedure, nor is it something on which the Speaker can be asked to rule.

This seems rather conclusive and I do not see what I could usefully add.

[Translation]

Accordingly, for the reasons I have just explained, the Chair will allow debate to continue on the motion. I thank hon. members for their attention.

● (1520)

[English]

BILL C-46—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD ACT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on Monday, March 3 by the hon. member for Malpeque concerning the admissibility of Bill C-46, An Act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and chapter 17 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998, standing on the order paper in the name of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Malpeque for raising this matter, as well as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board for their contributions on the issue.

[English]

The member for Malpeque contends that Bill C-46 is inadmissible because it contravenes section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act which states:

The Minister shall not cause to be introduced in Parliament a bill that would exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley, or wheat or barley produced in any area in Canada...unless

(a) the Minister has consulted with the board about the exclusion or extension, and

(b) the producers of the grain have voted in favour of the exclusion or extension, the voting process having been determined by the Minister.

In particular, the member for Malpeque alleges that the consultations referred to in paragraph (a) of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act have not taken place.

[Translation]

In arguing that the bill is in order, the government House leader pointed out that the bill does not propose to amend the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food added that the intention of Bill C-46 is, in fact, to amend section 47 of the existing Act and, therefore, that the provisions of section 47.1 do not apply in this matter.

[English]

The Chair has looked at Bill C-46 bearing in mind the arguments made. In light of the circumstances, it is perhaps helpful to highlight the bill's main objectives, as contained in its four clauses. Clause 1 amends the act to confirm that the government may repeal or amend any regulation it makes under the act. Clause 2 establishes a dispute resolution regime which does not relate to the point of order of the hon. member for Malpeque. Clause 4 is the coming into force provision found in most bills, regardless of their subject matter.

It is clause 3 that is at issue in this point of order. Clause 3 repeals a section of a 1998 amending statute; the effect of clause 3 is to cause the repeal of section 47.1, which I just read, and nowhere in the bill can the Chair find reference to any matter prohibited within section 47.1.

The Chair must conclude that, as Bill C-46 does not appear to propose the exclusion of any wheat or barley product from the provisions of part III or IV of the act, nor the extension of the application of these parts to any other grain, it is not subject to the requirements of section 47.1 of the act.

Accordingly, the Chair cannot find that the bill offends the requirements contained in section 47.1 and I am ruling that the bill has therefore been properly introduced and may proceed.

[Translation]

Naturally, the member for Malpeque will have the opportunity to debate the principle of the bill at the second reading stage and, if the House adopts the bill at that stage, the committee to which the bill is

Business of Supply

referred will no doubt want to examine his arguments during its clause by clause consideration.

I thank the member for Malpeque for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Laval had the floor. She now has five minutes, or nearly five minutes, to conclude her remarks.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier, at the beginning of my speech, I told you how uncomfortable I felt in rising to speak to this motion, but I am not alone. Today, women's groups, Women and the Law, Equal Voice and aboriginal women's groups must also be embarrassed to be listening to this debate in the House.

On the day after a vote that will be etched forever in the minds of women in Quebec and Canada as a disastrous day for their rights, I find it somewhat mean-spirited that we have to debate a motion that blames, not the people who should be blamed, but people who make a practice of working together. Those women's groups must also find it mean-spirited.

On the day after such a vote, on the contrary, what this should be is an opportunity to show all of those women's groups and human rights groups that for some issues and in some cases, we really can join forces and combine our strengths, our energies, our ideas and our suggestions and move beyond partisanship.

It is very unfortunate that we have to discuss this motion today, in this manner. It is unfortunate that I have had to speak out against women with whom I usually work, in committee, in a much less partisan way. Their parties have left me no choice.

Because of International Women's Day and this year's theme, "Strong Women, Strong World", I would like us to recall that we, the women of this Parliament, have to be strong women. We have to be strong to make a strong world for the people we represent, for all the people who place their trust in us, when they vote, to stand up for their interests properly, and to use our time as members responsibly so that we can stand up for their rights and make it possible for them to move forward and go even farther.

On this point, I would even like to call on all my women colleagues in this House, even my colleagues in the Liberal Party who drafted the motion, to rise and vote against their own motion, because it is a motion that cannot stand. I hope they are listening.

Business of Supply

Every one of us, both men and women, is going to vote against this motion. We all know that. I hope there will be some Liberal Party members present to vote for it. Otherwise, it will be just another instance of a party whistling in the wind while still claiming to stand up for the disadvantaged, women, aboriginal people, seniors and the marginalized. When you really want to come to people's defence, acting like this is not going to accomplish it.

• (1525)

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member, we should be working together as colleagues and comrades in the House, but I must say that is not always possible.

I would remind the hon. member that the NDP has made it a very partisan House in many ways. On September 28, 2006, the NDP voted with the Conservative government in support of the \$1 billion in cuts. I put forward a motion that basically read that the cuts should be rescinded in order to support women and her party chose to vote against it.

In its plan for women, the NDP slammed the Liberals aggressively. We do not do that. We simply put forward our program. We do not even mention the NDP. I will not go through the list but the NDP has often attacked and slammed individuals and has had to apologize in the House for certain smears. There were other times for which it has never apologized.

While I agree with the hon. member that we really need to try, unfortunately, sometimes it does not happen. However, that does not take away from the fact that we need to continue to work for women's issues. I commend the hon. member for her work because I know that she is a member who works hard, collaborates and is a strong participant on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and has put forward some very good recommendations. I know that we will continue to work together.

I wonder if she could help us in the House to understand two things. First, how can we get women's programs back given the fact that so far we have not been able to convince the government of the day, and, quite frankly, I do not believe we will? Second, how will having an election change anything? That is the crux of it, that is part of what is causing the frustration. Maybe the hon. member has the answers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, with whom I also enjoy working.

We have heard about the interests of the New Democratic Party, the interests of the Conservative Party and the interests of the Liberal Party. These are the basic reasons, I think, why we have such problems in this Parliament.

The Bloc Québécois is the only party that does not owe someone, some lobby, company or big corporation. The only people to whom we are indebted are the people who elected us and placed their trust in us.

This is where many of the problems lie: all the other parties in the House cherish hopes of gaining power some day, and when a party

hopes and wants to take power, its policies clearly change according to the issues of the day, the various things that people want or ask for, but not necessarily according to the needs that our electors tell us about in the streets where it really counts.

I think that one of the big problems in our Parliament lies in the fact that power is too often tied to Bay Street, and Bay Street often has teeth that are too long, pockets that are too full, and hands that are too big.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleague that this is International Women's Week and that this week we all had the opportunity to meet a number of Afghan female parliamentarians who were here in the House. That was a great privilege for all of us.

I also would remind her of some of Canada's international efforts as they relate to women. Canada is addressing the needs of Afghan women by supporting projects that improve the protection of women's rights, the participation of women in political life, which we saw this week, and women's access to the labour market, health services and education.

We have seen many changes in Afghanistan in six years. Six years ago, only 700,000 children went to school, all of them boys. Women did not participate in political life and were not represented in government. Today, however, close to six million children are attending school, one-third of them girls. More than 6.5 million Afghans, 43% of them women, voted in the parliamentary and provincial council elections and 27% of the members of the national assembly are women.

I call that real progress for women but the Bloc position on extending the security for those we are standing beside in Afghanistan is to simply leave now. I am wondering how she squares that with the idea of protecting vulnerable women?

• (1530)

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I can do that very easily. My colleague forgets that charity begins at home. We have legions of native women who do not have the wherewithal to feed and educate their children, send them to school, and just be themselves with roofs over their heads. The government is responsible for the people in native communities but it does not have enough respect for them to give them what they need.

There are also our seniors to whom the government would not give the money that it has owed them for quite a number of years. It owes it to them now and will owe it to them in the future because it will not take the first step toward giving it to them. In addition, our veterans' widows have not received one red cent and do not get any home care services even though their spouse was in the army for six or seven years at the front. They are too old now to take care of themselves but do not get any assistance.

I am glad that Afghan women are being assisted; I am glad Afghan children can go to school; and I am glad women make up 27% of the Afghan parliament, but I want us to take care of the people in need right here in Quebec and Canada.

Business of Supply

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Laval for her excellent work as the Bloc Québécois critic for the status of women. Women are well represented by her. On the eve of International Women's Day, she rose and strongly defended the women of Quebec, and I am very proud of her.

My question is simple. With today's motion, the Liberals are trying any way they can to blame the other parties. I would like her to explain what the Liberals did not do to help women when they were in power.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, do I have an hour and a half to reply? Unfortunately, I will not have enough time.

In the 1990s, many cuts were made in order to achieve a balanced budget. Unfortunately, the people most affected by those budget cuts were the women, once again. That is always the case. When cuts are made, the first areas to be cut are social services, that is, areas that affect the most vulnerable people, thus those least likely to be able to defend themselves, specifically, women.

In the 1990s, cuts were also made in the area of social housing. At the same time, transfers to the provinces were also slashed. All women were therefore negatively affected by those cuts, in terms of health care, education, housing and employment. All women suffered as a result of those cuts.

[*English*]

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the motion today. Especially as we approach International Women's Day, it is most important that we bring voice to the issues facing women in Canada, particularly as we see the present government chipping away at the foundations of our country. Numerous matters are raised in the motion, and all of these issues are very critical.

I represent a very large riding. It is a rural riding, which includes cities, towns and first nations. The other day the Minister of Canadian Heritage rose in the House and stated that she was proud of her right to vote as a woman. She was aware that women in Canada had to fight for the right to vote. She is indeed correct on that.

I might add, in case she is not aware, that first nations people and therefore first nations women did not have the right to vote until 1960 without giving up their treaty rights. This means that my grandmother was not entitled to vote until she was 45 years old, which is my age. Her name was Madeline Beardy and she was a band councillor. I am proud of the legacy I inherited from her. I am proud of the traditional customary laws in my home communities. On my maternal side, I am from the Muskrat Dam First Nation in Ontario. On my paternal side, I am from the Norway House Cree Nation.

I raise this because I want members to understand that is not the traditional laws of my people that have oppressed us as first nations women, nor made us vulnerable citizens in the country. It is the historical injustice and inequitable relationship with the federal Government of Canada, which has forced first nations women into some of the most dire living conditions in this country.

I failed, Mr. Speaker, to mention something, and I know this is a technical piece of information. I have just been handed a piece of paper reminding me, as a new member, that I have to announce I am splitting my time with the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Many of the communities in my riding have health and social issues facing no other people in the country. They are without comparable funding formulas for the same services as Canadians in health, education and child welfare. These are the issues that women talk to me about when I meet with them in my riding. It is about their children and how they will ensure their children and their grandchildren have hope for their future.

The past Liberal government created a political accord with first nations, the Métis Nation and the Inuit to ensure the gap would close in the foreseeable future. It is most important to note that this occurred not just solely out of the goodwill of a government. It occurred just as the women's right to vote happened, out of years of advocacy by women. The minister stood in the House and was so proud of that.

Research and advocacy are the pillars of ensuring that every member of a society has equal opportunity. This does not mean we all have to be the same, as the government seems to infer. It means that we all have the same opportunity. This is the hallmark of our great country. Through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and through our Constitution, we ensure the members of this society have equal opportunity and equal rights.

Women were not allowed the right to vote until about a century ago, and that was not bestowed upon them by the goodwill of government. This is 2008 and we are still struggling with a government that does not believe equality is integral for women in our country, that research and advocacy are necessary—

Hon. Vic Toews: Property rights.

Ms. Tina Keeper: The member mentioned property rights. I am about to get to the issue of matrimonial real property. The Conservatives have a “father knows best” attitude. It is a paternalism that is so disturbing, something we have not seen it for decades and decades.

● (1535)

First nations women, aboriginal women, first nations people and our leadership have been seeking an opportunity to engage in discussions with the government for decades. We had political accords under the previous government and they included first nations leadership through the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. That was important. It was about a process of reconciliation that would ensure we worked together to provide a future for aboriginal people in our country.

Business of Supply

The Native Women's Association of Canada responded to the disturbing pattern of the Conservative paternalistic government upon the government's announcement of its legislation on matrimonial real property. The title of the press release is "Consultative Partnership' a Sham". The association said:

The Government of Canada has acted unilaterally in trying to resolve the issue of a lack of matrimonial real property laws that apply on reserve. Despite engaging in a discussion process with relevant National Aboriginal Organizations, the federal government introduced legislation, The Family Homes on Reserve and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act, that does not have the support of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

The Minister of Indian Affairs was well aware that NWAC did not support the legislative draft proposed, after a lengthy meeting with him in December. NWAC outlined the critical importance of systemic solutions, the promotion of indigenous legal systems and the need for non-legislative solutions.

The suppression of the voice of women by the paternalistic Conservative government also was revealed through its cuts to the court challenges program. The loss of this program has had a devastating impact on women and on official languages. First nations children residing on reserve do not receive services if they are disabled. The court challenges program was the only opportunity they had to seek justice.

Women in my riding of Churchill have been negatively impacted by the government's cuts through the loss of early learning and child care spaces and the opportunity to utilize the Status of Women office. This office used to be in Manitoba, but the member from Manitoba made sure the government got rid of it. Now the women in my riding are unable to access that service. They are in a rural riding and the opportunity for women—

Hon. Vic Toews: Maybe if you went in your riding. They come and see me because you are not around.

Ms. Tina Keeper: The member for Provencher says that they want to see him, but I do not think that is the answer.

Early learning and child care are not a priority of the paternalistic disturbing Conservative government. Women, research, advocacy and human rights are not a priority for the government in terms of equality for Canadian women, for first nations women. Not only are they not priorities, but the government has cut the opportunity for women to access any of these rights. Not only has the government not invested in women's programs, but it has cut opportunities for women.

Probably the number one issue in Thompson in my riding is housing. The reckless, careless Conservative government has not invested in affordable housing.

I am proud that I am able to stand and participate in the debate on this motion today.

• (1540)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest. I know my colleague has great interest in the first nations issues.

The question of this motion today, which has confounded many of us in this place, is about accountability and cause and effect. The

motion is construed and tries to shift blame to other places as to the results of actions.

I think of a leader in my community, who the member might know. He recently passed away. I am speaking of the traditional chief of the Haida, Chief Skidegate (Dempsey Collinson). For 30 years, he was hereditary chief of the Skidegate Band. He portrayed, in every action and every way and everyday, that true leadership meant taking actions and taking responsibility for those actions, and the cause of those effects.

I often thought, when I spoke with Chief Skidegate, whether he could have instructed many of the elected officials in this place to realize that when there was an action, and when there was something we did, particularly when in positions of power, there had to be a consequence. True leadership means following those consequences to their ends.

I ask the member to realize and to confirm this to the House. The reason the Liberal Party was thrown from office in the end was a decision made by the electorate of our country, through a free and fair democratic vote. The reason people in northwestern British Columbia, and the Haida in particular in this case, supported my campaign was about leadership and consequence of action, being true to our word and doing what we say we are going to do. The Liberals seem to have a deep and profound problem understanding that the actions they caused had a result, and that result was their being removed from office. I wish they would get over this idea that somebody—

• (1545)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Churchill.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, in terms of responsibility, as the member has articulated, we have a responsibility when we are here.

I remind the member that the early learning and child care agreements were signed by the provinces. We were able to that for the first time in the history of our country. We had a \$5 billion Kelowna accord. Again, it was historic in that it brought together the first ministers, aboriginal leadership and the federal government for the first time in the history of our country. When the Liberals came to power in 1993, they had inherited a \$42 billion deficit from the Conservative government, which had also cut the court challenges program. The Liberals reinstated that program.

My point is we have lost these national child care agreements. We have lost the court challenges program. We have lost the Kelowna accord. We lost those because his party decided to support the Conservative Party to bring down the past Liberal government. It was that party's decision.

Mr. Rod Bruinoog (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the member opposite reference a number of things in her speech and I will refer to a few of them.

She mentioned how interested she was in the city of Thompson and the people. Whenever I travel there, as I have many times in the last two years, I am often asked if I am the MP for the area. They have not seen their MP.

Business of Supply

I will ask a very specific question to this member. She referenced matrimonial real property. As we all know, women on reserve, if their marriage breaks down, they do not necessarily get access to the matrimonial property. A wife and her children could be booted out of their home. Does she support our initiative to extend matrimonial real property to first nations women?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, is that not surprising? His constituents say the same thing to me. They write to my office as the parliamentary secretary on that file because they cannot get a response from him. In fact, I have had very similar phone calls to my office. It might be a partisan thing. Who knows?

In response to his question on the matrimonial real property, this is an issue that first nations women and aboriginal women have been wanting to discuss with the federal government. They made it clear from day one that they wanted to participate in this process. The first nations women's council of the Assembly of First Nations, and these are aboriginal women themselves, engaged in a process with the ministerial representative, Wendy Grant-John, a very fine ministerial representative. She also has indicated that the government should not prepare this legislation unilaterally. In fact, that unilateral decision making on legislation is at the crux of the problem. That in itself is paternalism.

On this very serious issue, the Conservatives have manipulated it just as they did on Bill C-21. We are talking about the whole issue of human rights. Again, native women—

• (1550)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, I gave the member much more time than was permitted.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this motion. I am going to speak from the perspective of a proud father of three daughters and a husband.

I think we have come a long way in this country. The Liberal Party is, after all, the party of the charter. As the party of the charter we have come in a generation, I believe, to the point where my daughters simply assume equality. That is not really a discussion around our table. It is not something they actually find themselves fighting about in their courses.

I have one daughter who recently graduated from the University of Waterloo. She is about to get married in a couple of months. She has found employment and is looking forward to a life where she will achieve in many areas that I could not even have thought of when I was growing up.

I have another daughter who is in her second year at McMaster University. If there is a lawyer in the family, she is probably it. We feel somewhat sympathetic to that, but nevertheless, I expect that she may well go into law, possibly even politics, my gracious me. I do not expect her to actually encounter any sexism barriers and I do not think she actually thinks that she will encounter any barriers.

My third daughter will be 18 tomorrow. I think probably the nation should be warned about that. I anticipate that she will also go

to university. In fact, she has already been accepted here at the University of Ottawa. She recently came back from a debating competition in Great Britain. She did extremely well in an international debating competition. I have no idea why she has those particular talents.

I think the general point is that where I come from and the household in which we live, equality is simply expected.

The genesis of this motion is that in the enthusiasm of the Bloc and the NDP to bring down the previous government in their vacuous political machinations, they actually destroyed much of the progress of the previous government in three critical areas.

The first area was Kelowna, where there was an unprecedented agreement among all the provincial premiers with the federal government and all the aboriginal leadership. There was a serious and a significant commitment of funding to address those inequality concerns. That was lost because the NDP and the Bloc decided that they were going to join with the Conservative Party and bring down the previous government.

Then there was the issue of a national child care program. It was an unprecedented program. There was an ability on the part of the nation to actually address the issue of child care and actually take meaningful steps, so that Canadian women in particular, but Canadian families generally, are not forever running around trying to find child care, which often is inferior and inadequate.

Again the NDP and the Bloc, and I know, Mr. Speaker, you might have some bias on that point, in their enthusiasm to destroy the previous government for their own political calculations, took the unprincipled step of joining with the Conservative Party and taking us back into the 19th century.

As well as losing Kelowna and the child care program, we also lost the environmental initiatives that had been taken by the previous government. If we look at the November 2005 update, there was an over \$5 billion commitment made to address climate change issues and a real program.

The country ended up losing the government, putting these folks in place, and the consequence of which is that there have been zero child care spaces created. We have an embarrassment on the international stage on climate change and an aboriginal file which is in utter disarray.

• (1555)

That is what we get for the apparent principles of the NDP being placed in a position such that its so-called political equation took precedence over its so-called principles.

I would like to speak to the issue of the child care spaces, if I may, that have not been created by the government. This is up front and personal for me.

There is a young woman employed by my office. She and her husband had a baby a little less than a year and a half ago and, in the fullness of time, she wanted to re-enter the workforce. Her re-entry was delayed some number of months because in the city of Ottawa one cannot find adequate day care spaces due to the fact that the government has not contributed. It just simply has not done the job.

Business of Supply

The notion that if families are given a cheque for \$100 once a month somehow or other that will compensate for child care spaces is ludicrous. One hundred dollars a month does not even get them in the door in many instances in and around Ottawa or any major city. This is a personal experience.

I heard the member for York Centre challenge the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. After the minister had been to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, our member asked him how many spaces had been created. Of course, the minister dodged the question.

The minister then said he had been in Halifax the previous week and was again asked how many spaces had been created there. Of course, none have been created because the government is off on a tax cutting agenda, an agenda which is antithetical to family building, and has a cheesy program that sends out \$100 a month, which is sort of a one size fits all.

If people try to get child care spaces for \$100 a month in this city or any other city in Canada, I say good luck to them because they are simply not there. If there is a choice between an actual program which creates child care spaces and \$100 a month for young families, let us do the right thing as opposed to this crazy notion that \$100 will cover it.

The other area that really bothers me about the government is the creation of affordable housing. Liberals were in government when I came here in 1997 and they were just digging out from the Mulroney mess. I think 1997 was the first year the Liberal government ran a surplus. Of course, over that period of time a number of deficits had built up. There was a deficit in infrastructure, which is still building and not adequately addressed. The other deficit that was really acute for the Liberal caucus was the issue of homelessness and affordable housing.

Within the first month of my being elected, I was watching television and saw people marching in front of a motel in my riding. It had some pretty ugly slogans, such as "gypsies go home" and things of that nature. It was really an embarrassment. What really transpired was that there was simply no affordable housing for refugees or anyone else in and around the GTA and people were being put up in motels at \$30 or \$40 a night, an extraordinary sum of money.

To shrink the story a bit, what came out of that was a commitment on the part of the Liberal caucus to create a program for affordable housing. The then hon. Claudette Bradshaw grabbed it with enthusiasm and ran with it. The ultimate result was the SCPI program.

The government's response to the SCPI program was to let it wind down and then at the last second to re-fund the program. It was a really good, solid working program. It made a huge difference in my community.

I see these as significant losses. We have lost Kelowna. We have lost child care. We have lost environmental legislation. We have lost the SCPI program, only to be re-funded and renamed, and we have just lost time. It is all because of the machinations of the Bloc and NDP for their own political calculations.

• (1600)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I have a message before proceeding to questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed certain bills.

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN**

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to participate in this debate. I am almost reminded of a game of T-ball where we see the kids who need a little help in getting a hit put the ball on a stick. They spend their time stepping up to the plate and whacking away not unlike the Liberals, who for a strange and confounded reason have twisted themselves into this perverse logic to talk about principle.

Let us talk about principle and what the Liberals have done to support the Conservatives in the last six months alone on Afghanistan. They have completely moved over their position that the leader of the Liberals said he would not move on.

On the environment, we will have a motion and an opportunity for the Liberals tomorrow to do what the leader of the Liberal Party said he wanted to do, which is to bring back the clean air and climate change act for a vote. The NDP are moving that motion tomorrow.

We offer this to the Liberals, to come with us, join with us, and do something about the environment and help save the planet. What did the Leader of the Opposition do 20 minutes ago? He walked out to the media to say he could not possibly support that on some vague Liberal principle.

When we talked about tax cuts, those folks got up and said they did not simply want the tax cuts being offered by the Conservatives, they wanted more and then they turned around to say there is not enough funding for the programs that they pretended to believe in, like child care and pharmacare.

The reason the NDP opposed those tax cuts, opposed the budget, and voted in our place was because the principles we believe in need to be manifested in reality.

There is a strangeness and a perversity in the motion, that actually pretends to talk about principle, not even to mention the promises they made while they were in government.

Another Commissioner of the Environment's report came down today, again putting truth to the lie that says that the promises made were more talk than action. Those are not my words. Those are the words of the Commissioner of the Environment. The auditor's office of the country said that the Liberal Party had failed on the environment. We know that. It is in black and white.

Business of Supply

I ask my hon. colleague, if he is going to talk about principles, will he oppose the government? Will he join with us tomorrow to bring back environmental legislation that the country needs and on principle oppose this wrong-headed government?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should have thought about that about two years ago, when in fact he joined with the Conservative Party and destroyed the three items that I mentioned: Kelowna, child care and the environment. Congratulations, you destroyed it.

A vote for the NDP, we might as well just mail the vote in to the Conservative Party. That is exactly what it did.

The NDP talk of principles in this chamber is just nonsense. My goodness gracious me. Now we are trying valiantly to dig out from the mess created by the NDP by trying to keep the government alive until it can be shot and put out of its misery. You guys carry on with this idiotic notion that somehow—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, order. The member for Scarborough—Guildwood started using the word “you”. I let him get away with it once and then he did it again.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Peace River.

On behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells, it is a pleasure to join in the discussion on the actions taken by the Government of Canada in support of women's equality.

I would like to address my remarks particularly to the issue of child care spaces, as raised by the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

First, in the true spirit of equality, this government recognizes that choices in child care are best made by the parents, women and men, who are primarily responsible for their children's well-being. That is why we are supporting the child care choices of all families with young children in a clear and tangible way, through the universal child care plan.

Since July 2006, the universal child care benefit has been providing \$100 each month, or a total of \$2.3 billion per year, for two million children under six years of age. This is direct financial support that helps all Canadian families, regardless of where they live, their hours of work or the choices they make for their children's care.

We are also helping parents offset the cost of child care, through the child care expense deduction.

For the average family, the universal child care benefit, together with the child care expense deduction, covers well over one-third of the cost of non-parental child care. The combined effect of these measures is even greater for lone parent families, mostly headed by women.

I am pleased to say that the universal child care benefit has lifted an estimated 24,000 families with about 55,000 children out of low income status.

We also introduced more direct support to families with children through a \$2,000 child tax credit for each child under the age of 18. This tax credit will provide more than 90% of Canadian families with tax relief of over \$300 per child.

Turning specifically to the issue of child care spaces, budget 2007 confirmed new funding of \$250 million per year to enable provinces and territories to create child care spaces that are responsive to the needs of parents. These spaces are administered in an efficient and accountable manner. This funding is on top of the \$850 million provinces and territories already receive through the Canada social transfer for young children. This makes for a total of \$1.1 billion this year, rising to \$1.3 billion by 2013-14.

Our government's approach recognizes that provinces and territories have primary responsibility for child care services and that they require flexibility to address their respective priorities. We are beginning to see the positive results of our approach to child care spaces.

Since budget 2007, many provinces and territories have announced plans for new child care spaces, more than 33,000 so far. Others are investing in enhancing the quality of their spaces or the affordability of their spaces, for example, through raising wages of child care workers or making capital investments in existing day cares.

The provinces and territories are responding to our government's support so that they can create the necessary quality child care spaces in their jurisdictions.

Last year's budget also extended existing funding for agreements with the provinces and territories on early childhood development, early learning and child care. Not only are we supporting the provinces and territories to create child care spaces, we are also helping businesses to do so as well.

• (1605)

In budget 2007, we announced a 25% non-refundable tax credit to a maximum of \$10,000 per child care space created to support businesses interested in creating child care spaces for the children of their employees and potentially for children in the surrounding community.

This government recognizes that families are the building blocks of a society and that child care is a priority for Canadian families. That is why we are committed to helping parents balance work and family life and to provide them with real choice in deciding what is best for their children.

In total, we provided \$5.6 billion in 2007-08 alone in support of early learning and child care. This was accomplished through transfers to the provinces and territories, direct spending and tax measures for families. This is the largest investment in early learning and child care in the history of Canada. It is three times more than the previous government invested.

Our approach was carefully thought out. Before launching our programs, we consulted widely with provincial and territorial governments, businesses, child care providers and non-profit organizations. They told us that direct federal government intervention was not the way to go. We listened.

Business of Supply

Our role and responsibility as a government is to provide flexibility. We are there to support families, to ensure they have choices and to respect their choices.

These are the words of our Prime Minister on the universal child care benefit. He said:

The reason we ran on it, that we believe so strongly in it, is the very reason that our opponents are so vehemently against it: it's a real, meaningful and tangible benefit, paid directly to parents—and institutions, bureaucrats and special interests can't touch it.

Children aren't raised in academic faculties or government offices or the boardrooms of social activists. Children are raised in families, so that's where the money flows.

The Liberals hold an insulting ideological belief that without government direction, parents cannot choose what is right for their children. The Conservative government believes precisely the opposite, and that is why we are providing choices and options for Canadian families when it comes to providing care for their children.

I would like to add that the hon. member's concern for the ability of women to join the workforce is not reflected in their participation rate. In fact, our nation continues to have one of the highest rates for women's labour force participation among all OECD countries. It has risen more rapidly as well.

What women have told us is that they want choice in how they care for their children. That is what our programs offer: support and respect for individual choices.

• (1610)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's comment with respect to choice, the comment that the Conservatives have lifted a large number of women out of poverty and the comment that this program greatly helps single parents are absolutely offensive.

The hon. member talked about choice with regard to the \$1,200 but the fact is that none of the women who really need it receive \$100 a month. After taxes, they are lucky if they get \$50 which does not even pay for one day of child care, never mind finding a space which is not available. I am not quite sure what choice that gives.

I speak to all the women in my riding and those who need it cannot have it. Nothing is available.

The hon. member said that the benefit covers one-third of the cost of child care. How \$50 a month covers one-third of the cost is beyond me, because in my riding it certainly does not.

The hon. member talked about the child tax credit of \$300, which is not refundable. Unless a person has \$2,000 to invest in the first place, which most of these women do not, then they do not get anything back so it is not a refundable credit.

If the Conservatives are negotiating these spaces with the provinces, which the Liberals were doing, that is a great thing, but those choices they keep talking about that women have, maybe they think of earlier education and child care as a babysitting program that can be done at home. This is not what children deserve and it is not what women in this country deserve.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, our government has done more for Canadian women in two years than the Liberals did in 13 years.

Our government is moving forward to support projects that make a complete difference in the lives of Canadian women, including children. We are taking steps to address life's most difficult challenges, including economic security, lack of training and violence against women.

Frankly, Canadians are fed up with the Liberal arrogance and empty rhetoric. Back in January 2006, our government was not installed. We were elected by the people of Canada. It is time for the Liberals to come to grips with that fact and they should stop blaming the NDP and the Bloc members. They should look in the mirror because the only ones to blame are themselves.

With regard to child care, in the little over two years that we have been in office, our government has taken solid steps to improve life for the most vulnerable Canadians. We have also followed through on our promise to help Canadians with child care. Our government has delivered choice and support to parents through the universal child care benefit that is \$1,200 a year, \$100 a month to every child under six years of age. It has added up to—

• (1615)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry but we have one more person who wants to get in on this

The hon. member for Winnipeg North, questions and comments.

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Liberals. This budget is offensive. I just wish that the Liberals, if they had found it so offensive, would have chosen not to stand and support it or to let it pass, especially the 18 women on the Liberal benches who allowed this budget to pass.

I have two quick questions for the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells. The first is with respect to senior women who, as she will know, are among the poorest in this country. It appears that the only way older women can get any support in this budget to help make ends meet is if they go to work. Then they become eligible for a little increase.

What do I tell the 76-year-old woman who came to see me last week or the 86-year-old woman who came to see me the week before who were looking for a way to make ends meet? Do I tell them to go get a job?

My second question has to do with child care. When it comes to choice I agree with the member but could she tell me where the choice is for a single parent woman who needs to work rather than be on social assistance? For two parent families, where both people need to work to make ends meet, where is the choice for that family?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I was the vice-chair of the Status of Women committee which participated in an inquiry into the women's program in 2004 and 2005. Our February 2005 report called on the federal government of the day to increase funding for women's programs by at least 25%. The Liberal government of the day, however, would not listen to us and it never happened.

It has taken a Conservative government to get the job done. Our government went above and beyond what the Status of Women committee was asking for. Last year we increased the budget for women's programs to \$20 million, which was an increase of almost 76%, its highest level ever.

Talking about senior women, just about—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Beaches—East York for moving the motion. Specifically, with regard to the issue of housing, our government has a very credible record, an incredible record, quite frankly, considering the 13 years of inaction by the Liberals. I would like to bring some attention to it.

Canada has one of the best housing systems in the world. It has many players working together to meet the housing needs of Canadians across this country. Our national housing strategy requires the coordinated action of many partners to support housing choices for people of different needs, including those who need affordable housing.

Taken together, this government's broad range of coordinating housing activities as well as the efforts of other levels of government has constituted a truly national housing strategy.

The vast majority of Canadians are able to meet their housing needs through their own means and through the private market, either through home ownership or through the rental market without direct assistance from this government.

To help Canadians access a home of their own and secure a mortgage at the best possible rate, our national housing agency, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, provides mortgage loan insurance. CMHC also facilitates financing for affordable housing projects to allow borrowers to have access to loans at the best possible interest rate, lowering the overall cost of borrowing.

Despite the success in Canada's real estate market, which stands in stark contrast to the housing market south of the border, we know there are a number of people who are experiencing core housing needs still. These Canadians are unable to satisfy their housing needs without assistance. Some are experiencing homelessness and some are at risk of homelessness.

Our government's philosophy is to try to help to prevent homelessness and to help those in need find safe, affordable housing. In our most recent throne speech, we renewed our commitment to help the most vulnerable people in our country, those seeking to break free from a cycle of poverty and homelessness. In addition, we committed to working to improve living conditions in the north for first nations and Inuit people through better housing.

I would like to assure my hon. colleague that the Government of Canada is taking meaningful action to address the need for affordable housing. In fact, this federal government is investing more in affordable and supportive housing than has any other government in history.

Business of Supply

Indeed, our government currently spends more than \$2.7 billion annually on affordable and supportive housing. We are investing significantly in the construction of new affordable rental units, a homelessness partnering strategy, housing renovation and the operation of existing social housing. Annual federal spending in support of this strategy has never been higher.

This government is doing its part, but we all have a role to play in helping to house Canadians. Indeed, helping our most vulnerable is a shared responsibility.

Provincial governments play a pivotal role in the provision of housing and important support services, like health care, training and education. Municipal governments, civil society groups, community associations, the private sector and others help with the on the ground delivery and the management of housing and associated services.

Partnerships at all levels of government are creating tangible results. We are helping to create stable homes, a place where Canadians can get settled and then get on with the business of building a better life and a better future.

Together, we are making the difference in the lives of people and in communities across this country. Our programs include a \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, which we are providing in collaboration with provincial, territorial and local partners. To date, this initiative has created thousands of new affordable houses across this country.

Our government has also invested \$1.4 billion in a new housing trust for affordable housing, for northern housing and housing for aboriginal people living off reserve. Provinces and territories have begun to roll out programs, and the first affordable housing projects are currently being announced. This is in addition to the \$256 million commitment over two years for homelessness and housing renovation programs.

● (1620)

Through CMHC, the federal government continues to invest approximately \$1.7 billion a year to support close to 630,000 low and moderate income households. This includes ongoing financial support for many non-profit and cooperative housing projects.

We recognize that there is a high incidence of poverty among first nations communities. That is why we continue to support the construction of new social housing and the maintenance of existing housing on reserves. We are also helping first nations to build capacity to manage housing programs.

Our 2007 budget announced the creation of a first nations market housing fund. This \$300 million commitment is supporting the development of housing markets and will create up to 25,000 homes on reserve over the next 10 years.

Budget 2008 builds on the significant progress made to support aboriginal Canadians by allocating \$70 million over the next two years for measures to foster aboriginal economic development. Our recent budget also provided \$330 million over the next two years to improve access to safe drinking water for first nations communities.

Business of Supply

This government also recognizes the challenges that our low income senior population faces when it comes to housing costs. That is why we are working with the provinces to provide rental assistance and other programs to help vulnerable seniors.

In the most recent budget we raised the earned income exemption for guaranteed annual income, GIS, recipients, so that low income seniors can keep a much larger portion of their hard-earned income without having their benefits clawed back.

That is also why our government introduced in our recent budget a new tax-free savings account. It will provide individuals with a tax-free savings vehicle to meet their ongoing savings needs, including saving for a down payment on a home or perhaps the ongoing cost of maintaining a home. For seniors in particular, this is very important because the money that they save in their TFSA will not reduce the benefits that they receive through the GIS or the OAS.

Our government also understands the special needs of individuals and communities. We have an obligation to protect the vulnerable. That is why we provide ongoing support for projects that provide a safe place for women and children fleeing domestic abuse.

This government believes that the most vulnerable Canadian citizens should be able to live a full and active life with dignity. Among the most vulnerable are those who face complex challenges related to mental health disorders, and as a result, often lack basic necessities such as adequate housing.

For this reason, budget 2008 commits to helping those who need the care and support of fellow Canadians. Our government will invest \$110 million to support innovative projects to help Canadians facing mental health and homelessness challenges.

We are taking steps to meet the needs of low and moderate income people, not only through housing programs, but also through our emphasis on training and work, and our effective management of the economy and our government's finances.

Canada's economic fundamentals are solid. Our unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in nearly 33 years. Business investment is expanding for the 12th consecutive year. Canada is on the best fiscal footing of the major western industrialized countries.

This is in addition to the tax cuts previously announced, including a further 1% cut to the GST, which is also expected to improve the affordability of homes.

All of these factors contribute to reducing poverty and homelessness and to helping more Canadians afford a home. The best social safety net is a combination of relevant skills and a good job. These things allow individuals to support themselves and their families.

I assure my hon. colleagues that the Government of Canada is delivering on its commitment to help house Canadians and to keep our national housing strategy strong.

• (1625)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to hear from the hon. member that there is a national housing strategy. I would love to see a copy of it so that I can actually understand what is in it. The homelessness program that he

talked about was actually a Liberal program called SCPI which the Conservatives shut down and caused a number of organizations to have to shut their doors. It was reannounced under a different name and now it is called HPI.

The member mentioned the \$2.7 billion annually which actually was already there. The subsidies are ongoing, so there is nothing new there.

He talked about the rebuilding of certain areas and old housing. That is the Regent Park reconstruction that is being done which was funded under the Liberals.

We know that in the budget the Conservatives cut CMHC, and I think it was by \$45 million. He said there is \$1 billion of affordable housing, although we had \$1.6 billion. The minister for housing in Ontario is saying that the dollars they are announcing are actually declining.

Would the hon. member be willing to table in the House the national housing strategy with all of the dollars attached in a proper breakdown of where the money is, and where it came from to start with?

• (1630)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member has had an opportunity to look at either of the budgets, but obviously she was supportive of both of them. She had the opportunity to see what was in them. She has indicated her support and that is indeed why we are here today.

I am certain that part of the reason the member is so supportive of them is the important measures that were included.

I do not think that it would be very wise for her to go back to her constituents and say that she voted against the billions of dollars that are being invested in housing in new and innovative ways, specifically in aboriginal communities.

Throughout the country we see aboriginal communities continuing to ask for more money to invest in the creation of innovative ways to house their residents. We, as a government, in the 2007 budget brought forward a very innovative way to help aboriginal communities. We were hailed by aboriginal communities from across the country for bringing forward this initiative.

Obviously the member would not want to vote against this type of initiative or the other initiatives that I outlined in my speech. Although there may be a lot of rhetoric coming from the other side, I do not see any evidence that the Liberals were ever interested in providing housing for vulnerable Canadians.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I think it is important that members of the House do not take liberties. I did not and never would accept the measures across the way. I resent the hon. member suggesting such a thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but it seems more like a point of debate. Resuming questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Business of Supply

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member has raised the issue of housing. I would like to point out to him in fact that Canada is the only nation in the developed world that does not have a national housing policy. That policy was cancelled by the Liberals in the 1995 budget.

What has continued since that time is one of incremental band-aid pilot projects which do not meet the needs in this country for housing. There has not been a new initiative in terms of public housing, social housing, cooperative housing in this country since then because of what the Liberals did.

Why does the Conservative government continue the approach of the Liberals which does not address the fundamental issues pertaining to the shortage of affordable housing for Canadians? Let me remind him that the money that is being thrown around by both the Liberals and the Conservatives, the \$1.5 billion for housing, comes directly from the New Democrats who required this as part of our budget with the Liberals in terms of the \$4.6 billion that we required to be set aside so it would not go toward corporate tax breaks.

Is that why there is this continuation of pilot projects to the point where we are simply on the housing front a nation of pilot projects?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I do not recall an NDP government of Canada ever being in existence. Therefore, I am unsure as to where that budget of the NDP came from.

However, I remind the hon. member that all tax dollars come from taxpayers. They do not come from the New Democratic Party.

Having said that, I do agree with her that the Liberals did nothing on this file for the duration of their time in office, except to cut and cut and destroy any ability for people who are the most vulnerable to get ahead, specifically on one of the most fundamental of all things, which is to have a roof over their heads.

I saw it in my own community as the \$25 billion was cut out of the provincial transfers. We saw more and more of the most vulnerable on our streets. It is going to take some time to rebuild that.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we hear from the member for Kitchener Centre, 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 Ottawa—Vanier, Telefilm Canada; the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Official Languages; and the hon. member for Brant, Manufacturing Industry.

The hon. member for Kitchener Centre.

•(1635)

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate today.

I am also pleased to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for London West.

International Women's Day, which is this coming Saturday, has historically been a time when we celebrate the progress made to advance women's rights and assess the challenges that remain. Established in 1977 by the United Nations, International Women's

Day encourages us to consider the steps to bring equality to women and girls, in all their diversity, and also to celebrate the collective power of women, past, present and future.

Sadly, Canadian women have received little more than lip service from the Conservative government. It is embarrassing to note that the government went to the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings last week claiming there was a plan. Where the Conservative government is concerned, there is no plan. There is no funding. There are no details. And certainly there is very little interest in women's issues.

On this side of the House, we take women seriously. We recognize that women's equality is not some ancient battle that was won years ago. Every day, women face discrimination in various aspects of their lives, from getting a simple car repair to running multi-million dollar companies. Canadian women face a far different reality than their male counterparts.

Violence against women is one of the most deplorable acts that occur in our society today. Canadians look to our government to present concrete measures to end this social problem. All women have the right to live in safe communities, free from violence and free from the threat of violence.

Every time I read a report about violence against women, I am reminded that violence against women is not something that happens to other people in other communities. These are our friends, our neighbours, our sisters and our daughters.

Feminist centres reveal that one in four women endures a sexual assault in her lifetime. One in 10 women is beaten. Statistics Canada confirms that 51% of women, and I find this so shocking, have been criminally assaulted in their lifetimes.

Spousal violence has psychological, physical, social and economic impacts for the victims, for their families and for society at large. Female victims of spousal violence report being injured, suffering lost productivity and, in most instances, experiencing multiple assaults and fear throughout their lives.

There are extreme negative emotional consequences. Forty per cent of women assaulted by their spouses report that their children witness this violence, which in some cases is severe violence.

The number of shelters for abused women and their children has increased from 18 in 1975 to 543 in the year 2004. In addition to these shelters, over 600 services for victims of crime, including 105 sexual assault centres, are operational across Canada.

The shock is not that these shelters and these facilities exist for women. The shock is that we need them in these numbers. We need to get to the root problem.

Spousal violence makes up the single largest category of convictions involving violent offences in non-specialized adult courts in Canada. Over 90% of the offenders were male. One in five homicides in Canada involves the killing of an intimate partner.

Business of Supply

Last night we saw a private member's bill go over the first hurdle. I guess the only thing that gives me any heart in this whole process is the fact that it was just a very small first step. The member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park says that what he wanted to do with his private member's bill was deal with violence against women who are pregnant.

It is a terrible issue. It is one that I think every member in this House would like to see curbed, but if we really want to do something about violence against pregnant women, we make the fact that they are pregnant an aggravating fact in the sentencing.

• (1640)

The whole thrust of the private member's legislation that the House dealt with last night flies in the face of *Dobson v. Dobson*, wherein the Supreme Court ruled that the mother and the fetus were one. As much as I think we all agree that we want to deal with violence against women, and certainly against pregnant women, I would contend that this is not the thrust of or the real reason for that piece of legislation.

These statistics are horrifying. Violence against women affects Canadian society. Ultimately, the impact of that violence is felt by everyone, both directly and indirectly.

We are all responsible to help end this scourge, but instead of cutting funding for women's advocacy groups the way the minority Conservative government has done, we should be ramping up support to work toward ending violence against women.

I have always reflected that this day is about the celebration of the fight that was put forward by the generations before mine. It is our mothers and grandmothers who fought for equality and rights, but over the past two years, more than ever, I have been reminded that women's fight for equality is far from won.

Canada has always been a prosperous, fair and egalitarian nation. From my perspective, it is an absolute affront to society that in a time when this country is recording record surpluses we see the elimination of programs that support equality for women.

I welcome the day when we no longer need a program to promote gender equality. I welcome the day when women's progress is not encumbered by discrimination, glass ceilings or ignorance, but we are not there yet, and I fear, more than ever before, that we are simply moving in the wrong direction.

Two years ago, Canada marked 25 years since our nation ratified the most comprehensive treaty on women's human rights: the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It is known as CEDAW. By ratifying, the government has agreed to play a lead role in upholding women's equality rights.

Unfortunately, however, without a commitment to fulfill those obligations under this UN convention and under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, full equality will elude many women in Canada, particularly those of us who confront multiple oppressions.

Equality for women is not about who is right. It is about what is right. And equality is right.

Doors were opened by courageous women who came before us and we must do our part to ensure that they remain open to expand the opportunities for those who follow us. That can only happen with the concerted commitment of the government and all members of the House.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member to comment on a Status of Women quote. On October 26, the member for Newton—North Delta made comments in the Standing Committee on the Status of Women suggesting that the debate is just because there are too many women there. The director of communications for the Liberal candidate for London North Centre was quoted as saying that “all of this demonstrates one more reason why women shouldn't be allowed to run for office, much less vote”.

I would like the member opposite to tell us how these sentiments would fit into the strategy for economic prosperity for women and for having more women involved in politics, given the comments and quotes that were taken directly from the Status of Women.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I have to say off the top that I am really not quite sure how that quote fits in with the comments.

I would say, having been in this House since 1997—and I have many colleagues who have been here longer than I have—that I think there has been a distinct race to the basement with the kind of personality politics and the kinds of personal slurs that we hear in heckling as well as in the demeanour in the House. That saddens me. I think we all bear a responsibility for this.

Quite simply, I think there should be more women in the House. I know that our leader has made a determination and is on the record as saying that he will have one-third of our candidates female in any upcoming election. I think that women do come with an ability to bring consensus and a different style.

I think it is very important that all members of this House be committed to equality for women and, yes, to economic independence. I can hearken back to the prime minister's task force on women entrepreneurs and the kind of statistical basis and support we received from the research that was going on in the Status of Women. That research had been going on for years and years.

Nothing disheartens me more than hearing many of the minority Conservative government ministers present pieces of legislation to committees and say, “I feel that this is a very good bill”. Somehow in the government there is the ideological “I feel that this is the right thing to do” approach and not the kind of objective research and testimony from experts that would factually support a good piece of legislation.

The Conservatives have gutted those kinds of resources, both in the community and in the government, and I think it leads to the continuing decline in the kind of support and objectivity that legislation has.

Business of Supply

•(1645)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the statements of my next door neighbour and colleague, who accuses this government of doing nothing more than paying lip service to many of these issues. I take issue with that, because I serve on the aboriginal affairs committee and I can assure her and the others members of this House that we are doing far more than that.

We have taken action on a number of initiatives. Section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, a situation that should have been addressed long ago, finally has been addressed by the committee and is through and on to the Senate. We have the residential schools settlement, the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the new recently introduced bill dealing with matrimonial real property.

These are all action items that clearly negate any accusation of lip service. I wonder if my colleague would correct the record on the fact that these are action items which will make a big difference in the lives of many women, specifically aboriginal women.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I would tell my hon. colleague that what I base my statement on is the fact that I have had not one or two but 50 or 60 women demonstrating outside my office, in the heart of Kitchener at Speaker's Corner, against the kinds of cuts that amplify and exhibit the kind of ideology of the government in doing away with the court challenges program.

I would remind this House that it was a program whereby people who felt that their rights were not being respected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms could actually go to the Supreme Court. It was this money and this mechanism that allowed immigrant women to get language instruction paid for when they came to Canada, because there was a time when only men were given language training if English or French was not their first language. It was the court challenges program that actually led to immigrant women being able to get that kind of training as well.

I am basing my comments on the fact that the government is gutting the kind of advocacy and the kinds of issues that are the mainstay of bringing equality to women and girls, both in Canada and internationally.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to many of my colleagues in the House, all different parties, speak to this motion today. We have to come back to why we are here. We are here because we want to improve the lives of women in this country. That is really important to many people in this House.

I started many years ago, in 1993, and we did make some progress. I want to go over some of those achievements which I have witnessed in this House. For example, achievements which were put in by Liberal governments which included the establishment of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women back in September 2004, to have our own standing committee so witnesses could come. They could voice their concerns, we could respond to them, we could petition our ministers, and move action forward.

In October 2005 an expert panel was created to provide advice and options to strengthen accountability mechanisms to advance gender-based analysis and gender equality issues. When we were in

government, we talked about this all around the world, and in fact other countries have taken up gender budgeting, for instance South Africa. But here at home, under this government, it is still talking about it and it is not really happening.

I think about an achievement that affected many of my constituents and that was in the year 2000, where we extended the parental benefits to one year. Now, either the male or the female can take those parental benefits and they can work it to what fits their needs in their household. That was a really important change that helped the families in Canada and especially the women of Canada.

Centres of excellence for women's health in the gender and health institute were created to work on health policy issues unique to women. For example, we did not test our drugs on women, we just tested them on men. But women are a different size and creation, so now we have more of a focus on women.

There was \$32 million committed on an annual basis to the national crime prevention initiative, and \$7 million to the family violence initiative during our time in government. Of this money, over \$1 million over 4 years was specifically to address violence against aboriginal women.

I have often heard credit taken on the opposite side for some of the things we started in 2005, and one of them was the trafficking in persons which was added as an offence to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act at that time. I think it was Bill C-49.

I was actually a parliamentary secretary at Indian and northern affairs when we had to respond to the sisters in spirit proposal which the Liberal government provided \$5 million over 5 years to the Native Women's Association of Canada. These funds supported NWAC's work with other aboriginal women's organizations and the federal government on activities aimed at ending violence against aboriginal women.

We went in other places. For example, in post-secondary education we tried to make it more affordable for lower and middle income Canadians. Over \$2.1 billion over 5 years was committed to improve student financial assistance.

Over 5 years, \$1.3 billion was provided to improve settlement and integration services for new immigrants to Canada. The basic resettlement is so important in our communities. I was with Mary Williamson who runs a centre in my city and this money is desperately needed. I know recently there was a top-up, but it is not enough. We have to do more.

When newcomers come to Canada, they are welcomed because we need them. We know our economy will need them in the future. But this is a good grassroots organization and I have a number of these grassroots organizations in London. Sitting around the table in the last month or so, we spent an afternoon going over some of the issues which affect women and women's equality.

Business of Supply

Right now it is just a word. It is not reality in Canada. It is not reality in a pay system. Women in Canada still earn 70¢ to every \$1 a man makes. So where is the pay equity legislation from this government that it once talked about? We know that it has not been forthcoming.

We know that senior women are important in our communities, in every community. Budget 2005, when we were government, as a Liberal government, we ensured that senior women would benefit from a \$2.7 billion increase over 2 years to the guaranteed income supplement, and a \$15 million increase to the new horizons seniors program.

● (1650)

However, that is the past for today. Today, we have to move forward, but are we moving forward? That is the most important question because we are here to celebrate women this week, yet I am worried that we have not progressed as far as we should.

Have we progressed with the vehicles that allowed women to progress? For instance, the court challenges program provided a way to say to a government that it was not meeting the needs, that there was a problem, and to solve that problem. We had that program. It was cancelled under this Conservative government.

The Law Commission used to do research to help form government policies. Many times this assisted women and minority communities in Canada. Again, it was abolished under this government.

We need an enduring commitment to women's equality in order to defend women's rights, and former governments of the Liberal Party took action. There is a poster in my office saying: "Women's rights are human rights", but is it real here in Canada today? Are we going forward or backwards?

The Conservatives ignore, I believe, the true issues facing Canadian women today. Since taking office the Conservative government has closed 12 Status of Women regional offices. There was one in my area.

The Conservatives eliminated the court challenges program and the Law Commission. They have refused to fund women's advocacy groups. This is especially important in the women's program of the Status of Women because it did work well in providing an advocacy outlet for women to change the status quo, to improve their lives and their communities from the grassroots level.

It was not, as has been said earlier today, just lobbying. It was lobbying to create change, to break down barriers, to overcome hurdles where disadvantages existed.

I do not understand why right now women's groups cannot do advocacy. We can do advocacy if we are a military organization in this country. There are more women than military organizations in this country. I believe that women should have the ability to advocate for their own equality. Remember, equality, women's rights are human rights. That should be more than a phrase.

We need to reinstate equality as the main goal of the women's program at Status of Women. We have to change the guidelines so that advocacy can be put back and utilized by the groups and

organizations in this country, so they can enhance their ability to make change and improve their lives.

I would like to spend a minute or two talking about child care because this is a government that did child care through the mail. It gives a cheque of \$100 a month. It is taxable. Yes, it can help families. I do not think it is right for the current Conservative government to say the Liberals will take it away if we form a government. That decision has not been made. I certainly do not know whether that would be true or not. However, I do know that child care is needed in every community in this country, whether we are an urban centre or a rural centre.

In the Conservatives' election campaign we heard they would create new child care spaces along with the cheque in the mail. In reality, what has been created? To my knowledge no new child care spaces have been created by this government.

We also have housing issues and violence against women issues. I have not had a chance in my last minute to get to these issues, but I know they exist and I know we have to do more.

When the time came for the lending of a vote to one party, we got a Conservative government that took us backwards. That is the reality. That is the fact.

We need more support for women in this country. Then, we will have real equality of women in this country. I look forward to that time and I look forward to speaking, working, studying, and helping the women of Canada and all around the world on this issue.

● (1655)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have been debating back and forth for some time now, which really goes to the core of empowering women, of giving women the ability to empower themselves and to feel strong, to stand up and speak for themselves and change their condition, not as an individual but as a large group of women in different areas, is the word "advocacy".

Some people seem to look at it and say, as in fact the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women said, we will not fund women's groups to challenge the government. So, it seems as though that is all.

I wonder if the hon. member could give us a bit of an explanation of the fundamental importance of what this really is, what it does for women, and has done in the past, and why it is important to continue that funding.

Business of Supply

• (1700)

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the critic for status of women for coming to my riding for my round table afternoon. We had different organizations, those representing child care, those representing immigrants, those representing women's groups, people who were involved in the community, and all were working toward equality.

However, all of those groups would like advocates. They would like someone to carry their message. They would like to make sure there is change because there is not sufficient access to housing and not sufficient access to the law. The ability to do their appropriate research, to get their information at a grassroots level, to provide the appropriate statistics, and then to take that information and move it forward to the government of the day will bring about new laws.

New laws have been brought about in the past. Laws on violence against women, access to different shelters, all of these things have been brought about because women advocated for them. They are not waiting for the men of this country to give them a donation. They are not looking for handouts.

What they are looking to do is to change their position so they can go forward themselves, for their own economic independence, for their own place in society, and to have pride. They are not looking for a handout.

I have often heard things in the last couple of months from this government that seems to take pride in fixing something when it is not really breaking down the barriers. The barriers will only be broken down when we have from the grassroots a movement that can advocate toward government.

I just do not understand why this government will not provide those resources to the disenfranchised, the people who need it. It has worked in the past. It could work in the future, and I believe that we would bring that back.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if time permits, I will be sharing my time with the member for Surrey North.

With International Women's Day just two days away, I am pleased to speak to this important issue of the status of women in Canada, although I am sad to note that status has actually been deteriorating.

From 1995 to 1998, Canada ranked number one on the UN human development index and the gender development index. Since then, women's progress has been stalled, economically, socially and politically.

In 1999, we fell to third on the GDI. We were seventh in 2004 and, by 2006, we ranked 14th in the world economic forum gender gap index, behind Sri Lanka, the Philippines and most European countries.

That precipitous drop happened under the Liberal government which presided over a government that did nothing to overcome some of the biggest obstacles to continuing progress for women. During its tenure, it failed to remove the single biggest barrier to women's access to good work which, of course, is access to affordable child care. It failed to redress the huge and growing

imbalances in the taxation of women when compared to men, corporations, charities and overseas businesses.

Under the leadership of the then finance minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, the Liberals insisted on blowing the government spending capacity on gratuitous tax cuts to the richest sectors of Canadian society while telling everyone else to tighten their belts.

Women are still paying the price for the Liberals' unthinking adherence to the ideology of deficit reduction, but the Liberals, who have always thought of themselves as the naturally governing party, thought women would not remember, just like they assumed the sponsorship scandal would not matter. After all, they were entitled to run this country in perpetuity.

However, a funny thing happened on the way to the polls. Voters said that enough was enough. They rejected the party's right wing policies, as well as its excuses for the sponsorship scandal, and sent the Liberals into opposition.

However, the Liberals appear to be slow learners. Instead of recognizing that the voters had sent them a message and had punished them for their sense of entitlement, their attitude is still the same. In fact, nothing makes that more clear than the motion we are debating here today.

It ends by saying that it was the Bloc and the NDP's defeat of the Liberal government in 2005 that led to the installation of a government that is hostile to the rights and needs of vulnerable Canadians. How absurd. Do the Liberals really believe that if we had the power to install a new government that we would have chosen the Conservatives? No political party has the power to install a government. The only body that has the power to install a new government is the Canadian electorate.

It was the Canadian electorate that threw the Liberals out and, contrary to the contention of this motion, the Liberals' record in government did not entitle them to another term.

Let us look at what the motion says and of course what it does not say. It states that:

...there is a growing need in Canada for a national housing strategy designed to assist the most vulnerable in our society and to treat them with the respect they deserve;...

Absolutely. Except it was the Liberals who cancelled the national housing program in 1995. It also states that:

...an adequate supply of high quality childcare spaces is essential to ensuring women's participation in the workforce and the government should take the necessary steps immediately to create 125,000 spaces...

Again, absolutely. However, where was the Liberals' child care plan during their 13 long years in office? I agree that we need to restore the court challenges program, that we need to restore the research and advocacy mandate to the government's women's program and that we need to enhance the role of Status of Women Canada and provide access for women to government services in all regions of our country.

Business of Supply

However, it is precisely because these things are so important that we need to make progress on each of these issues now. If we are serious about achieving equality for women in Canada, it is no good to table a motion in this House today whose "be it resolved" simply assigns blame for the Liberals' election loss. We need constructive action that will make an immediate difference in the lives of women.

We had that opportunity in this House just two days ago when we voted on the Conservative budget. The NDP was here in full force to oppose a budget that failed Canadian women. The Bloc was here too. The Liberals only sent in 11 of their 93 members and therefore allowed the budget to pass. Where were the other 82 members?

• (1705)

We could have defeated the government resoundingly and sent a strong message to women from coast to coast to coast, but when it was time to stand and be counted, even the mover of today's motion was a no show. What a disgrace.

She is playing Canadian women for fools. Despite being responsible for further stalling the social, political and economic progress of women, she is hoping once again that women will not notice, that women will be placated by a crassly partisan motion that is a day late and a dollar short. Nothing could be more disrespectful of women and their ongoing struggle for a fair and just society.

We must remember how long that struggle has been going on. It was in the early 20th century, between 1909 and 1911, that working women in the United States started organizing and striking in response to low wages, abhorrent working conditions and a lack of legislative protection for women. It was the 1911 fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York, in which 143 women lost their lives, that galvanized women in their fight for better conditions and human rights.

Yes, we are a long way from 1911 today, both in time and progress. Canada now has a strong base on which to build when it comes to women's equality. It was nearly 90 years ago when women received the right to vote. It was nearly 80 years ago that we were legally recognized as persons, although I might add, that was 20 years later than corporations were recognized as persons in Canada. We have guaranteed equality rights in the charter, decriminalized abortion and birth control, and a strong network of women's services across our country, including emergency shelters and rape crisis centres.

As I said at the outset, we are starting to slide back. At best, women's progress is stalled economically, socially and politically.

Today, women in Canada are still not safe in their own homes or on the streets. An estimated one in four women will be a victim of sexual violence in her lifetime. In the workplace, women still only earn 70% of every \$1 that a man makes. Poverty affects almost half of single, widowed or divorced women over 65 and more than 40% of unattached women under 65.

There are many battles yet to be fought and won. The most recent Conservative budget should have been one such battle. New Democrats fought it but in the absence of Liberals during the vote, we ultimately did not win.

That is devastating for the women's movement in Canada. That budget did virtually nothing for women. In fact, women were essentially left out of this budget altogether. The word "women" appeared in the 2008 budget exactly seven times. The word "corporation", by contrast, was mentioned 109 times. Nothing symbolizes the Conservative agenda more clearly.

Heck, there was more money in this budget for hogs than there was for women. The budget gave \$20 million to develop a plan to advance the equality of women, a plan, by the way, that we have had since 1995 as a result of the commitments Canada made at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women. However, the government found \$50 million for the hog industry. That works out to \$3.57 for every hog in Canada but only \$1.21 per woman.

There was no new money for the national child benefit, child care, affordable housing, a revival of the court challenges program, proactive pay equity legislation or any improvement in the minimum wage or maternity leave benefits.

Senior women, who experience poverty at twice the rate of senior men, were told that if they could not make ends meet that they should go out and get a job. Instead of raising their GIS, the government simply said that it would exempt the first \$3,500 earned from affecting their GIS eligibility.

What is even worse, when I asked the Minister of Finance about that he erroneously alleged that he did increase the GIS. Absolutely not true. The only increase to the GIS is the legislated increase based on the consumer price index.

The finance minister then went on to talk about the \$5,000 tax-savings plan, completely oblivious to the fact that I was asking about Canada's poorest seniors who, by definition, do not have the capacity to save. To add insult to injury, he then told them to check out his government's website to get more details.

I would strongly encourage the Minister of Finance to come to my riding of Hamilton Mountain. I would happily take him on a tour of seniors buildings in my community for a reality check. Seniors who are having to choose between eating and heating cannot afford to buy a computer or pay for monthly Internet access. It is almost as if the Conservatives inhabit a parallel universe.

Yes, the struggle continues and the battles will continue to be fought but we would win many more of these battles if the opposition parties in the House were united in fighting for the equality for women.

The Liberals abdicated that responsibility when they allowed the Conservative budget to pass this week. In light of that self-serving action, which was orchestrated simply to avoid an election that the Liberals knew they would lose, the motion that is now before us simply is not worth the paper that it is written on.

Business of Supply

•(1710)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a very selective memory. She forgets that her party actually voted against a motion that we put forward on November 28 to reinstate the \$1 billion cuts that affected women. She has forgotten that the child benefit program, which was introduced by the Liberals, was one of the most effective programs that helped women. She has forgotten the parental leave program, which was introduced by women, the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health across the country, and a whole host of other things, such as the child care program in 2000 for \$2 billion, \$400 million and then \$5 billion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You had 13 years.

Hon. Maria Minna: You had a choice of working and you chose not to. These were programs that were on—

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis: “You, you”, parliamentary procedure.

Hon. Maria Minna: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I said “you”. I should have said the hon. member and not “you”. However, the fact is that the NDP voted against reinstating \$1 billion of cuts.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party appears to be full of good ideas. First, it offered women a red book full of grand ideas and then took 13 years to ignore it. Then, in opposition, we got the watered down version of the red book. The red has now turned to pink. We have a motion before this House that does absolutely nothing for women.

What the Liberals should have done is stood up and be counted when it mattered, and that was on the vote on the budget this week. The Liberal women were not there. We now have a Conservative budget that passed in the House and we have taken yet another step backward in making progress for women's equality.

•(1715)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*English*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Call in the members.

•(1740)

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

(*Division No. 61*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélanger
Bell (North Vancouver)	Boshcoff
Brison	Brown (Oakville)
Cannis	Chan
Coderre	Cotler
D'Amours	Dhaliwal
Dosanjh	Dryden
Fry	Godfrey
Goodale	Keeper
LeBlanc	Lee
MacAulay	Malhi
Maloney	Marleau
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Patry
Pearson	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Rota
Russell	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Silva
Simard	Simms
St. Amand	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Tonks	Turner
Valley— 57	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Atamanenko	Bachand
Baird	Barbot
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bellavance
Benoit	Bezan
Bigras	Black
Blackburn	Blaikie
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Christopherson
Comartin	Comuzzi
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Demers	Devoilin
Dewar	Doyle
Duceppe	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Faillie	Fast
Fitzpatrick	Fletcher
Gagnon	Gallant
Godin	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravel	Grewal
Guay	Guimond

Private Members' Business

Hanger	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Layton
Lemieux	Lessard
Lévesque	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malo	Manning
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
McDonough	Ménard (Hochelega)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Mulcair
Nadeau	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Ouellet	Paquette
Paradis	Perron
Petit	Picard
Plamondon	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Priddy	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Siksay	Skeldon
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Sweet
Thi Lac	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Wasylcia-Leis
Watson	Williams
Yelich— 167	

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy	Asselin
Bernier	Clement
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Finley	Flaherty
Gaudet	Guergis
Kotto	Lalonde
Lemay	Lussier
Pallister	Roy
Smith	Strahl— 18

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I declare the motion lost.

It being 5:45 p.m., the House will now proceed to consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1745)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The House resumed from February 5 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we last discussed Motion No. 410, the hon. member for Crowfoot had the floor. He still has seven minutes under debate.

The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity today to discuss Motion No. 410 as it relates to Iran and Sudan. We are all deeply concerned about the human rights and humanitarian situations that exist in both Sudan and Iran. We are also deeply concerned by Iran's nuclear activities.

We are pleased to fully support the hon. member's view that further pressure must be placed upon the governments of Iran and Sudan, including increased economic pressure to meet international standards of conduct.

Our concerns with the governments of Iran and Sudan are reflected in our approach to bilateral relations with these two countries.

Our bilateral relations with Iran are governed by the tightened controlled engagement policy. The policy limits official bilateral dialogue to the following four topics: the case of murdered Canadian Iranian Zahra Kazemi; Iran's human rights performance; Iran's nuclear program; and finally, Iran's role in the region.

Under the controlled engagement policy, Canada prohibits the opening of Iranian consulates, cultural centres and Iranian banks here in Canada. Moreover, it proscribes the establishment of direct air links and high level visits.

In regard to Sudan, Canada has withheld trade and commercial support, as well as trade development programs to Canadian businesses wishing to do business or invest in Sudan since 1992. In addition, bilateral government to government aid has been suspended to Sudan since the early 1990s, and arms sales have been banned since 1992.

Canada's engagement in Sudan is to support multinational peacekeeping forces and to facilitate support for the implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement which ended the civil war in 2005, and to support efforts to resolve the current conflict in Darfur.

In regard to Iran, Canada has supported and responded to the warning of the Financial Action Task Force on the risks posed to the international financial system by deficiencies in Iran's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing regime. The Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions recently issued an advisory drawing attention to the recommendations for heightened attention to transactions related to Iran as a result of these concerns. This advisory is consistent with the due diligence obligations on Canadian financial institutions under the Iran regulations.

The steady decline in trade with Iran since 2001 demonstrates that the business community understands that there are risks associated with doing business with Iran. It is no coincidence that at a time when Iran's neighbours are enjoying an unprecedented economic boom resulting from high oil prices, Iran, which benefits from enormous oil and gas reserves, is suffering an economic meltdown.

Private Members' Business

The collective efforts of the international community and the approach it has taken toward doing business with Iran has had a huge impact. As long as Iran continues to contravene broadly accepted international norms, there is little prospect that this will change.

Canada also works within the multilateral system and with our international partners to sustain pressure on Iran and Sudan to improve their behaviour.

Iran deliberately concealed its nuclear activities for almost two decades and has failed to comply with numerous International Atomic Energy Agency and United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Continuation of Iran's sensitive nuclear activities, particularly the enrichment of uranium, could give it the capability to develop nuclear weapons. Such a development would be a matter of grave concern. Canada is seriously concerned about major inconsistencies in Iran's arguments regarding the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

Canada has fully implemented the binding economic measures against Iran called for under UNSC resolutions 1737 and 1747. On March 3, 2008, the United Nations Security Council issued resolution 1803 in response to Iran's failure to comply with its international obligations under the previous UN resolutions. This new resolution will increase the pressure on Iran to suspend all sensitive nuclear activities, including uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing activities.

• (1750)

As with the previous Security Council resolutions, Canada will ensure its full compliance through Canadian domestic law. These UN sanctions, which have received no negative votes in the Security Council, send a very strong political signal to Iran that it must change its behaviour with respect to uranium enrichment activities, or continue to face harsh multilateral sanctions from the international community.

The UN Security Council, through various resolutions, has imposed an arms embargo against Sudan. Canada has shown great dedication toward, and remains very concerned about, the human rights situation in both Iran and Sudan.

Iran blatantly disregards its commitments and obligations under both international and domestic law. The new penal code being drafted in Iran, particularly a section that imposes the death penalty for apostasy, in other words converting to a new religion, witchcraft and heresy, targets religious minorities and clearly violates Iran's commitments under the international human rights conventions to which Iran is a party.

Executions of minors and others, including through cruel methods, continue to be carried out. The persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, such as the Baha'is, continues with no end in sight. For example, attacks against Baha'i children and youth occur on a daily basis and include even the expulsion of Baha'i children from primary school and even kindergarten. Freedom of expression in the media is limited. Women's rights are oppressed. These deplorable actions compel the Government of Canada to continue to work with the international community to pressure Iran to change its behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, I see that my time is up. In conclusion, I would just like to say that for all these reasons and much more that I was not able to mention, we will support this motion. We commend the member opposite for bringing this motion forward.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to address the House today and to speak to this issue. Motion M-410 suggests that punitive action be taken against Sudan and Iran. It seeks essentially to encourage Canada to exert pressure on the regime in Tehran, Iran, and the Sudanese government.

I believe that the member for York Centre wishes to break the silence, here in this House, about these human tragedies. However, the proposed measures will not be fruitful without a more comprehensive consideration of the impact of such measures. I do not understand what led the member to propose a single initiative for two countries that are in totally different situations. Each case could be dealt with separately, and that would probably be the most effective way of proceeding.

It is possible that such measures would have no effect on the targeted governments and that the only result would be a serious disruption in the peace and security of these regions. To find a solution, we must deal with the situations in Iran and the Sudan separately. It was unwise to suggest dealing with these two different cases in the same motion. What are needed are measures that will lead civil society to change and an investment in peacebuilding efforts. We must see to it that the means to implement an agreement are put in place.

What is tragic is that governments must also revisit their restrictive administrative practices with respect to the citizens of these countries. Western and European countries give in to the blackmail of these autocratic regimes, which do not respect international rules. For example, we need only consider the rules for immigration and refugee status applicable to refugee claimants from these two countries.

We have seen cases, situations in which people have argued on the basis of their sexual orientation, and their cases have not been given a proper hearing. They have been removed to those countries. So we have to review some of the measures and policies that apply here. We have to look at Canada's position as a whole. We have to look not only at what goes on outside Canada, but also at what goes on here, in our own country.

It is hard to believe that when the government negotiates its policies it does not take into consideration the fact that when it grants asylum, it is engaging in actions that appear hostile to those countries, and that this could be damaging to talks.

Private Members' Business

There are examples. For instance, in France, the government has signed bilateral agreements with Iran to protect the economic interests of the Total company. That happened in 2003. It is one example among many. I know that my colleague from the Montreal region talked about some of them. If I am not mistaken, it was my colleague in the NDP who identified Total. A little research into that company reveals that not only French interests are involved; Canadian and other foreign interests are also involved. These countries have signed bilateral agreements, but they apply policies domestically that they use during negotiations within the framework of those agreements.

There is another matter that it is difficult to assess: the effectiveness of those regimes at infiltrating our intelligence services. For example, testimony given by people from Iran or the Sudan, who are now here, reveals that they engage in disinformation.

It is clear to observers that the Islamic regime cannot tolerate internal reform. We can see this. If I am not mistaken, some of my colleagues have raised this here in the House. At present, students are marching in the streets, women are being oppressed, and there have been thousands of public executions.

● (1755)

These facts are known, and we have to take them into consideration.

The number of people executed in Iran has now risen above 150,000. This is no small number, and it is alarming. The people of Iran are entitled to better support and better protection against an ideology that systematically blocks the emancipation of women in Iran.

I agree with what my other colleagues have said in this House. We have to initiate a debate so that, as I said earlier, we can find a way to make appropriate changes to our international affairs policy. We have to consider the question so that we can formulate a more coherent policy, one that is more respectful of the democratic aspiration and of our values.

The autocratic nature of these regions clashes with the values that our society holds dear, values that include equality between men and women, freedom to participate in civil society, freedom of expression and our opposition to the death penalty, to name but a few.

I must also point out, however, that we have to oppose any unilateral action. We have to work within the parameters of the international framework and the United Nations rules. We must therefore reinforce the multilateral approach.

We may question the effectiveness of the motion, considering Canada's political weight. Canada has hardly any investments in Sudan or Iran, so if it acts unilaterally, its action will have little impact on those countries. Sudan and Iran's largest economic partners are Russia and China. So even if Canada starts withdrawing investments, Sudan and Iran can always continue their business relationships with their partners, which would mean that Canada's actions would have almost no effect.

We believe that measures will carry more weight if we take a broader view of the issue and if we let the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade do its work.

The issue raised in the motion by the member for York Centre is premature.

Negotiations are underway with Iran. Taking such a measure now could harm these discussions and could affect Canada's potential international position. A resolution has been passed to sanction Iran. I think that Canada can work within this framework—or at least the government can be forced to do so.

Canada's current legislation already places significant importance on economic sanctions in multilateral fora. So if the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade agrees, nothing will stop the government from taking action then.

I will leave it at that for now.

● (1800)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased to speak to this important motion, which, as my colleague just explained, concerns two relatively different topics that have a common element, and that is Canada's role in the world where we are needed most.

● (1805)

[English]

I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion before the House. As members know, the NDP has been extremely concerned about the supreme humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. We have also voiced our grave concerns about the situation in Iran, the flagrant abuse of human rights, the crackdown on people's freedoms and, most disturbingly, the Iranian president's continuous, repeat, bizarre and inflamed outbursts against Israel, against Jews, calling for the destruction of Israel.

The lack of a resolution to the case of Zahra Kazemi, a Canadian citizen killed at the hands of Iranian authorities, is also of great concern, as are the growing fears over that country's possible attempt to develop a nuclear arsenal.

Sudan and Iran, as I mentioned, pose two very different challenges to the international community and to Canada. I hope to set out some of the positions of the NDP on this issue.

With regard to the supreme humanitarian crisis in Darfur, we believe Canada must take immediate action. It is not enough simply to point at the inaction of other countries. By the latest UN estimates, over 450,000 people have been killed due to the violence and disease in Darfur, probably more. Millions, as we know, have been displaced. Rape, destruction and ethnic cleansing have been carried out with total impunity.

I will briefly describe the NDP's action plan for Darfur. It is a three step plan that calls on the Canadian government to use that most precious resource, which is our proud reputation as a peacekeeper in the world. We suggest therefore that Canada support resolution 1769 by committing personnel and resources. We know what kind of challenge is involved. It is a huge area and the needs are great, but we have to start.

We also have to invest in the long term development of the civil society and the peace process in Darfur, something in which Canada has a great deal of experience and can be put to good use here.

We also believe we have to divest all Canadian investment from the Sudan.

New Democrats believe Canada must take a leadership role in Darfur. Resolutions do not protect vulnerable citizens. Peacekeepers can.

Canada must provide personnel and resources to support the UN's vitally important mission. We have a clear chapter 7 mandate to protect civilians. We have the consent of the government of Sudan. We have four years of violence and destruction behind us.

Canada talks about global leadership and the responsibility to protect, and that is what the government is doing. This mission will be a crucial test of both. We need to demonstrate our commitment with troops on the ground.

Members will hear some suggest that Canada's military is already overstretched because of our engagement in Afghanistan. That is precisely part of the problem. Indeed, by putting all our eggs in one basket in the Kandahar region in southern Afghanistan, we are not leaving enough for an extremely important mission like Darfur.

This is one of the main reasons that the New Democrats have called for an end to Canada's engagement in the current counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan. We think it is a wrong-headed mission. It will not produce the hoped for result. We also think this is a supreme humanitarian crisis that deserves all our attention.

We have reached out to the Liberals to join us in our effort to end the war in Afghanistan. We recognize they have a fundamental choice before them. They have to choose between war and peace. We think Canada should continue to use its reputation to build a comprehensive peace process. Being involved in search and destroy missions in southern Afghanistan, is not going to bring that result. One does not build schools with uranium-depleted shells from a howitzer.

I take this opportunity to once again to invite my Liberal colleagues to think about that and to choose the path to peace that we are proposing.

We also envision our troops contributing to an independent foreign policy committed to the values of all Canadians. Canadians have always been proud of our contributions to the UN peace-keeping force. We have fallen far off the list of the top 10 contributors to peacekeeping. Believe it or not, we are now at number 50, and it is time to change.

[*Translation*]

The United Nations resolution is a first, absolutely crucial step toward bringing stability to the Darfur region of Sudan. Canada must show international leadership by providing troops for this mission. Nonetheless, this mission is but a minor aspect of a comprehensive strategy that must be implemented if we truly want to achieve peace.

Private Members' Business

[*English*]

There cannot be a military solution to the Darfur crisis. The underlining problems are political. Therefore, Canada must demonstrate its commitment by working towards a political solution.

Financial and intellectual assistance in the development of a political solution is the second part of the NDP's action for Darfur. That means a major financial and diplomatic commitment to support the successful implementation of the existing CPA, which is the comprehensive peace agreement between the north and the south, as well as reigniting the failed Darfur peace talks to strengthen and broaden the Darfur peace agreement.

Peace cannot be achieved without the development of a vibrant civil society and its meaningful engagement in the comprehensive peace process. A lot of valuable work is being done by people on the ground in Darfur on this front and Canada should be supporting these efforts. We should be there front and centre.

For instance, I had a meeting with a constituent recently. We talked about the situation there. That citizen was extremely concerned about the fact that Canada was failing in Darfur and realized, like we do in the NDP, that we had been putting all of our efforts into Afghanistan in a failed mission.

I can also tell members that people like Stephen Lewis, with a proud history in the NDP, has always reminded us, in reference to Africa's struggle against HIV-AIDS, "all roads lead from women to social change". I am encouraged by the leadership that women are providing in Darfur to bring peace to their community, but as we all know and understand, in this crisis situation they cannot do it alone.

The third part of the NDP's action plan is to cut off any financial contribution that Canadian corporations may be making directly or indirectly to the atrocities in Darfur. Many Canadians have taken personal steps to ensure that their money is invested in ethical businesses. However, in our well-informed world, knowing what we know about Darfur, business as usual is disgraceful. It is downright wrong.

New Democrats fully expect Canadian companies operating throughout the world to hold themselves to the highest standards of corporate social responsibility. One need only think about Canadian mining companies around the world. The Canadian government cannot speak out for human rights in places like Darfur and then allow Canadian companies to undermine these efforts by cooperating and legitimizing the regimes responsible for violating human rights in the first place.

To that end, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has adopted an NDP motion to undertake a study of Canadian companies whose business is directly or indirectly contributing to the crisis in Darfur.

On Iran, it should be borne in mind that the NDP has been very clear in its criticism of the Islamic Republic regime. The NDP continues to condemn Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for his inflamed anti-Semitic and anti-Israel declarations.

Private Members' Business

The NDP calls on Canada to lead a united global effort aimed at convincing Iran to immediately halt its imprisonment, torture and execution of minors and other citizens for their religious and ideological beliefs, notably members of the Baha'i faith. We have seen to where that can lead. We saw, for example, a man being deported to Malaysia by the Conservative government refusing to provide him the ability to stay here as a refugee. That deportation sees him going back to a country that, according to Amnesty International, is going to put him in jail for 20 years, not for anything he has done but who he is. This is the type of breach of human rights that we are talking about here: torture, execution of minors and other citizens for what they believe.

The members of the Baha'i faith, a beautiful faith based on understanding and peace, is in particular harm's way in Iran and we condemn the current regime in Iran for that.

We also urge the government to call for the immediate release of Mansour Osanlou, President of the Syndicate of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company who has been in prison almost continuously since December 2005, as well as Iranian prisoners of conscience.

The NDP wants the government to work with international community to convince Iran to negotiate in good faith and to participate in open and constructive dialogue to put a definitive end to any thought of pursuing nuclear material enrichment in Iran. It will lead to grave destabilization in the region, which has already known more grief than it needs, but this can only make things worse.

The NDP continues to demand justice in the murder and torture, as I mentioned, of Zahra Kazemi. It is an unbelievable situation.

While we are extremely concerned about the possibility of Iran developing an arsenal based on nuclear weapons, we also warn against any unilateral action that could further inflame the region. We want to ensure that everything is tried and we do not head for war unless there is no other option.

Canada must make it perfectly clear to our allies that mistakes on the Iraq war should not be repeated with Iran and a peaceful solution achieved through diplomatic means is possible and, indeed, the best way forward.

• (1810)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House to split my time with the member for London North Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There is consent. The hon. member for Davenport has the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tragically, we as human beings are reminded all too often of the sad reality that there are people who, for whatever reason or cause, are prepared to inflict upon their fellow human beings unimaginable acts of cruelty and hatred.

If we are to work toward a more just, stable and peaceful world, we need to ensure that violations of human rights are confronted

forcefully. It was the Dalai Lama who stated, "Peace can only last where human rights are respected".

History is unfortunately full of examples where peace is undermined simply because of indifference, fear to confront, or a belief that nothing could be done to change what is occurring in a given state or region.

The two nations noted in this motion, Sudan and Iran, are indeed countries in which human rights are clearly and consistently being violated. Through a systematic and institutionalized means, these two states act in a manner that cries out for action on the part of the world community.

The amount of human suffering in Darfur is simply unimaginable. It is also absolutely and completely unacceptable. The United Nations report in 2005 confirms that within Darfur, murder, torture, mass rape, summary executions and arbitrary detention have taken place.

The United Nations has passed no less than 15 resolutions with respect to human rights abuses in Sudan. U.N. resolution 1590, passed in 2005, mandates the implementation of the Darfur peace agreement which Sudan continues to defy in practical terms. Resolution 1706, passed recently, extends the mandate to October 15, 2008.

This situation is intolerable and the ongoing violence against the people of Darfur is a blight upon the world community.

Similarly, the situation with regard to Iran is totally unacceptable within the context of international human rights law and in respect of the most fundamental standards of state-sponsored conduct.

One has only to look at the volumes of evidence confirming human rights violations in Iran. These violations extend to labour leaders, religious groups, dissidents, gays, lesbians, women and journalists to name but a few.

We in Canada are familiar with the terrible actions by Iranian officials that resulted in the death of journalist, Zahra Kazemi. In particular, the Iranian prosecutor, General Saeed Mortazavi, must be brought to justice for his actions.

I have presented a motion before this House calling for the initiation of an international criminal investigation of General Mortazavi and will continue to demand action in respect to his conduct.

As recently as February 22 of this year, Human Rights Watch has called upon Iran to end the practice of executing juveniles. As with most of these cases, the very validity of the alleged crimes is called into question.

This morning, Ms. Shirin Ebadi appeared before the Subcommittee on International Human Rights where she spoke about the violation of human rights in Iran. Ms. Ebadi is, of course, the recipient of the 2003 Nobel peace prize for her work on human rights and the promotion of democracy.

We know that Iran, either directly or indirectly through agencies and groups, supports and encourages these violations. What is referenced here are the most brutal measures that are absolutely incompatible with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which confirms that human rights are universal, to name just two international conventions governing state conduct.

The situation in these two nations is bleak to say the least. The level of human suffering in Sudan and Iran is something we cannot ignore and we must take action as parliamentarians.

● (1815)

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Davenport for his willingness to share his time.

I want to speak a bit personally. I know we are wrapping this up, but it is important for us to remember that we are actually speaking about something that many Canadians have already undertaken.

I would like to commend a group called STAND, Students Taking Action Now! Darfur. This group has been in our universities and high schools for a number of years now and has been acting really hard on the issue of Darfur. I had the privilege of taking a couple of their members to Darfur this past January and I was very impressed with their commitment.

These students decided they were going to go after all the various universities in the country that had investments in Darfur. I would like to commend them because at the end of the day, they have been successful at getting a number of universities across the country to divest from the companies that are taking part in what is going on in Sudan. This included my own university, the University of Western Ontario, which had invested in six companies.

STAND was so proficient and consistent at what it did that I am proud to announce that the university president, Mr. Paul Davenport, has now pulled the University of Western Ontario out of all of those investments. We are speaking about something that Canadians are already involved in.

There was mention earlier of the peace talks that took place between north and south Sudan. I was at those peace talks along with my wife and there was one driving factor that got the northern government to come to the table. In the first round of peace talks it did not want to, but in the second round there were a number of reasons why it did.

Much of it was because of the divestment threats that were happening from Europe, the United States and Canada, which were trying to divest from companies that were taking part and the northern government realized it was going to be financially hurt if it did not participate.

A large part of the success of those peace talks, that resulted in peace between north and south Sudan and ended a war that had killed three million people and displaced five million, was due to divestment and because Canadians using the Internet, especially students, knew how to access that stuff and make a difference.

My wife and I were in villages when bombings took place, when the government of north Sudan sent in their MiG jets, big bombers or

militia units. We need to remember that 70% of the money that comes from these oil revenues and other companies that are in Sudan goes toward munitions. We were at the receiving end of those.

I know none of us want it to be that way, but it was not about my wife and I. We had to watch people as they had to gather together for funerals and other things because the western world would not speak out at that particular time.

This is life and death. We are not talking about some fancy little thing that we are trying to do. We are talking about people dying in Darfur right now because many of us have failed to take action.

I heard it mentioned earlier that one particular party had a plan for what it was going to do in Darfur. We all have plans for what we want to do in Darfur, but it is not about that. It is not about my plan or someone else's plan. It is about the fact that this is the kind of thing that has to rise above all our plans. For the sake of the people of Darfur and, yes, of Iran, we have to take action.

I heard Stephen Lewis being quoted earlier. Let me remind people that I was at a conference with Stephen Lewis a couple of months ago and he said the very thing that is keeping us back from acting on Darfur and divestment is partisanship. I am trying to say that it does not matter what other people's plans are or what my plan is. What matters is: What is our plan? What is it that we stand for and believe in this country?

I do not want to take much more time, but everyone knows I have three kids from Darfur. I have talked about how they wake up at night from the bombings and everything else that happened. There are millions of kids still in Darfur who are going through this. It is time for all of us to act.

I commend my colleague for having the courage to stand up and demand that we begin to divest from a government that will do this to its own people. I commend the people across the way who have been willing to support this bill, and I plead with my Bloc colleagues, I really do. I know there might be some difficulties with it, but it is not about nuance. It is about human rights and acting.

I am thankful for the time that has been given to me and I especially want to commend my colleague for the courage he has shown in bringing this forward.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has carefully reviewed the motion tabled by the hon. member for York Centre.

This government shares the opposition's indignation over the human rights situations in Sudan and Iran, and we have repeatedly raised our concerns about those human rights violations in bilateral and multilateral fora. We are also deeply concerned about Iran's nuclear activities. For this reason, the government fully supports the motion.

We believe the time has come to exert more pressure on the governments of Sudan and Iran, including economic pressure, in order to urge both countries to comply with international human rights law and standards of international conduct amongst sovereign nations.

Private Members' Business

Our concerns about the governments of Sudan and Iran affect the way we conduct our bilateral relations with them, as well as our interactions with them in multilateral fora such as the United Nations General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, and the G-8. In fact, in 1992, Canada banned arms sales to Sudan and has withheld trade support services since then.

Iran's continued support for militant groups threatens regional stability and raises the possibility of further conflict. Canada will continue to work with the international community and within multilateral and bilateral fora to address its concerns on Iran's role in the region.

For five straight years, Canada has worked with more than 40 co-sponsors and successfully led a resolution on the situation on human rights in Iran at the UN General Assembly. Canada demonstrates great leadership in this respect, as it leads one of the most difficult country-specific human rights resolutions at the General Assembly. The adoption of the Canadian-led resolution signals that the international community is deeply concerned about Iran's serious human rights situation and that concrete steps must be taken to address it.

With respect to Sudan, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, UNAMID, took over from the AU mission at the end of December 2007. To date, UNAMID only has 9,000 troops out of its mandated strength of 26,000, and it lacks essential logistics and equipment.

Since the adoption of resolution 1769 before the Security Council, calling for the deployment of UNAMID to Darfur, the Government of Sudan has systematically imposed a series of administrative obstacles to delay or obstruct this.

We urge the Government of Sudan to cease the obstructions and to cooperate with UNAMID deployment. We also urge rebel groups to cease their attempts to limit UNAMID freedom of movement.

Canada strongly condemned the attack on a UNAMID supply convoy by elements of the Sudanese armed forces in West Darfur in early January and called on Sudan to ensure that there would be no recurrence of such incidents in the future.

Turning to Iran, since 1996, Canadian relations with Iran have been governed by the tightened controlled engagement policy, which limits official bilateral dialogue to the following four topics: the case of murdered Canadian-Iranian Zahra Kazemi, Iran's human rights performance, Iran's nuclear program and Iran's role in the region. This policy reflects Canada's ongoing concerns about the Iranian government's opposition to the Middle East peace process, its support of terrorism, its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and its atrocious human rights policies.

Furthermore, this policy has shown great foresight in that it already bars cooperation between any Canadian government agency and its Iranian counterpart. For example, Canada does not facilitate trade and investment between Canadian private firms and any Iranian state entities.

As my colleagues may know, in March 2005, the UN Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. On April 27, 2007, the court issued two arrest warrants for

war crimes and crimes against humanity for Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs Ahmad Haroun and militia leader Ali Kushayb.

• (1825)

Canada has called repeatedly on the Government of Sudan to cooperate with the court and to arrest and surrender these two Sudanese individuals.

The recent events in Chad and allegations that Sudan was supporting the rebel offensive also raises great concerns with respect to regional stability and the safety of civilian populations, as do earlier reports that Chad had bombed Sudanese territory.

Humanitarian access in Darfur has been increasingly difficult due to regulatory and systematic obstruction by the Sudanese government. Humanitarian workers are being attacked by rebels and bandits.

Nearly 2.2 million people have been displaced as a result of the Darfur conflict, with most of them attempting to find refuge in violent, overcrowded camps. Ensuring full and safe humanitarian access is essential to allow populations to receive protection and assistance. Humanitarian workers must be permitted to carry out their work without hindrance.

Canada is active in supporting peace in Sudan and Canadian diplomacy is at the forefront of international efforts. Canada has been among the largest supporters to the African Union Mission in Sudan, AMIS, and is continuing to support UNAMID. And Canada has committed approximately \$268 million to peace, humanitarian needs and early recovery since 2006. But we believe the time has come to take additional steps to convey our concern and place pressure on the Government of Sudan.

I will conclude by saying that this government is eager to work with the opposition to develop practical and viable ways to place further pressure upon the governments of Sudan and Iran.

[English]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague previously indicated, the Government of Canada remains deeply concerned about the human rights and the humanitarian situation in Sudan and has responded to those human rights violations both in word and in deed.

The government is supportive of the motion under debate. We believe that the time has come to place further pressure upon the government of Sudan, including economic pressure, to meet international standards of conduct.

We should remind the House that, since 1992, Canada has withheld trade and commercial support and trade development programs to Canadian businesses wishing to do business or invest in Sudan.

The UN Security Council, through various resolutions, has imposed an arms embargo against Sudan, as well as an asset freeze and travel ban against four Sudanese individuals, which Canada has also implemented.

Private Members' Business

Canada's support to peace in Sudan, as part of a coordinated international effort, has totalled over \$268 million since 2006. Moreover, this government continues to make numerous representations on human rights and humanitarian issues to the Sudanese government and other parties to the conflict.

It should be noted that Canada's diplomacy is active in promoting calls for action on Sudan, including for Darfur. Canadian diplomats and senior officials constantly raise their concerns with respect to the situation in Sudan through our bilateral relations and in multilateral fora, such as the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

In October and November 2007, Canada attended the new round of Darfur peace talks as an observer state and, together with other countries, continues to support the efforts of the UN and the AU to reach a resolution to the ongoing conflict in Darfur.

Canada is actively involved in soliciting the participation of all rebel groups in the AU-UN led mediation process and keeps urging all of the parties in the Darfur conflict, including the government of Sudan, to negotiate in the spirit of compromise in order to achieve lasting peace for Darfur and for all of Sudan.

In that regard, we were dismayed by the refusal of some rebel movements to participate in the peace process and urge them to do so without delay.

It should also be noted that Canada continues to play a lead role in the efforts employed by the United Nations Human Rights Council on the situation in Sudan. The current situation is unacceptable and Canada wants to ensure that Sudan's human rights record remains under close international scrutiny.

This is also one of the reasons why Canada continues to call on all parties to the conflict in Sudan to respect their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law to protect affected civilian populations.

As the House may know, in March 2005, the UN Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. The court was established as a permanent tribunal to prosecute individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Canada provided a voluntary contribution of \$500,000 to assist the ICC in its investigations in Darfur.

In addition, we take every occasion to call on the government of Sudan to cooperate with the ICC and to arrest and surrender the two Sudanese individuals indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity, the Sudanese minister of state for humanitarian affairs and a militia leader.

Canada has always been one of the world's most committed peacekeeping nations. Canada is proud to continue to provide high value support to a great number of multilateral peacekeeping initiatives through capacity building, training, planning and logistics, as well as strategic contributions of personnel.

In Sudan, Canada has made an exceptional contribution as one of the principle donors to the African Union Mission in Sudan, AMIS, to seek to mitigate the violence and attacks against civilians and to provide a more secure environment where humanitarian actors could

operate. Canada has committed a total of up to \$116 million to AMIS since 2006.

Canada's contribution included providing critical air support to AMIS through the leasing of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, a contribution that has continued during the ongoing transition from AMIS to UNAMID.

• (1830)

As part of our contributions, the Canadian Forces have up to 50 personnel currently supporting the peacekeeping missions in Sudan in an effort to bring security and stability to the country. In addition, Canada loaned 105 armoured personnel vehicles to AMIS troop contributing countries and these vehicles will continue to be used by UNAMID.

Canada also participates in UNMIS, another UN active mission in Sudan since 2005, with a mandate to support implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement which ended the long civil war in southern Sudan.

On the humanitarian and early recovery front, the Canadian International Development Agency has provided over \$152 million in assistance to Sudan, including \$98 million for humanitarian assistance through Sudan and for Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, and \$54 million in early recovery initiatives since January 2006.

Approximately half of the humanitarian assistance funds have helped the population of Darfur. CIDA, through the UN and NGO partners in Darfur, has recently helped to establish 12 new boreholes for the provision of water, has conducted hygiene promotion programs for over 78,000 internally displaced persons and has created child friendly spaces in IDP camps and enhanced safety measures in schools for the improved protection of 21,000 Sudanese children and community members.

Canada's involvement in various peacekeeping activities throughout Sudan is very significant. Between April 2006 and March 2008, Canada will have committed approximately \$20 million to support the AU-UN peace process in Darfur, as well as to strengthen judicial institutions and to conduct community security, mine action and small arms control initiatives in south Sudan.

In addition to these activities, Canada is currently funding a communications and outreach initiative in Darfur to help ensure that the people of Darfur are aware, understand and play a role in the developments related to the ongoing peace process.

Given that Canada and the international community have dedicated considerable effort and resources to establish long-lasting peace in Sudan and that this goal has not yet been achieved, the government shares the opposition's desire to implement measures to influence a more receptive approach on the part of the government of Sudan. We also agree that we need to ensure the safe and unhindered humanitarian access to the affected populations.

Private Members' Business

The government welcomes the motion tabled by the hon. member for York Centre and is prepared to work with the opposition to find practical means of implementing the motion in order to place further pressure on Sudan until we see definite progress on our concerns.

● (1835)

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity today to discuss Motion No. 410 as it relates to Iran. We are all disturbed by Iran's erratic behaviour and the risk it poses to both the international community and its own people. We share the view of the hon. member opposite that it is now time for clear action. This is why we are pleased to fully support the member's motion.

I unequivocally agree that there is a need to maintain pressure on Iran to change its egregious behaviour. Indeed, our government is already actively engaged in efforts to encourage Iran to break away from its current radical policies and begin to behave like a responsible member of the international community.

This is reflected in our approach to bilateral relations with Iran, which is governed by a tightened policy of controlled engagement. The policy limits official bilateral dialogue to the following four topics: the case of murdered Canadian Iranian Zahra Kazemi; Iran's human rights performance; Iran's nuclear program; and Iran's role in the region.

Within the limitations of the controlled engagement policy, Canada also prohibits the opening of Iranian consulates, cultural centres and Iranian banks in Canada. Furthermore, it proscribes the establishment of direct air links and high level visits.

Canada also works within a multilateral system and with our international partners to sustain pressure on Iran. Canada has fully implemented the binding economic measures called for under United Nations Security Council resolutions 1737 and 1747.

On March 3, 2008, the United Nations Security Council issued resolution 1803 in response to Iran's failure to comply with its international obligations under previous UN resolutions 1696, 1737 and 1747. This resolution will place further pressure on Iran to suspend all sensitive nuclear activities, including uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing activities. As with previous UNSC resolutions 1737 and 1747, Canada will ensure its full compliance with the decisions of the Security Council through Canadian domestic law.

The imposition of these UN sanctions sends a strong political signal to Iran that it must change its behaviour with respect to uranium enrichment activities, or continue to face harsh multilateral sanctions from the international community.

Canada has significantly restricted its interactions with Iran through its domestic law under the regulations implementing the United Nations resolutions on Iran. The regulations impose an embargo on export to Iran of certain goods and technologies that could contribute to Iran's uranium enrichment related activities or to the development of nuclear weapons. The regulations also impose an assets freeze against designated persons and entities engaged in Iran's nuclear activities. In addition, the regulations impose a prohibition on the provision of technical or financial assistance related to the goods and technology subject to the export ban.

In addition to existing regulations, resolution 1803 includes: a travel ban for targeted Iranian officials; a freeze of assets of newly designated Iranian companies and officials; and additional restrictions on the sale of identified dual use items to Iran. As well, the resolution calls for governments to withdraw financial support for trade with Iran, to dissuade domestic financial institutions from entering into transactions that could support Iran's nuclear activities, and to inspect cargo going into and out of Iran via identified carriers.

The commitment of Canada and other like-minded states to the UN sanctions against Iran sends a strong and clear signal to Iran that it must halt its uranium enrichment activities.

● (1840)

The Government of Canada has also supported and responded to the warning of the Financial Action Task Force on the risks posed to the international financial system by deficiencies in Iran's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing regime. The Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions recently issued an advisory drawing attention to the FATF recommendation for heightened attention to transactions relating to Iran as a result of these concerns. This advisory is consistent with the due diligence obligations of Canadian financial institutions under the Iran regulations.

The business community is well aware that doing business with Iran is a risky proposition. This is clearly reflected in our trade statistics which have shown a steady decline in trade with Iran since 2001. It is no coincidence that at a time when Iran's neighbours are enjoying an unprecedented economic boom resulting from high oil prices, Iran, which benefits from enormous oil and gas reserves, is suffering an economic meltdown.

The collective efforts of the international community and the chill they have put on the prospect of doing business with Iran had an impact. There is little prospect that this will change so long as Iran continues to act in a way which contravenes accepted international norms.

Iran's continued support for the militant groups in the region is a case in point. The threat posed to international peace and security and regional stability by groups supported by Iran is undeniable. Iran's support for Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic jihad, coupled with its backing of violent insurgents in Iraq, has helped destabilize a region of strategic global importance. Canada must continue to collaborate with the international community and with its multilateral partners to address its concerns regarding Iran's spoiler role in the region.

Canada stands ready to respond to positive developments in Iran. We welcome the interest and advice of the hon. member for York Centre and we welcome this motion today.

Let me conclude by reiterating what my colleague has already said, that this government will continue to work on strategic, focused and ultimately effective actions to respond to the situation in Iran.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 6:45 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired. Accordingly, the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division is deferred to Wednesday, March 12, 2008, just before the period provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

TELEFILM CANADA

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 1, I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages a question in this House.

Here is the wording of that question, which came the day after the new chair of the Telefilm Canada board of directors, Mr. Roy, appeared before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I am quoting myself:

The new chair of the Telefilm Canada board of directors, Mr. Roy, who was appointed by the Conservative government, yesterday told the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that Telefilm Canada's funding is insufficient.

I continued on, asking when the government would do something about the needs of that industry, which has been calling for action for two years.

I would like to repeat what was said the day before at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage meeting, so that my colleague across the floor can answer me later—hoping that my colleagues across the floor will pay attention to the debate.

Here is what I asked Mr. Roy:

But, as Chair of the Board, Mr. Roy, you aren't prepared today to say that there would be grounds to increase Telefilm Canada's funding?

Adjournment Proceedings

He replied:

As Chair of the Board, I—

I retorted:

You're appearing in that capacity.

He replied:

Currently, in the French-language film market, given the appetite of producers, I don't think funding is sufficient.

In my question of February 1, I reiterated Mr. Roy's comments made the previous day. I will quote one part of the answer I got from the parliamentary secretary to the minister.

I believe if he were to reflect on the answer of the new commissioner, the new commissioner was not asking for increased funding.

That was a bit of smoke and mirrors. He did not ask for increased funding; however, he did say that the funding is insufficient. It is the same thing.

I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that I asked this question on February 1 in the hope that the government would include something for French-language and English-language feature films in the budget.

Thus, I began searching. The industry has been looking for additional support for at least two years and has been waiting for answers from both the current minister and her predecessor. An additional \$20 million had been talked about. I know that the Charest government has done its part. I believe it put in \$10 million. There was hope, and I was told that meetings had been organized, but nothing happened.

When I asked the question on February 1, it was in the hope that something would be included in the budget. We searched and searched. I noted that, in the case of the Department of Canadian Heritage, many cuts were made—departmental savings—and that some amounts were also added. In total, over three years, \$72 million was added to cover the Olympics and related preparations, and that is commendable. Except that, of the \$72 million, it seems that \$60 million is from budget cuts. We were looking for signs that the Department of Canadian Heritage would add \$10 million over three years.

I continued to search because there was obviously nothing about feature films. I continued to search. The national museums were in the same boat. The government said it was adding several million dollars when, in reality, it was adding \$2.1 million over three years to the total envelope for national museums. In the end, there were mostly cuts there, too. However, there was nothing there for feature films.

And so I continued. With regard to another institution, Library and Archives Canada, which we know well, not only are they not receiving any new funding, but they are being cut. There is mention of the gradual elimination of the book exchange program. Still nothing about feature films. How sad.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1850)

[English]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, working with the hon. member opposite, I want to say, with the greatest respect, that unfortunately I think he is taking Mr. Roy's testimony out of context. He should remember that when he asked Mr. Roy whether Telefilm's funding was adequate he explained that the answer depends on the perspective.

He said on the one hand that the film industry will always be happy to receive as much money as anyone would care to give, but on the other hand he said that "anyone working in a cultural industry other than film could say that too much money is being allocated to that sector".

I think the new Telefilm director gave a balanced answer. I would suggest that the member might want to consider some of the following. I would like to look at some numbers.

In 2006-07, our government invested over \$765 million in Canadian audiovisual content: \$74 million from the National Film Board; \$96 million from the Canada feature film fund; \$252 million from the Canadian television fund; \$14 million from the Canada new media fund; and \$330 million from two tax credit programs. That does not include over \$1 billion for the CBC.

By any measure, this is a large investment by Canadians for Canadians. In addition to the direct investment in the audiovisual industry, I would remind the member that we also reduced the GST by two full points, which also helps the industry.

The hon. member asked when the government will increase the Telefilm budget. Why is he asking that? I remind him that the 2005 Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, under the Liberal government, issued the report, "Scripts, Screens and Audiences: A New Feature Film Policy for the 21st Century". The present standing committee under the present government retabled the report.

I would think he would remember that because it was done on Tuesday, May 30. I checked the notes. I see that the member attended that particular meeting, so he would be aware that the report was retabled. This is important, because I would like to remind my colleague that all parties supported the committee's conclusion that existing levels of feature film funding were adequate.

In other words, they recommended this under the committee under the Liberal government. It was retabled not once but twice. It was tabled and the committee unanimously concluded that existing levels of feature film funding are adequate. Our current government agreed with the standing committee's conclusion in its response tabled before the House of Commons on September 29, 2006.

Are we satisfied? No. Our government is in a continuous discussion with the audiovisual industry regarding its concerns. Our government is and remains committed to Canada's film, television and new media industries, and no one can say differently.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I have yet to receive an answer.

The hon. member is talking about 2005, but this is 2008. In the meantime, a crisis has occurred in the film industry in Canada, especially when it comes to French-language feature films. There was not enough money. The Government of Quebec acknowledged this and did its part. That is all that was expected of the government. The current minister and her predecessor implied that they would give money, but nothing happened.

The excerpts of my discussion with Mr. Roy, the chair of the board of directors of Telefilm Canada, were very clear. At the end of the meeting, he said:

Currently, in the French-language film market, given the appetite of producers, I don't think funding is sufficient.

Since there was a request, and the Government of Quebec did its part, the Government of Canada could do the same thing.

•(1855)

[English]

Hon. Jim Abbott: Of course, Mr. Speaker, this is why we have the government and the opposition. Again I will say that the government, on behalf of the people of Canada, has invested over \$765 million in Canadian audiovisual content: \$74 million, \$96 million, \$252 million, \$14 million, and \$330 million, plus \$1 billion for the CBC. I really think that this particular sector is not doing all that badly with way over \$1 billion and approaching \$2 billion.

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of sectors that are doing poorly, the manufacturing sector is doing very poorly as well.

I asked the Minister of Industry a question on November 23, 2007, which was dealt with by his parliamentary secretary. I pointed out, and this is beyond dispute, that hundreds of thousands of good manufacturing jobs were disappearing at an alarming rate, and, I dare say, particularly in Ontario. I also indicated that the government had taken little by way of action.

In my riding alone, many well-paying jobs have been lost. These were jobs that paid \$20, \$22 and \$24 an hour. The Minister of Finance, in particular, and, to an extent, the Minister of Industry, continue to trumpet the fact that thousands and thousands of new jobs are being created.

New jobs are being created in the service sector, in retail and in hospitality. It is true that all work is noble but the reality is that the jobs which are being created today are paying people, in many cases, about half the salary that they were earning, earning at places that have closed their doors because of lack of assistance from the government.

I am talking about Canadian Blue Bird Coach in Brant. A terrific entity, which had been in Brantford for some decades, has had to close its doors. It has relocated to the United States. GenFast, another long time solid employer in my community, has gone. Easton Coatings has gone. DURA Automotive is gone.

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Yes, some jobs are being created. Wal-Mart, for instance, in my community, has decided to open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Yes, there will be jobs created at Wal-Mart probably paying \$8 or \$9 an hour. That is fine enough but, for an individual trying to maintain or support his or her family, receiving an hourly wage of \$9 an hour is not commensurate to having received \$22 an hour a few months ago.

The answer from the government, I presume, is that it has done lots, that it has reduced the corporate tax rate and it has made provision for accelerating the capital cost allowance. Those measures are of some benefit but they are only of benefit to manufacturing entities that are yielding a significant profit. It is only of benefit to entities that have the financial resources to buy new equipment or new technology, in which case the accelerated capital cost allowance provisions help.

However, this is at a time when other countries are targeting their manufacturing industry and are providing direct incentives to manufacturing, such as in the United States where the state governments and the federal government are injecting billions into the manufacturing sector to preserve jobs and to preserve manufacturing entities.

Again, does the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry not recognize that there are hundreds of thousands of well-paying jobs that have been lost? What exactly is the government doing or intending to do to keep still with us those jobs that remain?

• (1900)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is just now that the hon. member for Brant remarked that manufacturers are facing difficulties. It is as though this is a new reality for members opposite, yet workers have been losing jobs in manufacturing since 2002. It is sad that manufacturers, their workers, their families and their communities that depend on them have to pay dearly for the lack of leadership in the previous government.

Why did the previous government not take action when it became clear that our manufacturing industries were facing a perfect storm? With over two million Canadians directly employed in such a cornerstone component of our economy, one is left to wonder.

I want to bring forward some of the comments he made in his speech.

He did not do his homework. If he did, he would know that almost 18,000 new manufacturing jobs were created this past January. Last year wages in Canada grew. He says that in service jobs and the jobs created, the low paying jobs, overall wages grew 4%. Unemployment overall is at a forty year low. Unemployment in Canada is 6.1% and in manufacturing, the sector that he talks about, it is 5.9%. We are really getting things turned around.

Fortunately, Canadians decided for a change, for action, for leadership last year. That is why this government immediately set out to introduce measures that would benefit the manufacturing industries.

Our first budget was described by the industry as the best budget for manufacturers and exporters in five years. By the way, the

member voted against it. We introduced 29 tax cuts, including eliminating the capital tax, reducing corporate and small business tax rates and confirming the elimination of the corporate surtax. We also took steps to improve productivity through investments in innovation and skills training.

We followed up November 2006 with “Advantage Canada”, a long term plan to make Canada a world economic leader. This plan announced the Government of Canada's strategic economic priorities for ensuring that businesses, including manufacturers, would benefit from advantages of competitive taxes, a sound fiscal environment, broad-based entrepreneurial opportunities, extensive knowledge resources and a modern infrastructure.

In March 2007 we introduced a budget that created a shift in attitude toward the manufacturing sector not seen in a decade. Budget 2007 introduced a new temporary investment incentive for manufacturing and processing businesses at a cost of \$1.3 billion, permitting businesses to write off 100% of their investments in machinery and equipment over the next two years.

In budget 2008 we are enhancing this measure, allowing manufacturers to benefit from an additional \$1 billion in support.

We committed to cutting red tape for businesses, in particular small and medium sized businesses, and we are delivering. The government took another important step in October 2007 to eliminate 80,000 requirements and obligations in 13 key regulatory departments and agencies.

We also announced the details of a \$33 billion building Canada plan to modernize our infrastructure, which includes at least \$400 million for the new Windsor-Detroit crossing.

Innovation is an important driver to improve productivity, and business, research and development is a pillar of innovation. This is why the government introduced a new science and technology strategy that will benefit industry. In budget 2008 we have proposed improvements to the scientific research and experimental development tax incentive program, based on the consultation we launched last year, as well as \$34 million per year for collaborative research that contributes to the knowledge and innovation needs of the automotive and manufacturing sectors, among other sectors.

With budget 2008, we are providing over \$9 billion in tax relief to manufacturers over the period of 2006-07 to 2012-13.

Our tax reduction initiatives will give Canada the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the group of seven, the G-7, by 2010, and the lowest statutory tax rate in the G-7 by 2012.

In January we unveiled the community development trust aid package of over \$1 billion. We—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Brant.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite spent a fair bit of time talking about earlier budgets. He did, in fairness, touch on the 2008 budget. However, with respect to the 2008 budget, I would like to quote Jason Myers, president of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, who wrote:

Disadvantage Canada, that's what this budget represents for Canada's manufacturing and exporting sectors...We [as manufacturers] were very specific in what the nation's most innovative industry needed and we received recycled ideas and pocket change at a critical time when we needed tangible solutions. It's disappointing.

The member opposite touched upon the Windsor-Detroit tunnel. Surely he is aware of the 30-year high unemployment rate in Windsor. Ten per cent of individuals in Windsor are not employed, are not able to find work, a community that relies heavily on the manufacturing sector.

The government, with respect to the automotive sector, has provided auto funds of—

• (1905)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member and his party for allowing our budget to pass. This proves to Canadians that the Liberal Party believes that we, at this difficult time, are the best to manage the finances of our country.

Let me be clear. This government, unlike its predecessor, recognizes the importance of our manufacturing industries, including the auto sector, to our country. Since we came to government, we

have continually introduced initiatives that help our industries compete. At a time when others sat around and watched, we took action.

Our response to the report of the House's industry committee on manufacturing was comprehensive and overwhelmingly positive.

We set out to develop a long term economic plan that would give an advantage to our businesses and create jobs. In fact, last year in Ontario alone nearly 100,000 new jobs were added to the economy, offsetting the 37,000 jobs lost in manufacturing. These are mostly full time, high paying jobs.

We introduced incentives for manufacturers so they could innovate and improve their productivity. Budget 2008 introduced a number of important initiative to benefit manufacturers. Total tax relief—

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Since the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert is not present in the House to raise a question during the adjournment debate, her notice is deemed to have been withdrawn.

[*English*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:07 p.m.)

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