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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 27, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 27, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of two delegations of Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie concerning their participation in the Canada-France Symposium, “The legacy of France in Canada after 400 years”, held in Paris on March 7 and 8, 2008, and in the Parliamentary Affairs Commission of the APF held at Andorre-la-Vieille, Principality of Andorra, on May 6 and 7, 2008.

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) it is my pleasure to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation to the 16th session of the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization held in Geneva, Switzerland on October 3, 2007.

The Speaker: If I could seek consent to move to petitions, we will come back to motions in a few minutes. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PETITIONS

CBC RADIO ORCHESTRA

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table petitions signed by many residents of greater Vancouver, including a number who live in Burnaby—Douglas.

These petitioners are all fans of the CBC Radio Orchestra. They note that it has played a key role in the cultural life of Canada and Vancouver over its 70 year history and it has been key to the promotion of Canadian musicians and composers.

The petitioners call on the government to ensure continuing funding for the CBC Radio Orchestra and a strong and renewed commitment from CBC/Radio-Canada to classical music in its over the air programming.

I am sure these petitioners believe that it is not too late to save the CBC Radio Orchestra.

•(1005)

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, sensing perhaps the need for time, if the House will indulge me, I will read the whereas clauses of the petition and—

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that he cannot do that, but he can give us a brief summary.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I will give a brief summary then, Mr. Speaker.

This is the sixth in a series of petitions. I hope the government will respond positively to them.

The petitions have been signed by people living in the city of Ottawa, the national capital region. They are asking the government to direct the National Capital Commission to proceed to a detailed assessment of an interprovincial bridge linking the Canotek industrial park to the Gatineau airport in the east of the respective cities. This is also known as option seven of the first phase of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment.

We are waiting for the final report of the consultant. That phase proposes that a bridge be built at a certain location which would essentially cause further problems. This seeks the removal of heavy truck traffic from the core of the nation's capital. Every self-respecting city has a ring road. There is a need to build a bridge, perhaps even two bridges, but in the appropriate location so that eventually there would be a ring road around the national capital region.

The petitioners are asking the government to take the appropriate action in directing the NCC to do the right thing.

GASOLINE PRICES

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by hundreds of people from the quaint Ontario communities of Finch, Crysler, Apple Hill, Cornwall, Berwick, Monkland, Roxborough, Moose Creek and Maxville.

Privilege

The petitioners point out that gas prices at the pump are not indicative of the true cost of gas. When gas prices go up, they go up immediately at the pump, but when gas prices go down, they do not go down at the pump.

Considering that there is 5% GST, 10% federal excise tax, and 14.7% provincial tax, the petitioners would like the federal government to reduce federal taxes and put in a mechanism where companies would have to justify a proposed increase in gas prices and also be required to give 30 hours' notice of that increase. The petitioners also indicate that when the price of a barrel of oil goes down, the price at the pump should automatically go down at the close of the stock markets on that day.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

USE OF MEMBER'S LETTERHEAD AND FRANKING PRIVILEGES

The Speaker: The chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Malpeque and I will hear him now.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege relating to a letter that was sent under the franking privileges of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

The letter, a copy of which I am prepared to table, was sent to a number of individuals, farmers in fact, and organizations in western Canada. The letter is directed to those producers. I would like to quote from the letter:

A change in leadership around the Board of Directors' table would mark a new era of opportunity in Western Canada. Your vote can make that happen.

The member then makes reference to the individuals for whom he is advocating. I will quote again from his letter:

Together, we can bring marketing choice to Western Canada. Time is running out, vote for Sam and Walter today and mail or fax it back to Myers Norris Penny.

I believe this is a very serious breach of parliamentary privilege and a breach of democratic principles in this country. The letter comes from a parliamentary secretary who has access to confidential information of the Canadian Wheat Board. Is he or is he not using that list which should remain confidential to target a political agenda within his own riding? I understand other members of the Conservative Party are also sending out letters.

Mr. Speaker, there are two points here. One, is the parliamentary secretary breaching his oath of office and using confidential lists for political purposes? Two, is the parliamentary secretary breaching the rules of the House and using his franking privileges for political purposes and getting to his ideology in marketing choice?

What would happen if we in the House, in the next provincial election in any province, used our franking privileges day in and day out to mail out and advocate for a certain politician? We do know that the government, that the Minister of Agriculture has lifted third party spending rules and that allows the big grain companies and others to work for their opponents which is against, I believe, individual farmers.

This is a very serious matter. The question, Mr. Speaker, that you must resolve, is whether by using the privileges of a member of Parliament, as has been done by the member, a parliamentary secretary no less, has he not impugned the integrity of an election which is supposed to be independent of government interference and thereby called into question the integrity of the election and the role of all members of the House? The question here is, what will the government and its members not do to achieve their ends?

The misuse of the letterhead of a member of Parliament and the franking privileges to attempt to blatantly influence a democratic process of the Canadian Wheat Board constitutes, I believe, a clear violation of those privileges. Mr. Speaker, I believe that you should find that member in contempt of his parliamentary privileges by what has happened.

I have a last point to make. The recent election for Speaker was all about decorum in this House. In fact, the Prime Minister in his throne speech said that upholding the ideal of democracy that we embody in the world is a responsibility that each of us bears. I believe the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, has undermined what we are talking about in terms of the ideal of democracy because he has taken away fairness and equal rights in terms of a democratic election for directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. He is undermining the very thrust of what the Prime Minister talked about in the throne speech.

This is an extremely serious issue and cannot be allowed to continue. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule in that way.

• (1010)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the member for Malpeque's question of privilege.

First, I would point out that questions of privilege are designed for one very important reason. If a member's ability to do his or her job has been impeded or thwarted somehow, then that is a question of privilege. That does not hold water in this case whatsoever. I see nothing in the presentation that the hon. member for Malpeque made just a few moments ago that would even suggest remotely that the letter sent out by the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands impeded the ability of the hon. member for Malpeque to do his job.

Second, is the member for Malpeque honestly suggesting that the Speaker of this House should censor members' communications? I hope that is not what he is suggesting, because after all, all members have the ability to communicate with their constituents.

Third, the member for Malpeque seems to be suggesting that somehow the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands used a confidential list. There is no proof of that whatsoever. In fact, all of us as parliamentarians have people we communicate with on a regular basis. We all communicate, advocating our positions as political parties. It is quite evident, and we have made no secret of it, the desire of this government to ensure that western Canadian farmers obtain marketing freedom. That is a position we have not only advocated publicly but we have done it in communications for the last several years, and this seems to be nothing more than a continuation of that.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you respectfully that there is absolutely no question of privilege here whatsoever, and I ask for your considered ruling on that as quickly as possible.

●(1015)

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add some comments to the question of privilege put forward by my colleague, the member for Malpeque.

I too have received a copy of the letter from the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands that was sent out to a number of individuals and organizations in western Canada. I too wonder about where the list came from. We have heard about lists that the government has and the abuse of lists in sending communications to members of the community.

After review of the letter, of which I too have a copy, I find it to be in clear violation of members' franking privileges. The member, I should add, is a parliamentary secretary, a member of the government. In the letter in question which has been tabled, the member encourages the recipients to support candidates in the Canadian Wheat Board elections who represent the same views as the government, those who support marketing choice.

The mailing, as you have heard, Mr. Speaker, was sent on members' parliamentary letterhead and was mailed using taxpayers' dollars through the member's franking privileges. This member is clearly using his member's office resources to interfere and influence the Canadian Wheat Board director elections so that his views can be represented at the table.

It is, to my mind, a clear example of political interference. The member has abused his privileges as an MP and, more important, as a parliamentary secretary for the Canadian Wheat Board. Members do not send out endorsements for their provincial colleagues in provincial elections nor for municipal colleagues in municipal elections because it is indeed a violation of our privileges. I would submit that this is no different.

I would also submit that this brings the whole House of Commons into disrepute. Again I ask, where did he get the list? His interference, in my view, is unethical as the member, as I said before, is a parliamentary secretary and has a direct interest in the outcome of the election.

Some members might have noted what was stated in the *Winnipeg Free Press* this morning, “—so that they can hopefully vote for candidates who will be able to work with the government after the election”.

Privilege

This is the mindset of the government. Is he saying that the government will not work with members who do not hold the same views as the government on the Wheat Board? The member clearly wants his allies on the board, as he explicitly endorses two candidates, one of whom, as stated in the letter, “—was seen as instrumental in brokering the merger between the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative parties”. This individual is Sam Magnus.

The Conservative government and the parliamentary secretary are continuing their assault on the Wheat Board, trying to dissuade voters against specific candidates. Recently, a group calling itself Market Choice Alliance complained that two unsuccessful Liberal candidates were running in the election, but made no mention of the fact that two Conservatives were running to be on the board.

This does not sound like non-partisan work. They, along with the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, will do anything in their power to get their way. The member has blatantly interfered in the democratic process of the Canadian Wheat Board and I believe he has clearly misused his privileges as a member of Parliament.

Like my colleague, I believe the member should be found in contempt. It is incumbent upon you, Mr. Speaker, to censor the abuse of communications that the member has entered into, and I respectfully ask you to do so.

●(1020)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is shameful that the deputy House leader would become complicit in this activity by trying to defend it. He also suggested it is not within your jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker. However, in your jurisdiction is the cost of running Parliament, and if someone is abusing the franking privileges and the letterhead, which are costs of Parliament, it is definitely within your jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker.

My main point is that I would like you to investigate as well, Mr. Speaker, is whether or not this is breaking a law or within the spirit of a law. When Parliament creates an organization that has democratic elections, then why would someone try to influence those elections at taxpayers' expense? That is hardly within the spirit of the law and maybe breaking the law.

The Speaker: It is not for the Speaker to investigate breaches of the law. That is for other officials to do. However, I will take this matter under advisement and consider the issue. There may be further submissions later. I am certainly prepared to look at it in detail and come back to the House in due course.

I know the chief government whip spoke to me, and we skipped motions by consent in order to revert. I am prepared to revert now if the chief government whip indicates that he wants to propose a motion to the House at this time.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations between parties and there is general agreement that I present the following motion. I move:

That the Standing Orders be amended as follows:

The Address

1. By replacing Standing Order 104(2) with the following:

104(2) The standing committees, which shall consist of the number of Members stipulated below, and for which the lists of members are to be prepared, except as provided in section (1) of this Standing Order, shall be on:

- (a) Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (twelve Members);
- (b) Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics (eleven Members);
- (c) Agriculture and Agri-Food (twelve Members);
- (d) Canadian Heritage (twelve Members);
- (e) Citizenship and Immigration (twelve Members);
- (f) Environment and Sustainable Development (twelve Members);
- (g) Finance (twelve Members);
- (h) Fisheries and Oceans (twelve Members);
- (i) Foreign Affairs and International Development (twelve Members);
- (j) Government Operations and Estimates (eleven Members);
- (k) Health (twelve Members);
- (l) Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (twelve Members);
- (m) Industry, Science and Technology (twelve Members);
- (n) International Trade (twelve Members);
- (o) Justice and Human Rights (twelve Members);
- (p) National Defence (twelve Members);
- (q) Natural Resources (twelve Members);
- (r) Official Languages (twelve Members);
- (s) Procedure and House Affairs (twelve Members);
- (t) Public Accounts (eleven Members);
- (u) Public Safety and National Security (twelve Members);
- (v) Status of Women (eleven Members);
- (w) Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (twelve Members); and,
- (x) Veterans Affairs (twelve Members).

2. By replacing Standing Order 108(3)(b) with the following:

108(3)(b) Citizenship and Immigration shall include, among other matters, the monitoring of the implementation of the principles of the federal multiculturalism policy throughout the Government of Canada in order:

- (i) to encourage the departments and agencies of the federal government to reflect the multicultural diversity of the nation; and
- (ii) to examine existing and new programs and policies of federal departments and agencies to encourage sensitivity to multicultural concerns and to preserve and enhance the multicultural reality of Canada.

3. By replacing Standing Order 108(3)(d) with the following:

108(3)(d) Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities shall include, among other matters, the proposing, promoting, monitoring and assessing of initiatives aimed at the integration and equality of disabled persons in all sectors of Canadian society;

That the Clerk of the House be authorized, where appropriate, to redirect, after consultation, any references to any committees that have already been made at the time of the adoption of this order.

The Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*Translation*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from November 26 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will begin if I may with my thanks to all the people of Sherbrooke for showing their confidence in me for the fifth time in a row in this past election. I was re-elected because we have confidence in each other. May I also congratulate all of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois. I am sure that they, too, continue that relationship of confidence with their fellow citizens, for they are the only ones who really represent the needs and aspirations of Quebec. I also congratulate all the other members, and you, Mr. Speaker, on your election, which means that we know that decorum will reign in this House. Moreover, yesterday we witnessed the Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole ensuring the respect for decorum as well.

That said, an election campaign has just come to an end, and not much has changed. A government has been sworn in, a government which sought to obtain a majority under false pretenses, with a platform which pointed to more of the same—that is a minority government.

Judging by the throne speech, many members of the government did not campaign according to the rules. Obviously, candidates campaign to get re-elected. But they also campaign to meet with people, companies, institutions and community, social and economic organizations. They campaign to talk with people and find out what they want, to acknowledge their needs and, above all, to be able to meet those needs.

When a government does not want to meet people's needs, the best way it can do that is to not acknowledge those needs. It is easier to say that the most pressing needs are high finance and its impact on the economy. It is easier to take that line and forget about all the other needs people have and what they are going through. So it is that the government decided to deal with the economy.

On reading the throne speech, we can also see that the Prime Minister has remained totally insensitive to how the crisis is affecting the people and the economy. The Prime Minister did not learn anything from the election results in Quebec. And as my leader so aptly put it, this throne speech is just like the most recent Conservative convention: ideological. Incidentally, the Conservative ideology is rooted in the western oil sands. To all intents and purposes, its sole concern is the oil industry.

The Address

The throne speech is very disappointing. The Prime Minister came up short. We were promised a throne speech that would focus on the economy, with none of the usual irritants, but what we got was just the opposite. Even though the forestry industry is in very dire straits, the government promises to carry on as if nothing were wrong. The speech contains no commitment to improve employment insurance or create a support program for older workers. There is not even one line about providing assistance for retirees affected by the financial crisis, which shows incredible insensitivity.

The many irritants in the throne speech prove that the Prime Minister still knows nothing about Quebec. He is maintaining the cuts to culture and to economic development organizations. He continues to want to impose a repressive young offenders law and dismantle the gun registry.

• (1025)

He persists in wanting to create a federal securities commission. He will not even say the word "Kyoto". He persists in wanting to reduce Quebec's political power. He promises to expand intrusions into areas under Quebec's jurisdiction such as healthcare and education. There is nothing about the fiscal imbalance, but he uses untruths about the education transfer and wants to cap equalization payments. He wants to support the nuclear power industry and continue with unbridled military spending. He is making the same promises about the federal spending power with a formula that has already been rejected by Quebec. This throne speech gives no thought at all to the Quebec nation or to the interests or values of Quebec.

The openness we were expecting is not there. The worst thing is this complete lack of sensitivity to the effects of the crisis on people and the economy. It is simple. We oppose this throne speech.

This statement of intent is fuzzy when it comes to what the government intends to do to support the economy. For one thing, the throne speech is virtually silent on the enormous problems in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, when entire communities are affected and are desperately waiting for the federal government to play its role in getting the economy going again and providing support for workers who have lost their jobs.

We expected the government to do something. When it called the election, it postponed accountability. And yet we knew what might happen to the economy. The government virtually abdicated responsibility, or really, perhaps, demonstrated that it was incapable of acting. Yes, the government should act, and most importantly, it has the resources to act. All that is missing is the will.

The Bloc Québécois proposed a three-part plan this week to get the economy going again and to help people, to help the public.

The government has a lot of leeway; it could have over \$27.7 billion in two years. We could keep a reserve and still invest over \$23 billion. It is easy to find \$6 billion in bureaucratic spending, and to close the tax havens. Why are they called "tax havens", in fact? What they are is tax hells for taxpayers in Quebec and Canada. They are being indirectly deprived of services. To my eyes, this is really tax evasion, and the government should fix it as quickly possible.

Of course there are still all the hand-outs to the oil companies, and that could amount to \$5.9 billion over two years. And there is the possibility of using the CMHC surplus.

There are other approaches for fixing the situation that cost nothing too, to encourage our domestic businesses and provide more help for our people. There is preferential purchasing, of course. We could make regulations for forestry products to be used in federal construction projects. Another thing is to eliminate the employment insurance waiting period.

I am aware of the needs and aspirations of the people of Sherbrooke, and obviously in my last election campaign I was being told important things I already knew about when it comes to people's social and economic situations. Certainly we can talk about employment insurance, an issue that has still not been resolved. It is up to the government to ensure that people at least have decent living conditions. There is also the question of social housing. In the community of Sherbrooke there are more than 1,350 households and families in extreme need of housing.

• (1030)

You are signalling that I have to finish. That is unfortunate, since I could have gone on, because once again the government is not up to the job.

• (1035)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election. I would also like to congratulate the member opposite on his. I listened carefully to his speech. Today, we will have the chance to support a throne speech that will position the Canadian economy. The steps we have been taking for over 30 months have put our country in a better position to face the economic crisis.

One important measure in this speech is to expedite infrastructure investments everywhere in Quebec and Canada. I am thinking not only about projects that would help us ensure that our communities have access to quality drinking water, but also projects that would have an economic impact, which is the case in my riding, Lévis—Bellechasse, with the ecotourism infrastructure in Buckland.

I think that this throne speech makes it possible for our economy to maintain its purchasing power. Members have seen all the measures we took on behalf of seniors, particularly concerning income splitting and the increase in income eligibility for seniors who receive the guaranteed income supplement—those with the lowest income. Unfortunately, the member's party opposed this. Fortunately, members on this side of the House think it is important to give our seniors, our families and our manufacturing companies in Quebec the tools they need to face this potential crisis.

How come the Bloc members will not support the expediting of infrastructure investment, when all the leaders in Quebec politics are calling for expedited infrastructure investment?

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, it is important to invest in infrastructure in order to maintain a reasonable economic level. More importantly, this investment would fill a need that has been developing within each of our communities and municipalities over the years. However, the government's program has shortcomings.

The Address

The investments in infrastructure must be expedited. Quebec must be the sole authority. As well, the tax reimbursed to the municipalities must be adjusted. These are the missing elements. There are too many hidden agendas in this speech. It is a fine speech, relatively flexible, and it could seem attractive to many people, but there are too many things missing. The economy is a fine topic, but it has to help the public.

Yesterday, my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville asked the minister about preferential procurement. More than \$50 billion is spent on purchases, procurement, goods and services, and it would not cost the government anything. However, if the money the government spent on goods and services was kept inside the Canadian market—by buying from our businesses—it would cost the government nothing and would breathe economic life back into Quebec and Canada. Certain aspects could be somewhat advantageous for Quebec, but, on the whole, it makes no sense.

Although many things have been left unsaid, we can see the direction the government is taking. This morning's newspapers indicated that the government wants to take away the fundamental elements of a healthy democracy, of the public's healthy expression during elections. In fact, it is trying to suffocate its political opponents through games, which, ideally, would allow it to achieve a majority. I will not describe these games, as that would be unparliamentary.

[*English*]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

I want to congratulate the members who were elected for the first time to the House and, of course, the members who were re-elected to the House on October 14.

As the first Conservative elected in Prince Edward Island since 1984 and the first in the riding of Egmont for almost 30 years, I am very pleased and proud to stand here today in the House of Commons to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

As the member of Parliament for Egmont and the regional minister for all of P.E.I., it is my responsibility to represent the interests of my constituents and all Islanders. To that end, I look forward to working with our provincial government to achieve that goal.

Like all Canadians, Islanders are concerned about the economy and how these difficult times will affect them. Our Prime Minister has shown great leadership during this global economic uncertainty and our government is committed to protecting Canada's future.

The Speech from the Throne is the government's plan for sensible leadership and strong economic management. It is our commitment to protecting Canadian families and jobs in tough economic times.

On October 30, I was chosen by the Prime Minister as the first woman to hold the office of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans as a stand-alone portfolio. I wish to thank the Prime Minister for putting his trust in my ability to execute the responsibilities of this office.

In my role as the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, one of my priorities will include a review of the Fisheries Act. I want to

encourage my colleagues in Parliament, regardless of their political stripe, to recognize the importance of renewing this 140-year-old act in light of the difficult economic situation we find ourselves in and the effect it has on all Canadians and their communities. I encourage them to work collaboratively toward legislation that works for our industry to ensure that it remains economically viable and sustainable.

I want to now talk about some of the important commitments contained in the throne speech that are important to my riding. These commitments are important to the people of P.E.I. because they are facing some unique economic challenges.

First, our government remains committed to Canada's traditional industries, such as fishing and agriculture, because we believe they uphold the economic well-being of many regions and communities, such as those in P.E.I. Our government will continue to assist these industries through measures aimed at marketing Canadian products internationally while helping businesses to innovate.

In addition, our government has worked with each province and territory and has provided them with funding through the community development trust to support Canadian workers in communities affected by international economic volatility.

Our government is committed to expediting the Building Canada plan to ensure that infrastructure projects are delivered to communities as quickly as possible. We believe that modernizing infrastructure contributes to a stronger economy and a cleaner environment, with more prosperous communities.

P.E.I. has already benefited from the Building Canada plan with much needed funding for water and waste water projects around the province. The Building Canada plan will benefit P.E.I. and other provinces because it will provide them with predictable, long-term funding for infrastructure needs. The government's commitment to infrastructure funding represents the largest infrastructure commitment ever to Prince Edward Island.

During these tough times, P.E.I. farmers need to know what will be done to help farming remain viable in P.E.I. and in Canada. Our government will continue to strongly support supply managed sectors at home and in international negotiations.

The government is implementing its new growing forward programs, programs that are focused on results, reflect input from across the sector and are tailored to local needs. Most important, growing forward is a plan to build agriculture for the future and will enable provincial flexibility, which is very important, within national standards to support Canada's farmers and agriculture sector.

The Address

The government has strongly supported the fisheries on P.E.I. and across Canada. For years the industry was seeking a capital gains exemption on its licence transfers. For most, this is their retirement fund as they have no pensions. Our government has delivered to fishers on that item. We have provided more permanent funding of \$20 million annually to small craft harbours and we have hired more than 165 new fisheries officers over the last three years.

● (1040)

Our government has supported wind energy initiatives in P.E.I., which has allowed P.E.I. to become a leader in wind energy production.

We have a thriving aerospace sector in P.E.I., with hundreds of people from my riding working in this area, and it is expanding steadily.

There have been a number of initiatives that our government has undertaken to assist workers in Canada. The community development trust, which I mentioned earlier, also supports a wide variety of initiatives aimed at job training, skills development and community transition plans that will foster economic development and create new jobs.

The targeted initiative for older workers, which is the federal-provincial employment program that provides employment activities for older workers and helps them stay in the workforce, has been very well received on Prince Edward Island.

The labour market agreement with the provinces to address the gap in labour market programming for those who do not qualify for training under the EI program was also well received. This problem was evident as I would often speak with people who felt that they were in dead-end jobs that they could not afford to leave because they did not qualify for assistance under the EI program.

I also would like to share with the House that one of the most well received programs that our government has implemented is the pension income splitting for seniors. This made a significant difference to many seniors in our province.

I also want to salute our government's commitment to our veterans. They are a big part of all of our communities and I am proud that the government has shown support to them by enhancing the veterans independence program and establishing the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the voters of Egmont and the many volunteers who worked tirelessly on my campaign during the election. It was a true exercise in democracy and an example of what makes Canada such a great country. The election results came down to the very last poll. My opponent requested a recount, which was carried out shortly after election day. What makes this so great is that no one was hurt, no one was imprisoned and everybody participated not only in the recount but in the entire campaign peacefully. We must keep in mind that Canada is the greatest country on earth for those very reasons.

Canadians can be assured that our government is doing everything possible to ensure they are protected during these difficult and uncertain economic times. As the regional minister for my province, I am very proud to say that I am the voice of Prince Edward Island at

the cabinet table. Our Prime Minister has provided a steady hand in a time of global economic influx. By all reports, Canada is at the top when it comes to being in a position to weather this economic downturn. I think that can be attributed to the forward-thinking of the government and our very capable leader.

● (1045)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the minister mentioned in her remarks the P.E.I. farmers. However, she talked about the Prime Minister, the same Prime Minister who allowed us to lose 85% of our hog farmers in Prince Edward Island in the last year, the same Prime Minister who allowed our beef farmers to get into trouble and the same Prime Minister who insulted Prince Edward Island potato and cash crop farmers with the offer of one cent a pound for water damaged crops.

Is the member saying that the Prime Minister will now do something different and actually support P.E.I. potato, cash crop, hog and beef farmers, which he clearly has not done in the past?

I can tell the minister where the Conservatives can find the money. The Conservative government now has, as was pointed out yesterday, the most bloated cabinet since the Mulroney days. It has more cabinet ministers since the Mulroney days. Twenty million dollars to thirty million dollars has been wasted on political contingency funds by the new cabinet for political purposes.

If your Prime Minister is showing sensible leadership, like the minister claims, is the minister willing to make a commitment today that she will work to reduce the size of that cabinet so that the money can be spent in sensible places instead of the Prime Minister's ideological agenda for political purposes?

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I heard the hon. member for Malpeque use the second person in addressing some of his remarks. I would just remind him to use the third person at all times.

● (1050)

Hon. Gail Shea: Mr. Speaker, in response to my hon. colleague from Malpeque, I will point out that the government did provide \$6 million to the beef plant in Albany. It also provided \$12 million to potato farmers who were in desperate need of funding.

The government has transferred more money to Prince Edward Island than any other government in federal history.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the minister to the House and to the unenviable task that she has in trying to run the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as a minister. The tradition has been that ministers have taken over the top spot and have been told by the department what they will and will not do. I hope her steady hand is different.

The Address

On the north coast of British Columbia we have lost upwards of 80% of our commercial fishing fleet in the last seven years. We have watched the decimation of fish stocks and the mishandling of the entire industry by the department where decisions are made by the 1,850 bureaucrats here in Ottawa while on the ground officers are being cut. We lost 75 last year and more the year before.

My question is very simple. Is the minister willing to consider the fundamental reforms that are required for the fishing industry, relooking at the salmon quotas that have been shoved down fishermen's throats and looking at EI reform that would allow shore workers to actually access the program that they have paid into? Also, has the minister been to the north coast and, if not, is she willing to visit?

I have talked to the owners and operators on the coast. They told me that they had extended offers to the two previous department ministers but that they had refused to come and talk to the people who were actually affected by the decisions made in this place.

If the minister is really looking to do something different, showing up in the communities that are most affected by the decisions that she and her department will make, is she willing to visit the communities of Prince Rupert, Haida Gwaii and other coastal communities and actually talk to the people affected? I think that would go along way toward improving relations between the people affected—

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Hon. Gail Shea: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that I have had no less than 20 invitations to visit the west coast and I have committed to be there as soon as possible. I look forward to meeting the stakeholders in the industry.

I have said right from the beginning that my guiding principles for the department would be on sustainability, economic viability and consultation. Consultation is so important because it is the future of the stakeholders of this industry that we are talking about.

Therefore, I am committed to consultation with the industry and I look forward to getting to British Columbia.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: We have enough time for a very quick question. The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, we learned that two more parts plants in Ontario will be closing. We are all well aware that hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost in Quebec and in Canada over the past few years in key sectors: forestry, communications, and automobile and parts manufacturing.

Today, the government is waking up and saying that it plans to do something, but everyone knows that once the parts plants close, we will keep getting parts from other countries to continue manufacturing things here.

What is the government prepared to do to stop these closures and ensure that the parts used to manufacture products here are made here?

[*English*]

Hon. Gail Shea: Mr. Speaker, I know our government is actively pursuing trade agreements which we hope will open markets for Canadian products. As far as private businesses, we cannot dictate to them what they do or what they buy but we certainly do promote made in Canada.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge a few key people, as this is my maiden address in this House. Although a long-time resident of British Columbia, I did grow up in Ottawa where, as a young child, my parents nurtured an interest and a respect for politics. To this day, they continue to enjoy healthy debate on many of the areas of interest to Canadians. This debate has now become even more vibrant as I begin my new role.

My husband, Gord, has always been a wonderful support and this was proven yet again by celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary at a public debate during the campaign.

I would also like to thank my children, Scott, Jamie and Alison. Although busy with their own lives at university, they provided endless volunteer energy and time, particularly through political cyberspace. This, they inform me, is the mechanism for engaging youth, and I will do my utmost to incorporate this during my mandate.

To see the energy and commitment of my campaign manager and volunteers during the election was truly a humbling experience, and, of course, the biggest thanks of all goes to my constituents of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo who have entrusted me with the privilege of being their member of Parliament. I am incredibly fortunate to have this diverse and beautiful riding and my commitment is to represent them with knowledge, energy and honour.

In my short time here, I have come to appreciate the unique backgrounds of my hon. colleagues in the House. I believe this will add richness to the debate as we grapple with the many challenges ahead. I myself left Ottawa 27 years ago and have spent those years working at the coal face in urban, rural and remote communities. Politics was not my life path but it is my opportunity to bring these many years of experience and reflection to the dialogue.

I now would like to make some general observations about the Speech from the Throne and then I will focus on a few areas of particular interest to me.

We are experiencing escalating complexity in our world, whether it is with the environment, global financial markets or delivering health care. We no longer live in the much simpler world of our great-grandparents. As Plsek noted, the traditional ways of getting our heads around problems are no longer appropriate. Even Newton's clockwork universe in which problems can be broken down into smaller ones, analyzed and solved by rational deductions is an approach for the past.

The Address

It goes without saying that our financial system is global and that there are a number of individuals and countries that have the freedom to act in ways that are not always totally predictable. These actions directly affect us as a nation. We are all interconnected. One agent's actions change the context for all other agents. As such, the Speech from the Throne acknowledges the seriousness of our economic situation, the importance of working globally and the need to be adaptive in our response.

Complexity requires that we try multiple approaches and let directions arise by observing what is happening around the world and gradually shifting time and attention to those strategies that work the best.

I have listened to the opposition members as they debated the throne speech and they have made mention of the lack of a detailed plan. This is simply not true. Although I am not an economist, the approach proposed in the throne speech acknowledges the seriousness of the situation and provides for an adaptive approach to a very complex problem.

Accessible and effective health care has been the focus of my education and career and will always remain near and dear to my heart. It is important for all members to remember that our health care system ranks as one of the most serious concerns among Canadians. We also need to understand the challenges faced by the provinces in meeting this growing demand. This is why it was with great personal appreciation that I noted in the Speech from the Throne the ongoing commitment for long-term, fair and predictable transfer payments.

However, we all must recognize that our health care system cannot continue long term with exponential growth, consuming ever increasing amounts of the budget. I, therefore, support our commitment to creative measures to tackle major heart, lung and neurological diseases and to build on the work with the Mental Health Commission of Canada. It is important to emphasize the word "creative". I will give two specific examples from my riding as to how the federal government's commitment to innovation has provided the seeds for creative, systemic change and the ability to reduce expensive, acute care utilization demands.

● (1055)

The first example is focused on special support for heart disease. Funding provided from Infoway Canada for patients with congestive heart failure created a pilot home monitoring program. Patients went home with special equipment to monitor their condition and expert support only a telephone call away. The results were incredibly positive in terms of reduced hospital admissions and patient confidence.

Another example was an innovative practice for patients with lung disease, which, by the way, is another significant cost to our acute care system. Federal targeted funding for primary health care transition saw respiratory therapists and other practitioners working with family doctors. This program supported prevention, early diagnosis, nicotine cessation and exercise. This again had a strong, positive impact on patients.

In both these examples it was the federal government's transition dollars that leveraged new approaches. Ultimately prevention and

innovation will be critical for the long-term sustainability of our health care system.

Local government has always struggled with the need for ongoing support for basic infrastructure. The applications and lineups are always long for much needed water and sewage treatment facilities and the costs prohibitive without federal and provincial support.

It is ironic when a local government is under order from the Medical Health Officer to upgrade a water system or written up by the Ministry of Environment for exceeding effluent permits, but does not have the balancing government financial support.

Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo is dealing with three transnational highways and too often we are dealing with tragedies and deaths from accidents on some of the challenging sections of our roads. The throne speech commitment to the building Canada plan will not only support vital infrastructure needs, but also create important economic stimulus during these challenging times.

Government is not simply about administration of silo departments. We often have overlapping interests and the ability to create multiple wins. The throne speech commitment to introduce sensible policies that can help consumers improve our environmental well-being can be met in many ways.

For example, in the House yesterday I paid tribute to the partnership between our government, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and one of our large ranches in the region that have now preserved over 8,000 acres of environmentally sensitive grassland that was home to many endangered species. This success is a great example that the approach to the environment does not need to be in isolation from our other interests.

I am confident that in the upcoming months there will be endless creative approaches available to us in support of other struggling industries such as forestry. Our government believes in the fundamental ability of Canadians and our industry to adapt to a changing world and will be strategic with this support.

My response to the throne speech would not be complete without acknowledging the aboriginal people of Canada and the many bands within my riding. The government's stated commitment to ensure that aboriginal Canadians fully share in economic opportunities is a critical obligation.

Kamloops is the proud base for the First Nations Taxation Commission. Officially it began its operations on July 1, 2007. The commission describes its role as helping to reduce the barriers to economic development on first nations land, increase investor certainty and enable first nations to be part of their regional economies. The FNTC will essentially fill the institutional vacuum that has prevented first nations from participating in the market economy.

It was with great pleasure that I met with the Chief Commissioner of the FNTC and heard about his vision and enthusiasm for how the commission would create practical and measurable improvements, not just a commitment of words but a translation into action.

The Address

I thank the House for the opportunity to give this speech in support of the Speech from the Throne. As I have listened to the debate over the last six days, it is clear that although we are from different parties, many of our goals for Canadians are similar. We may differ in our opinions as to the best way to accomplish these objectives, but a willingness to consider all ideas is what Canadians expect from us.

• (1100)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I congratulate the member on her election to the House.

I appreciate the member's comments about forestry. Many jobs have been lost in Northern Ontario and many working families are having difficulties right now. Many of those families and working people do not qualify for EI any more, so we would like to see a strategy on that.

My question for the member is specifically on forestry. Would the member join me in calling for a national summit on forestry in the near future to talk to all the stakeholders to see how we can improve the situation?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I also congratulate my colleague on his election to the House. Forestry is an absolutely critical concern to our community. I have many mills and much of that industry is within my riding. They have been grateful for the support that has been provided to them through the western pine beetle action plan.

I am confident that we will work together as a government to continue to deal with the issues around the forest industry in a positive way.

• (1105)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, congratulate the member on her election. I am glad she at least raised a concern about struggling industries. A lot of industries are struggling at the moment.

Although there are great words in the throne speech, everyone knows it is an outline, it is not really a book of substance. Recently the president-elect in the United States, although he is not even president yet, talked about a stimulus package for those industries. What we hear from the Conservative government, which said some things in the throne speech that made sense, is there will not be an immediate stimulus package.

Is the member willing to encourage and pressure the government to get with it? People are on unemployment, forest industries have shut down in many areas, the auto industry is in trouble as is the agriculture industry. There is a crisis now and the government cannot wait.

The previous speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, although she had the \$6 million right in terms of assistance to the beef industry, it has not been paid out. It was committed the February before last.

We need to see not only money being committed, we need to see the money on the ground before it will do any good. Will she

encourage the government to get with it, get on the game and get the money out there right now with a stimulus package?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, it would be very important to also recall that we have stimulus packages. We took proactive measures. We have decreased the GST. We have lowered business taxes for small businesses, for personal businesses and for corporations. Some of the OECD nations are now following our lead. We are in a better position.

I also bring attention to the fact that our building Canada plan is unprecedented in terms of our commitment to the infrastructure within Canada.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague from Kamloops to the House.

The pine beetle action fund that she mentioned took the government 18 months to properly figure out the application process. The government called it a crisis, yet dealt with it like it was not. For a year and a half, communities had stacked up idea after idea of economic development concepts that the government could properly fund almost instantaneously.

When the minister was questioned about this at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, he said that he had no idea that this had taken place. He asked why communities did not go back and think about something on which they could possibly work.

Is the government committed to making announcements that are followed by the actions described in those announcements in some kind of considerably less order of time than—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, after many years of inaction by the Liberal government on the western pine beetle issue, I am very proud of our government's record on this. As we speak, we have retraining of forestry workers. We have machines mulching up the supply. We have a number of measures. We have economic diversification measures happening in our small communities.

In our 30 short months of a minority government, we have done many things in aid of this crisis that the previous government had failed to do.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Scarborough Centre.

I am humbled to stand in this great hall and give thanks to the people of Etobicoke North who have given me the greatest honour of my life. I promise to serve my community with humility and to the best of my ability, as the Hon. Roy Cullen did before me. Beautiful, historical, proud Etobicoke, this is the community in which I was born and raised and in which I choose to live today.

In the 1830s John Rowntree welcomed his family to Canada with a dream of a new life, a new beginning and a real hope for the future. Ever since, Etobicoke North has welcomed people from around the world, and today it is a microcosm of the world. Here we celebrate Caribana, a celebration of Caribbean culture, Diwali, the festival of lights, and Eid, the festival of sacrifice. Here we celebrate in our churches, gurdwaras, mosques and in our beautiful Mandir, a gift to our community and to all of Canada.

The Address

We are proudly one of the most multicultural ridings in all of the country. I invite everyone to experience our diversity, gifts and richness. We rank fifth out of 308 Canadian ridings in terms of the 74% of people who are first generation Canadian born into Assyrian, Italian, Indian and Somalian communities.

Sadly, however, we do have our challenges. Almost 20% of residents are not yet citizens. They face family reunification challenges and language and job barriers. Almost 25% of our families are headed by single parents who often work two jobs just to put food on the table. Almost 20% of the riding is engaged in manufacturing, the second highest percentage for the entire country. In stark contrast, only 5% is engaged in management. We need real investment in our families and in communities, particularly during this economic slowdown.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predicts that Canada will have the second slowest rate of growth in the industrialized world. The economy must be our number one priority and we should ensure that the money starts flowing right away. We must invest in infrastructure and manufacturing to keep Canada's economic lifeblood running, to keep people employed and to protect the savings of seniors.

At the same time, we must protect our most vulnerable citizens, the 550,000 Toronto households that live below the poverty line. It is therefore prudent that we draw a lesson from the corporate world, namely, that social and environmental initiatives reap profits.

We must invest in our families as spending on our children is a sure thing. Canadian researchers calculate a 2:1 economic and social return for every dollar invested in children. American researchers find a 3:1 or 4:1 return for low-income families.

As the former vice-chair of the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, I know the face of poverty in Canada's largest city. I have seen first-hand children who gobble down breakfast because they have not eaten since lunch the day before. Investment in our families has large economic payoffs.

●(1110)

Targeted measures with clear return on investment include early childhood care and education, secondary school programs for students at risk of dropping out, increased access to university education and better foreign credential recognition.

I am tired of meeting doctors, engineers and university professors who are dying to work in their chosen fields but who are instead driving taxis and working in call centres. I am particularly discouraged as new Canadians offer direct links to global markets, and we have such a shortage of doctors, particularly in family medicine and geriatrics, that we simply cannot afford to marginalize any of our citizens.

We must also invest in the health of our seniors. There will be 7.5 million Canadians over the age of 65 by 2025, and population aging has tremendous implications for Canada. Most elderly people will not be able to pay even a fraction of the health care costs they incur, as the average hospital stay is \$7,000 and does not include cardiac or emergency care. Keeping our seniors healthy, independent and mobile and preventing and postponing disease are two of the biggest challenges we face.

As one last health point, the World Health Organization predicts that a pandemic of influenza is inevitable if not imminent, and that it will cause 2.7 to 7.4 million deaths worldwide. The economic costs are estimated at 5% of world GDP, or \$3 trillion.

We must also invest in violence reduction. We can no longer accept the status quo, the human and economic cost of children killing children or violence against families. Each assault causes unspeakable grief to families, creates instability in communities, obstructs the development of business centres and reduces trust in government. Each assault costs the economy.

Gun violence is estimated to cost \$155 billion in the United States alone each year, and the lifetime medical cost to victims is \$37,000 to \$42,000. Responding to violence diverts billions away from education, health care and social security.

Preventive measures show a good return on investment, often by several orders of magnitude. Interventions that target juvenile offenders often result in economic benefits that are more than 30 times greater than the corresponding costs.

Finally, we must invest in the environment. Reducing greenhouse gases, pollution and waste saves our planet, saves lives and banks money. We can no longer ignore climate change. It is real, it is happening now, and it may be the defining issue of our generation.

By 2100, which is within our children's lifetime, winter temperatures will soar in the Canadian north, glaciers will recede, and permafrost will melt. Scientists predict major economic, environmental and social costs. Estimating these costs is notoriously difficult, but a group of insurance companies recently put the cost at \$300 billion per year.

Scientists also predict co-benefits of reduced greenhouse gas emissions in the form of 5,000 fewer premature deaths across the country, as well as in savings of \$1 billion in connection with emergency room visits, hospital admissions and lost working days in Ontario alone.

●(1115)

In closing, I promise to champion the families of my beloved Etobicoke North and to fight hard for their issues. I promise to fight hard for Canada. I love this country.

The Address

Each time I cross the border or touch down in a plane arriving from abroad, I feel the tremendous joy of coming home. When I lived away from this country, I heard my anthem and was beckoned home.

• (1120)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague. She is the representative for my parents, so I hope she has good luck and works hard.

The member talked much about climate change. She is a new member, so she is not necessarily burdened with the legacy of her party on this particular topic. However, she must bear some responsibility for the policies and philosophies that have gone before her. I refer in particular to the hundreds of millions of dollars that left federal coffers for the support of automakers in Ontario, without any caveats or covenants whatsoever to require those automakers to produce green vehicles.

I can remember imploring the then minister of the environment, now her leader, to attach some strings to the money that was coming out of the federal government to encourage the automakers to make the cars of the future and not the cars of the past. His response to me was that he was unable and unwilling to do that.

Has the philosophy of the Liberal Party changed at all with respect to the economy and the environment? These two things need to be wedded together. They are the two things that are most critical in addressing this great problem of our generation. Any dollars, any encouragement, or any policies leaving Ottawa must require that both economic and environmental measures be buried within them, so that any conditions set forth are actually met and we do not end up in the enormous problem of a climate change disaster that was created by her party and previous governments as the record of this country.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will serve the member's parents to the best of my abilities.

I cannot speak to the past on climate change. The Liberal Party did sign Kyoto. The environment and the economy are inextricably linked, as our platform made very clear in the last election, but we really need to talk about the future. The question on climate change and what is going to be done about it should be to the government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new member for Etobicoke North on her presentation.

In her speech, my colleague touched on three issues covered in the throne speech, the first being the environment. In the throne speech, the government committed to ensuring that 90% of the energy produced in Canada is clean energy. That is a step in the right direction toward making our country a leader in sustainable development.

Then the hon. member talked about the importance of investing in infrastructure. The throne speech conveys the government's firm intention to invest in Canada's infrastructure to improve quality of life in our communities while stimulating economic growth during these hard times.

Lastly, since there are a lot of immigrants in my colleague's community, I would like to know what she thinks of the fact that the throne speech included a commitment to recognize foreign credentials. It seems to me that many of the people in her community would be interested in that. What is her position on the throne speech? Does she intend to support these three excellent measures within it?

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as a former university professor in meteorology, climatology and climate change, and as the lead author for North America on the intergovernmental panel on climate change that won the Nobel Prize, I would like to know the hon. member's baseline for reducing greenhouse gases and by how much they will be reduced. The baseline is important, and I want to know at what point it will lag what Kyoto was to achieve by 2012.

With regard to infrastructure, we need the money flowing right away. How much money is going to be invested? Who will be getting the big projects?

• (1125)

The Deputy Speaker: The time for questions and comments has expired.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin this debate, as all other members have, by thanking certain people. It is the first opportunity we have had to speak in the House since the election. I thank the residents and good people of Scarborough Centre for once again deciding in their wisdom that I am worthy to represent them in this, the 40th Parliament. I was first elected in the 35th Parliament. That is a long time ago, six elections ago. This is my sixth term. It is with humility that I thank the voters of Scarborough Centre.

I thank my volunteers as well, who were present day in and day out to help me achieve another victory. I want to thank my riding association. They were the administrative side, and they were there to help in any way possible. Last but not least, I thank my entire family, beginning with my wife Mary, who spearheaded the campaign once again. I thank my children: our daughter Irene and her husband Tony; our two grandchildren, little George and little Maria; our son Paul and his new bride Christina; and our young son Daniel. To everyone else I give my thanks, and I commit to them once again that I will be here to be their voice in my literature and to represent their views.

Before the election started and as this debate unfolds, I was asking myself what we need to do. I consulted my constituents and many people around me, knowing that this debate would unfold as soon as Parliament opened. As I have asked in the past, what is a throne speech? The other day I responded to another member by saying that a throne speech is a general overview of what the government intends to do. It contains nothing specific. That is why it is good to have a vote, but in essence we should make it a confidence vote because there is nothing specific in it.

The Address

What did I do during the campaign? I responded to what the people wanted. The people said that these are very difficult and trying times. They asked me to point out certain facts in order for them to judge. My opponents from the Conservative Party were putting out literature with pictures and inflammatory comments that I will not go into. There were statements that in essence were inaccurate. However, I say that this is a democracy. Let the people judge.

As a member for 15 years, I have accumulated a database of facts. I went back and took out the books. It was not what the member for Scarborough Centre had to say. It was not what other people had to say. It was what the media printed. It was what was on the record, records that you, Mr. Speaker, have read in the past as a member, as has everybody else. I went down the list and saw that we did inherit a \$43 billion deficit, and we did bring down the debt by almost \$60 billion, and we did reduce the debt to GDP ratio from 68.5% to 38%, which is what the Conservative Party is saying today. I am glad they are pointing it out.

As a Liberal government, we brought eight consecutive balanced budgets. Before the election, the Prime Minister was saying that we needed to have an election because Parliament was not functioning. Canadians were asking why it was not functioning. When they asked me, I would say that I knew we were having problems in committees because there were disruptions. Chairs of committees were walking out and we could not get our work done, if that was what the Prime Minister was referring to.

The government brought in legislation on, for example, crime and justice issues. My opponent was saying we blocked and blocked repeatedly. However, I pulled out my record and noticed that it was odd. I voted in favour of crime bill after crime bill. Why did they not go through? It was because Parliament was prorogued by the Prime Minister.

● (1130)

I stand up here and say, yes, we wanted to do things, but we were strapped in 1993-94. I read a beautiful statement the other day written by the former governor of the Bank of Canada David Dodge, somebody we all know. He is a very well-recognized, internationally astute economist. We have been pushing in Ontario, along with the premier and the mayors, to put money into infrastructure, which was one of our programs in 1993 after we took over. It created so many jobs and stimulated the economy. David Dodge said in London, Ontario, that it is a good time to build those bridges, build those roads which by policy we neglected in the 1990s because we were broke.

I want to repeat his words, "because we were broke". This country was unofficially bankrupt, so we had to put our house in order, get the economy rolling, and then once that was rolling, indeed, we made those investments that we committed to the people, for example, the Canada infrastructure program.

I know in my area of Scarborough Centre the decisions were made from the bottom up. They went to the then city of Scarborough and asked what were its needs. It identified those needs and we supported them in a one-third, one-third, one-third partnership.

I went down the list and I started outlining what was important and my constituents said health care. The House will recall that just before the election there was a survey that was done which asked, if an election were held today what are the three most important issues for Canadians. Number one at 79%, as very important, was health care; number two at 75%, as very important, was the economy; and, number three at 61%, as very important, was the environment. I agreed with them.

People who have known me around this honourable chamber for 15 years know I have been saying that health care is and will be the most important issue for us here in Canada.

When I listened to the auto executives in the United States the other day, I remembered, as the parliamentary secretary to industry, that we had the auto people come before our committee. Do members know what they said to us about why they were competitive here in Canada and why we had a healthy industry? It was because of health care.

We know also, and it is on the record, some of the statements from the Conservative members. If they had their way, along with Mike Harris and his group, they would privatize health care. That is not something I am saying. Those are words that were uttered from their mouths, specifically in interviews that are on the record.

I went down the list and I outlined these points to my constituents, and pointed out that the largest investment in health care, \$58 billion, was made by the Liberal government as a result of the Romanow report. Mr. Romanow said in an interview with Peter Mansbridge, that the Liberals not only met his expectations, they exceeded them. We met that commitment for Canadians. On infrastructure, as I mentioned earlier, unprecedented investments were made.

They asked me also to point out why the current Prime Minister reneged on certain commitments. I asked, what commitments? So they asked me to dig them out. One of the things they were very adamant about and they are still asking questions is a need for clarification on the in and out advertising scam from the last election. I said that I agreed with them, but the committee has been put on hold. If we believe in democracy, we will allow that to unfold and get to the bottom of it.

Canadians want to know what happened with the former member of Parliament, now deceased, Chuck Cadman. Canadians want to know why the largest tax increase on income trust at 31% was there and why seniors lost their future moneys. Canadians want to know why today the government is not putting forth the money that was allocated for infrastructure.

In 10 minutes it is really impossible to say what we want to say, but I look forward to any questions that the members might have.

● (1135)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the hon. member for his re-election again to the House.

The Address

He talked about a number of things. He mentioned infrastructure a couple of times. Surely he knows, as I know and everyone in the House knows, there is no new money for infrastructure with \$7.3 billion in tax cuts. He talked about the debt that this country is about to start accruing. Cancelling those tax cuts would be a big help in going in that direction. Tax cuts, by the way, that are for the most profitable companies in Canada, not struggling companies and not small businesses.

The hon. member clearly thinks that his party would do a much better job in government. Therefore, I would like to ask the member a very simple question. Why is he supporting the Speech from the Throne?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, we are supporting it because we made an amendment, because Canadians today cannot afford another half a billion dollars for another election, because as I said in my statement, the throne speech is a general overview of the government's intentions. It has not given us a budget. It has not given us anything specific. It would be unfair to Canadians. It would be unwise. It would be a bad example to those who are watching us. They have asked us to co-operate. I think this Liberal team is showing the willingness to co-operate, giving the opportunity to the government to bring forth specifics.

Now, on the infrastructure, if I may, the member asks why? We proved it. We have a record that speaks for itself, not a record that we made up. These are facts, not innuendoes.

Also permit to me point out, on infrastructure, in the 2005 budget, the Liberal government renewed the municipal rural infrastructure program, the Canada strategic infrastructure fund, the border infrastructure program, and the public transit capital trust. That was \$11.5 billion between 2007 and 2014, which the Conservative government unfortunately cancelled. How did we do it? We did it in a balanced way, the Liberal way.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side honour the member's time as parliamentary secretary to the minister of industry. He knows the file.

He would have read and seen on television that emissaries of the government went to Washington. I wonder what he makes of the fact, given his experience working with senior ministers of industry, effective Liberal ministers of industry, that they were unable to meet with anyone of influence in Washington? What does he make of the fact that in the United States the bailout bailouts, so-called, the economic stimulus packages, are in the percentages of GDP which, calculated by Canadian terms, would be in the billions of dollars? And if there is not an economic stimulus package delivered today to the workers who need it, the savers who need it, the pensioners who need it, in the order of billions of dollars for Canadians, what would he make of that, given his experience?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I really was not prepared for that question, but I will say that this little trip was done in such a clandestine way. This trip was for Canada, not the Conservative Party. We do not distinguish between red, blue or whatever party. We as a Liberal team, when we used to go abroad for the good of Canada, invited other members. Now we have been shut out. I do not know what the Conservatives are afraid of. I do not know what they are scared of.

As a vice-chair of the defence committee some time ago, we were invited to one meeting in that previous mandate. The Conservatives would notify us at the last minute when of course we could not make it. As a result of the minister's visit, I think he has an obligation to come back and provide a full report, given the circumstances. However, everything is done behind closed doors, as I said, in such a clandestine way that Canadians do not know.

I think for the good of the country, the Conservatives must open up the process. They must invite other party members to participate, as tradition calls for, not just single-handedly going there and us not knowing who they talked to, if they talked to anybody.

● (1140)

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Vancouver Island North.

It is a real honour to rise today to represent the people of Halton in this great place. I want to begin by thanking them for the profound trust and confidence that they have placed in me as a member of Parliament. It is a very humbling experience to know that so many friends and neighbours are counting on me to represent them here in Ottawa. They deserve strong representation in this House and I pledge to them that I will work tirelessly every day to deliver it.

I specifically want to thank the number of volunteers that I had during the election campaign who brought a lot of vigour and a lot of excitement to a hard-fought battle. Anyone who has stood in this place before knows that they would not be here but for the support of loved ones and family.

I am blessed to have grown up in Cape Breton Island, but I have chosen to make my home in Halton and that is where I raised my children. I would like to thank my family in Cape Breton and my former neighbours, teachers, employers and everyone who has extended their support and their congratulations, specifically, the Frasers, the Maccormacks, the Starzomskis, the McNeils and the Schmidts.

In Halton, I have to thank my family. I thank my husband, Dave, for all his support. Without him I know I would not be here today serving the people of Halton and our great country. I thank my sons, John Colin and Billy, for being patient, for being good boys, and for watching this today.

It is really hard being away from family and loved ones, but our families and our communities are the reason why we choose to serve our country in this way. We want to ensure that our children have the same great opportunities that we had and that Canada tomorrow is stronger and more prosperous than it is today. Like all members of this House, I recognize the privilege and the responsibility we assume as members of Parliament, and that includes the responsibility to lead.

As it has been demonstrated again in the Speech from the Throne, this government understands responsibility. Thanks to the leadership and prudent management of this government, Canada can face today's global economic uncertainties from a position of strength.

The Address

Natural resources have always been an important part of Canada's economic equation and going forward they will be key drivers of growth. These vital industries employ some 900,000 Canadians, generate close to 13% of our gross domestic product and contributed \$100 billion to Canada's trade surplus last year, yet in the face of this current economic downturn, simply having a wealth of natural resources is not enough.

We need to transform our resources into a more value-added product to keep high quality jobs here in Canada. We need to spark innovation and increase productivity. We need to do these in order to strengthen Canada's competitiveness.

Competitiveness goes hand in hand with securing a diverse and growing supply of energy and a balanced approach to tackling climate change. That is why positioning Canada as a clean energy superpower is important. We will therefore work with Canadians to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from industry in a balanced, sensible and achievable manner. We will work with Canadians to implement a North American cap and trade system with our partners. We will work with Canadians to encourage targeted investments in the most promising clean technologies, such as wind, solar, geothermal, small hydro, and carbon capture and storage.

We will work with Canadians to increase energy efficiency. We will work with Canadians to expand the production and use of renewable and alternative energy. We will create a clean electricity task force to help ensure that 90% of our electricity comes from non-emitting sources by 2020. Nuclear energy will play an important role in how we reconcile a growing demand for energy with the need to tackle climate change. Continued leadership on our nuclear priorities will further enhance Canada's energy security and help position Canada's nuclear industry for success at home and abroad.

• (1145)

At home, our government will ensure that our regulatory framework is ready to respond should the provinces choose to advance new nuclear projects.

Effective and efficient regulations for large resource projects are critical for Canada's competitiveness and environmental leadership. Through initiatives such as the Major Projects Management Office, or MPMO, we are improving Canada's regulatory system.

Ensuring a more effective approach for northern research projects, including pipelines, is a critical next step. This is all about promoting responsible development of the Arctic and asserting Canada's sovereignty. Our commitment to support Arctic research reinforces these objectives.

Sound regulation is also essential in our mining sector as it faces greater competition and lower commodity prices. Finding new resources and developing and implementing the technologies that will allow them to be extracted in ways that are both cost effective and environmentally effective will require significant effort.

Our government is committed to working with the mining sector to further enhance Canada's already strong investment climate. We are delivering on our commitment to provide \$100 million over five years to the geomapping for energy and minerals program to seek out new resources. We are committed to extending the super flow-through share incentive for mining exploration.

Our government is equally committed to a healthy forest sector, which is so important to so many communities and Canadians across this country. From natural disasters such as the mountain pine beetle infestation in the west and a sharp downturn in the U.S. market, to a volatile currency and shifting market preferences, our forest industry is facing serious challenges. We will work with the industry as it goes through this period of restructuring.

We will continue to support its efforts to create new products, convert mills to biomass and expand our markets overseas. Our \$1 billion community development trust is helping resource communities diversify their economic bases.

Canada's natural resources belong to all Canadians. The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that Canadians gain the maximum benefits from these resources. This requires that attention be given to immediate pressures arising from the current economic downturn as well as longer term challenges posed by a highly competitive global marketplace.

That is precisely what the government is doing. We will continue to work with Canadians to ensure that our resource sectors are positioned to emerge from today's global downturn stronger, cleaner and more prosperous.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her elevation to cabinet as well as her election in the last campaign.

No doubt this is a very difficult file and a very daunting challenge for her.

It is clear that many Canadians in the past couple of months have been extremely concerned about the cost of energy prices, most important, the sudden dramatic rise in the cost of gasoline and now home heating fuel, which impacts electricity.

As we head into a time of deflation, people are losing their jobs and they are also seeing higher costs for energy, particularly truckers in western Canada with respect to diesel fuel. They also have home heating concerns as well.

What contingencies, what plans and discussions does the government have to address this? I heard nothing in the minister's speech that addressed one of the most fundamental issues confronting Canadians today, higher energy costs at a time when they are losing their jobs. What does the minister have to say about that? What plan does the government have, if any?

The Address

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, when we commenced on the election campaign at the beginning of September and when we went door-to-door, one thing Canadians told us, and very vocally, was the fact that they were concerned about oil and gas prices. The concern at the time, of course, was that the prices were so high and people wondered how they could afford to put gas in their cars.

As we went along in the election, it became clear that with the expected downturn, the economic global uncertainty and with gas prices going down, the volatility of the issue was of concern to Canadians.

Our government strongly believes we need to secure our energy future in order to ensure we have long-term economic growth. We take our responsibility as an emerging super-power in energy very seriously.

In the Speech from the Throne we laid out our intention to ensure that 90% of Canada's electricity would be produced by non-emitting sources such as hydro, nuclear, clean coal or wind power by 2020. We know we need to meet the challenges associated with climate change.

In the Speech from the Throne we also laid out our commitment to ensure that Canada's regulatory framework would be ready to respond should the provinces choose to advance new nuclear projects.

We are looking at the electricity situation. More specifically, we are also taking a look at ensuring our vast natural energy resources keep providing an important source of wealth and jobs for Canadians.

As well, it is important to note that protecting Canadian consumers is a top priority of the government.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the minister on her appointment. She says she is very concerned about the forestry industry, and understandably so, and that it should focus more on secondary and tertiary processing.

I have some questions for her regarding the fact that thousands of jobs have been lost—which is nothing new; this has been going on for years.

Why does the government not give businesses any real support? Why does the government not grant loans and loan guarantees, so that businesses can focus more on secondary and tertiary processing? Why does the government not give refundable tax credits to companies that invest in research and development? We know that it takes a long time to recover research and development costs. These are promising solutions. Does the minister intend to show that she has vision and invest in these two projects?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we truly understand that workers and their families in the forestry community are facing challenging times. We know that when a mill closes, it affects every corner of the community.

In the Speech from the Throne we have committed to helping this industry by investing in innovation and creating market opportunities.

We understand the anxiety that communities are facing. However, our government has been ahead of the curve and we have a comprehensive plan to ensure the long-term success of the industry.

We are investing in innovation to make the mills more competitive. We are supporting the market development to create the opportunities for people to sell into other markets. We are reducing corporate taxes to keep the jobs in Canada.

We are also supporting the environmental leadership shown by Canadian companies in this industry and we are ensuring adequate credit remains available for Canadian business.

Finally, we have launched a rail review to ensure our products can get to the market.

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am back. I was here for the 35th, 36th, 37th and 38th Parliaments and now I am back for the 40th. I missed the last Parliament. It feels very good to be back. I had a long apprenticeship on the opposition benches and now I am back with the government.

I want to thank the people of Vancouver Island North, my campaign team, my family and everyone back home who had so much to do with keeping the Conservative Party label and my campaign in full mode for a long period of time. It might have seemed short to people sitting here, but when one is anxious to get back and join the House of Commons, 30 months or so is a long period of time.

I recognize many members of the House, but there are many that I do not recognize. There have been two elections in the meantime and maybe one-third of the membership here is different. I look forward to meeting some of them. I notice that three members in the House of Commons share my last name. I was alone for four Parliaments. I have introduced myself and it is very interesting to find out that we are from three different parties and three different parts of the country. It just goes to show the Scottish diaspora carries on unabated across Canada and we continue to make a valuable contribution.

The riding of Vancouver Island North is the north half of Vancouver Island and the adjacent coastline. It is one of the biggest ridings in Canada. It has many challenges geographically and physically from a transportation standpoint. The riding consists of mountains, lakes, ocean and year-round golf. It is a very special place.

Parts of the riding are very resource dependent. It is the wood basket for the coast. It has a very active fishing industry. Port Hardy is the largest groundfish port in the province. On the west coast, there is a very large fishing fleet out of that community, Campbell River and Comox. It has an active mining sector and tourism sector.

The Address

Comox air force base is a very significant DND asset in the country. Of course there are a lot of retirees. The Comox Valley, as an entity, where about 60% of the population of the riding resides, has the third oldest age demographic in Canada because it is such an attractive place for seniors. It is well connected to the Canadian air traffic transportation network, with Comox airport, Campbell River and Port Hardy all tied in with the grid for Canada.

Also, 23 first nations are in the riding. It is very significant in my portfolio. Those first nations are a very important dynamic within the riding. The accomplishments of the government in the 39th Parliament did not go unnoticed. I received endorsements in my riding from first nations. I enjoyed working with them, and continue to do so.

They are very impressed with the accomplishments. Specifically, the ones most often mentioned are the residential schools settlement and the apology, the action we have taken on specific land claims and, specific to British Columbia, the acceptance of the common table negotiations involved with the B.C. treaty process.

● (1155)

Those will act as a segue to talk about the Speech from the Throne. The Speech from the Throne had two significant and overarching statements regarding aboriginal affairs and northern development. I was pleased to listen to the comments of the Minister of Natural Resources prior to my speaking where she talked about the Arctic, northern development, clean energy, sovereignty and other resource issues and northern issues that are important.

The throne speech talked about first nations education and our northern strategy. The government is working to ensure aboriginal peoples have access to the same educational opportunities as other Canadians. We are working to improve education in partnership with the provinces and the first nations communities. We are committed to improving educational outcomes for aboriginal people. It is a shared responsibility in which governments, communities, educators, families and students all have a role to play.

We believe that first nations students deserve an education system that will encourage them to stay in school, graduate and give them the skills they need to enter the labour market successfully and share fully in Canada's economic opportunity.

That is why we invested in a new reforming first nations education initiative that sets the long-term foundation for improvements in first nations education. We are investing \$268 million over five years and ongoing funding of \$75 million in subsequent years. This is for the first nations student success program and for the education partnership program. This funding is over and above existing investments in education of \$1.7 billion in 2008-09.

I have a couple of examples. Last year we signed a memorandum of understanding with the New Brunswick first nations and the Province of New Brunswick to improve educational outcomes of first nations students in band and provincially-operated schools in that province. Last November, the First Nations jurisdiction over education in British Columbia act came into effect in B.C. which has led to negotiations with 13 first nations.

We continue to make major investments to support a wide range of school infrastructure projects, ranging from study and design,

renovation, minor repairs and construction, to operation and maintenance. Since April 2006, we have completed 9 new schools and renovations to 18 schools. We have 67 ongoing school projects, 13 are at the design stage, 9 in new construction and 45 in renovations.

We have seen unprecedented efforts from our government toward the north. We have been continuously committed to help the region realize its true potential as a healthy and prosperous region within a strong and sovereign country. The northern strategy is a comprehensive and integrated vision for a new north built on four important priorities: strengthening sovereignty, protecting our environmental heritage, promoting economic and social development, and improving and devolving governance so that northerners have greater control over their destinies.

● (1200)

From the Speech from the Throne to budget 2008, our government announced concrete measures to implement that vision, including: geological mapping to enhanced economic development; the expansion of the Nahanni National Park; construction of a deep water port in Nanisivik and a commercial harbour in Pangnirtung; the expansion of the Canadian Rangers; investments in polar year projects, in housing and in improving living conditions; and the creation of a Canadian Forces Arctic training centre in Nunavut, in Resolute Bay.

Perhaps the signature of the government's legacy in the north is the investments in a new polar class icebreaker to replace the Canadian Coast Guard ship, *Louis St. Laurent*, and plans to build a world-class, high Arctic research station at the cutting edge of Arctic science.

We are committed to the north and northerners and we will continue to work with the three territories to ensure northerners are full partners and active decision makers in the future of the new north.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will begin by congratulating you on your new position and my hon. colleague for his new role as parliamentary secretary.

Given the fact that it is the first day that we are back in the House since the terrorist attack that took place yesterday in Mumbai, India, I would like to express our profound horror, shock and dismay and to tell the people of India and the victims that our solidarity and our prayers are with them.

Would my hon. colleague share his comments on this issue and would he be willing to speak to his House leader to see if there is a possibility of having a moment of silence today?

The Address

We have found out that Canadians may also have been taken and are unaccounted for. This is a terrible tragedy around the world and we must show our solidarity.

I would invite my hon. colleague to make comments and to speak to the House leader about a moment of silence today.

• (1205)

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments. The Prime Minister did condemn the attacks today. I do join in the sense of outrage over what has occurred.

We do know that some Canadians are involved but that, in itself, is not the entire question. We have a humanitarian issue here and one that displays the worst aspects of terrorism and getting away from the rule of law, away from all of the values that Canadians value so much.

Yes, it is most appropriate that we take a non-partisan approach in the House. I certainly will be talking with my colleagues and with the party officials. I believe this is on everybody's radar and everybody's agenda today.

I congratulate the member for making this top of mind for everybody. It joins us all together in a common feeling. I know that many people are in very high emotional distress. They have had major losses at this time and our collective hearts go out to them.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, congratulations to the hon. member on his re-election.

I have heard a lot of talk about the expansion in the north and military spending along those lines, but the government cannot find the money to build one school for the children of Attawapiskat. I am wondering if the hon. member could explain that, please.

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the school in Attawapiskat has been in the news quite a bit because the member of Parliament from that riding has made this a very significant issue.

Officials from Health Canada were at the school in June of this year and they gave the school a clean bill of health. We are removing the environmental hazard, which is actually not where the current elementary school is located. That is happening this year. That is an approximately \$1 million expenditure being carried out by the first nation. That is its responsibility.

Efforts are ongoing to ensure that school, along with all other institutions and schools in the Ontario region, are on some kind of schedule for capital spending. The reality is that at the current time that school is considered safe and there are—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to wish you all the best in your new position.

I am going to split my time with the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

This is my first speech since the throne speech and I would like, of course, to thank the people of my riding for electing me. I also

want to point out that when the voters were making their decision, they had to assess the future performance of the parties and candidates they were choosing. The Quebeckers in my riding made no mistake, as in most of Quebec, where 49 members of the Bloc Québécois were elected.

The Conservatives have produced a Speech from the Throne that is completely out of touch with what is going on in Quebec. It seems to be directed at the rest of Canada with no consideration for the needs and issues clearly expressed by Quebeckers during the election campaign.

It is all the more amazing, therefore, to see that this throne speech has the support of the Liberal Party of Canada. It is the same old bunch of federalists. They insist on their highly centralizing positions that are entirely contrary to what Quebec wants and could benefit from.

For example, the Conservative government is persisting with its cuts to culture and to the economic development agencies, even though the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie said during the election campaign that there would be other programs to replace the ones that were eliminated. Now the axe has fallen and there are no other programs. The new Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages has confirmed that there will not be any programs to offset the cuts. The Conservatives say that reducing Quebec's cultural presence on world markets suits them just fine and they can live with that. In their view, culture is a commodity like any other. There is a clear disconnect on this between the views of Quebeckers and the views of Canadians, and that is one of the reasons why we will oppose the throne speech.

Finally, the Conservatives are still insisting on imposing regressive legislation against young offenders and on dismantling the firearms registry. Over the years, we have developed a rehabilitation system for young offenders in Quebec that works very well. Our rehabilitation rates are higher than in the rest of Canada. This throne speech just shows the right-wing Conservative steamroller still barreling along in the same direction and in the same spirit we saw at their convention in Winnipeg. It is an approach based more on punishing than rehabilitating. That too is contrary to the wishes of Quebeckers.

The Conservatives are insisting on creating a federal securities commission. Here too, they are acting contrary to the entire consensus in Quebec, including both the political parties and the economic experts. If I were a Conservative member from Quebec, I would not be very proud of having an approach like this, which is neither wanted nor accepted in Quebec, as we have seen over the last few years. The position of Quebeckers is very clear. Here too, there is a disconnect between what the Conservatives want and what Quebeckers want.

The Address

Next, the speech does not even contain the word Kyoto. Today, a certain approach should be in place, at a time when we are faced with a financial crisis, an economic crisis: there must be sustainable development solutions. In this connection, the Conservatives continue to draw a clear line between economic development on the one hand and environmental issues on the other. Yet we know that they cannot be separated. Quebeckers figured that out a long time ago. The people of Quebec view sustainable development as the way of the future. They would have expected to see some indication in the throne speech that the Conservatives got the message, especially since they are now really isolated. Even the Americans, with the election of a new president, will move far away from the approach they had in the Bush years. The Australians have changed governments, and with it their attitude to this subject. Soon Canada will be the only one left with this restrictive and regressive approach of not requiring development to be sustainable, and of continuing to view economic development and environmental issues as opposites rather than parts of the same movement, as they must be.

The speech also announces another reduction to the political weight of Quebec; constituencies will be added and the result will be that the number of Quebec members compared to the whole of Canada will be reduced.

• (1210)

This intention is repeated, yet it has no support whatsoever in Quebec. We can see that there are a great many points on which there are very marked distinctions between the approach of the Conservative Party, with the backing of the Liberal Party of Canada, and the approach of the people of Quebec, which is transmitted to this House by the Bloc Québécois members. Quebeckers have made their wishes very clear. In six elections in a row, they have shown that they would prefer to have a party like the Bloc Québécois represent them, even if they knew from the start that it would be in opposition. They are therefore certain that the positions defended before, during, and after the election will remain unchanged and that the Bloc Québécois members will be focused on the development and defence of the interests of Quebec and the promotion of sovereignty.

The government also promised to interfere more in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction, like health and education. There is nothing in the Speech from the Throne about the fiscal imbalance or education transfers. It has been 14 years now since the Liberal government made cuts to this sector, and the Conservative government is turning a blind eye. It is going down the same path and is not fixing the situation. This has a huge impact, because knowledge is very important to face the current economic crisis and the challenge of a world economy, and Quebec needs the post-secondary education transfers it should be receiving. But this was not in the speech.

The government also clearly announced that it wants to support the development of nuclear energy and continue unrestricted military spending. This goes completely against what Quebeckers want. Quebeckers are against the development of nuclear energy because other clean energies or alternative energies can be developed, and they do not want us to go in that direction.

As for military spending, yesterday we saw the report assessing the mission in Afghanistan. It is going nowhere. We are up against

some difficult situations, and there is not much progress being made. But it is clear that we could have used this money and invested it much more constructively. I think the way the mission has been run clearly shows that the Conservative government, which decided to purchase equipment without having foreign affairs or defence policies, must now face the facts. It purchased military equipment without first thinking about what was needed. The government needs to go back to the drawing board, and there was no indication of that either in the throne speech. Furthermore, the government is repeating the same promise about federal spending power, with a formula that was rejected by Quebec.

This Speech from the Throne does not take into account the Quebec nation, or the interests and values of Quebeckers. There is no sign of the spirit of openness we were hoping for. I think Quebeckers sent a very clear message during the last election—as we saw, over 70% of the population voted for a party other than the government—and most of the members here proposed an approach very different from the one taken by the Conservative government. Quebec saw a decline in Conservative votes and a decrease in the number of members, but in the end, the Conservatives did not seem to get the message. Naturally, Quebec will eventually draw its own conclusions. Whether we have a federal government that is Conservative or Liberal, Quebec never wins. It is never given enough of a say, because the federal government's priorities are never the same as Quebec's priorities. Once again, this is true of this throne speech, and I hope Quebeckers will begin electing many sovereignists, both in Quebec and in Ottawa. The best way to defend the interests of Quebec at this time, and this is clearly what Quebeckers chose, is to elect a large majority of Bloc Québécois members. I hope Quebeckers will choose a sovereignist government in Quebec. That way they will have the best team to defend the interests of Quebec, until sovereignty is achieved.

I understand why Quebeckers elected members of the Bloc. They predicted that the Conservative government would show no openness towards the priorities of Quebec.

• (1215)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. You are the member for Victoria and you are also bilingual. It is a pleasure for a Quebecker like me to see a bilingual woman heading the business of the House. We are very proud of your appointment, Madam Speaker.

It has been two years since the Quebec nation was recognized in this House and, with the outcome of this election, it must be said that our government's policy of open federalism is getting results. During his speech, my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet commented on this. On the one hand, we can see that more Quebeckers are responding positively to the federalist policy being put forward and, on the other hand, that fewer Quebeckers are responding positively to the Bloc's restrictive ideology and lack of pragmatism.

I have a question for my colleague. I would like to ask him why he is not supporting the Speech from the Throne when it contains three concrete examples of open federalism.

The Address

First, we want to limit federal spending power, which is one of Quebec's traditional requests, notably in areas of exclusive jurisdiction. We want to protect copyright, which is extremely important for culture, and we want to remove tariff barriers so that our businesses can engage in trade. We have outlined concrete measures for the environment and we want to invest in infrastructure.

How can my colleague vote against a Speech from the Throne that is advantageous for Quebec, risk plunging the country into another election and ignore Quebec's best interests?

•(1220)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Paul Crête: Madam Speaker, thank you for saying the name of my riding correctly. My colleague was talking about Montmagny—L'Islet, but Kamouraska and Rivière-du-Loup also contributed to my victory during the most recent election campaign.

My colleague began by talking about recognition of the Quebec nation, which I feel was a major issue during the latest election. Quebecers realized that, although the Conservative Party recognized the Quebec nation, that recognition lacked substance, would only ever be symbolic, and would never produce concrete results.

When it comes to the Quebec nation's distinct language and characteristics, concrete actions could be taken to give Quebec more powers. In terms of spending power, the proposed formula—the one promised in the previous throne speech—is not what Quebecers want. Quebecers agree that this is not the kind of formula they want.

With respect to tariff barriers, without Quebec, there would never have been a free trade agreement with the United States. The sovereignists were the ones who pushed that agenda forward. We have always been in favour of doing things that way. We want open markets. We want to have our own country and make 100% of our own laws with the taxes we pay. That has always been our election platform, and our platform has earned us six majority mandates in Canada's Parliament.

In my opinion, Quebecers now have proof that, in light of the Conservatives' throne speech, the only ones looking out for their interests are the members of the Bloc Québécois.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank you and I extend my congratulations.

[*English*]

You are doing a great job.

During my comments on the throne speech, I went to great lengths to outline how the people really in need were not helped at all. Canada is in a crisis. When I went door to door during the recent election campaign people were very worried. I challenged all Canadians, all 33 million of them, whether there was a single one of them that was given any comfort by the throne speech in their time of crisis. I received zero replies, not a single Canadian out of 33 million.

Throne speeches can be somewhat vague. What enhances this worry for me is that in the economic statement that is to come later

today there still will be no major prescriptions outlined. The minister said that he will only be making a statement and he will wait until next year to do something.

Does the member also sense that those people who are seeing their pensions and RRSPs disappear, those people who are worried that their parents will be able to survive on a fixed income, those people who are losing their jobs, those people who are losing their homes are terrified—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry. The hon. member's flattering comments went to my head. I forgot to say that it was just a very short question. The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Madam Speaker, I realize that a very brief answer is in order. I will just say that this week the Bloc Québécois presented some very concrete proposals to stimulate the economy and we hope that the Conservative government will act on them. Unfortunately, thus far it has indicated that it wants to put things off until the next budget, which would be very harmful. In my opinion, it would be better to deal with economic development than strike a blow to democracy, given what we have heard about the funding of political parties.

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Before doing so, I would like to take this first opportunity to send a warm thank you to the voters of Châteauguay—Saint-Constant for their continued trust. They gave me a very strong mandate with a margin of 15,000 votes. I thank them.

Their trust is an honour. I will proudly represent every single citizen in my riding during this 40th Parliament. I will defend their interests and the consensus of the Quebec nation. Thank you again to all. Congratulations, Madam Speaker, on your appointment.

For several weeks we have been tracking the serious global financial crisis which, sooner or later, will affect the businesses and citizens in our regions. Having seen what is being done elsewhere in the world to counter this global recession, people expect the federal government to play a decisive role in supporting them and getting the economy back on track as soon as possible.

In my opinion, when we talk about this central role, we need to keep in mind that a government is not a business. A government exists to serve and protect the people. It is there to prevent people from suffering needlessly from this widespread financial crisis.

As I listened to the broad statements in the throne speech on November 19, I was expecting that the government would take action on the economy to help people get through these difficult times. I believed it would act in the best interests of the people. But, sadly, people are going to have to be patient and bite the bullet.

The Address

My leader, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, took the words right out of my mouth when he described the throne speech as insensitive. The speech is particularly insensitive because it all but ignores the poorest members of our society. And I am not even talking about how the consensuses of the Quebec nation are simply ignored. This speech is insensitive, all the more so because of the many important issues it fails to address, including seniors. Not only do our seniors continue to be deprived of government pension money that is owed them, but they are left out of the throne speech.

People who spent their whole lives saving for their retirement are worried today when they see their savings threatened by the global financial crisis. What is the government proposing to do to carry out its fundamental duty to protect our seniors? Nothing. Not one word.

The government may turn its back on seniors, but the Bloc Québécois and I will not, because we understand the urgent needs that seniors and their associations shared with us when we toured Quebec during the summer and fall of 2007. We got a very clear message: seniors have become impoverished in the past decade. Even though pensions and the guaranteed income supplement have generally increased in step with the consumer price index, it does not reflect the real circumstances in which pensioners and GIS recipients live.

In fact, the cost of living for seniors tends to be affected more by the cost of drugs, health care services and housing. In order to establish an acceptable quality of life for our seniors and to restore their dignity, the Bloc Québécois developed four important approaches that were included in Bill C-490: increase by \$110 per month the amount of the guaranteed income supplement; continue paying the benefits, for a period of six months, to a surviving spouse; automatically enrol people over 65 who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement; and ensure full retroactive payment of the guaranteed income supplement for all those who were shortchanged.

Not only will we continue to defend with equal fervour our seniors' legitimate demands to improve their quality of life, but we are also thinking of those who have been cheated by their pension funds. Clearly, we should raise the age limit from 71 to 73 for converting RRSPs and registered pension plans into taxable annuities and RRIFs.

I said earlier that I was disappointed by the direction taken in the throne speech and total silence regarding protection of the most vulnerable. My colleagues and my constituents are well aware of the great interest I take in all matters of justice, and especially social justice. One thing is clear and I think it was quite deliberate: the major omissions are all social issues.

•(1225)

I note that apart from seniors, the glaring omissions in this throne speech concern women, people with inadequate housing, older workers, the unemployed, the cultural industry, francophones outside Quebec, students and others in the education system who are waiting for \$800 million to be reinvested to remedy the fiscal imbalance, and non-profit economic development organizations.

This is certainly not mere coincidence. I am sad to say that I see once again the same groups of people that were ignored by the

Conservative government in the last Parliament. It is quite simply disheartening.

I would also add that it is not just the most disadvantaged people who are bearing the cost of the Conservative government's insensitivity. There are consensuses in the Quebec nation that have again been ignored in this throne speech. They alone could provide the subject for a lengthy speech, but I will simply name those I find most urgent.

First, there are the cuts to culture and to economic development organizations. In Quebec, the consensus is that culture is one of the fundamental pillars of our identity and must be protected.

Second, there are the repressive laws to be applied to young offenders. In Quebec, the consensus is that we focus on rehabilitation and that our system is working well, since we have one of the lowest crime rates in North America. Punishment instead of prevention, to reduce crime, is absolutely not acceptable.

Third, there is the creation of a federal securities commission. In Quebec, the consensus is that we already have our own and it is fine that way.

Fourth, there is the fact that the Kyoto protocol is not mentioned. In Quebec, the consensus is that we have chosen the Kyoto protocol route, and not some sort of compromise or inaction.

Finally, there is the rejection of our own affirmation by reducing Quebec's political weight in Parliament and creating new intrusions into areas under Quebec's jurisdiction. In Quebec, the consensus is that we are in the best position to define our needs, and that affirming our identity in our institutions is necessary if we want our culture to be able to survive.

There are many other instances of insensitivity that my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois have discussed at length in their speeches, to demonstrate the point to which the consensuses in Quebec are still being jeopardized by this government.

I will close by saying that I, with all the Bloc members, will not be supporting this throne speech, for all of the reasons I have stated.

•(1230)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was delighted that the member referred to the lack of mention of culture in the throne speech. The devastating cuts to cultural programs cost the Conservatives a majority government and yet there is no mention of arts and culture in the throne speech. They just did not listen to the public. They did not reinstate those programs. I would like to ask the member if she has any confidence in the fact that they did not listen.

The Address

It is embarrassing. The new Minister of Canadian Heritage has been terribly briefed. He suggested that the Conservatives were increasing support for cultural programs. He insinuated that they had not cut some major programs in the area of arts and culture. That sham was exposed by *The Globe and Mail* quite some time ago. The minister should be honest, instead of saying that they did not make that negative point on culture. He is suggesting that the thousands of Quebecers who marched in the streets and the half a million people who visited that website are wrong and that he is right.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

The issue of culture is vital for the Quebec people, and they have taken to the streets to condemn all of these cuts. Quebecers feel that culture is fundamental. Culture is the soul of our nation, it is our identity. Yet the Conservatives have inexplicably made draconian cuts to culture. Everyone has asked for explanations, asked about the reasoning and the need behind the cuts. No one has yet dared to answer and, when asked for information, the Minister of Canadian Heritage in the previous Parliament refused to give an explanation as to why the cuts were necessary.

Culture is not only our identity in Quebec, it is also an important economic engine. Everyone knows that Quebec culture is known around the world. It is possibly the most widespread of all Canadian culture. Think about Cirque du Soleil, Céline Dion and all of the people who make an incredible mark through their innovation and genius. Think about cinema and writers. The Conservatives made brutal cuts, and I think that the people of Quebec have made it quite obvious that they will not accept that kind of treatment and that they will continue to refuse to allow anyone to trample their identity, their culture and their nation.

• (1235)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, first of all I would like to thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois and all her colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, an opposition party that is really close to the New Democrats when it comes to government priorities.

Could the hon. member tell me what exactly the Bloc's demands are as far as this economic crisis is concerned?

For us, they are investment in infrastructure programs, social issues such as health, unemployment and so on, and innovation programs, and the protection of consumer rights as well. That is our position.

Now what, exactly, are the Bloc members' demands?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant has just 50 seconds for her reply.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

In fact, I must rectify something in her preamble, where she said the Bloc was very close to the NDP. We most certainly need to clarify that a little. We represent the people of Quebec and the nation of Quebec, but we do not share the centralist views of the NDP. What we want is to regain our power, while the NDP wants to

centralize power, and this is really the total opposite of our fundamental positions.

Since my allotted time is coming to an end, I will close with this: on the economic level alone, as far as our manufacturing and forestry sectors are concerned, we must really call for major investments. As I said in my speech, we of course are calling for all of the suffering disadvantaged and marginal members of society to be given proper support in this Speech from the Throne.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kitchener Centre.

• (1240)

[Translation]

I am proud to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

[English]

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, I am proud to rise today to speak in favour of the passage of the reply to the Speech from the Throne.

First, I extend my thanks to the constituents from Souris—Moose Mountain, those who were responsible for electing me and getting me back into the House of Commons for the third term. I thank my family, my wife Sally, in particular, who stood with me throughout the campaign. I appreciate all the effort that was made on my behalf.

Both my province of Saskatchewan and Canada at large have made some solid economic gains in the past few years. We wish to continue to build upon that and the momentum we have created in the years to come.

Our government is mindful of the challenges faced by Canadians and their families in this time of economic uncertainty. I think of the people with small businesses, farmers, seniors, workers and families. I am sure if we work together, we can preserve their jobs and savings and come through stronger after these times than before we entered into them.

I also think of the first nations communities. I have seven reserves in my riding. We must strive to improve the educational success of our aboriginal young people. Preparing for the future means taking the necessary steps to create the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world. That is precisely what our government is doing.

In times of economic prosperity or uncertainty, it is more important than ever for Canadians to acquire skills and knowledge. In the Speech from the Throne our government made a commitment to strengthen Canada's workforce by continuing to support student financial assistance. To that effect, we have increased post-secondary education funding by 40%. We are also helping students through our new, income-tested student loan repayment assistance plan to ensure that no more than 20% of any borrower's income will go toward repaying the loan.

The Address

In budget 2008 our government introduced a new Canada student grant program that would provide students from low-income and middle-income families with cash assistance each month of \$250 and \$100, respectively. Starting next year, the new grant is expected to help 245,000 students for the first year.

The Speech from the Throne also reiterated our government's commitment to take measures to encourage skilled trades and apprenticeships. We have a number of programs in relation to that. The Speech from the Throne also emphasizes our government's commitment to work with provinces to remove barriers to internal trade, investment and labour mobility by 2010. We want to be sure that Canadians can move from province to province to ensure their skills and abilities can be used wherever they are required.

As I mentioned earlier, an important source of untapped potential in Canada lies within our aboriginal communities. Close to 16,000 aboriginal people are taking advantage of the aboriginal skills and employment partnership program, which helps them receive trades training and secure sustainable skilled jobs in the north and across Canada.

Our government has also committed significant funding over six years for new labour market agreements with the provinces to help address the gap in labour market programming for those who do not currently qualify for training under the employment insurance program.

With certain economic challenges ahead, our government recognizes that many workers may be forced to leave their jobs as a result of the economic downturn. Our government will support these workers facing transition and we will be there for them in the time of need.

We want to support Canadians in difficult times because our economy is only as strong as our workers and their families. The Prime Minister has stated that governments have a duty to help families and communities bridge the gap between a downturn and recovery.

That is why in January 2008 the Prime Minister announced a \$1 billion fund for the community development trust, which supports a wide variety of initiatives such as job training and skills development to create opportunities for affected workers, community transition plans that foster economic development and create new jobs and infrastructure development that stimulates economic diversification.

To help older workers transition into new job opportunities, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development introduced the targeted initiative for older workers program to help unemployed older workers in the most vulnerable communities. We must help all Canadians participate.

Let me now turn to breaking down the barriers that prevent Canadians from reaching their full potential.

Canada is built upon a promise of opportunity and a willingness to work hard to secure a better life. That promise should be kept alive. It gives us hope.

By breaking down barriers to equal opportunity within the workplace, the Canadian economy will become even stronger and

more competitive. We continue our work in this regard through our tools for fairness in the workplace, the Employment Equity Act, the racism-free workplace strategy and our federal labour standards that establish minimum conditions of employment for employees and for many employers, helping them to compete on more equal footing with other businesses.

We can find better ways to reconcile work with our other responsibilities in life and we will. A new model of labour standards must take this into account. To help families with children balance work and family life, our government introduced the universal child care plan. This plan provides parents with more choices in deciding what is best for their children.

Through our universal child care benefit, transfers to the provinces and territories and child-related tax credits, we are making historic investments that benefit families with children, mostly helping low income and modest income families. In fact, our investments amount to the single largest investments in child care in the history of Canada, three times more than the previous Liberal government had invested. Our universal child care benefit assists 1.5 million families and about two million children per year.

For the average family, this benefit, together with the child care expense deduction, offsets well over one-third of the cost of non-parental child care. The combined impact of these measures is even greater for one parent families. The universal child care benefit program has lifted an estimated 24,000 families with about 55,000 children out of the low income bracket.

With our significant funding for the creation of child care spaces, the provinces and territories have announced the creation of over 60,000 new child care spaces since March of last year. We will continue to work co-operatively with provinces to create daycare spaces and give parents what they have asked for: real choice in child care.

The Speech from the Throne reiterated our government's commitment to extend the homelessness partnering strategy and help more Canadians find affordable housing. Accordingly our government has renewed federal housing and homelessness programs at current levels for five years until March 31, 2014. This has been well received.

In helping to keep Canadians safe, the government is committed to preventing violence in the workplace. The violence prevention regulations that apply to workers in private and public federally regulated workplaces are now in force.

The Address

The Speech from the Throne also highlighted the need for our government to review all program spending carefully to ensure program spending would be effective and in line with Canadian priorities. Canadian taxpayers expect modern and cost effective services responsive to their individual needs. Through Service Canada, we continue to improve the access of citizens to a full range of government information, programs and services. We will continue to encourage innovation in service excellence while focusing on efficiency and results.

Once again, I reiterate the great honour and privilege it is to serve my constituents in this House. I believe I will live up to their expectations and I will do the best I can to represent them. I trust we will emerge from these uncertain times better, stronger and more able than we were before we entered.

• (1245)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a delight to see you in the chair. I know you will do a wonderful job for the House.

My colleague and I have not had a chance to chat yet, but I am the critic for human resources for the Liberal Party and I know he is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. I am sure we will get to know each other on committee.

I hope the first order of business that our committee will undertake will be a continuation of a study that we left off with when the last Parliament ended, which is a study of poverty in Canada. The government, as I am sure most people know, has an appalling record when it comes to dealing with poverty in Canada.

He talks about the universal child care benefit. Every serious poverty organization and advocacy group in Canada have said to turn that into a child tax benefit. The Association of Food Banks last week indicated that they had never had so many working people visiting food banks.

Will the government get serious? Will we have a poverty reduction strategy such as England, Ireland, the Scandinavian countries, Australia and like Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and even Nova Scotia? When is the government going to get serious about reducing poverty in our country?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his opening kind comments and remarks. I look forward to meeting him in our committee and working with him and others to see how we can address the issues that face us. Homelessness, housing and poverty are a matter of concern, particularly in difficult times.

I can assure the member that we will be looking at ways to meet the needs are out there through the employment insurance program, improvements to the universal child care benefit program, the child tax credit and the working income tax benefit.

I also remind the member that we have dedicated more funds to homelessness and bringing people through the transition in the housing initiative than any other government in history. We have just announced that we will ensure that there is funding of \$387 million for a period of five years for a total of \$1.9 billion to address those two issues alone.

It seems to me if one has a place to stay, a house, a roof over their head, a bed to sleep on, food on their table, they can progress to what they can become.

I am looking forward to working with the member to see what we can do in this area.

• (1250)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I, too, want to add my congratulations to your appointment as Acting Speaker in the House and appreciate the work you are doing.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary about an aspect of his speech that was glaringly absent and shockingly missing, as it was with respect to the Speech from the Throne. It has to do with people with disabilities for whom he has responsibility.

In his position as parliamentary secretary, he will know that people with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty. Fifty-five per cent of Canadians with disabilities are unemployed. That rate rises to 75% among women. Two million Canadians do not have the aids and supports they need to work and to participate equally in their communities.

The government has to begin to do something.

First, does the parliamentary secretary have any kind of sense of how the government will advance quickly toward the ratification of the UN convention? Second, will he do something he refused to do in the last Parliament, which is to work with us to ensure there is a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Human Resources to deal specifically with the concerns of people with disabilities?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Madam Speaker, we look forward to receiving whatever input the member and others are prepared to make in this regard. There is no doubt that persons with disabilities need to be regarded in a particular way to help them become what they can be and integrate them into the workforce.

We have put a number of programs together to that end. We are going to improve the registered disability savings program to make it easier for persons with disabilities to access money that has been transferred from unused retirement savings plans. We are extending the eligibility for child disability benefit. We are introducing a working income tax benefit, which provides up to \$500 for individuals and up to \$1,000 for families. It includes a supplement for low income working people with disabilities.

There is no doubt more can be done and more needs to be done. It is something on which we are prepared to receive input. In the course of events we all want to work together to improve the situation as best we can.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, at the outset I want to add my voice to say how shocked and saddened I was to hear about the events in India yesterday. It was a terrible tragedy.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne and I wish to thank the people of Kitchener Centre for giving me the opportunity to speak on their behalf. I am deeply grateful to my campaign team for their dedicated assistance.

The Address

We live in interesting times, as the Chinese proverb would observe. To further borrow from that tradition I suggest that we may define our present circumstances with the character for “crisis” that expresses in a single word not only “danger” but also “opportunity”. This Parliament has before it both danger and opportunity, and we have heard a throne speech that recognizes both the dangers and the opportunities.

The Speech from the Throne clearly addresses the economic challenges that define the work of this Parliament. As we speak, with the most recent reports available, Canada continues to enjoy the only budget surplus among the G-7 nations. Our average hourly wage rate has continued to increase by 4.3% in the last year. Our unemployment rate remains near historic lows. For the first time since 1981, we have less unemployment than the United States. In 2008, we have had a net gain of 107,000 new jobs to date. This contrasts with 1.2 million jobs lost by our neighbours to the south in 2008 to date. The fiscal prudence of our government in the last Parliament, undoubtedly, contributed to these advantages.

During the election campaign and again in the House I have heard the opposition parties refer to our government spending as “squandering the surplus that was left to us”. I must say that I do not consider paying down \$37 billion of national debt in just two years, reducing almost \$200 billion in taxation and investing in infrastructure as squandering anything. These were proactive measures to ensure the health of our economy.

To suggest that the government was wrong to reduce the surplus in this way, is to suggest that we should reverse those actions by raising taxes once again. To suggest the government was wrong to do these things, is to suggest that we should cancel those infrastructure investments. Yet, those are the very actions that have made our economic success known around the world. It is unwise to now suggest that lowering taxes and investing in infrastructure were wrong or should be reversed. Quite the opposite is true.

Those measures provided ongoing economic stimulus. The GST cuts, for example, did not just put more money in consumers' pockets last year, they continue to increase consumer spending power this year and will continue next year and the year after that.

The benefit of these tax reductions and infrastructure investments could not be greater if the government had waited until now to implement them, as have some of our neighbours. Quite the opposite is true. Because we were ahead of the curve, we are already enjoying the benefits and have delayed the onset of a recession far longer than have our neighbours.

However, the dangers remain: loss of stock market value; declining U.S. consumer confidence; reduced demand for our products, especially automotive, from our largest trading partner; and dropping commodity prices. We are all painfully aware of the dangers we face.

We cannot escape the economic downturn. The economic problems afflicting our largest trading partner will inevitably affect us. We are a trading nation. The health of the global economy impacts the health of the Canadian economy.

The government has already demonstrated its keen awareness of the necessity for international co-operation. Our Prime Minister has

already met with world leaders and worked with them on general principles which will be implemented by our government with the support of the House. My personal hope is that two approaches will become priorities. I am certain that I speak for the people of Kitchener Centre in expressing these priorities. These in fact are opportunities. The first is an acceleration of investment in infrastructure. The second is ensuring support for those whose livelihood is lost or whose essential savings are lost by the economic downturn. These two priorities are emblematic of the Kitchener traditions of industrious community development and socially innovative concern for our neighbours.

● (1255)

As to infrastructure, the government has already wisely budgeted for \$33 billion in infrastructure investment over the next several years. It is now important to provide much of that economic stimulus over the next 12 to 24 months. I am confident that our government will take those measures to the fullest extent possible. This is an opportunity to address real and present infrastructure needs.

It is equally important to ensure that no Canadian is left behind. In Canada, we do not abandon the less fortunate. Clearly, the economic downturn will make itself felt in the employment insurance fund and in provincial social assistance programs. I confidently expect our government's new budget will address these very important needs.

The throne speech expresses a commitment to ensure delivery of the generous transfer payments already planned for health care and social programs. It promises to ensure that programs for workers facing transition are available for those who need them most. The throne speech also affirms our resolve to extend the homelessness partnership strategy and help more Canadians find affordable housing. These are opportunities to improve our support networks.

How will our government achieve these fundamental goals? How will we as a House in another minority position come together? How can the government reconcile sometimes conflicting needs across 10 provinces and 3 territories? We have a unique opportunity to accomplish this great work in this 40th Parliament.

We have two things going for us. First, we have heard a near universal call for a renewed sense of decorum in this chamber. This reflects a thirst by members of this House and by Canadians across our great land for a sense of common focus. The challenges before us are so great that they compel us to put aside partisan sharpness and find common purpose. This is an important opportunity to improve our public discourse.

Second, we have a Prime Minister who has the confidence to risk an open-minded search for solutions. Confidence leads to open-mindedness. It takes confidence to be transparent. It takes confidence to trust one another. In the last Parliament, our Prime Minister demonstrated his own quiet confidence on a number of occasions. These occasions included an open-minded commitment to secure Parliament's approval on the Afghanistan issue before acting.

The Address

Another good example was the thoughtful and unifying resolution on the nationhood of les Québécois. Another was the heartfelt apology to our residential school survivors. These moments inspired the people of my riding of Kitchener Centre and, I dare say, they inspired Canadians across our great land. Everyone who was here for them can be proud of their work.

Those accomplishments required strength and confidence. Those efforts produced the truly shining moments of the 39th Parliament. Those efforts demonstrated how open-mindedness, transparency and mutual trust, possible only through confidence in our own strengths, can achieve common focus.

The Speech from the Throne lays out a path through a dark forest of economic perils. I call on all of our hon. members to seize the opportunity to confidently put on the cloak of open-mindedness, transparency and mutual trust. Let us travel that path together with common focus on the needs and well-being of all Canadians.

• (1300)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the member when he talked about putting partisan positions aside. I could not agree more but that is not what it is all about. It is a matter of being accurate with the facts. He talked about budgeting \$33 billion over the next several years. After the patient is dead, we cannot bring him back. Will the member work to ensure that the money comes right away?

Let me clarify for the member what the Conservative government has not done. In 2005, money was put aside for the municipal rural infrastructure program, the Canada strategic infrastructure fund, the border infrastructure fund and the public transit capital fund, totalling \$11.5 billion for 2007-09. In the Conservative's 2007 budget, for the member's clarification, only \$4 billion of those funds were included, eliminating \$7.5 billion. The \$20 billion that he talks about was money coming from the gas tax and the GST rebate to the cities.

Is the member prepared to stand and tell his constituents that he will go to his government and his Prime Minister to get that money back for the cities?

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Madam Speaker, timing is very important with these infrastructure projects, which is why I am so pleased that the Speech from the Throne expresses a commitment to accelerate these projects.

The strength of our land is that we work in partnership with the provinces, not unilaterally. In my own riding of Kitchener Centre, for example, the Kitchener-Waterloo region transit corridor was designated as a top priority last August by the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada. My expectation is that I will be working hard to ensure that those funds flow on a timely basis in order to advance that project.

I have already been in touch with the mayor of Kitchener and the chair of the Waterloo region to find out what they believe to be their top infrastructure projects. I regard it as my job as a member to ensure that those get funded.

• (1305)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Kitchener Centre. I

hope he can live up to the high standards set by his predecessor, Karen Redman, a person for whom we in the House have a great deal of respect and admiration.

I know Kitchener quite well. I was born in Kitchener and my parents live near Kitchener in a village called Winterbourne. I also know, from visits to that city, that the concerns of that area are not being represented by the Conservatives to date. I hope they will be.

I want to ask about one particular issue, the issue of laid-off workers who not only must face the horror of being laid off but who suddenly do not have drug coverage. Residents of Kitchener have told us, as I am sure they have told him, that they want to see the government bring in a national drug strategy to ensure that all people, regardless of their economic circumstances, have access to necessary medications. Will the member promise to pursue that with the government?

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Madam Speaker, my friend's presence in this chamber is simply more evidence of the number of great people who have come out of Kitchener. I am glad to hear that we share those common roots.

I, myself, was born and raised in Kitchener. I know its hills, valleys, streets and byways like the back of my hand. I have many friends and acquaintances who I have worked with over the years in Kitchener. I am in good touch with the kinds of needs and desires that they have.

I also want to add to what my friend has said about my predecessor, Ms. Redman. Many years ago, in another life, I had close contact with the organization that she represented. I have always had a good relationship with her and agree that she carried off her duties with class and dedication.

As to the issue of the unemployed and drug coverage, the government's first approach is to ensure that as few people as possible are unemployed. The kind of stimulus measures that are referred to in the Speech from the Throne are designed to do that. My expectation is that they will be largely successful.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I must inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Davenport.

My congratulations, to begin with, Madam Speaker, for achieving this position. In my opinion, your obvious good will and calm nature will bring you the total cooperation of all members on both sides of the floor.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Lac-Saint-Louis for reaffirming their confidence in me.

[English]

I would like to thank the citizens of my riding for choosing me once again to represent them in Ottawa, to be their voice in the nation's capital.

The Address

I would also like to congratulate my colleagues, those who are taking seats in this House for the first time and those who are returning to this House. I would like to congratulate my colleagues from all parties. We have all shared the rigours of campaigning and I believe that a mutual respect flows from this fact, from this shared experience and from this shared commitment to Canada. Campaigning is fast becoming a habit for all of us here. I must admit that campaigning is a habit that I enjoy more and more, though many citizens are understandably growing weary of and saturated by several federal campaigns in rapid succession, interspersed, of course, with elections in other jurisdictions.

Nonetheless, I enjoyed last fall the opportunity to meet my constituents on a more frequent basis and in the more intense manner that is an election campaign. I enjoyed sharing their ideas at train stations, at shopping malls, at their doorsteps and in public gatherings and debates. I enjoyed their passion for the issues, domestic and international, that make the voters of Lac-Saint-Louis some of the most informed and engaged voters in the country.

The distinguishing feature of my riding, apart from the fact that it is surrounded on three sides by water, sitting as it does on one of the continent's greatest waterways, the St. Lawrence River, is the fact that my fellow citizens are known for their adherence to principle. This has always, in my memory, been the hallmark of the voters of Lac-Saint-Louis. They adhere to their principles, regardless of the direction of the prevailing political winds. The voters of Lac-Saint-Louis cannot be pushed off their principles by political fads or by slick and powerful political machines and their communications strategies.

I would like to turn to the throne speech. I listened intently to the throne speech, like the rest of my colleagues. There are some good ideas in the throne speech and there are ideas that may not be obviously those that my party and other members of the opposition would have put in a throne speech. Regardless, the throne speech, at this point, is mere words. What remains to be seen is whether those words are put into action.

There are two qualities that are required of a government or that are sought by the people of their government during difficult times: first, the government must be trusted by the electorate; and second, the government must be able to address short-term problems while simultaneously moving toward long-term solutions to longer-term challenges.

I am sorry to say that I feel the government has a dubious record on both counts, a record that leaves room to doubt its ability to lead Canada through these challenging times and its ability to put the words of a throne speech into action.

Let us look at the meaning of trust. What does trust mean? I believe there are two components to trust. One is transparency and the other is competence. In terms of transparency, the question is: Can the people put their faith in the government's pronouncements? That is very important to the people's trust in the government.

When it comes to competence, what we mean when we are speaking about trust is where it is assumed that the government has the best and most honest intentions and keeps its word, does the government repeatedly make the best and wisest decisions? Because

a government that does not keep its word, if it is not effective, if it bungles, if it makes mistakes, or if it is incompetent, leaves the people, in some ways, no better off.

Let us look at transparency, first. I am not at all certain the government has earned the trust of Canadians by dealing honestly and sincerely with Canadians over the past three years. Does the government keep its word? Does the government follow-through on the direction to which it has publicly committed? Does the government engage in sleight of hand, pretending to do one thing but doing another? Does the government prefer window dressing to solid content?

Let us briefly examine the previous Conservative government's record.

On fixed election dates, the government committed to them, but it reneged on that commitment.

On income trusts, the government promised not to tax them, but it reneged on that commitment.

• (1310)

On capital gains taxation, the government promised positive reforms of taxation of capital gains in the 2006 campaign. That promise, like the promise to create more child care spaces, simply evaporated.

On infrastructure, the government promised to renew our infrastructure. Yet, it has been dragging its feet. I believe one of the reasons it is doing that is that it does not want to add to the deficit because that would be politically embarrassing. It does not want to add to the deficit that the chief Parliamentary Budget Officer said flows from the policies of the government. It would rather put off spending to save political face. It would rather let our infrastructure crumble than lose political face. It would rather keep people unemployed than lose political face.

On patient wait times, the previous government promised to reduce them before just giving up on even trying to fulfill that promise.

On climate change, three years ago the government promised regulations to help fight greenhouse gas emissions, but we have not yet seen a single published regulation.

On senate appointments, the government said it would elect senators. The first thing it did in 2006 was appoint a senator. The people responded by not electing that Senator to this Parliament. Now we know that the government and the Senate is setting up the board. It is setting up the Senate and in fact it is setting up Canadians to appoint 19 senators without election. It will argue, of course, that the Senate is dysfunctional and that it has to act.

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Let us look at the second component of trust: competence. Some will argue that it does not really matter if a government is sincere or intellectually honest as long as it is competent and effective. As a matter of fact during the election campaign, in going door to door, I ran across many decent people who said that they did not like the government and they did not believe it, but its members seem to be clever and smart. They seem to be foxy and I suppose that counts for something. Maybe they can accomplish something by being clever and foxy. It is a little sad when we think about it, that good, decent people, after three years of Conservative government rule, have decreased their expectations about political honesty to such a level.

Here again the government has scored low on the measure of trust that is competence. Earlier this week, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas) absolved the government of responsibility for the upcoming federal deficit by stating that the government could not foresee the current global recession. This begs the question, why did the government therefore eliminate the financial cushion the previous Liberal government had inserted into past budgets? That is what the cushion was for; it was for unforeseen problems. The Conservatives cannot have it both ways. If they did not foresee, why did they not plan for the worst in case it happened? That is an issue of competence.

There was a line in the budget inspired by my private member's bill, Bill C-228, that says the government will implement legislation to prevent transfers of water out of basins. It remains to be seen if the government will follow-through on that, but it can count on the fact that I will certainly be pushing the government to act as quickly as possible.

• (1315)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I welcome my colleague back. I know certain issues around water and others will be front and centre in his mind again. We did good work on the environment committee together.

My question is around choices that the government is making in these uncertain times. We will see a series of the government's choices this afternoon. I would suggest that many of them will appear as policy but will be political in their nature. I hope not but the government has already indicated through a number of leaks to the media that it will be the case.

The choice revolves around how to actually stimulate an economy. I will speak about the northwest of British Columbia that has been in a recession for some number of years now. Some communities face upwards of 80% unemployment, while the government comes forward to say that there is not a problem it has not seen that a tax cut will not meet, and if one only has a hammer then every problem starts to look like a nail.

Companies in my region that had been suffering for a long time had not in fact been paying taxes because they had not been making profits. As the tax rate went down for corporations, they were not seeing any benefit coming back to them. Whereas when we were able to use part government and part private funding for a mill in Fort St. James for instance, 250 mill jobs are being saved and the workers are going back to work this week.

This is something that is about a choice, but the government seems so hooked to an ideology, that there is no other solution other

than a tax rate measure rather than a true stimulus package and investment, which is being debated south of the border. I wonder what the member's thoughts are on the choices that are being made right now and have been made in previous budgets by the current ideological government.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, the member's question relates to a point that I wanted to raise with the member for Kitchener Centre. He talked about the GST cut and how that is stimulating the economy.

The problem with tax cuts and interest rate cuts is that their effect, and this we learn in economics 101, is mediated by market psychology. We could cut taxes all we want but if people are afraid they are not going to spend. We can cut interest rates all we want but if businesses are not optimistic they are not going to borrow and they are not going to invest.

In response to my NDP colleague's point, I think in times like this what is important is that the government takes control of levers that it would have absolute control over, things like infrastructure spending. If the government decides it is going to spend on infrastructure, no amount of market psychology is going to make it change its mind, but if an individual gets a 1% GST cut, and by the way the effect of that is just recouped by oil companies that raise gas prices or coffee shops that raise the price of coffee, the problem is that the government has a very loose string. It has a loose string that it is trying to push. It is a string when what we need is a more solid lever.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech and I would like to ask a two-part question.

As members will recall, the forestry crisis has given rise to many problems over the past 30 months, or since the Conservative government came to power.

I would like my colleague to answer the following. Has the government understood? Has the government listened to the demands? It was forewarned of the situation, of the economic crisis and the situation in the forestry industry. Did the government do anything?

Second, the Conservatives were also forewarned of the possibility of a deficit, but they said not to worry and that there would not be a deficit. I will ask my colleague the question. Has the government heard anything that we told it in the past 30 months? Did the Conservatives get the message or are they simply turning a deaf ear?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I think that what we see, once again, with this newly re-elected government, is—

An hon. member: They did not listen.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: They obviously did not listen. This government is not overly concerned with long-term policies. I mentioned it in my speech. A government that inspires confidence must first of all be intellectually honest and, second, must plan for the long term. I do not believe that the government has any alternative measures in the event that the crisis hits full force.

The answer is no.

[English]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the good people of Davenport for the trust they have shown in me. I congratulate all members in the House for their election or re-election as members of Parliament. In choosing us as their representatives, the people of Canada have reposed in us a sacred trust and the responsibility of a noble tradition dating back to the founding of our country.

To the members who did not return, I take this moment to thank them for their service to this country we all love. Their hard work and dedication will long be remembered.

I would also like to thank my leader for his confidence in appointing me as official opposition critic for foreign affairs with responsibility for the Americas.

Allow me to begin by quoting from the Speech from the Throne:

In Canada as in other countries of the world democracy today faces a decisive challenge. It must adapt to new circumstances and new demands or fail in its purpose. This challenge is not abstract but a confrontation which you will have to face by virtue of your election to Parliament.

If members do not recognize these words from last week's Speech from the Throne, there is good reason. They are from the Speech from the Throne delivered in Parliament on September 12, 1968. If these words reach forward across the years and carry any message, it is that all times are challenging, the world is always evolving, and every generation must lift the torch and boldly go forward into the darkness in order to light the way for those who are to follow.

In 1968, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the young and vibrant newly chosen leader of Canada. Although the world faced many perils, not unlike today, he called upon all Canadians of his generation to hear the call to work toward building a more just society where prosperity was known to the many and not just the few. Most of all, he called upon all Canadians to take up their place in the world.

John Maynard Keynes once said that Canada is a place of infinite promise. Truly, we in the House have an enormous responsibility to meet the challenges that face our country and the world.

The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, is absolutely correct in the comments he made following the Speech from the Throne. He said, "By electing a minority government, Canadians are asking Parliament to work together to see our country through the economic challenges that we now face". With power of any kind there comes responsibility and we have a responsibility to make this Parliament work.

Clearly, Canadians across the land are facing unprecedented economic challenges. Are the two other opposition party leaders suggesting that it would be better to spend \$300 million on an

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election for the purpose of their political agendas rather than on meeting the needs of Canadians at this difficult time in our history?

As the leader of my party has made clear, there is much lacking in the Speech from the Throne and there is much need for improvement. However, Canadians sent us here to work. They sent us here to stop the blatant partisan gamesmanship that some have repeatedly displayed and instead put the interests of Canadians first.

With one of the lowest voter turnouts in Canadian history, it must be recognized that all of us here have a profound responsibility to seek to encourage confidence in our institutions and to give to citizens across this country a message of hope, co-operation and commitment in these difficult times. We are here for the people's business, not our own business.

In a mere nine years, Canada will be 150 years old. In 1967, Canada's 100th birthday, Canada hosted Expo '67 and the world stood up to take note of the great nation we had become.

There were bold new social, economic and political changes brought forward in that time of great advancement and wonder. We need to look for that vision once again to meet the challenges of the new millennium and to tend to the flame of hope and prosperity passed from the torch of history that has come from generations past. This will require bold action, especially in times of recession.

By way of example, the premiers of Ontario and Quebec, as well as others, have for some time called for the creation of a high-speed rail link between the city of Windsor and Quebec City. It would create a rapid and environmentally sustainable transportation link across that region of Canada. It is forward thinking and long overdue. Although nine years away, if we committed now to build the high-speed rail link, it would surely be possible to achieve its completion by our country's 150th anniversary.

● (1325)

Likewise, our national pension plan which was created by a previous Liberal government is a bold and daring statement that recognizes our need to take care of those who have worked so hard to build our country. The throne speech was a missed opportunity to clearly commit to protect the pensions of older Canadians. This is something they deserve. We must work together to ensure that all Canadians have the quality of life that is due to them as people who have raised us, worked for us and dedicated themselves to building a better tomorrow for those who now enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Our nation's infrastructure is in desperate need of attention. A real and dedicated financial commitment in this area would help to restore infrastructure in an environmentally sustainable manner in every corner of Canada and would also generate badly needed jobs in all regions.

We need vigorous and meaningful action to protect jobs in all sectors of our economy, including our manufacturing industries.

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Working families need support from their national government during difficult times. We must work to reduce poverty and also ensure that as the world's economic foundations are challenged that more Canadians do not find themselves in such circumstances.

Our young people must believe that their future is bright. Though there are clouds of uncertainty hovering overhead, behind those clouds is sunshine. Young Canadians are the future. We need to help them learn, assist them to meet the challenges of a changing world and ensure they know that we are with them regardless of the pressing challenges that surround them.

Our country needs to show leadership in meeting the challenge of climate change. We need to show the world that our commitment is meaningful and that we are prepared to lead the way as if our survival depended on it, because in actual fact it does.

The throne speech would have done well to commit our country to a greener economy and the economic and environmental benefits of cultivating such progressive and necessary policies.

As a country we must also commit to green technology in the production of automobiles. If the present challenges facing automobile manufacturers have taught us anything, it is that the future will require us to produce more environmentally friendly cars which are more appealing to the marketplace.

We need to address the ongoing needs of our first nations people and to protect our territorial integrity in the northernmost parts of our country.

In challenging times it is easy to forget that a nation's identity is in many ways defined by its culture and the artists who define it with dedication and talent. As in all economically troubled times, artists are among those who will face some of the most severe financial pressures. We must commit to support them in every way possible, for their work is important to Canada and the world.

During the tenure of the previous Liberal governments, which efficiently and progressively managed public affairs in this country from 1993 to 2006, we not only balanced our budgets but also maintained a prudent contingency fund. The current global economic crisis confirms the wisdom of such a policy. We must find a way to restore contingency funds and not unwisely adopt economic policies that look good in the short term but do not serve our country in the long term.

I would also encourage the government to continue the policies of previous Liberal administrations with respect to the banking industry. Despite great pressures at the time, the former Liberal prime minister and finance minister resisted the requests for mergers and looser banking regulations which would almost certainly have placed our financial institutions in less favourable positions than they are in now.

We all agree there is much to be done. The call today to all members of the House is that we work together to seek bold solutions to the challenges that currently face our country and the world. Now is not the time for partisan bickering. We have the people's business to tend to and they await our answer to their call.

In these seemingly dark times, let us move on in the glow of our nation's unyielding spirit. Let us show the world the way forward no

matter how difficult the road so that we may be the first to reach the dawn.

● (1330)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I welcome my colleague back.

With respect to the economic update that will be presented this afternoon, the questions in front of us will be questions of potential confidence. We know the experience of the Liberal Party in the last session of Parliament on many questions of confidence. Because of political reasons, it was suggested that Liberal members were unable to express their own convictions in the votes. Forty-three times there were confidence measures brought forward on budgets, on the throne speech, on fiscal measures, and for reasons not associated with Parliament itself, other than political, they were unable to act on their convictions, .

I have a question for my colleague, whom I know as we have worked on various issues together. As we face these most dire and uncertain economic times, the choices before government are critical for working families in this country. These decisions will affect not only this current fiscal year, but perhaps years to come. The current Conservative government is wedded to some very deep ideologies that prevent it from applying other prescriptions, true stimulus packages, true investments in industry and communities.

What will the Liberal Party be doing as we face these confidence measures? Where will the line in the sand be drawn? Where will the conviction be on the choices that are before us as a minority Parliament to act in the best interests of Canadians everywhere?

Mr. Mario Silva: Madam Speaker, we all recognize the difficult situation this country is facing. In my speech I alluded not just to the fact that it is an economic situation but also to the fact that there is a lack of confidence in our parliamentary institutions. The fact that there was such low voter turnout in the last election should concern us all here in this Parliament.

As parliamentarians we have a responsibility to work together to meet the challenges ahead and to confront the government when it fails to react positively to the crisis facing the world.

We want to see a stimulus package such as those in Europe and the U.S. so that the economy can keep on going. I am afraid that the government is missing an opportunity. The Conservatives have not been good prudent managers of the economy or of our country's finances.

We have wasted the last two years by not addressing the issues of concern. Today we are facing a serious financial situation which has been brought on not just by what is happening in the world but also by the actions of the government.

We as opposition members have to make sure that the government is held to account for its actions.

● (1335)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in his excellent speech, the member talked about the lack of confidence in our parliamentary institutions.

The Address

It was discovered that the Conservatives had a book of dirty tricks on how to thwart democracy in Parliament.

An. hon. member: Two hundred pages long.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: A book of 200 pages, Madam Speaker, on how to thwart democracy in Parliament and committees.

The Conservatives cannot do that now so they are trying to thwart democracy in the Senate. The Conservative Party senators are holding up the Senate. They are holding up democracy. They are holding up progress for people in this time of need.

Mr. Mario Silva: Madam Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague for his fine work and for being re-elected in the great riding of Yukon.

All of us realize there is a serious challenge going on. The question is how will the government react, and what will be its response. We are certainly waiting with great anticipation for the comments from the Minister of Finance later on today.

We know the government's record. It does not want to cooperate. Any indication from what I have been hearing as of late, is that it has again taken a very hostile attitude toward this Parliament. The Conservative government does not want to cooperate with members of Parliament.

This is the third minority Parliament in a row. We have a responsibility and a duty to work together. Unfortunately the government once again is taking an ideological bent, a reformist bent, in attacking the different parties instead of working together.

Canada is facing a crisis. We have to address that crisis. We cannot do it if the Conservative government is bashing the opposition instead of getting the opposition to work together so we can address the serious crisis facing our country.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. I will be sharing my time today with the hon. member for Wild Rose, my seatmate.

It is a privilege of the highest order to be in this chamber today and to participate in the debate on our government's Speech from the Throne. It is with great humility I express how thankful and honoured I am to serve the constituents of the great Kenora riding as their member of Parliament.

I thank the hundreds of volunteers from across the riding, many friends, old classmates, hockey teammates and other volunteers who came from other parts of the country to help elect a Conservative member of Parliament from the Kenora district for the first time in more than 90 years.

I also make honourable mention of Leo Bernier, the last great Conservative to serve the Kenora riding as a member of the legislative assembly in Ontario. He has become a friend and mentor and provides counsel for me to be an effective representative in Kenora.

As the oldest of eight children, I want to thank my loving family for their unconditional support, especially my parents, David and Dorothy Rickford, who taught me about the importance of serving one's community. In addition to raising a big family, participating in various church and civic activities, my parents opened our home to

hundreds of foster children over the span of 30 years. I thank mom and dad for inspiring me. They are extraordinary example of dedication and sacrifice. I am proud to be here on their behalf today, as well.

I thank my great-grandfather, William Rickford, a World War I veteran, now deceased, my grandfather, Reverend Stanley Hugh Kenyon, and my uncle, Ron Rickford, both of whom are veterans of World War II and are alive and well today. In fact, I wish to thank all the brave men and women who have served, or who are serving, our country in the Canadian armed forces.

My grandfather was a Saskatchewan farm boy who turned 20 in 1939. He volunteered to serve in the army and spent the next four and a half years fighting overseas. After the war, he pastored churches throughout Canada and in other parts of the world.

Recently I had the distinct pleasure to be in this honourable chamber with my family to present him a letter from the Prime Minister recognizing his lifetime of dedication to his family, outstanding service to his community and the sacrifice he made for his country in time of war. Listening to him as he read this letter aloud to us, adorned in medals he had earned, was one of the proudest moments I have ever experienced as a Canadian.

Like so many others before and after him, our brave soldiers serve unselfishly in the interests of peace, security and freedom from our great country and represent, in my respectful view, the single biggest reason why I and my esteemed colleagues stand in this chamber today.

With respect to the Speech from the Throne, there has been a lot of thoughtful discussion to this point. In short order, I would prefer to emphasize a number of its key components, which I believe will dramatically improve the lives of my constituents.

It bears mentioning that until the past two and a half years, the constituents of my riding, in fact, most of northwestern Ontario, have felt that they have been taken for granted. The results of the last federal election fairly reflect this. The Liberals were pushed out of just about every electoral district in northwestern Ontario.

For starters, putting money into the pockets of lawyers rather than forestry workers by engaging in a protracted softwood lumber dispute with the United States, played a significant role in setting the forestry sector back more than a decade and translated into the closure of mills, big mills like Abitibi-Consolidated in Kenora and other mills in Ignis and Hudson. The protracted softwood lumber dispute and anti-American rhetoric used by the Liberals and the NDP in the past for political gains added nothing to fostering positive relationships, which we must have with the United States, our friends, our largest trading partner and one of the greatest sources of tourism, of particular importance for Kenora.

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Moving forward, I cannot understate the importance of developing infrastructure in my riding to help forestry, mining, tourism, small business and the overall sustainability of our communities. Programs like FedNor and specific support for traditional industries like forestry, mining, workers in transition, support for new housing, education and maintaining important transfer payments for health and social spending by the provinces are but a few of the myriad examples that the Speech from the Throne addresses for the benefit of my riding.

• (1340)

It is refreshing and progressive to see forestry mentioned within the rubric of the environment, industry and manufacturing, something I am not sure the other parties completely understand, since their comments to this point about forestry reflect a backward and incomplete understanding of the exciting future for the sector. For example, the use of forestry residuals such as sawdust, bark, trim and shavings and secondary biomass could be one way of producing alternative fuel sources that are renewable. Our government is committed to further research of cleaner energy sources.

The Speech from the Throne deals extensively with the need to invest in research, innovation and marketing for things like Canadian pulp and wood products to markets beyond North America to ensure the long-term viability of a dynamic, value-added forestry sector. Fortunately the government has taken a comprehensive view of how to deal effectively with regions in Canada, like my riding, that are in transition and depend upon key sectors such as forestry and mining as their economic drivers.

The Speech from the Throne demonstrates that this government gets it. It understands the pressures on the communities in my riding, especially during this time of global economic uncertainty.

The community development trust supports a wide variety of initiatives such as job training and skills development, community transition plans that foster real community-based economic development, encouraging skilled trades and apprenticeships to ensure throughout my riding that people are competitive in a modern economy, supporting first nations in these regards as well as ensuring that they too have access to skills, training and apprenticeships in order to assist them to participate in economic development initiatives such as the new value-added forestry initiatives on the horizon in which first nations communities in my riding will have an equity stake.

The building Canada plan marks the beginning of unprecedented commitments to much needed infrastructure in the communities in my riding, the kind of infrastructure that focuses on development, that creates jobs and stimulates our riding's capacity to economically diversify. Within the traditional industries, it is relied upon and gives hope that we will be open for business in other areas of manufacturing.

I can assure the constituents of my riding that I will be fighting for key priorities in the building Canada plan, such as the twinning of the highway from Kenora to the Manitoba border, the completion of the waste water treatment plan in Dryden and substantial improvements to the Red Lake Airport, one of the busiest airports in our country.

The Speech from the Throne serves to further reduce the cost pressures on Canadian business and encourages companies to invest in new machinery and equipment. This is particularly important to us in northwestern Ontario. We appreciate the tax relief provided by the government through broad-based tax reductions for business, a temporary accelerated writeoff for investments in machinery and equipment, such as the heavy machinery that is relied upon by the mining and forestry sectors in my riding, and improving the flexibility of and strengthening access to capital through Export Development Canada and Business Development Bank of Canada to help manufacturers in my riding meet the challenge of being globally competitive.

This government will set an objective that aims for 90% of Canada's electricity to be provided by non-emitting sources like Hydro by the year 2020. Folks in Ear Falls, Lac Seul First Nation, Pickle Lake and Mishkeegogamang will no doubt benefit from this sort of commitment in the future. As I previously mentioned, the government's commitment to supporting the development of cleaner energy sources may also include raw biomass for forestry residuals.

The Speech from the Throne ensures that provinces receive generous transfer payments for health care and social programs upon which folks in ridings such as mine depend.

There are a number of other examples, but I want to close by saying, while fortunately the Kenora riding is not as affected by higher levels of major crime, we appreciate that the government recognizes the need to be assured that we are safe in our homes and communities. The government will take action against crime, including stiffer penalties for gun crimes. At the same time, not criminalizing law-abiding firearm owners is a key issue for the constituents of my riding and we want to see the long gun registry dismantled. Many constituents in my riding, in fact, throughout northwestern Ontario, safely and lawfully, for sport, hunting and sustenance, want to protect their long-standing traditional ways of—

• (1345)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on his maiden speech. I knew his predecessor, Mr. Roger Valley, very well and I know he worked very hard on behalf of the people of the north, a very excellent member of Parliament.

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The member is a new member and it is important that he spend the time to talk about hope for all Canadians, including those in his own riding. However, the reality is we are faced with a severe economic crisis, the full impact of which has not been felt yet. We need to give hope to Canadians.

I thought the member would like to comment on what he saw in terms of a plan on whether we should invest now in areas where maybe we have the best opportunity to create jobs and to provide the lead. Will he make a commitment to the House that he will continue to support the necessary social and income supports for Canadians who are unable to help themselves?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his re-election.

“Advantage Canada”, building Canada and the community development trust reassure us all that the government is committed to supporting communities, particularly communities in my riding. I am confident, moving forward, we will continue to support programs that are responsible and responsive to communities throughout my riding. Over two dozen communities in my riding are isolated and not accessible by road. The government is committed to supporting those programs and moving forward. I have every bit of confidence that we will be there for them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, in none of the speeches I heard this morning from the Conservatives was there any indication of urgency, nor was there mention of a contingency plan to face the major crisis we are experiencing.

Since 2002, 400,000 jobs have been lost, including 150,000 in Quebec. Workers are losing their jobs and their homes, and are then faced with insecurity when it comes to their pension plans. They no longer know what they will have at the end of this crisis, and the government is showing no sense of urgency.

The throne speech implicitly mentions the crisis, but will the government do something to protect retirees and those who will eventually be retiring? Will it protect pension plans as other countries have done?

• (1350)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, I am confident in assuring the House that our government is well prepared to address all the problems and challenges that people are facing across Canada.

[*English*]

I have plenty of confidence in the Speech from the Throne that it has addressed substantively for the benefit of Canadians living in large metropolitan cities and remote communities and isolated in all regards.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the member as a new member just like myself.

My question for him is about his moving tribute to the veterans who were in his families, his father and his grandfather. I found that noble and moving.

However, I recognize that in the Speech from the Throne there is no mention of veterans or the care of veterans, either veterans from

the first or second world war or new veterans coming home from Afghanistan. It is of great concern to me that the Speech from the Throne simply fails to mention the service which is ongoing and the care which is needed, both in veterans' facilities and for their families upon their return home.

Is that a concern for the member as well?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, actually it was my grandfather and my great-grandfather, but nonetheless I can assure the member that veterans, including my grandfather, know our government is there for them and will be here for them. We continue to make an investment in veterans from all wars in the rich past of Canada's military history.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): We are resuming debate. The hon. member for Wild Rose will undoubtedly begin and have time left over after question period.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Madam Speaker, first I would like to thank the hon. member for Kenora for agreeing to split his time with me. After 91 years of Liberal representation in that riding, we are very excited to have a such a great member in the House of Commons. Thanks are due to the people of Kenora for sending him here. We are very fortunate and feel very lucky to have him as a member of our caucus, and I know the people of Kenora will be very fortunate to have him as their representative.

I could not stand here in the House without thanking my constituents in Wild Rose, from the hundreds of volunteers who worked hard on my campaign to the thousands of people who marked an “X” beside my name on the ballot. I am truly honoured and humbled by the trust and confidence they have placed in me to be their representative. To receive the largest majority in the history of our great riding was a true honour.

In the fall of 2007, when I was running for the Conservative Party's nomination, the pastor of my church back home in Airdrie, Sandy Isfeld, happened to be here in Ottawa. He stood here on Parliament Hill and prayed for me, my family and my campaign. He told me afterwards that the moment he said “Amen”, the bell in the Peace Tower rang. Every time I see the Peace Tower, it will be a reminder to me that I would not be here without the support and prayers of so many people back home in my constituency of Wild Rose.

I pledge to the constituents of Wild Rose that I will honour that support by working faithfully to represent them and their interests here in this place.

I am sure anyone in the House would tell us that the people who make the biggest sacrifice to allow us to be here and to serve our constituents in this way are our families. I can truly say that my wife Tara and my son Quinn, and all the rest of my family back home, are the most supportive family anyone could wish for. I love them and I thank them.

Statements by Members

I also want to thank someone who is no longer with us: my grandfather, Mel Richards. He helped to shape the person I am today. He taught me a lot about life, about making hard decisions, about doing what is right, and about always standing up for what I believe in. He was also the person who first introduced me to my predecessor, Myron Thompson, back in 1992, when Myron was first seeking election. Myron told me recently that when I got involved with his campaign in 1993, my grandfather told him that when he retired, I would be the person who would take his place. I do not know how serious my grandfather actually was about that statement at the time, but I can say to my grandpa, wherever he is today, "Here I am, Grandpa".

Wild Rose is one of the most diverse ridings in Canada. We have some of the best farmland in the entire country, so agriculture is an important part of our economy. Our economy is also heavily driven by oil and gas, tourism, and forestry. We have a number of towns and cities in our riding. They are among the fastest-growing municipalities in our entire country. They include places like Cochrane and my home town of Airdrie.

There are affordable housing issues in places like Canmore and elsewhere. Of course, I am extremely fortunate that my riding is home to what I believe is the most beautiful area in the entire country, Banff National Park, and also includes many of our winter sports facilities and Winter Olympics athletes. We are very proud of that.

The people of Wild Rose expect a government that does more than just talk about what needs to be done. They expect a government that will take action, and this Conservative government will deliver.

Of course the biggest issue we face right now in Canada is the economy. We are in a time of global economic instability, and ensuring that Canada is well positioned to endure and to come out of these tough times stronger than ever before is without a doubt the main priority of the government.

However, please allow me to spend the next few minutes talking about some of the other important measures contained in the throne speech, measures that I know the people of Wild Rose will be very excited about.

As I knocked on doors and visited people throughout Wild Rose in the last election, the issue raised most frequently was crime and the need to get tough on crime. The safety and security of Canadians is our utmost priority. Our government will take tough action against crime so that justice is served quickly and Canadians can feel safe in their homes and communities. Serious offences will meet with serious penalties.

● (1355)

The people of Wild Rose expect a government that does more than talk about getting tough on crime. They expect a government that gets things done, and our Conservative government will deliver.

People in Wild Rose have long called for the abolishment of the long guns registry. Under this Conservative government, gun laws will be focused on ending smuggling and on implementing stronger penalties for gun crimes, not on criminalizing law-abiding firearms owners. We will get rid of the wasteful and ineffective long guns registry. The people of Wild Rose expect a government that does

more than just talk about abolishing the gun registry. They expect a government that gets things done, and this Conservative government will deliver.

The issue that first grabbed my attention 20 years ago at the age of 14, the issue that got me involved in politics, was the need for Senate reform. We will continue with our agenda of Senate reform by reintroducing legislation for the election of senators with terms limited to eight years. The people of Wild Rose expect a government that does more than talk about Senate reform. They expect a government that gets things done, and this Conservative government will deliver.

When we talk about the tough economic times we are facing right now, we have to remember those who grow our food, our farmers. Weather conditions, BSE and other factors have forced them to endure tough times for a number of years already. Our government is strongly committed to providing marketing freedom for farmers, ensuring that the wishes of western Canadian farmers are respected and giving them the freedom to market their grain either on the open market or through the Canadian Wheat Board. The people of Wild Rose expect a government that does more than just talk about marketing freedom for farmers. They expect a government that gets things done.

● (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member will have three minutes when the debate resumes.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC NATION

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Madam Speaker, "the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada". Two years ago today, the House of Commons unanimously passed this motion, a motion that the Bloc Québécois opposed until the last minute, but one that was fiercely defended by Conservative members from Quebec and across Canada.

It was a gesture of recognition and reconciliation that serves to remind us all that Quebecers were integral to the founding of Canada and have played an important role in its development—with a distinct language and culture—while making an especially rich contribution to our progress and collective heritage.

Like Canada as whole, Quebec faces a number of challenges, particularly on the economic front. The people of Quebec know that within a strong and united Canada, and with open federalism, we will get through this crisis.

Statements by Members

[English]

UKRAINE

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this past Saturday in my riding of Parkdale—High Park, thousands of people lined Bloor Street in a candlelight memorial marking the 75th anniversary of Holodomor, the famine genocide of Ukraine's rural population in 1932 and 1933.

This deliberate famine, perpetrated by the Soviet regime of Joseph Stalin, starved millions to death in an attempt to destroy the aspirations of Ukrainian nationalists for a free and independent Ukraine. These families suffered the most terrible of fates, forced to experience the particular horror of being deprived of food in a land of plenty. Even more inhumane was the quiet violence of restraining families from feeding their own children.

The brutality of this tragedy visited upon the Ukrainian people is nearly impossible for us to comprehend, but we must try. It is tempting to turn away, but the only way to show respect to the 10 million lives lost and to the survivors, many of whom live in Canada today, is to pay attention, to remember, and to tell the story. We are required to compel the memory of the famine genocide forward and to work harder to guarantee—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Compton—Stanstead.

* * *

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the people of Compton—Stanstead are very disappointed in the government's throne speech.

In my riding, agricultural producers in the Coaticook region are still concerned about whether the supply management system will be protected. Workers in the Haut-Saint-François forestry and manufacturing sectors have once again been ignored when it comes to help for older workers or employment insurance reform. Students at both of Sherbrooke's universities are still waiting for the fiscal imbalance to be resolved and for the \$820 million towards education. There was nothing in the throne speech for people without adequate housing, those living near the border, or environmentalists either.

In short, even with a political lieutenant from the Eastern Townships, the government has overlooked our region's interests. Instead, the Conservatives have proven that only the Bloc members have our people's interests at heart.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the tremendous work being done by young aboriginal leaders in first nations across my riding of Churchill. These young leaders point to the need for young people to be heard. They speak of the hardships they face: high rates of suicide, an overwhelming sense of hopelessness, and tremendous abuse.

These leaders, such as Saul Harper, Bobby Monias, Frankie Manoakeesick, Derek Flett, Darcy Linklater, Allison McDougall, John Mason and Dion Lamb, are working for change. While they work in their communities, we need the federal government to listen to their concerns and act on them. We need the government to invest in healthy alternatives for young people by building schools, increasing funding and education programming, providing support for recreation and supporting youth initiatives.

The commitment of these young people ought to be an inspiration to all of us and a call for action for all of us as well.

* * *

● (1405)

NATIONAL 4-H MONTH

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, November is National 4-H Month.

For 95 years, 4-H members and leaders from across Canada have shown their pride, spirit and enthusiasm for agriculture, skills development and leadership.

Originally, 4-H focused on farming related activities but today this outstanding organization provides young people with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed not only in agriculture but also in life.

While having fun and making new friends, the skills and values mastered during the 4-H program are key to the development of confident young people.

4-H has provided thousands of young Canadians, like me and many of my rural colleagues, with an opportunity to learn and grow through personal competition and challenges.

A survey showed that involvement in 4-H creates better civic leaders now and into the future.

Each year, 10,000 dedicated 4-H leaders from across Canada volunteer their time to instruct, mentor and help about 28,000 young people become responsible, confident citizens.

The Government of Canada is proud to be a long-standing supporter of 4-H and its programs for our young people.

I congratulate all 4-H members and their leaders for their great work.

* * *

[Translation]

2008 BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARD

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to congratulate Beaulieu Plumbing & Mechanical of Edmundston on being named 2008 Business of the Year by the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick. The Business of the Year award in the category of sales over \$5 million went to Carole and Gaétan Beaulieu and their two children, Justin and Josée.

Statements by Members

Founded in 1984, Beaulieu Plumbing & Mechanical originally had four employees and operated out of a room in the Beaulieu family's home. Today, the company employs 90 people and serves the whole of New Brunswick and occasionally Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

This provincial recognition pays tribute to the drive and determination of Beaulieu Plumbing & Mechanical's founders. The Beaulieu family can be proud of its economic contribution to the riding of Madawaska—Restigouche and the entire province of New Brunswick.

I am happy to celebrate the success of business people in my province and to recognize the Beaulieu family's contribution to our community. Thank you and congratulations.

* * *

[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a global credit crunch, beginning in the U.S., has created a serious cyclical problem for global automakers. For the Detroit 3, this adds to the serious structural problems they were already facing.

This government takes seriously its responsibilities to workers and their families, the communities that rely on this industry and the Canadian taxpayers.

Building on our auto action plan and the auto innovation fund, with first funding in Windsor to reopen the Ford Essex Engine Plant, our government has worked in bipartisan fashion with the Government of Ontario, approaching industry and U.S. officials, exploring options for support during this current crisis. Our auto caucus has also extended an invitation to meet with the CAW who must be part of the solution.

It is important to note that the Detroit 3 have yet to define their ask to this government, to present a detailed plan to complete their restructuring and explain how government support would be applied. When industry fulfills these, we will do our due diligence.

In tough economic times, we are acting responsibly for the auto industry.

* * *

[Translation]

MEMBER FOR RIVIÈRE-DES-MILLE-ÎLES

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to a new Bloc Québécois colleague and an old friend, the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. This weekend, friends and colleagues will celebrate, during an evening of tribute in Quebec City, his work with the Canadian Auto Workers, where he was the Quebec Director for 13 years.

Throughout his union career, he was involved in many different labour negotiations. In 1995, during the long lockout that saw 500 Kenworth employees on the streets, he played a major role in the re-opening of the plant, renamed Paccar.

A convinced and convincing unionist, he made a name for himself as a progressive militant engaged in defending the aspirations of

Quebec workers. He was just as committed to the fight for greater social justice as he was for Quebec sovereignty. The Bloc Québécois is proud of the addition of the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles to its grass roots and parliamentary team.

Bravo!

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is remarkable that when this government took office almost three years ago it acted so quickly and effectively to prepare Canada for a possible downturn in the economy.

The United Kingdom just lowered its GST and President-elect Obama just promised to lower personal income taxes. We did both more than two years ago.

Many countries are just now lowering corporate taxes to encourage business and create jobs. We did that two years ago, with further reductions over the next four years.

Many countries are just now planning new infrastructure spending, which we started two years ago, with more stimulus already budgeted for years to come.

The opposition parties have just now recognized that there is a problem with the economy but this government has already been ahead of the game, cutting taxes and stimulating the economy. Canadians will continue to reap the rewards of this foresight and good government.

We did not receive a single thanks from any opposition members of Parliament.

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● (1410)

RED CROSS YOUNG HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to inform the House of an award received by a young woman in my riding.

Heather O'Reilly of Clarenville was presented with the Red Cross Young Humanitarian Award for Newfoundland and Labrador, the Red Cross' highest provincial honour.

At 26 years old, Heather has done more than most people twice her age to reach out to others and make a difference in their lives. Heather, who is a second year medical student at Memorial University of Newfoundland, has done two volunteer stints abroad. Her first was to Guyana, South America in 2002 through Youth Challenge International which is an organization she was introduced to while attending Queen's University and participating in Queen's medical outreach program. It was through this organization that she able to spend a summer and volunteer in Bethany, a small village in Guyana where she helped to educate the local people in health and wellness.

It was her experience in Guyana and her first look at world inequalities that inspired her to set up MUNHOPE in 2004 of which she is executive director.

In 2007, Heather volunteered in the medical clinic of a refugee settlement called CHOGO in Tanzania.

MUNHOPE returned to Tanzania in 2008 and Heather is planning a third trip in 2009. To quote Heather, "To not only know about the inequalities in the world—

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

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, December 6 is Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. December 6, 2008, marks 19 years since 14 young women were murdered at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal, targeted because of their gender.

To address the problem of violence against aboriginal women and girls, the Government of Canada is partnering with the Native Women's Association of Canada on the Sisters in Spirit initiative.

In budget 2008, the government announced the development of an action plan and it will include further work on violence against women, including in the aboriginal communities.

The government is also investing \$2.2 million for up to five new shelters for aboriginal women to use to escape family violence. The government co-sponsored the National Aboriginal Women's Summits which focused on violence and other quality of life issues.

As we commemorate December 6, 1989, let us resolve to work even harder for change, for peace and for an end to violence in all its forms.

* * *

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S PERSONS AWARD

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently, one of my constituents, Ms. Shelagh Day, received the prestigious Governor General's Persons Award.

This honour recognizes a lifetime of work on equality, social and economic rights for all Canadian women. I rise to offer my congratulations and thanks on behalf of my constituents and our entire caucus.

Vancouver Kingsway is home to many outstanding women such as Ms. Day. Dorothy Inglis, a past recipient of the Persons Award, was instrumental in securing equality rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and also hails from Vancouver Kingsway.

We applaud these two women, especially Ms. Day on her recent impressive honour. I do so today because this week we celebrate the White Ribbon campaign, an initiative that urges men to speak out against violence against women. Because she has devoted her life to improving respect for women, it is particularly apt to applaud her efforts when we are remembering that we still have a long way to go.

Statements by Members

TERRORISM

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to condemn the acts of terror yesterday that occurred in Mumbai.

Reports of over 100 dead and hundreds more wounded have shocked people around the world. Many Canadians, particularly those of Indian descent, are deeply troubled by the Mumbai attacks yesterday and earlier today.

The bombings this week and in recent months are not the answer and democracies must stand together in opposition to such heinous and cowardly attacks.

I hope peace and order are soon restored in Mumbai. Many of us have travelled to Mumbai and India and see its great potential as an emerging partner for Canada in an ever more interconnected world.

Our thoughts today are with the people of India at this troubling time.

* * *

[Translation]

MUMBAI ATTACKS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, horror and indignation. These words express our sentiments as the attacks continue in India's financial capital, Mumbai.

Last night, a terrorist group calling itself the Deccan Mujahedeen simultaneously carried out ten attacks in nine public places. Busy places were targeted. These men, armed with grenades and Kalashnikovs, opened fire gratuitously on passersby and foreigners were targeted as hostages. Canadians may be among the large and growing list of victims. So far 125 people have been reported dead and more than 327 injured.

The Bloc Québécois urges the Canadian government to bring home as quickly as possible all Canadian citizens in the affected area who wish to return. We also would like to extend our most sincere condolences to the families of victims.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

TERRORISM

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we watched in horror as terrorists attacked targets throughout the Indian city of Mumbai. The terrorists killed indiscriminately and, according to recent reports, have taken Canadian hostages.

Canada has strong personal links to India and there are many Canadian families, including many of my constituents who are at home right now trying to call loved ones to ensure they are safe and sound.

Oral Questions

These attacks only serve to remind us that there are still those who use fear, hatred and terror to subvert democracy. They cannot and will not succeed.

I am confident that our government is doing everything it can to assist Canadians and the Indian government in dealing with this crisis.

I am sure all parliamentarians would join me in condemning this cowardly act. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the people of Mumbai who are suffering so much right now.

* * *

TERRORISM

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government and the people of Canada, I stand today to condemn, in the strongest terms, the deplorable terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India. The use of violence and terror against innocent civilians is appalling and must not be tolerated.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke this morning with the Indian Foreign Minister Mukherjee to express Canada's sincere condolences for those injured and killed in these cowardly attacks.

Canada stands united with India against all forms of terrorism. The ties that bind our two countries are strong and these attacks have only strengthened our resolve to continue working together for the mutual security and prosperity of our peoples.

We continue to work closely with the Indian authorities to assist any Canadians who may be directly affected by these attacks.

* * *

BAY OF FUNDY

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Bay of Fundy Tourism Partnership for nominating the Bay of Fundy as one of the seven wonders of nature.

This international contest will recognize the most spectacular nature spots in the whole world, and the Bay of Fundy is certainly one of those.

It is the only place in the world where we can see tides go up and down 50 feet, twice a day.

It is the only place in the world where we can see islands, such as Isle Haute and Spencers Island, that have been undisturbed for thousands of years.

It is the only place in the world where we can see 12 species of whales, seals and endangered species all the time.

It is the only place in the world with great villages, with seafaring history, such as Parrsboro, Port Greville, Advocate and Spencers Island where the *Mary Celeste* was first launched and sailed off into history.

I ask all members to consider voting to support the Bay of Fundy as one of the seven wonders of nature at www.new7wonders.com.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me give the Prime Minister the opportunity to inform the House and all Canadians about the status of Canadians at risk in the Mumbai situation.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition.

[Translation]

I telephoned the Indian High Commissioner today and the Minister of Foreign Affairs telephoned his counterpart to express our condolences and our solidarity with their country against the terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

● (1420)

[English]

We would obviously like to extend all our sympathies to anyone from any country and their families who have been affected by loss of life or injury in this terrible tragedy. The ministry of foreign affairs is doing all it can to contact and help Canadian citizens who are affected by this.

Let me be very clear. We join with the entire world in expressing our outrage against this kind of unforgivable hatred, brutality and violence, and we will always stand with our friends in the democratic world against this.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 24, 1998, Paul Martin rose in this House to announce to Canadians that the Liberals had brought them through to the other side of the \$42 billion Conservative deficit. For the next 10 years, Canadians enjoyed surpluses, even in difficult times. During the election, the Prime Minister said that talk of the possibility of a deficit in Canada was ridiculous.

Why did the Prime Minister mislead Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, Canada is not currently running a deficit and this is thanks to the good management of the Minister of Finance, who will present his economic and fiscal update later today. The Leader of the Opposition knows that, in Washington, the leaders of the G20 agreed on the need for a global economic stimulus. We will do this along with the other countries, if need be. We have the strongest economic outlook in the G7.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is truly a dark day for Canada. We are facing an out-of-touch Prime Minister who has driven Canada into deficit, a Prime Minister who is paralyzed in the face of an economic crisis, and a Prime Minister with no plan to get our economy back on track.

Is the Prime Minister even able to move beyond cheap political games to do anything about what matters to Canadians: the economy and their jobs?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, due to the strong and early actions of the government, this country has the strongest fiscal and economic position in the G-7. It is recognized by every country in the world at the international events that I have been at.

This country is virtually alone at this moment in continuing to run a surplus. We will not go into structural deficit. We will continue to have the best fiscal position in the industrialized world, and that is a strength all Canadians want.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from vehicle assembly plants to parts suppliers, dealers and researchers, every community in Canada is exposed to a major company failure in the auto sector. A week ago it was 70 layoffs in Cape Breton, yesterday 855 layoffs at Magna plants in Aurora and Newmarket, and today it is 200 more at Linamar in Guelph.

The fact is that the Conservatives have known for months that major car manufacturers were in serious trouble, and yet they have done nothing except send their minister to sit in the waiting room of the U.S. Congress.

Why is it this minister has not even gotten off the starting blocks in doing something for hard-working families?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. One of my first actions as industry minister was to meet with the Canadian CEOs to get their picture on the situation. I then went to meet the American senior executives and senior policy-makers in Washington. I did so not only alone, on behalf of the Government of Canada, but I had with me the Government of Ontario. We are working in partnership.

Members may know the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty. He said that we need to be really thoughtful and make sure we get this right, we are talking about what could be a very expensive support package, and if we are going to do this, taxpayers in particular want us to do it right. We are with Dalton.

• (1425)

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as much as the Conservatives try to avoid it, there is one federal government in this country that is not acting and it is the one across the way.

[*Translation*]

Hard-working families deserve better. In the past two years, the Conservatives have already lost 45,000 jobs related to the automotive sector. The Conference Board of Canada is saying that we will lose 100,000 more. In other words, the Canadian workforce will decrease by an amount equivalent to the population of a city the size of Sherbrooke.

Oral Questions

[*English*]

According to John Gray, the mayor of Oshawa, dithering would be catastrophic, yet we have a supposed Minister of Industry who is now—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right now we are gathering the facts that will allow us to make the right decision.

[*English*]

We believe in doing the right thing for the taxpayers. That means making sure that whatever decision we make on any issue affecting economic policy, we have all of the facts on the table. I know that is alien to the shoot, fire, aim gang over there, but on this side of the House, we care about the decisions we make. We want to make sure they are the right decisions for the people of Canada and that they are the right decisions, incidentally, for the auto sector as well.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POLITICAL PARTY FUNDING

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to today's newspapers, the Prime Minister will use the economic update as an opportunity to make cuts to political party financing. Instead of tackling the economic crisis, the Prime Minister is actually manufacturing a democratic crisis

Instead of slashing funding to political parties for reasons that are purely partisan, why does the Prime Minister not tackle the real problem, the economic crisis rocking the entire world for the past few weeks?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance will deliver his economic and fiscal statement a little later today and I ask the leader of the Bloc to wait for that statement. However, I can assure this House that we will take measures, just as we took measures last year, to address this crisis based on how it develops.

Canada is in the strongest position of any G-7 country and we intend to maintain that position.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, the Bloc Québécois proposed some 20 measures to stimulate the economy. The government thanked us in the House, even going so far as to say that it appreciated our suggestions.

Will the Prime Minister finally move from words to deeds and implement today—not in three months—a real recovery plan to help the economy and the public?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government did many things last year. A year ago, for example, we cut the GST. The British government finally decided just this week to do the same in view of the economic crisis.

We are going to act today and will take more action in the weeks to come, especially in cooperation with the provinces. I am planning on meeting the premiers in January to discuss joint measures.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of manufacturing a democratic crisis, the Prime Minister would be well advised to do something about the economic crisis. The Bloc Québécois has proposed measures to help the unemployed, older workers, seniors, young people and families.

Will the Prime Minister quit trying to distract us, assume his responsibilities, and introduce a recovery plan incorporating the Bloc's proposals?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was not much talk about jobs in that question. I am not sure if it was an economic question or not.

I rose in this House the other day and I thanked the hon. members from the Bloc Québécois for their suggestions. The finance minister, again the next day, thanked those members as well. We would encourage other members in this House to do the same thing.

The finance minister advised the Bloc that he would take those suggestions under advisement and will be dealing with that when it comes time for our 2009 budget.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the recovery plan proposed by the Bloc Québécois can make the difference between an economic recovery and a deep recession. The Bloc's proposals would help to improve productivity, increase innovation in the manufacturing sector, and boost construction.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to help the victims of the crisis, help our companies and stimulate the economy?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have not been waiting for anything.

If the hon. member had been paying attention, in last fall's economic statement we introduced an economic stimulus that is actually increasing jobs in this country. In fact, we have a net job increase in Canada of over 200,000 this year alone.

This government has reduced taxes by \$31 billion this year. That equates to 2% of our gross domestic product. That is far and away ahead of some of the other G-7 countries.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, later today Canadians are going to be looking for bold leadership, dramatic and immediate action.

They are going to be looking to see EI reform. They want to see strong action to protect their pensions. They want to see credit

guarantees for businesses that are on the edge. The jobs of those workers are on the edge literally this afternoon. Canadians want to see investments in infrastructure to create work.

Instead of an immediate stimulus package to attack the recession, the government is apparently going to attack democracy.

I ask the Prime Minister, how is such an attack going to create one job or protect one pension? Why is he protecting the Conservative Party instead—

The Speaker: The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government acted early and strongly to deal with the economic crisis, including measures that we undertook as far back as a year ago, some of which are still coming into effect. The Minister of Finance has been very aggressive throughout this crisis. That is why Canada's job creation and fiscal position remains the strongest in the G-7.

Protecting the entitlements of political parties is not going to do anything for the Canadian people.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are heading into difficult times. Canadians want us to work together. They are fed up with political games, the government's low blows, and public relations stunts instead of solid economic and financial policies. The steps the Conservatives took in the past and the hand-outs to the banks have not provided any stimulus at all. An attack on our democratic system will not stimulate anything.

Why is the government refusing to act? Why is it stubbornly doing nothing?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the government has been acting for a year now. That is why the Canadian economy has created more jobs than the other major industrialized countries have and why we are one of the few with a budget surplus.

We are acting, and that is why the people of Canada gave us a stronger mandate. We will continue to act prudently, but we will act.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me get this right. Here we have a Prime Minister who says that we are in a recession; he calls it technical. The people being thrown out of work call it painful and tragic. They are trying to make ends meet.

They are going to tune in to the extent that they are able to the economic statement. What are they going to hear? Apparently, they are going to hear a Prime Minister who is going to try to protect and defend the Conservative Party rather than take on the challenges that they are facing each and every day.

What does the Prime Minister think about each and every day? Why does he not stand up for Canadians and take some action on their part instead of protecting his friends in the Conservative Party?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure when the Minister of Finance gets up, today he will do what he has always done, and that is he will speak strongly for a Canadian economy that has performed well compared to our competitors under difficult economic circumstances. He will take measures to strengthen our response to this global crisis. He will lay out a road map for further action. He will ensure that we protect our structural deficit. When it comes to government spending, he will ensure that parliamentarians, beginning with Conservatives, lead by example.

* * *

• (1435)

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the day when we may learn that Canada is being plunged back into deficit, it is being reported that the Conservatives' extremely flawed softwood lumber deal has actually created more jobs in the United States of America than in Canada. This is yet another example of the poor management by the Conservative government.

Forestry workers in British Columbia are crying out for help. Where is the government's plan for this ailing sector and its workers?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we indicated before, we have a comprehensive plan on dealing with this situation. We are very concerned. We understand the effect that closures of mills has on communities. That is why we are investing in innovation and we are expanding market opportunities. As well, we are cutting corporate taxes in order to make our mills more competitive.

John Allan, the president of the Council of Forest Industries, said that the deal in retrospect was a good thing and that anyone who pointed to the lumber agreement as part of their problems was—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver South.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that she read that deal, and I will say why.

The Conservative minister has absolutely missed the point. Let me be absolutely clear. Today's report reveals that this flawed deal works against the Canadian workers, the very people it was supposed to be helping.

The workers, as I said, are crying out for help. Instead of defending the flawed Conservative deal, why is she not getting up and defending the Canadian workers and their jobs?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the question of the softwood lumber deal itself, the members of the opposition have a very short memory. They forget that for years the industry was being assailed by attacks from the U.S. side, resulting in millions of dollars of litigation and untold amounts being paid to quotas.

The deal has the virtual unanimous support of the industry. This industry is being hit by a global crisis and players in that industry are having to make some tough decisions. Let us remember that the deal returned \$4.5 billion to Canadian industries. It is not a fault of the deal.

[Translation]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the automotive industry is facing an unprecedented cash crisis and needs urgent help.

The industry's demands are very clear and known to the government. We are talking about the survival of an industry that is important not only to Ontario, but also to Quebec and other provinces in Canada.

Will the Conservatives set aside their laissez-faire attitude and help not only hang on to jobs, but also create them?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, at this time we are gathering the information we need to make the right decision. It is important to contact our partners, including the Government of Ontario, of course, to get all the information we need to make the right decision for Canadian taxpayers and for the sector itself.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister's response is as clear as mud.

Quebec excels at research and development in the auto parts sector.

Every year, General Motors buys more than \$1.1 billion from parts manufacturers in Quebec, which helps support more than 13,000 jobs. These workers are living in uncertainty now, and all the Conservatives have to offer them is a new deficit.

When do the Conservatives plan on unveiling a plan to help workers?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have already announced a number of action plans for the automotive industry and more than \$250 million to support innovation in this industry. In the throne speech, we announced more money for this industry. For over two years we have been taking action for the good of the industry, as we have been for all of Canada's industries.

* * *

• (1440)

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs' unjustified cuts to the PromArt program could result in the cancellation of some 600 international arts tours. The new minister knows that artists from Quebec will be the hardest hit.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs rise in the House to defend the interests of Quebec artists and culture and tell us that he plans to restore funding for the program, or will his silence prove that when the Conservatives recognized the Quebec nation two years ago today, it was an empty gesture?

Oral Questions

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the PromArt program my colleague is talking about was a Liberal program that cost taxpayers \$7 million. In 2008-09, the program cost \$7 million. Of that \$7 million, only \$2 million was spent on artists' needs. The rest, \$5 million, went to administrative expenses. The Bloc Québécois wants a program that spent over 70% of its budget on administration, not on artists. That approach does not help Canada's artists. Our government is spending \$2.3 billion on artists, and that money is being spent wisely.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the program funded thousands of international tours. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has kept silent on this issue; his attitude is the same as that of his Canadian Heritage colleague, who cut other programs and transferred the money to the Olympic torch relay, and who is now refusing to reverse that decision.

If the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his cabinet colleagues do not really care about protecting Quebec culture, then why not transfer their jurisdiction over culture and their budgets to the Government of Quebec?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am always surprised by how petty the Bloc Québécois can be when it comes to discussing cultural issues. They know very well that we have increased our spending on culture. For example, they know that we invested in TV5. They know that every time the government has had to make a decision about helping francophones and Quebec culture, the government has been present, but they have not.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, has said that he would, if he could, give the order to shoot down the coalition aircraft that are bombarding villages and causing numerous civilian deaths.

The Canadian Minister of National Defence's reaction to this is to say that President Karzai is running for election, so what he said needs to be taken with a grain of salt. This is trivializing the matter rather than admitting that intervention in its present form is headed straight for disaster.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs realize that his government's strategy of focusing more funding on the military aspect than on humanitarian aid and diplomacy is more than dubious and verging on dangerous?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the hon. member does not understand that it is impossible to have development without security.

[English]

The hon. member is missing the point. We clearly cannot do the necessary development and reconstruction inside Afghanistan without a secure environment. That is why we are there as part of a NATO-led UN mission, which, by the way, for the member opposite

and for President Karzai, it is clear that we are there at the invitation of the Afghanistan government.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question was addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as it dealt with his foreign affairs policy. It would appear that this minister, like his predecessor, the member for Beauce, is the mouthpiece for the Prime Minister and incapable of answering for himself. What is his role, issuing passports?

I will ask the question again. Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs realize that his government's militaristic strategy in Afghanistan is fraught with failure and the intervention strategy needs reviewing as soon as possible?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has said, we are in Afghanistan at the invitation of the United Nations. We are part of a group that is working to rebuild that country. We are working to rebuild its governance strategies. We are working to rebuild its infrastructures. In short, the Canadian men and women over there can take pride in what they are doing. As for us, we shall pursue the same six objectives we set for ourselves a long time ago.

* * *

● (1445)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have provided multiple billions of dollars to fund bank liquidity. Yet what do these banks do as soon as they receive the money? They immediately turn around and dramatically increase the cost of credit to small business owners, the very people we need to pull us out of this crisis.

Will the Conservative finance minister use his bully pulpit to demand that the banks reduce the cost of credit to small businesses and their customers?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have provided funding to the banks exactly in the manner that it should be provided, to pass on to consumers. Through our insured mortgage purchase program, we have put that money through CMHC, but we have also put in a system that allows individuals to gain credit from the banks. Canadians asked for access to credit to grow their business.

The Liberals do not want to admit it, but some businesses in the country are doing well and are looking for financing to grow their businesses.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada sends them \$75 billion and the government cannot even pick up the telephone and tell them to lay off.

Small businesses are a key component to our economy and tens of thousands of job depend on their capacity to access affordable credit.

Like all Canadians, small businesses and their customers are about to pay a very heavy price for this new Conservative deficit. It will be a double whammy. A Conservative deficit and increased credit costs is the last thing they need.

Will the Conservative government start helping small business in their—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): What a novel idea, Mr. Speaker, helping small business. That is exactly what we did in the fall economic statement last year. We cut taxes to small business. We cut taxes to individuals so they could start new businesses.

If I recall, most of the opposition parties in the House voted against that.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our indications point to huge job losses resulting from the emerging Conservative recession. The Conservatives are ignoring this reality, just like they have ignored everything else. While the world acts, they sit.

Employment insurance is an absolutely essential program for Canadians, and the Conservatives have done nothing to ensure it will be there for workers as job losses mount.

Given the Conservative government's inability to anticipate or deal with the crisis, what assurance can the minister give that EI will be available to those who need it, when they need it? When will somebody over there start standing up for Canadian workers?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want the House to know that we will always stand up for workers and we will be there for them when they need it.

We have taken steps to improve the EI program. The Speech from the Throne further explains how we will improve it. We will target help to those who need help the most. We will be there for them when they need us.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives created an EI Crown corporation this year, saying that the economy was just fine and it only needed \$2 billion in the fund. We told them that was not enough. A whole host of experts told them the same thing at the committee when the Liberal-led opposition forced hearings on EI.

Given that the Conservatives are doing absolutely nothing to protect Canadian jobs, why would anybody believe they will do anything to protect Canadian workers when they lose their jobs?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have ensured that premiums are collected equal to the benefits that are paid out and we want to be sure they are used exclusively for workers and not for other expenses.

Oral Questions

It is an independent board that sets the amount for the premiums and that independent board is backed by money and backed by the government. If more is required for this year, it will be there and it will be reassessed again in the next year.

* * *

● (1450)

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I rise in the House for the first time, I would like to thank the good citizens of Edmonton—St. Albert for electing me their member of Parliament and giving me the great honour of representing them in the House.

Every day our Canadian Forces are making the world a safer place to live. Our largest overseas contingent is currently serving in Afghanistan, with the current rotation being filled by the brave servicemen and women from CFB Petawawa.

This Christmas they will be celebrating the holidays apart from their families and loved ones. Would the minister responsible for Canada Post please tell the House what programs are in place to help families stay connected with the troops serving overseas during this Christmas season?

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert on his recent election. He has Canadian Forces barracks in his riding and I know this is a very important issue for him.

I am very proud to make the announcement that Canada Post is again extending free parcel delivery to our troops overseas this Christmas season. They do a tremendous amount of work for us and we support them in their military efforts. Now, not only can we support them but we can encourage them with parcel delivery for Christmas. We encourage their families and friends to exercise that. I am proud of Canada Post for what it has done.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in another attack on democracy, a Conservative member of this House has apparently interfered with the directors election at the Canadian Wheat Board. The ethics code, which covers every MP, says that MPs may not assist a “person becoming a director or officer in a corporation, association or trade union”.

The member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands must face the consequences of violating section 3 and section 9 of the ethics code. How does the government House leader explain this? Is it a lapse in judgment, or intentional interference in a democratic election? What consequences will the member face?

Oral Questions

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when NDP members get up, they never ask about the real issues concerning the Canadian Wheat Board.

For example, last year when the organic farmers were trying to sell their grain, the Canadian Wheat Board said that it wanted to take 9¢ from them for doing nothing. This year the Canadian Wheat Board said it is going to take 30¢, but there are no questions from the member opposite.

Last year the contingency fund that the Canadian Wheat Board had to protect the rest of Canadian farmers lost \$35 million. There were absolutely no questions. This year they have apparently lost more money, and again, there are no questions from the opposition.

We are there for western Canadian farmers. We are going to protect them. We are going to bring marketing choice for them.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has intentionally attempted to influence the outcome of an election at the Canadian Wheat Board using his parliamentary letterhead. This is a clear violation of at least two sections of the code.

Pending the formal report of the Ethics Commissioner, will the member be suspended from his position as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, and especially as the Parliamentary Secretary to the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I am sorry that the NDP members are so out of touch with western Canadian farmers. I am sorry that they only get their advice from extremists in the agriculture community. I am sorry that they are here today defending the big Wheat Board against the individual farmers. However, I am here to say that I am happy that this caucus will stand up for western Canadian wheat farmers. We will do what is right for them. We are going to bring marketing choice for western Canadian grain farmers.

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[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, called on the coalition forces to set a deadline for withdrawing from his country. With complete disregard for his request, the Canadian government decided to escalate its military involvement in the region. Incidentally, the government's first quarterly report shows that security in Afghanistan is deteriorating.

Does the minister realize that his government is on the wrong track in Afghanistan, and what is he waiting for to correct the situation while there is still time?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the hon. member was here, but there was a vote taken in this place that did involve an end date, and that is 2011.

As far as the security situation in Afghanistan is concerned, clearly there are still challenges, but it is incumbent upon this government and the Department of National Defence to provide the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces with the necessary protection that they need. That includes such things as helicopters. That includes the protective equipment that is part of the force protection package that will be voted upon in the supplementary estimates, and I know that I can count on the member to support that estimate.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government is spending huge amounts of money on all kinds of military equipment. And it does not even have a specific plan. Yet, with an economic crisis looming, it sits and does nothing.

How can the Minister of National Defence justify this new increase in military spending when the government refuses to pay a cent to the victims of this economic crisis? That is absolutely outrageous.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): What is scandalous, Mr. Speaker, is that the Bloc and that member seem to be completely out of touch with reality when it comes to the necessity of providing the men and women in the forces with the necessary equipment that they have to have to do the job in this dangerous and ever-evolving environment.

There were estimates tabled in the House. We have appeared before committees. We have followed the recommendations of an independent committee. We are doing what is right for the Canadian Forces. I would expect the member to show a little more solidarity in our efforts to give the forces the important equipment to do that job.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): My question is for the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker.

Government members, in violation of all democratic principles, have been attempting to interfere and influence the outcome of the Canadian Wheat Board director elections.

Does the Prime Minister deny that those MPs, including the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, have access to the confidential voters list of names and addresses and are using those to send out letters? Does he deny that the MPs who are sending out letters are not registered as third party intervenors? Will he confirm that the election coordinator is looking into these illegal practices?

Oral Questions

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the last election the member for Malpeque acknowledged that the Liberals' agriculture policy just was not working. Why? Because it does not represent farmers. I do not think there is any clearer place where they have failed to represent farmers than on this issue.

We all know that he has failed in his job. We all know that the Liberals' agriculture policy has failed. We are going to step forward. We are going to protect western Canadian farmers. We are going to bring them marketing choice. We are going to do that soon.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Is there no law that that party will not break, Mr. Speaker?

Obviously the words about democracy in the throne speech are not worth the paper they are written on. Fundamental to democracy are elections based on election rules and the law. The parliamentary secretary has violated election regulations. We believe other members have violated mailing privileges of this House. Further, the parliamentary secretary has violated his oath of office and has used lists privy only to him. Is there absolutely no respect for the law?

Will the Prime Minister finally put a stop to the lawbreakers in his party?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Sound and fury, Mr. Speaker, signifying nothing.

I wonder where the member actually was when one of the pro-Canadian Wheat Board directors was out using the Canadian Wheat Board logo on his election material. I did not hear anything from him at that point. I have not heard anything from him when the Canadian Wheat Board has been banning reporters it does not like from its news conferences.

Once again I am going to reiterate that we will be there. We will be standing up for western Canadian farmers. We are going to bring them marketing choice as soon as possible.

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CREDIT CARD INTERCHANGE FEES

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, small businesses create a huge percentage of all the job growth in Canada. We should be helping them, not hurting them.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business is demanding that this government act before the big banks' next big cash grab. Our small businesses are facing a 10,000% increase in their Visa and MasterCard merchant fees. Is this fair?

Does the government believe that it is not its problem, or that it can just not do anything about it? Which is it?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member raises an issue of real importance to small business. As he knows, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has been speaking with the players about this issue. The fact of the matter is that the banks in this country are

competitive. They are free to put forward products to all of the customers they have, including small business.

The Minister of Finance has written to the banks about this issue asking them to deal with it. We are awaiting their responses momentarily, and we believe we can work on it together.

* * *

• (1500)

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, natural health products are under attack. The Conservatives have made a mess of the approval process with unreachable deadlines to regulate a massive number of critical health products.

Canada has over 10,000 natural health stores, with over 25,000 people employed directly. Countless families rely on these products. The approval process is hopelessly backlogged and there is fear Bill C-51 is coming back. Small businesses will fail and consumers will suffer.

When will the government work with, and not against, the natural health community?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to bringing forward new legislation on that. We hope to introduce it sometime in the new year. We are committed to protecting the health and safety of Canadians. We will be putting forward our plan in the next few days.

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada leads the G7 nations and is second among OECD member countries when it comes to supporting university research.

Last year the Prime Minister launched our country's science and technology strategy. The government has made important new investments to attract the best researchers, equip them with the best facilities and make sure that Canadians get the economic benefit from our innovations.

Can the Minister of State for Science and Technology update the House on new developments?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week I had the pleasure of opening our 11th centre of excellence for the commercialization of our technology, to move it from the laboratory to the marketplace.

Today I am thrilled to announce to the House that the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics at the University of Waterloo has appointed an internationally respected scientist and theorist, Dr. Stephen Hawking, as its distinguished research chair.

This is a very proud day for Canada. It is great news for our science and technology community. I look forward to seeing more good things from this government's initiative.

*Business of the House***GOVERNMENT SPENDING**

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's new Conservative deficit is the result of irresponsible and fiscal mismanagement and Canadian families and workers are getting burned.

Yet the Conservatives have racked up tens of thousands of dollars in extra travel and hospitality fees, limo rentals, charter jets, millions in sole source contracts for their buddies, and excessive ministerial budgets and staff.

If the Conservatives really want to cut down on the fat, maybe they will get their heads out of the pork barrel.

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talks about the size of our cabinet, so let us talk about some facts.

At the end of Jean Chrétien's time in government, he had 39 members in cabinet, as did Paul Martin, this with only 133 Liberal members of Parliament in the House. Statistically that was the largest cabinet in Canadian history. His cabinet was almost 30% of his caucus.

The member might also be interested to know that the cost of our cabinet today is still millions of dollars less than when the Liberals were last in office.

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[Translation]

MEAT PROCESSING INDUSTRY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the difficulties that are affecting the slaughter industry and that are forcing a company like Levinoff-Colbex to ask the federal government for urgent assistance are a direct result of the federal government's mismanagement of the BSE and cull cattle file. It is not just the survival of this company that is at stake. The entire slaughter industry is at risk.

Of the amount promised during the election campaign for the slaughter industry, how much has the minister set aside specifically for Levinoff-Colbex? I am looking for a specific dollar amount.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the slaughterhouse issue is not just of interest to the company that the member mentioned. It is also of interest to other regions of Quebec and Canada. During the election campaign we said we would do something. The amount of \$50 million was mentioned, but we will have to wait for the budget to see about that.

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• (1505)

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the B.C. Treaty Commission reported that treaty negotiations are being stalled because it must wait for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to finish a review of the west coast salmon.

Seven communities are close to a deal, yet without a discussion of salmon, nothing can be finalized.

Will the fisheries minister tell the House and the aboriginal communities who are stuck in limbo when the salmon review will be finished and when the federal negotiators will get a mandate to conclude the treaty negotiations?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, DFO is firmly committed to seeking fishery treaty arrangements with the first nations which are mutually agreeable, broadly supported and implementable. Recent conservation concerns require that arrangements be fair and integrated with other fisheries. Also, they must be sustainable. While we do not want to delay the treaty process, we must ensure that the fish are there for future generations.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Raúl de la Nuez Ramírez, Minister of Foreign Trade of the Republic of Cuba.

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[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the government what its plan is regarding the business of the House for the time remaining until we recess on December 12.

[English]

I would also like to know when the government intends to introduce its ways and means motion.

Finally, I would like to know, if the government has not already officially designated the opposition days between now and the adjournment on December 12, when it intends to officially designate those opposition days.

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on one week at a time if that is all right.

Today, we will wrap up the debate on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. In addition and pursuant to an order made Tuesday of this week, at 4 p.m. today regular proceedings will be interrupted for the Minister of Finance to deliver his fiscal economic update.

Following the statement, each opposition party will be given an opportunity to respond to that statement. After the responses, the House will resume consideration of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Tomorrow, we will be debating the substance of the economic fiscal update.

The Address

I would like to designate Monday, December 1 as an allotted day pursuant to the order I mentioned earlier. Following the consideration of the opposition motion on Monday, we will propose to the House a ways and means motion, which the member mentioned, relating to the economic fiscal update. A bill will then be tabled that is based on that ways and means motion. That bill, which will have the designation as C-2, will be debated for the remainder of next week.

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[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during oral question period, the Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism) alluded to something.

[*English*]

The Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism, in reply to a question by the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, made reference to a letter.

Mr. Speaker, you can appreciate that from my position here I cannot see that far down, although I probably need an adjustment to my glasses. However, the minister made reference to a letter that was apparently given by the Minister of Finance to the various banking institutions and credit card companies. I am wondering if that minister will now table the letter to which she made reference.

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister has left the chamber, but I will certainly approach her and make sure that we are able to provide that.

• (1510)

The Speaker: There was no suggestion that the minister read from the letter. Tabling is not required unless the letter is read in reference to some document, as the hon. member for Mississauga South points out so ably.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in earlier answers to questions from both the NDP and Liberals, the parliamentary secretary denied, as his office officials admitted, that he used the voters list as the source of mailings. Will he deny that his office confirmed that he used that information and did so illegally?

The Speaker: I am afraid the hon. member for Malpeque knows that supplementary questions cannot be asked on points of order after question period. I would suggest he restrain himself until tomorrow when he can ask questions in question period again.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Wild Rose had the floor and he has three minutes remaining in the time allotted.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your election to the Chair once again. I will resume where I left off prior to question period.

In addition to the priorities I spoke about previous to question period, there is one other issue that is near and dear to my heart, and that is showing our soldiers and our veterans the respect and admiration they deserve.

Every day, as I walk down to the Parliament buildings, I pass by the National War Memorial and every day I pause to reflect on the bravery and sacrifice of our Canadian soldiers, both past and present, both here in Canada and abroad. I think particularly about those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, laying down their lives to ensure that we in Canada would continue to enjoy the democratic country in which we live. Without their courage and conviction, we would not be here in this place to debate the issues of the day or enjoy this great country that we are so fortunate to call home.

The people of Wild Rose expect a government that does more than talk about supporting our troops. They expect a government that gets things done. The Conservative government will deliver with the necessary equipment that our soldiers need to do the great work that they perform.

In last month's general election, Canadians voiced their trust in the government by voting to renew and strengthen our mandate. They did so knowing that this is the best team to guide Canada through the looming economic storm. That storm is now here and we are already starting to see the effects of the global downturn around the world.

During this challenging time, the government is mindful of the privilege and responsibility with which it has been entrusted.

I am truly humbled by the opportunity the people of Wild Rose have given me to be their member of Parliament. There is difficult work ahead but the people of Wild Rose have my commitment that I will work relentlessly and tirelessly to address the challenges that we must face together, both now and in the future, to ensure that Canada remains the true north strong and free.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for his election to the House. The previous member from Wild Rose was a colourful character, and the member has big shoes and a big hat to fill. I do want to welcome him to this chamber.

The Address

I want to remind the member that when the last Conservative government was in power, we did have a \$23 billion deficit, unemployment was over 10% and interest rates were over 11%. It did get straightened out, but now we have another Conservative government here. According to all the projecting agencies, it would appear that we are right back in the very same boat and on the same path that Canadians soundly rejected before, and the deficit again is somewhere between \$20 billion and \$50 billion.

It appears to me that I have seen this movie before and it does not end well for working-class families, and that is both in the technical sense and in the real sense.

In the last election, the Prime Minister went to every province and every city and he gave us a steady dose of pabulum that there would be no recession and no deficit and that anyone who suggested otherwise was ridiculous.

Days after the election was over he changed his tune and said that not only was a deficit essential but that people who did not support a deficit were being overly simplistic in their thinking.

Obviously the Prime Minister knew this—

● (1515)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must cut off the hon. member there to give the hon. member for Wild Rose a chance to respond.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the member that we are in a time of unprecedented global economic instability that is rapidly changing at the present time.

Our government foresaw that and we put a lot of measures in place to ensure our economy would remain one of the strongest through this time. That is why groups, such as the World Economic Forum, have indicated that our financial system is the strongest in the world, and that is because of the actions of this government.

We will continue to take strong and bold action to ensure our country comes out of this time of economic instability as strong as ever.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member who represents a beautiful area of the country, Wild Rose in Alberta.

I would like to get back to his statements about strong government action.

What we have seen right across Canada over the last 20 years is a huge erosion of middle-class incomes.

As the member well knows, under the Alberta Conservative government, farm receipts have fallen to the lowest in the country. In fact, many Alberta farmers are in a net loss position as a result of right wing economic policies. We also see right wing economic policies now at the federal level having the same kind of impact right across the country, which means that fewer Canadians have faith in our political system, and that is why we saw a record low turnout during the most recent federal election.

As a new member of Parliament, is my colleague ready to push his government to take strong measures, including rolling back this bloated \$50 billion corporate tax cut?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned tough times. If we want to see true tough times in this country, we would put the NDP in this place over here.

My colleague mentioned tax cuts. I would be hard-pressed to believe that removing tax cuts would be the proper way to stimulate the economy. Our government foresaw what was coming which is the reason for many of the tax cuts that we put in place, both for businesses and individuals.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway. I would first like to congratulate you on your election as a member and as Speaker. I look forward to working with you and the other members of the House.

I would also like to join my New Democratic Party colleagues in congratulating the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

I want to thank the citizens of West Nipissing, French River, Rayside-Balfour, Valley East, Onaping Falls, Folyet and the communities surrounding Nickel Belt who have elected me as part of the second largest New Democratic caucus in the history of the party. I humbly acknowledge the trust they have shown in me and the responsibility they have given me. I assure them that I will work unstintingly and will not disappoint them. I am honoured by their trust and I am determined to be here always to stand up for them.

In addition, I would particularly like to thank my wife Marie-Claire, my daughter Johanne and my son Michel for their support and encouragement. It is because of them that I am here.

I am honoured to be here with those of my colleagues who have been elected for the first time, and I am eager to get to work with them.

● (1520)

[*English*]

We are facing one of the most significant events of our times. Across the globe, we are seeing banks collapsing, companies faltering and people losing their jobs. This is just the beginning.

Ordinary Canadians are worried. They were looking to the Speech from the Throne to give them an indication of the direction the government would take to deal with this problem.

There were some positive items. I welcomed the general tone of the speech, with its call for co-operation and its conciliatory language. If the government is able to back up this new tone with action, then we are likely to see a productive Parliament that works for all Canadians.

The Address

The nods to the environment, the expansion of the retrofit program and the mention of a continental cap and trade program show that the government is slowly coming around to some of the policies Canadians have been demanding. The people of Nickel Belt understand and appreciate cap and trade. Decades ago, in a necessary effort to protect our environment, Inco was required to cap its sulphur emissions by a specific day or be fined. It capped its emissions. The environment is recovering from years of damage due to sulphur, and it is important to note that Inco did not leave town.

Yet even with these elements, most of the speech was too vague and indirect. It did not match the urgency or the depth of what is required to protect working families in this economy. Canadians were hoping for more from the throne speech, and New Democrats were expecting more.

There was no indication of how the government will reverse the growing doctor deficit. Five million Canadians do not have access to a family doctor and have to rely on clinics and emergency rooms for their basic care. For example, in my riding we face a health care crisis. Ambulances are backed up at the emergency room with ill patients, while beds in the hospital are taken by those who would be better served in long-term care facilities.

We need to know why FedNor has not stepped up to the plate in terms of requested funding for such a facility in Chelmsford. Such a facility would significantly ease the burden on our acute care hospital.

Although consumer bankruptcies in September were 20% higher than in August and although unemployment is projected to rise next year to 7%, there was no mention of how the government is going to fix the EI system. Recent rule changes to employment insurance mean that an unemployed person must exhaust savings before EI is even available. We need to make sure money will go right back into the local economy to create jobs, keep small businesses afloat and put food on the table.

In northern Ontario, we are already seeing the effects of the slowdown. Because of the low price of nickel, Xstrata has made changes to its plans for the lifespan of two major mines. First Nickel has suspended operations at its Lockerby mine in Nickel Belt, resulting in the layoff of 140 of its 160 workers.

We need bold and strategic measures for our economy. The 21st century is new and different, and tired old 20th century solutions will not work anymore.

First, let us introduce financial regulations that would protect consumers in this economy. Even though strong regulations have kept our banking sector comparatively stable, effects from global market turmoil are unavoidable. Stronger oversight is needed to track the \$75 billion already given to secure banks. If assistance is given to any ailing sectors, taxpayers need a full accounting and, where appropriate, an equity stake in return. The federal government can protect consumers by ensuring that credit card companies stop hiking interest rates on cash-strapped families who miss a payment.

Second, let us invest in the new energy economy for 21st century prosperity. We do not have to choose between economic growth and fighting climate change. We can choose a new energy economy. We can put a price on carbon and harness the sun, wind and water.

Canadian innovation can make us leaders in renewable technology and create green-collar jobs. We can begin creating thousands of jobs right now by energy-retrofitting our homes and buildings.

We can support our local businesses and agriculture. In my riding Don Poulin Farms, which recently could sell its potatoes to local stores, is now forced to ship its product to Toronto corporate chains. These chains then ship the product right back, to be sold in local stores.

● (1525)

Using resources to transport food over greater distances forces local farmers into hardship. It is environmentally damaging, it is an additional cost, and it could result in unnecessary job losses in Nickel Belt.

Third, let us invest in private sector enterprise and innovation through our research institutions. Our universities and colleges should lead the world in practical innovation. They have proven they are up to it. We must do more through incentives for job creation, better support for research and development, and innovation funding. A good start would be to allocate funding for the Centre of Excellence in Mining Innovation in northeastern Ontario.

Fourth, let us make strategic investment in infrastructure and in the real economy. Let us commit to an ambitious plan to partner with our communities to repair our crumbling cities, invest in public transit, and build affordable housing. We can ensure that our publicly owned transit systems are efficient and effective.

In my riding it is nearly impossible to find an apartment that is both available and affordable. The roads are among the worst on the continent. We have relied on raw resource exports for too long. We need credit guarantees for viable companies in forestry and mining and we need them now.

Fifth, but certainly not the least important, is to invest in our social infrastructure. Without a national skills training strategy to address our skills shortage, we will only compound the length and depth of the economic downturn.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

The Address

[Translation]

In the United States, pensions are guaranteed up to \$50,000. We have to have pension insurance plans to protect seniors today and in future generations. We can create more jobs in child care and in caring for the elderly, increase the number of doctors and nurses and provide better opportunities for members of the first nations.

The government has got to respect the 62% of Canadians who voted for change. This parliament has been asked to set aside its differences and overcome its traditional partisan quarrels. However, that does not mean giving the government carte blanche, which is what Canadians have denied it.

The government has to make compromises and the opposition has to be constructive. If those conditions are met, I am convinced that this parliament will be able to rise to our expectations and to the expectations of all Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Nickel Belt for an excellent speech that brings some common sense to the House. Unfortunately, that is something that we do not find here as often as we would like. After a few weeks here, he has had the opportunity to see some of the Conservative government's economic impact and lack of action. He has also seen the impact on northern Ontario of the softwood lumber agreement and other Conservative Party policies that the Liberals supported.

I would like to hear his comments about the impact on the constituents in Nickel Belt from all of these policies and the government's lack of economic strategy.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, if the government does not change the employment insurance rules, many people in northern Ontario will suffer. In fact, this week in Coniston, another company, Northern Heat Treat Ltd, was affected. It had been operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Forty employees were laid off and now it operates only eight hours a day, five days a week. Changes must be made to employment insurance to help these people.

• (1530)

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too welcome the member for Nickel Belt to the House. Although we are in quite different parts of the country, northern Ontario versus the west coast of British Columbia, I would ask the member to say a little bit more about forestry.

In my riding, forestry companies are going out of business because they simply do not have access to lines of credit or to loan guarantees. These are viable businesses, and British Columbia has a long and proud history of being a forestry producer.

I ask the member to talk about the importance, both to my riding and his, of making sure these forestry companies have ways to stay in business, because once this economic downturn is over, we know that forestry companies and workers will add substantially to our local economies.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, forestry is also very important in Nickel Belt. The \$1 billion giveaway the Conservative government gave to the United States has not helped the Canadian forestry business.

We hope that in this session of Parliament, the Government of Canada will help the forestry industry right across Canada by guaranteeing some loans.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great humility and reverence that I rise in this honourable chamber to address it substantively for the first time.

I offer first my most heartfelt thanks to the people of Vancouver Kingsway for allowing me the privilege of representing them. I will do everything I can to justify their faith.

I must express my profound appreciation to my family, whose love and support sustained me, as well as to all those who volunteered on my campaign. Without their contributions I would not be here.

I extend also my most sincere congratulations to all of the members of the House on their elections. Whichever party they belong to, their dedication to their communities and their commitment to their country are worthy of our deepest respect. They certainly have mine.

I will share with the members of the House a little of what Vancouver Kingsway is about and of what I heard the citizens of our great riding express in the last federal election.

Vancouver Kingsway epitomizes Canada. It is a wonderful mosaic of diverse cultures and vibrant communities. It has boundless optimism in what our society can attain and should be.

It exists in the markets of Victoria Drive, where we can hear commerce conducted in the energetic cadences of Cantonese and Mandarin. It lives in the community halls of Fraser Street, where we can see the cultural expressions of every province and state of the Philippines, Pakistan and India. It is found in the small businesses of Kingsway, where we can meet hardworking Vietnamese and Korean entrepreneurs, and indeed entrepreneurs of every nationality imaginable.

We can see it in our wonderful network of neighbourhood houses at Collingwood, Cedar Cottage and Little Mountain, and in the Multicultural Helping House. They are all engines of social development and cross-cultural bridges.

It can be witnessed in countless citizen groups, such as those active in Riley Park, Kensington and Norquay, whose residents devote their time and talent to developing livable neighbourhoods that work for everyone.

What we can see in these and every one of the communities of my great riding is people living, working and celebrating in cooperation and tolerance. As an integral part of the tapestry of our nation, Vancouver Kingsway thrives with energy and life.

There is also great need in the riding I represent. Fully 50% of Kingsway families survive on less than \$50,000 of total household income, and tens of thousands of families survive on much less than that. The average citizen earns just over \$21,000 a year. It is a challenge to survive on such an income in an expensive city like Vancouver.

The Address

There are 6,000 families headed by single parents, primarily women. There are 24,000 children and youth deeply concerned about their futures, a full quarter of whom live in poverty.

There are thousands of immigrants who are underemployed, living in economic difficulty and separated from their families. There are seniors who live in deprivation, disabled who live in isolation and homeless who live without hope.

However, the citizens of Vancouver Kingsway are resilient, resourceful and positive about our future. They have spoken loudly and clearly in this last election about their needs and desires. They have articulated what they expect from their federal government and from all of us who were elected to guide the policies of our nation.

The people of Kingsway want affordable housing so that every person in our community can live in dignity, safety and security. They need more co-ops, more rental stock and more non-market housing of all types. They want their federal government to re-enter the housing arena in this country. There are perfect opportunities in my riding to create affordable housing at sites such as Little Mountain and the soon to be vacated RCMP headquarters.

They need quality child care that is accessible, stimulating and affordable. In these tough economic times, they want a national child care program that will help Canadian women and men cope with the challenges of raising healthy children. They desire good jobs that will allow them to support themselves and their families, jobs that are safe and valued, jobs that give a fair return for their hard work.

They want to protect our environment, address climate change and build a sustainable economy for our children and for future generations. They hope the federal government will lead and partner with them to help retrofit their homes and buildings, and that it will develop clean energy from solar, wind and geothermal sources.

They require a strong education and skills training system that is available to everyone, regardless of income. They know that a well educated society is critical to their own, their children's and our society's future.

● (1535)

They yearn for an immigration system that is fair, fast and effective, one that sees foreign credentials recognized, families united and immigrants better supported to succeed in their chosen country. They need more public transit, quality public facilities and a strong public health care system.

They want the federal government to support our arts and culture sector. They favour a strong public broadcaster, support for institutions such as the CBC Radio Orchestra and Ballet British Columbia, and they want our visual performance and creative arts to flourish. They realize that a worthy nation values its culture as well as its economy.

They want a society that takes care of our seniors, nurtures our children and protects our vulnerable. They believe in a Canada that is peaceful, just and a model of mature behaviour on the world stage. While they support our men and women in the military, they want us out of Afghanistan, out of combat and back into peacekeeping.

The good people of Vancouver Kingsway sent me here to bring these goals to the attention of the Government of Canada and to work immediately, tirelessly and forcefully to try to achieve them, and I am both honoured and committed to do so.

There is one issue that is of special interest to the citizens of Vancouver Kingsway, which must be drawn to the attention of the House, and that is the issue of democracy. In short, they want to send the clearest message possible that the votes of our citizens must be respected at all times and in every way. They stand firmly against those who subvert democracy by crossing the floor and strongly against those parties that would put their political interests ahead of the democratic expression of our citizens.

All citizens of our country owe a debt of gratitude to the thousands of Kingsway residents who stood valiantly and unceasingly for the integrity of our political system and for democracy in our country.

Beyond that, the citizens of Vancouver Kingsway also want real democratic reform in our nation. They want our government to respect the fact that Canadians have chosen a minority Parliament and to recognize that compromise and co-operation are expected for the betterment of our country. They want proportional representation so our Parliament will finally and accurately reflect the votes that we cast.

In addition, like most Canadians, the people of Vancouver Kingsway are concerned about their economic futures, their jobs, their savings, their mortgages and their pensions. They want us to ensure that the interests of our middle class, our working families and our small business sectors are protected and supported.

Although there are some measures in the Speech from the Throne that are positive and for which I give the government credit, unfortunately the real concerns facing the people of Vancouver Kingsway have not been adequately addressed, but I will work hard to convince the members of this Parliament that the measures I outlined and others are not only greatly needed, they are the right ones to put our economy back on a solid base.

The citizens of Vancouver Kingsway work hard and they believe in a country that rewards effort and initiative, but they also believe in a nation that is compassionate, fair and committed to social and economic justice.

Several decades ago, Tommy Douglas exhorted Canadians to "take heart, because it's never too late to build a better world". Such a sentiment is particularly apt today and the citizens of Vancouver Kingsway want us to get started on that task. I look forward to contributing in every way I can to this noble goal.

The Address

• (1540)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to get on the record the bizarre actions related to the north in the throne speech, which primarily ignored the north.

There was a lot of bluster in previous speeches about northern sovereignty and a lot of those promises were never kept, but in this throne speech all that was missing. There were two minor references. I think the government figured that out after the throne speech. Now the PMO has written sections of members' speeches with a bunch of old items that they had promised to do.

Even the Prime Minister mentioned two items. He talked about pollution, but he never rescinded the suggestion that the Conservatives made over a year ago to allow dumping in the Arctic. I have a private member's bill against that. He also talked about icebreakers, of all the nerve, because that was a promise he made to northerners to get elected, that there be three icebreakers, and now it is down to only one icebreaker.

Would the member support us in our efforts for the north, that the promises should be kept? Not only are two of the icebreakers gone, but the planes promised for Yellowknife are gone. The ice-strengthened supply ships have all been cancelled. It is great to make promises but if they do not follow through, it does not really help northerners.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I join with the hon. member in both the tenor and particulars of his question.

It is extremely important for government to keep its promises. This is reflected strongly in Vancouver Kingsway, where the citizens of my riding watched a member of Parliament cross the floor to the other side, notwithstanding he had indicated he would not do so.

The question of protecting the environment in the Arctic is of pivotal concern. I, too, was concerned by references in the throne speech to exploiting the oil and gas resources in the Arctic, which I think is reminiscent of Mr. George Bush's attempts to drill in the Arctic. The environmental considerations there ought to give us pause.

I also believe the member raises a good point in the government failing to keep its promise on the three icebreakers. It is our job in opposition to ensure the government speaks honestly and with integrity to the people of our country, and I will join with any member of the House in that endeavour.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Vancouver Kingsway on his recent election and all the hard work he has done on behalf of his constituents.

Many members in the House will know that Ed Broadbent introduced a motion in 1989 to reduce child poverty. A recent Campaign 2000 report speaks to the fact that British Columbia continues to report the highest provincial child poverty rate despite strong economic growth. The throne speech completely disregarded child poverty and, in particular, first nations children in poverty.

The report goes on to say that the long-term benefits of a poverty prevention strategy will be felt by all Canadians. It speaks to the fact that as we invest in child and family poverty, we have savings in

justice, health care, education and many other aspects of government spending.

Could the member comment specifically on what he would see as important elements in a poverty-reduction strategy for children and families in British Columbia, his riding and in Canada?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, poverty is an extremely critical issue in my riding. As I mentioned in my inaugural speech, one out of every four children in my riding lives statistically below the poverty line. Children do not live in poverty by themselves. They live in families. That means there are thousands of families in our ridings that are poor.

In 1989 the House made an all party commitment to try to eliminate child poverty by what I think was the year 2000. We did not meet that goal. It is very important that we in the House recommit ourselves to that process.

I listened to the government in the throne speech and in the answers in question period. It talked about how the economy was in decent shape and about the steps the government had taken. It is taking credit for making things better for Canadians. That is not the experience for many of the children and people in Vancouver Kingsway, British Columbia or across the country.

We need a strong employment insurance program. We need better transfers to the provinces so social supports are present for all families. We need to protect Canadian jobs—

• (1545)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Avalon

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the voters of Avalon for giving me this opportunity to represent them. They have given me their overwhelming support and for that I will be forever grateful.

I also want to thank my workers and my family who helped my campaign. In particular, I want to thank my wife, Susan, who is my dedicated soulmate, my friend and my CFO in my campaign. She kept everyone on their toes.

I want to also to thank my mom, Erma, and my family and friends for helping me achieve this goal. Without their hard work and dedication, this would not be possible.

As I went bay to bay, shore to shore and door to door during this campaign, I met many friends, old and new. I renewed acquaintances. I made some really good new friends for the first time. Those friends were former Conservatives who came over to work on my campaign.

This is a very humbling experience speaking in this chamber today. I am pleased to be sharing my time with the member for Don Valley West today.

We are all here for the same reason, to make our communities, our province and our country a little better place to live.

The people of Avalon sent a message in this election, and that message was on the Atlantic accord. The people were upset that a promise made to our province had been broken. That message was simple.

The Address

On that important issue, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley did exactly the same thing. He stood up for the people whom he represented and they recognized that.

Now we must put that behind us and we must move on in a new spirit of co-operation with the provinces and municipalities. We must work together. The government mentioned this in the throne speech, and I will quote from it. It states:

Our Government will also take steps to strengthen the Canadian confederation. It will respect the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories and will enshrine its principles of federalism in a Charter of Open Federalism.

Hopefully the federalism that the government has proposed is to work with the provinces and not be confrontational.

An hon. member: That would be quite a change.

Mr. Scott Andrews: It would be a change.

My riding of Avalon has seen great growth and in the regional economy things are going well. The new construction of Vale Inco hydromet plant at Long Harbour will be an exciting thing for the people of Avalon and Placentia Bay.

As their member of Parliament, I am committed to working co-operatively with individuals, businesses, community groups and municipal and provincial governments to build and advance our strength and to assist in overcoming the challenges together.

The throne speech is short on details, but we must focus on important issues for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I would like to explore some of these and make some suggestions to the government.

Infrastructure for communities is dear to my heart. As a former municipal councillor in the town of Conception Bay South, I have seen first-hand how communities need infrastructure. Water, sewer, roads and recreation facilities are very important to municipalities around our great country.

We need to look at breakwaters for communities like Hant's Harbour to provide protection for fishing vessels.

We need to look at new wharf facilities for places like Ferryland that just lost its wharf.

We must look at recreational facilities for growing communities like Conception Bay South, Bay Roberts, Carbonear, all areas throughout Conception Bay.

Another issue is the penitentiary that was promised by a Conservative government over 25 years ago for the town of Harbour Grace. We have not seen it. The government has not come through on that promise. It dangled the carrot there time and time again. This type of politics has to stop. The government must come clean with the residents and move forward and put the penitentiary in Harbour Grace.

We need clean drinking water and suitable roads for communities like Trepassey.

We need to work together on these issues.

The fishery is another issue that is important to me. We have not heard the government talk about an early retirement package for

fishermen or plant workers. It was something that we committed to in our platform and it was something that I heard about when I went around door to door. We must work co-operatively with the government of Newfoundland and Labrador so such programs can proceed and workers can retire with dignity.

● (1550)

The year 2009 will bring many challenges to the fishing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. With most fish exports going to the United States, it will be hard as these markets are under stress and duress in these economic conditions. It will take the cooperation of all stakeholders to ensure adequate compensation is there for this industry as well.

It is nice to cast a life ring to the auto sector which is important, but we must not forget the fishing industry.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has done considerable work on the fishing industry renewal process and would expect the federal government to cooperate and make the industry better for all involved.

Another issue that has been talked about for many years by the government, when it was in opposition and now when it is in government, is custodial management. It has been and continues to be an important issue to Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Conservative government has provided only lip service to this problem with overfishing continuing to happen on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks. I hope we can work in cooperation to put adequate enforcement measures in place to prevent the unnecessary exploitation of our fish stocks.

I would like to deal with two issues now: protecting our environment and finding clean sources of energy. In the Speech from the Throne the government said under "Tackling Climate Change and Preserving Canada's Environment":

Our Government will set an objective that 90 percent of Canada's electricity needs be provided by non-emitting sources such as hydro, nuclear, clean coal or wind power by 2020.

This is where I would like to go for a moment. We talked about a loan guarantee for the Lower Churchill. This is something that our province has been after for a very long time. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador has written the federal government on two occasions when it talked about promises and commitments to our province. I would like to read an excerpt from the premier's letter because it makes the point. It states:

The Lower Churchill is recognized as the most attractive, undeveloped hydroelectric project in North America. The project's 2,800 MW will be enough to power 1.5 million homes, potentially displacing between 13 and 16 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually, accomplished without significant reservoir flooding. The project could significantly strengthen the national electricity network while greatly adding to security of supply in eastern Canada.

This is a nation building exercise when we look at the Lower Churchill and getting a loan guarantee. In these economic times a loan guarantee would be the best thing to stimulate jobs by building this particular project. We need to work on that and we have not seen any action.

The Address

In a response, the Conservative government said that it supported the proposal in principle and believed it was important for Newfoundland and Labrador to have greater control over its energy mix. It said, "A Conservative government would welcome discussions on this initiative and would hope that the potential exists for it to proceed—". That was two years ago in 2006. What have we seen? No action on this particular issue.

This is something that I want to encourage the government to do, start to move forward, and get this project started. It is also important for the economy.

As I mentioned earlier, it is also important for the environment in my riding in particular. I mentioned the new hydromet plant that is coming to my district from Long Harbour, Placentia Bay, which is a great news story.

However, this project is going to require huge amounts of energy to make it happen. The need for that power from the Lower Churchill to get into the grid and get a line into the province of Newfoundland is important for one important reason, the Holyrood generating station. This is a thermal generating station that burns fuel in a boiler, to convert water into steam. It has been using bunker C fuel for many years and now the plant burns No. 6 heavy fuel oil at a rate of 6,000 barrels per day. The problem is that is creating a lot of emissions into the atmosphere. It is the number seven polluter in Canada.

We have an opportunity to guarantee that we get clean hydro power from Labrador into the grid and into the province of Newfoundland and Labrador to take this Holyrood generating station off line. They have done a lot of great work at Newfoundland Hydro in trying to reduce emissions but we need to do better.

In closing, I would like to talk about children, students and seniors. During this time of economic downturn and times of restraint, we must not forget about the most vulnerable in society, those who cannot look after themselves. Children must have adequate compensation for their daily essentials and for their families to acquire adequate child care. Students must be able to avail themselves of adequate financing for education and be ready to accept the responsibility of our future leaders. We must not forget about them. As Liberals, we care about the less fortunate in society.

• (1555)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his first response to the Speech from the Throne. Clearly, the member knows his community very well. As he read the Speech from the Throne he was looking to see where his particular community was reflected, and he was not seeing a lot in there.

When it comes to issues dealing with the social infrastructure needs of this country, some of which he alluded to, where does he see the needs in his particular community for more investments over and above the environmental issues that he recommended?

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is very important, it is vital to many communities. When we look at social infrastructure, in my mind that means recreation facilities and allowing young people a place to go to spend time with their peers, friends and families.

It is important to look at social infrastructure, recreation facilities, new rinks, new curling facilities and fields for children to play. Many of the old recreation fields in my riding are overgrown because they have not been looked after.

We need to look at the social side of things, and we need to look at the infrastructure that we provide the communities in my riding and across the country. We are not alone. People from many of the areas in my riding are coming to the bigger centres, but we need to look out for the smaller centres and keep connected with rural Newfoundland and Labrador and rural Canada. It is very important that we look at the infrastructure needs of the communities.

We have not seen it in the throne speech, so we need to look at what is going to come down. In times of economic downturn, we need to look directly at what the government is going to provide in infrastructure for communities to get things moving.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's speech and I noted that he talked about the potential of the Lower Churchill generating facility.

The member may be aware that the generators for the Upper Churchill generating station were built in my riding of Peterborough. We happen to have a lot of expertise in my riding when it comes to hydroelectric power. We have built the generators for massive hydroelectric programs all over the world.

The member spoke about infrastructure. The government has established a massive infrastructure fund, and I am sure he is well aware of that or in time he will become aware of it as he gets more accustomed to this place.

The problem with the Lower Churchill facility is with transmission licensing to get that power through to markets. I am wondering if he is aware if the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador or Newfoundland Hydro have an agreement on transmission with Hydro-Québec. As he knows, that is what would hold up this project.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster, International Trade.

The hon. member for Avalon.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, when we look at the infrastructure program that the government has put in place, moneys have not flowed to the communities. I am familiar with that infrastructure program.

The Address

When we talk about the Lower Churchill facility and transmission, it is absolutely very important that we look at a national transmission grid, an east-west national transmission grid to get that power to market. That is something we really need to look at. It is not only Canada. We can look at providing this electricity to all of North America. It is very important that we focus on that. It cannot happen unless the government moves forward with a loan guarantee.

I would encourage the member to go back to his colleagues, move forward so people in my riding can get employment, for people in his riding to get employment, and get this project moving sooner rather than later.

• (1600)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a tremendous pleasure and a great privilege to rise and speak for the first time in the House. I begin by congratulating you on your election. I pledge that I will do my best to honour the traditions, protocols and etiquette you have suggested to make the House more congenial, and the Parliament more effective.

It is a great honour to represent the people of Don Valley West and the communities of Leaside, Thorncliffe Park, Flemington Park, Don Mills, Lawrence Park, North Toronto and York Mills. I thank them for their support in the recent election. I thank them for putting their faith in me and letting me be their voice and vote in this Parliament.

I also thank my campaign team, who put their faith in me and taught me how to be a winning candidate. They tolerated me on my worst days in what turned out to be lengthy by-election and election processes. Don Valley West has come to expect the very best of its representatives, and I particularly thank my predecessor, the hon. John Godfrey. His work on issues important to all Canadians, such as child care, the city's agenda, and especially climate change and the environment have set a high standard for me to reach. I can only hope to serve my constituents and my country with as much intelligence, grace and principled conduct.

The task at hand is the debate on the Speech from the Throne offered by Her Excellency the Governor General last week. As with every throne speech, there was much hopeful anticipation about the government's agenda for this Parliament. It might surprise the hon. members opposite and perhaps some of the hon. members on this side of the House that I found a number of laudable elements in the speech as it was read. In fact, it was much less brutal than one might have expected following the heated rhetoric of the last campaign.

While exceedingly short on specifics, the throne speech did manage to cover a number of the bases one would hope to see covered in such a speech. Specifically, I was impressed that the government seemed to indicate that, despite all evidence to the contrary, it might actually believe that government can and should be a force for good in people's lives, and that it is appropriate for government to intervene, act and ensure that our future, particularly our economic future, is protected. The government might actually believe that it is right for governments to work as partners with business and industry to stimulate the economy, and that it is sometimes necessary to finance some of this economic stimulus to ensure that countless Canadians are not needlessly hurt by the dramatic decline in our economy.

What surprises me about this recognition is that it is simply not even close to what the hon. members on the other side of the House were telling voters during the election, week after week in the recent campaign. In fact, during the campaign, the Conservatives ran against incurring deficits and un-budgeted spending while continually denying that Canada was heading toward a recession.

There are two possibilities as to why the government has so radically shifted its position with respect to the economy, and neither of them, frankly, is pretty. First, it is possible that it completely misread the international economic indicators visible to most of us. Second, it is possible that it failed to see that the domestic economic policies followed in their first mandate, policies of irresponsible tax cuts and bloated government spending, have left the government completely incapable of responding quickly or well to the situation. I am talking about incompetence of the highest order.

The Prime Minister himself declared, "This country will not go into recession next year and will lead the G-7 countries".

He said that just days before the recent election, again boldly declaring that we are not going into deficit. Those statements were made only six weeks ago, and were made in the face of reams and reams of evidence to the contrary. All this from one who claims to be or have been an economist.

If this was done truthfully but naively, it smacks of utter and complete incompetence. If it is not incompetence, ineptitude or mismanagement, I fear it may be a far more serious problem for the government. If it is not incompetence, it is deception or misrepresentation. The campaign run by the Conservatives was disingenuous at best and dishonest at worst.

One of the main reasons I entered public life was to raise the ethical bar. Canadians want politicians to say what they mean and to do what they say.

• (1605)

Voter apathy, civic cynicism and outright disgust with politicians is based on political leaders refusing to say what they mean and, even worse, failing continually to do what they say. Voters are increasingly savvy and are simply tired of politicians telling them what they think they want to hear and then turning 180 degrees and doing something completely different.

At the core of the Speech from the Throne lies bear the ethical reality that shapes the government. It is a government that will say anything, do anything, promise anything to get elected and simply cannot and will not be trusted by Canadians. The throne speech reveals at its core that the government is morally bankrupt. It has lost its moral compass.

My comments thus far have been only on what the speech says, not on what has been left out. It is a speech that reveals the Conservatives to be morally adrift, to lack imagination and creativity, and they continue their hidden agenda of dismantling the social framework that defines Canada. However, it is what the throne speech is not saying that is more important.

Where is the national housing strategy? That is what the people of Don Valley West are looking for.

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Where is the will to tackle family poverty and child poverty, the poverty of too many of our seniors? That is what the people of Don Valley West are asking for.

Where is funding for youth initiatives, arts and culture, post-secondary education and women's programs? At door after door, that is what the people of Don Valley West told me they wanted.

Where is the recognition that the immigration system is broken and that newcomers to this country are more than economic units but also add to the beauty and the wealth of this country in numerous ways? That is what the people of Don Valley West want to hear.

Where is the commitment to shouldering our share of international aid and restoring Canada's position on the international stage as peacekeepers?

Where is the care for our veterans, old and young? That is what the residents of the veterans wing at Sunnybrook hospital are asking me about.

Where is the imagination that is going to help the poor and those who will be displaced by today's economic reality as it descends upon us, just as the government has emptied the cupboard?

These are the concerns of the people of Don Valley West. That is why they elected me. That is the voice that I bring to this place. That is what my party offers and that is what I pledge to work on.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member on his maiden speech and on addressing the House on a very important issue. It really is a matter of respect for Parliament and Canadians on how this political environment has evolved. The member mentioned it in his speech and may want to amplify a little about credibility and the responsibility of a government to provide peace, order and good government.

If he could please comment on that, it would be helpful.

The Speaker: Order. The question has been asked, but I think we will leave the answer until the House has quieted down a little.

It being 4:10 p.m., pursuant to order made on Tuesday, November 25, 2008, I now invite the hon. Minister of Finance to make a statement.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL STATEMENT

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I wish to table the government's economic and fiscal statement 2008.

I am pleased today to present the government's economic and fiscal statement and to set out our key short-term and long-term objectives as we prepare for the next federal budget. I present this statement at a time of unprecedented deterioration in economic and financial systems around the world.

Without a doubt, here in Canada and around the world these are difficult times that require difficult choices.

• (1610)

[Translation]

It is important to recognize how quickly and radically things have changed. The cascading effect of the international credit crisis was sudden and devastating. The unexpected credit crunch in the summer of 2007 and the recession brought on by the plummeting American housing market have now affected the whole world.

[English]

Today the International Monetary Fund expects global growth to be the weakest since 1993. The speed at which the crisis has intensified and the damage it has brought to countries around the world have been extraordinary. All countries are struggling to cope with this crisis.

The Euro area is in recession for the first time since its creation in 1999. It has been joined by Japan. There are signs of a prolonged downturn in the United States with a sharp decline in U.S. consumer spending and almost 1.2 million jobs lost since the beginning of this year. There is a lengthy list of American institutions that have either collapsed or required a bailout or takeover, all in a matter of months: Citigroup, Fannie Mae, Freddy Mac, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Washington Mutual, AIG, Wachovia. Financial rescue efforts are under way in the United States and similar ones are happening in countries throughout Europe.

The crisis has laid bare some serious flaws in many aspects of the international financial system: non-bank institutions that were not properly regulated and were relying on borrowed money; financial institutions lacking enough capital to withstand the financial market turmoil; and a dangerously short-sighted tendency to underestimate risk in good times. The mistakes of some are today being felt by all.

[Translation]

We have not been spared by the ensuing global economic downturn. No one in the world could have guessed how serious this economic crisis would be. The volatility of the global economy is unprecedented. It has affected Canada and has resulted in decreases in economic growth. The Canadian economy has not been tested like this for a generation.

[English]

Economic projections are now much lower than at the time of our last budget. Private sector forecasters expect real GDP growth of just 0.6% this year and 0.3% next year. The same private sector forecasters are now widely expecting a technical recession with negative growth in the fourth quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009.

No government at any level can guarantee the future. In fact, given so much uncertainty, no one could unconditionally guarantee the fiscal projections contained in today's statement.

[Translation]

We will be faced with tough choices as we prepare our next budget, in the face of the deteriorating international economy. Those choices must be part of a clear plan to protect our future.

Last week's Speech from the Throne laid out a five-pronged plan to protect Canada's economic security—a plan that will define the choices we make. Along with our international partners, we will reform global finance. Here at home, we will ensure sound budgeting. We will secure jobs for families and communities. We will expand investment and trade, and we will make government more effective.

• (1615)

[English]

We were fully aware that difficult times were ahead when I presented our economic statement last fall. We planned for it. We made choices to put Canada in a stronger economic position.

In fact, since 2006, we have reduced the federal debt by \$37 billion. We have reduced taxes by almost \$200 billion over 2007-08 and the following five years. We have reduced the tax rate on new business investment, leading to the lowest level in the G-7 by 2010. We have made historic investments in job-creating infrastructure. We have invested in science and technology, education and training.

Our government, from last year to next, will have doubled the level of federal funding for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure projects.

Canadians and Canadian businesses will pay nearly \$31 billion less in taxes in the next fiscal year thanks to the tax reduction measures introduced since 2006. That is equivalent to nearly 2% of Canadian GDP. This is a substantial fiscal stimulus, stimulus with staying power.

Unlike other countries, Canada is providing tax relief that is sustainable and permanent, tax relief that is helping Canadian families every single day.

We took action when it was necessary. Our performance has shown that it was worthwhile. However, our actions did not isolate us completely from the rest of the world. Global conditions have deteriorated as 2008 has unfolded. We had to take further extraordinary steps in the financial sector to respond to a global credit crunch we did not spark yet which threatened to engulf us if we failed to act. Once again, we had a head start over other nations.

Our financial system is considered to be the world's soundest by the World Economic Forum.

[Translation]

The International Monetary Fund concluded Canada's financial system is mature, sophisticated, well managed and able to withstand sizeable shocks. We have acted to keep it that way. We have protected its stability, so that Canadian businesses and families would continue to have access to credit. Businesses need credit to invest or to meet their payrolls. Families need it to take out mortgages and loans. These are basic and vital components of the Canadian economy.

[English]

We took steps to maintain the availability of longer term credit with the purchase of mortgage pools through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This innovative measure is allowing

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Canadian financial institutions to continue lending to consumers, homebuyers and businesses at an affordable cost.

Our government also created the Canadian Lenders Assurance Facility. The facility offers insurance on a temporary basis on wholesale terms borrowing by Canadian financial institutions. This backstop ensures that our financial institutions are not at a competitive disadvantage internationally.

We increased the borrowing authority of Export Development Canada and the Business Development Bank of Canada. The combined boost of nearly \$4 billion that we introduced will mean more lending choices for Canadian businesses.

We announced new rules for government guaranteed mortgages this summer to prevent a U.S. style housing bubble, rules that are in place today.

Our sensible Canadian approach is paying off. Our country will come out of this economic crisis in a strong position because we are going into it in a strong position.

Faced with threats from outside our borders, we answered with leadership from within. The result is a fiscal position that is the best of all G-7 countries.

The next fiscal year will be difficult but Canadians can be fully confident that we will overcome whatever hardships may lie ahead in 2009 and beyond.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Like governments, families face economic challenges beyond their control every day. When they face challenges like those, families must adjust their priorities. Just like governments, they must make tough choices—tough, but pragmatic. They make choices that give them flexibility to weather the storm.

[English]

Their choices are made with the future in mind. To protect the future they want, they make sacrifices today. Our government will take the same approach. We will protect the future by maintaining strong, fiscal and financial management.

We take no pleasure in saying that, despite our best efforts, this may not be enough to keep a small surplus on the books, but in situations like this it would be misguided to simply engineer a surplus just to be able to say we have one.

Today's statement lays out a plan that keeps our budget balanced for now. However, in the weeks ahead we will determine the extent to which we will inject additional stimulus to our economy, joining the efforts of our international partners.

Routine Proceedings

Any additional actions to support the economy will have an impact on the bottom line numbers in our next budget. These actions or a further deterioration in global economic conditions could result in a deficit. We do not take the potential of a deficit lightly. The thought of a long term structural deficit would be even more serious, one that the government is unable to climb out of, even when the economy improves. The days and years and decades of those chronic deficits are behind us and no matter what 2009 brings, they must never return.

[Translation]

Our goal must be to ensure the strength of the economy—to protect jobs, to encourage investment, and to help business grow. We must do that while protecting the long-term fiscal position of the government, so that when the economy improves, we return quickly to balanced budgets. Today, our government is announcing a series of measures designed to strengthen Canada's fiscal position in an uncertain time. These measures will enable us to plan on a balanced budget framework, while recognizing potential downside risks.

[English]

We cannot ask Canadians to tighten their belts during tougher times without looking in the mirror. Canadians have a right to look to government as an example. We have a responsibility to show restraint and respect for their money. Canadians' tax dollars are precious. They must not be spent frivolously or without regard to where they came from.

Canadians pay taxes so governments can provide essential services. They trust the people they elect to serve society with that money, not serve themselves. The truth is that tax dollars have been supporting political parties for a long time. For example, we take advantage of reimbursements on our election spending. Canadians also receive a tax credit on their donations to political parties. This is a generous allotment of tax dollars to politicians. It ought to be sufficient for all of us but we ask for much more in the form of a \$1.75 subsidy for every vote we receive in an election.

Canadians pay their own bills and for some Canadians that is getting harder to do. Political parties should pay their own bills, too, and not with excessive tax dollars. Even during the best of economic times, parties should count primarily on the financial support of their own members and their own donors.

Today our government is eliminating the \$1.75 per vote taxpayer subsidy for politicians and their parties effective April 1, 2009. There will be no free ride for political parties. There never was. The freight was being paid by the taxpayers. This is the last stop on the route. There will be no free ride for anyone else in government either.

• (1625)

[Translation]

The same principle will apply to the rest of the federal administration. We are directing government ministers and deputy ministers from every single department and agency of the government to rein in their spending on travel, hospitality, conferences, exchanges and professional services. This includes polling, consultants and external legal services.

[English]

In the broader fiscal picture, we will expand the actions under the new expenditure management system we put in place in 2007. We will use this systemic approach to help keep spending growth on a sustainable track. Under this new system, the government has been reviewing all departmental spending. The government already examined department spending of \$13.6 billion in 2007 and is examining \$25 billion in program spending this year.

For the first time in nearly 15 years, the government is also expanding this business-like, multi-year review to include corporate assets, crown corporations, real property and other holdings. The review will take a careful approach on the sale of any asset considering market conditions and ensuring fair value can be realized for the benefit of taxpayers.

Our government expects to save over \$15 billion over the next five fiscal years under the new expenditure management system. This system will be an invaluable tool to help us maintain balanced budgets, along with the other steps announced today.

[Translation]

As indicated in last week's Speech from the Throne, the government is also introducing legislation to ensure predictability in federal public sector compensation. Our government values the contribution and hard work of our public servants. They must be fairly compensated for their work on behalf of Canadians. They must receive equitable compensation for the work they do on behalf of Canadians. We must bear in mind that their work is also paid for by Canadians.

[English]

We will introduce legislation to ensure that the pay for the public sector grows only in line with what taxpayers can afford as the economy slows. This legislation would put in place annual public service wage restraints of 2.3% for 2007-08 and 1.5% for each of the following three years. This restraint would also apply to members of Parliament, senators, cabinet ministers and senior public servants. The legislation would also temporarily suspend the right to strike through 2010-11.

Another issue we intend to address is the litigious, adversarial and complaints-based approach to pay equity. Since the mid-1980s, Canadian taxpayers have paid over \$4 billion in pay equity settlements. These settlements were the result of pay equity complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. These complaints were filed after agreements on public sector wages had already been reached through collective bargaining.

New complaints continue to be filed, sometimes for the same groups that have already received past pay equity settlements. These represent large potential costs to taxpayers. This costly and litigious regime of double pay equity has been in place for too long. We are introducing legislation to make pay equity an integral part of collective bargaining.

• (1630)

[Translation]

We are also bringing certainty to the growth of equalization. We have put its growth on a sustainable path. A new, three-year moving average that puts growth in equalization in line with nominal GDP growth will bring fairness and stability to both the provinces and the federal government, while reflecting changes in the Canadian economy. We are ensuring that equalization will continue to grow, because it is a key federal program for providing support to provinces.

[English]

We are also protecting the Canada health transfer and the Canada social transfer. Provinces must be able to plan accurately, especially when it comes to some of the largest expenditure items in their budgets: health care and social services.

These transfer payments will continue their built-in growth of 6% for the Canada health transfer and 3% for the Canada social transfer. We will ensure that any new measures to support the economy are carefully chosen and targeted for maximum benefit. In preparing for the 2009 budget, we will ensure spending is as effective as possible and aligned with Canadian priorities.

Infrastructure is an example of such worthwhile spending. Investment in infrastructure creates jobs for today and for the future. It creates essential links between communities and regions. Next year's increase in infrastructure spending will be our largest and will push the total amount to over \$6 billion in stimulus to the economy.

[Translation]

Our government is committed to expediting our historic, \$33 billion Building Canada plan to get projects moving as quickly as possible, in particular for the upcoming construction season. We will work with provinces and territories to identify a limited number of key infrastructure projects across Canada by January 2009.

These investments will help keep Canada moving forward as the world economy slows.

[English]

Quickly deteriorating circumstances in the financial sectors in other countries have contributed to this slowdown. Here at home, we must have the flexibility to respond quickly and decisively and protect our financial system from global risks.

Our government is proposing that the Minister of Finance be granted additional flexibility to support financial institutions and the financial system in extraordinary circumstances. This is consistent with the additional powers we provided the Bank of Canada earlier this year. It is also in keeping with the action plans we agreed to with our international counterparts at the G-7 and G-20 meetings.

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These proposed measures include authority for: funding in the unlikely event there is a draw on the Canadian Lenders Assurance Facility; Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation establishing a bridge bank to help preserve critical banking functions; an increase in the borrowing limit of CDIC to \$15 billion to reflect the growth of insured deposits, the first increase since 1992; the power to direct CDIC to undertake key resolution measures to ensure financial stability, when necessary; and the legal ability to inject capital into a federally-regulated financial institution to support financial stability on terms that would protect taxpayers.

[Translation]

These are additional tools in our tool box. I hope we never have to use them. But the lessons of the past couple of months have shown us that we have to be ready to deal with every kind of risk, even the unlikeliest ones. With these measures, we will be ready. We are taking steps to help Canadian seniors. Our seniors built this country and deserve to live with dignity and respect. Many seniors are understandably concerned about the impact of the sharp decline in the markets on their retirement savings.

• (1635)

[English]

Registered retirement income funds, or RRIFs, and their associated withdrawal requirements are of particular concern. Last year our government raised the age limit for converting a registered retirement savings plan to a RRIF from 69 to 71.

I have heard from seniors about two issues they are dealing with today. The impression among some is that assets in RRIFs must be sold in order to meet withdrawal requirements and the recent steep drop in market value of some of those assets. There is no requirement under the tax rules to sell these assets to meet the RRIF minimum withdrawal requirements and seniors should not be left with the impression that there is. Assets may be kept intact so that they can grow in the future.

To help deal with this issue, last week I wrote to all federally-regulated financial institutions and asked them to ensure that in-kind distributions are accommodated at no cost to clients or that clients are offered another solution that achieves the same result.

These are exceptional circumstances and we are taking further action to allow RRIF holders to keep more of their savings in their RRIFs. To help seniors cope, today I am proposing a one-time change that will allow RRIF holders to reduce their required minimum withdrawal by 25% for this tax year.

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For example, an individual otherwise required to withdraw \$10,000 from his or her RRIF in 2008, the required withdrawal will be reduced to \$7,500. If the individual has already withdrawn more than \$7,500, he or she will be permitted to re-contribute the excess up to \$2,500 and claim an offsetting deduction for the 2008 taxation year.

[*Translation*]

We are also addressing the immediate consequences this financial distress has dealt to Canadian workers who contribute to federally regulated pension plans. Based on what has happened so far, and under current rules, the decline in value of these plan assets would trigger substantial payments at the worst possible time for struggling companies.

[*English*]

The money these companies would need to use for pension top-ups could otherwise be used for further investment and growth.

The government is proposing to allow plans under federal jurisdiction to double the length of time required for solvency payments, from five to ten years. Companies that pursue this option must meet one of two conditions: the agreement of pension plan members and retirees by the end of 2009, or the securing of a letter of credit to cover the five year difference to protect pensioners.

Today's announcement will give these companies one more option they can use to cope with these extraordinary circumstances.

To deal with longer term pension concerns, we will soon be launching consultations on issues facing defined benefit and defined contribution pension plans with a view to making permanent changes next year.

[*Translation*]

Since pension plans are regulated either federally or provincially, our government will coordinate our efforts with our provincial and territorial counterparts to create a pension system able to withstand whatever future challenges come its way.

This subject will be high on the agenda when I meet with my provincial and territorial colleagues next month.

● (1640)

[*English*]

While helping Canadian workers save, we will also help the businesses that employ them, in particular, with their ability to borrow. We will increase the supply of credit available to export-oriented manufacturers, including the auto sector, as well as small and medium size businesses.

On top of a recent \$2 billion increase to the borrowing authority of Export Development Canada, today I am announcing a \$350 million equity injection that will support up to approximately \$1.5 billion in increased credit for Canada's export business. The export sector has been hard hit by the financial crisis. EDC will now be able to add to the nearly \$80 billion in exports and investment it helps make possible for Canadian enterprises, including \$4 billion for the auto sector alone.

The government will also inject \$350 million in equity in the Business Development Bank of Canada to assist small and medium size companies. This new injection will increase BDC's lending ability by about \$1.5 billion and comes on top of a \$1.8 billion borrowing increase announced earlier this year.

We will also move forward quickly on the securities regulation front. Our cumbersome and unwieldy system of 13 securities regulators is a glaring flaw in Canada's world leading approach to promoting financial stability. The government will soon receive the report of the expert panel on securities regulation. The report is expected to outline the best way forward to improve the content, structure and enforcement of securities regulation in Canada. We will act on it quickly. We invite all participants to join us in improving our regulatory system.

[*Translation*]

This government came to office looking years down the road. Our country is better off today thanks to exactly such an approach. Short-term problems will not distract us from continuing to focus on the horizon. At the same time, we are far from finished confronting unheard-of global economic and financial threats. There are warning signs ahead that we must heed if we are to remain a global role model in an uncertain time.

[*English*]

We will address our immediate external challenges the same way we will reach our longer term goals: by continuing to manage tax dollars wisely and by investing strictly in the essentials and focusing on what ultimately matters, the longer term prosperity of all Canadians.

These are not easy times but we must not forget that our country has been through plenty of hard times before and we will get through these ones the same way.

Our government will respond to the challenges of the upcoming year the same way we are seeing this year to a close, through the values Canadians themselves hold dear: prudence and restraint, combined with hard work and a focus on the future.

The greatest histories are always written in the toughest times. I believe that we are in the midst of writing some bold new chapters in our country's long success story: an unfolding account of new accomplishments by a country that is compelled to grapple with global hard times and that will emerge even stronger because of them.

● (1645)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a time when Canadians are concerned about their country's economic future, at a time when the international financial markets are in crisis, the world is heading into recession, Canadian businesses are facing closures, and Canadians are worried about their jobs and savings. Canadians today deserve a government that would actually provide a real action plan to help the Canadian economy meet the challenges ahead.

However, instead of presenting us with a plan, the Conservatives have chosen symbolism over substance, rhetoric over real action and deception over decisions. They have given Canadians nothing but gimmickry when Canadians need a game plan.

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives have done nothing today to help protect the jobs and savings of Canadians. The Conservatives do not have an economic plan: there is nothing for manufacturers, nothing for the automobile industry, nothing for forestry, and nearly nothing for seniors and workers facing layoffs.

[*English*]

Today the Prime Minister is trying to distract Canadians from his own economic incompetence. He hopes we will not notice that he bungled the economy during the good times and that he has no economic plan for Canada during these tough times.

It is no wonder, today, that the Prime Minister wants to change the channel from economics to politics. We will not allow him to change the channel from economics to politics.

Our job as members of Parliament is to turn the channel back to the economy, back to the people. Canadians are hurting, and it is not about politics, it is not about political parties; it is about Canadians.

It is about the young Nova Scotian man whom I chatted with last week on the plane on the way to Halifax. As we chatted, the discussion soon went from small talk to big concerns. He told me that in recent months he had lost a lot of his investments and savings in the markets. He turned to me and he said that he and I had time to recover from this, but he was really worried about his parents because they feared they could no longer live on their retirement savings.

It is not about politics; it is about people.

It is about the friend I went to school with, whom I saw the other day when I stopped for gas at Sanford's corner store in Burlington, Nova Scotia. Jamie told me that after 20 years of working at the local gypsum company, he was being laid off, along with 49 other rural Nova Scotians, most of whom had spent their working lives there.

This is about Maynard Williams who owns Cornwallis Chevrolet in New Minas and his 32 employees who fear for their future.

These ordinary Canadians did not talk to me about political party financing. They talked to me about what was important to them. They talked about the economy. They talked about their jobs. They talked about their savings.

That is what I will be doing today and that is what the Liberal Party will be doing. We will be standing up for Canadians to protect their savings and their jobs, not play petty politics.

The Prime Minister is failing Canadians by not giving them a plan for the Canadian economy. He is failing Canadians by not telling them the truth, and the truth is, Canada is back in deficit. The Prime Minister is failing to tell Canadians why we are back in deficit, the fact that his bad tax policy and his big spending policy is responsible for that deficit.

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If members look at page 50 of the economic statement, they will see there, in black and white, that next year Canada will face a \$5.9 billion deficit.

Earlier today the Minister of Finance said, "It is misguided to engineer a surplus just to say we have one". That is exactly what the Conservative government is doing. It is pretending it has a surplus when in fact it has a deficit.

The government is trying to hide this new Conservative deficit, first, with rosy growth numbers, as we enter a recession. In fact, it is predicting 0.3% growth while the OECD's prediction is 0.5% shrinkage in the Canadian economy.

To further bury the new Conservative deficit, the Conservatives are planning massive cuts. It should not surprise anybody that one of the massive cuts they are planning, and that they actually are proud enough of to list in this document, is their pledge to cut pay equity for women.

We should not be surprised that, as they start to cut during tough times, they choose ideological cuts, because during the good times what did they cut? They cut literacy, they cut women's equality and they cut the court challenges program.

Most disturbing, in order to hide the new Conservative deficit, the Conservatives are preparing to sell off an imaginary list of government assets. They are preparing to sell in a buyer's market.

The Conservative government is not a government that is considering asset sales out of a sense of market opportunity obviously. That is a government that has put itself in a position where pawning off assets is required because of not market opportunity, but because of fiscal desperation. It is akin to selling the house to pay for the groceries.

I can see it now. The signs will be going up on government assets across Canada, "Come on down to deficit daddy's big blowout sale. Make us an offer. Seller highly motivated". The Minister of Finance is highly motivated to bury the deficit he fathered.

● (1650)

The previous Liberal government did not book revenue until an asset was actually sold. That makes sense to me. However, the Conservatives are booking revenue before they know what assets they are going to sell. Today, we asked financial officials for a list of the assets they intended to sell. The fact is there is no such list. The \$10 billion figure for the assets comes out of the air because it matches exactly the amount of money they required to pay off the deficit they created.

There is no list of assets that the Conservatives intend to sell. They are not that far along the process. There is no price yet set for those assets, but they have already booked the revenue.

The Conservatives are not being honest about the deficit and they are not being honest about the cause of the deficit. Last week, Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, was clear when he said:

The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions.

Routine Proceedings

It is pretty clear, and Mr. Page is very clear, that these bad policy decisions were the Conservative government's misguided tax policy and their big spending policy. In fact, under the previous Liberal government, spending increased over a period of 13 years, on average, 2.5% per year, consistent with inflation. Under the Conservatives, government spending has ballooned by 25% in 3 years, an annual growth rate of 8%.

It is a big spending, bad tax policy government that has created a made in Canada, new Conservative deficit. Three years ago, the Conservative government inherited the best fiscal and economic environment in the history of any incoming government in Canada. It had a \$13 billion surplus and the best economic growth in the G-8. Today, Canada is in deficit and for the first half of this year, we had the worst economic growth in the G8. That was long before the global financial turmoil.

Not only did the Conservatives' bad tax and big spending policies waste the surplus, they eliminated the contingency reserve, Canada's rainy day fund. The Conservatives spent the cupboard bare during the good times and gutted Canada's fiscal capacity to help vulnerable Canadians today during the tough times. Today, during these tough times, when Canadians are looking for some level of economic leadership, some sense of hope for the future and ideas to build a better and more secure economic future, they are getting no plan from the government.

The differences between the government's approach in Canada and the approach taken by our largest trading partner, the U.S., could not be more clear. The headlines said it all yesterday. "Canada bides time, U.S. sets course." Canadian Prime Minister waits, president-elect Obama acts. While we watch the U.S. take bold steps, in Canada all we see are political schemes.

•(1655)

[*Translation*]

For a few days now, President-elect Obama has been gathering the greatest economic minds in the United States in order to fashion an economic action plan to help protect jobs and the American economy.

[*English*]

However, in Canada we have a Prime Minister who calls himself an economist, who has been in office for three years and who promised Canadians in the last election that there would be a new economic plan within weeks of him taking office, in fact this fall, and we still do not have a plan.

Instead of showing leadership, the Prime Minister is playing politics, and nowhere is that more evident than in the auto sector. As the American Congress and Senate are working with the U.S. auto sector to develop a plan, our government is waiting and hoping that we somehow are going to be able to join a deal at the last minute.

What the Conservatives do not seem to realize is those American congressmen and senators are exacting commitments from the auto sector to put jobs in their districts. Yesterday, when the member for Guelph asked the industry minister to tell the House "with whom in the Bush administration and in the new Obama economic team he has met to ensure that Canadian jobs are protected", the minister

dodged the question. He was afraid to admit he failed to get any meetings of significance in the U.S.

The fact is, more than ever, Canadian auto workers need a Canadian government that is a voice at the table in the U.S. on this issue. However, when the industry minister recently went to Detroit for meetings, he forgot that on that day the Detroit auto leaders were all in Washington. It is bad enough to have a Conservative industry minister who is not at the table, but he does not even know where the table is. Let us hope his bungling does not mean that at the end of the day, Canadian auto workers are lucky to get a few scraps off that table.

Other countries are acting too. Great Britain, Germany, France and Japan are all taking significant action at this time of crisis and there is no plan from the Canadian government whatsoever. I can only think of four reasons why the Conservatives are not acting, why they have no plan.

Number one, is it because their reckless spending and bad tax policy has eliminated their fiscal capacity to help Canadians now?

Is it number two, that their absolute belief in rigid neo-conservative ideology leaves them blind to the fact that market forces alone will not solve this mess? They do not believe that government can and must play a role in helping people during tough times.

The third possibility is that the Conservatives have no idea what to do. Given how badly they bungled the economy during the good times, it is increasingly likely that number three is at least part of the problem.

The fourth is they just do not care.

Whatever its motive, by doing nothing to protect Canadian jobs and Canadian savings, the Conservative government is failing Canada. It is just not good enough.

It should not really surprise us that the government has no plan or vision today during the tough times because over the last three years it has failed to produce any form of plan or vision for Canada. In the last three years, the government was more interested in buying votes than building prosperity, and it is failing once again.

It was the economists who told the Conservatives that their tax policy was wrong, that we were the only country in the world that was increasing income taxes while cutting consumption taxes. They did not take that advice then. It is the economists who are telling them that we need a real plan for infrastructure today to invest in people, to create new jobs, new green jobs, to help Canadians with their post-secondary education, to help them train and retrain in lifelong learning, to develop the skills they need to survive and thrive in the new economy. The Prime Minister has been calling himself an economist for so long that he forgets he is not a real economist and he will not listen to the real economists, not in the good times and not in the bad times.

Routine Proceedings

When Canadians need strong economic leadership, all they are getting from the Conservatives are cheap political schemes. We need leadership today. We need a new deal, but the Prime Minister is telling Canadians, “No deal”.

This is not about politics. This is about people.

● (1700)

Members of the Liberal Party, as responsible members of Parliament, will be defending the people of Canada. We will be standing up for Canadians. We will be offering Canadians a clear vision of hope for a better future and pride in a stronger Canada, not cheap politics like the Prime Minister has done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week I said the following in reply to the Speech from the Throne:

These are times of crisis and our constituents are counting on us. There are times in political life, particularly in a minority Parliament, where ideology and a lack of openness are decidedly out of place.

That is what I said last week in the hope that the government would understand its responsibilities. The opposite has happened. What the Conservative government presented today was not an economic statement but an ideological statement. This ideology so blinds the government that it fails to see how urgent it is to act.

Instead of presenting a plan to help the economy recover and breathe some air into it, the Prime Minister has chosen to smother it. The Prime Minister has decided to turn his back on our companies, regions and people. The Conservative government has abdicated all its responsibilities. Worse yet, instead of attacking the economic crisis, the Conservative government has decided to attack democracy instead, as well as the rights of women and working people. The Prime Minister has preferred ideology to economics. He has placed partisanship above democracy. He has chosen to attack Quebec.

The government has created a democratic crisis out of thin air. The economy is threatened by Conservative Party ideology. Our democratic principles are under threat. The Conservative Party is a threat to the rights of women and working people, as well as to Quebec's financial welfare. This economic statement is clearly contrary to the basic interests of Quebec. Quebecers are watching us. How, in turn, will the members of the House be able to look Quebecers in the eye if we fail to take decisive action to fight with all our might against the economic crisis that is descending upon us? How will the members of the House be able to look citizens in the eye if we fail to protect democracy, the rights of women and working people, and the financial situation in Quebec?

One thing is certain: all the Bloc Québécois members will be able to look Quebecers in the eye because we will not yield on these basic principles.

All members remember that the Prime Minister chose to call an election for strictly partisan reasons. He decided to spend more than \$300 million, an amount that could have been used to counter the economic crisis. Above all, the Prime Minister wasted precious time. The difference between this Conservative government and other governments throughout the world is striking. The Government of China, for example, decided to take action by putting in place a \$700

billion recovery plan. Europe announced a \$318 million plan. Our American neighbours have voted for a plan worth almost \$850 billion. Most European countries have a deficit and yet they do not hesitate to take strong action in order to support and stimulate their economies. The American deficit has ballooned; nevertheless the government did not hesitate to take strong action to support and stimulate the economy. If governments throughout the world are acting with vigour, it is because they understand the urgency of the situation.

Despite the surpluses accumulated over 10 years, the Conservative government not only refused to present its plan, to provide relief, it consciously chose to stifle the economy to advance its outdated ideology on the reduction of government.

Naturally, we are prepared to cut our salaries and to reduce growth of expenditures by the government bureaucracy. But the purpose of these savings should not be to reduce government in order to avoid a one-time deficit, but to support the economy, to support the people.

● (1705)

The Prime Ministersays he has already taken action by reducing taxes, but if the actions by the Prime Minister were sufficient, how can it be that, as he himself admits, Canada will be moving into a recession, if it is not already in one?

Anyone can see that the Conservative government has no imagination, no new ideas, no serious plan for dealing with the crisis. This is the absolute opposite of the Bloc Québécois, a party that has put forward an economic recovery plan with constructive, realistic and necessary suggestions. By rejecting those suggestions, the Prime Minister has shown that he had absolutely no intention of showing any openness, of making the necessary compromises. The Prime Minister has put ideology before the economy.

We are all familiar with the Conservative party of the Prime Minister, which in reality is nothing more than the Reform Party in disguise. This statement proves it. The government has decided to take advantage of the crisis to attack the rights of women and workers. The government is proposing to suspend public servants' right to strike. It has decided to attack women's rights by submitting their right to pay equity to negotiation. Since when are rights negotiable? It is scandalous. We will never accept such an attack by the government on women's and workers' rights. We will never allow it.

Instead of being concerned about the economy, the Prime Minister has once again decided to attack Quebec. The Prime Minister declared his love of Quebec throughout the last campaign. Now we can see clearly that those declarations were not sincere. Once again he has repeated his desire to impose a federal securities commission, thereby ignoring the unanimous position of the National Assembly.

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He goes still further by opening the door to a centralized pension plan in Ottawa. What is more, by capping equalization payments, the Conservative government is seriously threatening the financial situation in Quebec. According to a Toronto-Dominion Bank study, this decision could cost the Government of Quebec \$450 million annually. This is called offloading one's problems on someone else. These decisions follow on the abandonment of the forestry and manufacturing industries, the abandonment of the Quebec regions, the cuts to culture and the cutbacks to economic development bodies. The Bloc Québécois will never stand for it.

Not content with putting ideology before the economy, not content with attacking workers, women, and Quebec, the Prime Minister is adding insult to injury by putting his own extreme partisanship before democracy. When speaking on December 8, 2005 about reforming the financing of political parties, the Prime Minister said:

These measures are directly inspired by reforms introduced by René Lévesque 30 years ago, reforms of which all Quebecers can be very proud. Quebec has led the way in electoral reform.

By announcing his intention to eliminate public funding of political parties, the Prime Minister is betraying the memory of René Lévesque. Public funding was at the heart of René Lévesque's reform. This desire to slash funding is a direct attack on democracy. Using the economic crisis as an excuse and under the pretense of saving \$30 million, the Conservative government has shown the world the extent of its hypocrisy.

Hardly a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister called an election for strictly partisan reasons. He spent \$300 million, ten times more than what he is trying to save by eliminating political party funding. What will the Prime Minister announce next in the upcoming budget? Does he plan to shut down Parliament to save \$500 million?

The Prime Minister has manufactured a democratic crisis, simply to give himself a partisan advantage, because this government's goal is to silence all forms of opposition: silence artists, silence women, silence unions and silence the opposition.

● (1710)

It is sad and it is unbecoming of a prime minister.

The few positive measures in this update are old, recycled measures and they fall short. The decision to purchase mortgage pools makes sense, but if the government is going to help the banks, why not impose conditions? Why not take this opportunity to set up an oversight team to ensure that small- and medium-sized businesses have access to credit?

As for RRIFs, it is not enough to reduce the mandatory withdrawal by only 25% and for only one year. The government should have raised the age limit for converting RRSPs to RRIFs to 73.

The Conservative government has put their ideology before the economy and before the people. It has attacked women's and workers' rights and it has attacked Quebec.

This update clearly goes against Quebec's values and interests, and we will categorically oppose it.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to share my time with the hon. member for Outremont.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for this division of time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my dear colleagues.

[*English*]

We are standing at a historic moment in this chamber, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian people were waiting for bold and dramatic action around an economic crisis that is affecting their families.

Everybody we talk to back in our ridings is concerned. People had hopes and aspirations regarding what might happen here this evening. They believed that the parties should work together around an economic crisis. That has not happened. That is not what we have seen. That is not what Canadians were hoping for.

Instead, what we have seen is a government that has failed to act. It has failed to act boldly as other governments around the world are doing to tackle a crisis the likes of which we have not seen in generations. We have seen a government that also failed the fundamental test of leadership, which is to work with other parties, particularly in a minority House, in order to chart the pathway forward.

[*Translation*]

People were hoping that something would change. Knowing that Canada has a minority government, they were hoping perhaps that the opposition parties and the government would work together to find ways of helping families that are suffering in this crisis. But this evening, the government rejected the idea of working together for families. Instead, it chose to pursue the partisan objectives of the Conservative Party. That is unfair. We cannot accept that. We reject that.

[*English*]

We needed a stimulus to our economy and we needed it desperately. In fact, the people who are being laid off day in and day out were counting on the government to step forward with the kind of economic strategy that would have at least put some light at the end of the tunnel. They were counting on a government that might understand what they are facing when they go home with a pink slip and might say that it will take a look at the supports that are there, like employment insurance, and fix them so families can feed their kids. Instead, we get partisan games.

Routine Proceedings

What do the Conservatives expect to say to workers who are working in factories right now, knowing full well that the management of those factories need backing for their line of credit so they can pay their bills and keep on producing? They were counting on the government to step forward, like other governments around the world have done, and say that it will stand behind our businesses, stand behind our workers, stand behind our communities and support Canadians instead of just looking after itself. The Conservatives have turned it right around and that is not acceptable.

What we see is a smokescreen. We have seen it before from some of the same individuals in Ontario when these same kinds of strategies and tactics were used. We have seen it before but I had hoped it would be different.

I met with the Prime Minister and all the leaders here to see if we could find ways to work together. I have done it in minority Parliament after minority Parliament. Canadians want us to work together. Did we hear the slightest indication from the Prime Minister and his representatives on the front bench that they were prepared to work together? Not in the slightest. Instead, it was abuse, insults and putting down people who serve in elected office. I am sick and tired of it and I think Canadians are too.

People were hoping to see some real action to protect their pensions and to protect their savings. They look at what is happening in the United States and they see President-elect Obama laying out a plan that provides at least some sense of hope and optimism. What we hear in Canada is denial. We hear the government saying that there really is no problem. It says that it has done everything so well that there is no problem. How out of touch can the government be?

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

People are crying out for actions or initiatives like the ones they are seeing in other countries. But this government is not listening and is just saying things that do not make sense.

[*English*]

I want to salute the speakers before me in this debate from the opposition side who have had the courage to stand up against this kind of ideological politics.

Canadians have ideas about how we can move forward. We have been consulting with them. We have brought those ideas forward here. We have said that there must be action to protect consumers who are being gouged by the very companies that are receiving help from the government. There is no sense of responsibility, aid or assistance.

We wanted to see investment in innovation so we could become more productive. We wanted to see investment in infrastructure. We have thousands of projects across our country that are ready to be built, with workers ready to build them.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

We need to invest at this critical time in order to create jobs and help Canada's communities and families. Those are our priorities, and I hope we can come up with an effective plan for people.

[*English*]

I am here to say this evening that we are not about to play the partisan games and watch the attack on democracy unfold while thousands of Canadians are being thrown into the streets because of the recession and the loss of jobs. We are not prepared to support an economic statement that leaves Canadians behind. We will be voting against it, and proudly so, on behalf of the Canadians we represent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we will receive a fiscal update and some proposals to deal with a crisis. I want to take a look at something very specific in terms of finances. The Conservatives boast of their excellence in management. Since their election at the start of 2006, program spending has increased by 24%, or \$40 billion. That is the kind of management we have been subjected to.

Today, part of their almost imperceptible ideological manoeuvring is to blame those who have been elected, to make a politician a figure to be hated, just as Karl Rove taught George W. Bush to do in the United States—attack and divide. We already know that only 59% of the population votes and even that is too much for the Conservatives because they want to muzzle the opposition and cut off their funding. And they will do all of this without taking any action during the worst economic crisis Canada has seen in generations. It is shameful.

[*English*]

For the Conservatives to be able to propose any concrete change or bring any structural ideas, something that would build the economy, something that would help create and maintain jobs, they would need to admit that there was a problem or that they had ever done anything wrong. Of course that would require a modicum of modesty. Now that they are back in here with a minority situation, they will not even recognize that they have done anything wrong or that the public does not trust them enough to give them a majority.

Let us look at the facts. Right now in Canada 350,000 families, which corresponds to the 350,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost because of the Conservatives, do not believe the state or the government has a role in the economy. They, therefore, have held back. They give across-the-board tax cuts but, of course, if a company did not make a profit last year it did not pay any taxes and it did not get anything back on a tax cut. Who got the money? Companies in the oil sector and the banks, the ones that did not need it. The companies in the forestry sector and the manufacturing sector in B.C., Ontario and Quebec, in particular, those are the families that have lost their jobs and those are the communities that are without work. That is the desperate situation that we are already in and the Conservatives refuse to recognize it and will not act on it.

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

What a colossal fraud, Mr. Speaker. Just look at them go. Last week, Kevin Page said that we were headed for a \$6 billion deficit because of their poor choices. And what do they have to say in today's statement? One has to read it to believe it; it really is something else. Let me read one sentence, and I am not making this up: "The government is planning on balanced budgets for the current and next five years, although given the downside risks, balanced budgets cannot be guaranteed." They have managed to say one thing and then say the complete opposite in the same sentence. Is that what they call good management of public assets? This is pathetic. That is what we have had to put up with for the last two and a half years.

That is why the NDP, on behalf of Canadians, is looking at the numbers and the proposals, such as the proposed sale of public assets. They want to sell off major assets that took years to acquire just to have a balanced budget. Take all of the institutions we have built and created in Canada over generations: social rights, the right to collective bargaining, which has been recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada. For no good reason, they want to abolish these rights in one fell swoop by eliminating the right to strike. They want to take away women's right to equal pay for equal work.

I invite my colleagues to take a look—and it is well worth your while—at the difference between the speech as read by the rather dry and accusatory minister, that unadulterated *homo reformensis*, and the slightly broader document, expressed a little more lyrically, which proposes what another system might be like. They are doing this for the benefit of their reformist base. They never learned their lesson from the last election.

Our constitutional system has a remedy for this. Part of that remedy will come from the NDP. I trust that everyone on this side will stand up against this right of centre ideology that no longer has a place in a country that is open and established, a modern country whose socio-economic institutions respect everyone. Our families and future generations are entitled to better than this. We will do our part to restore equality and freedoms here in Canada.

• (1725)

[English]

The Speaker: Order. That brings to a conclusion the discussion pursuant to the special order relating to the economic statement.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, as amended.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The question is on the motion, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion, as amended?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion, as amended, carried.
(Motion, as amended, agreed to)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I move that we see the clock as 6:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved

• (1730)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak on the issue of international trade.

I think it is fair to say with the events that have transpired today and the hard ideological thrust of the government that we saw just a few short minutes ago that events may have gone much further than was foreseen by the government when the finance minister rose to impose that ideological closure on the government.

I am rising to speak on another aspect of the government's ideological plan which came to light just a few days ago when the government pushed through the signing of the Canada-Colombia trade deal with the Colombian government.

As we know, this agreement has been widely derided because of the lamentable human rights situation in Colombia. Essentially we have a situation where the number of trade unionists killed, ordinary working people who simply want the right to be able to negotiate collectively with their fellow workers, has reached epidemic proportions. Thousands of those who work in the labour movement, those simple workers who are getting together with their co-workers, having chosen to have an organized workplace, have been massacred by paramilitaries who have close ties with the Colombian government, with virtually no protection from the Colombian government at all.

What did the Canadian government choose to do? It chose to sign an agreement. This is the protection that is offered to Colombian workers who are being massacred. I should mention that the number of ordinary workers killed, massacred by these paramilitaries with the tacit approval of the government, has increased this year. We are not just talking about an epidemic; we are talking about an epidemic that is getting worse.

Essentially the government's plan is to put in place a fine. There is a token fine if the murder of human rights activists or organized workers continues. In the Canadian government's wisdom, this ideologically bent government has put in place a token fine.

Adjournment Proceedings

People can continue to be massacred and killed indiscriminately, and the government will then ask the Colombian government, politely, to pay a small fine to itself. In other words, there is a solidarity fund, and the Colombian government has to cough up a small token amount. I do not know if there is a volume discount, so that it pays \$100,000 if five or six labour unionists or human rights activists are killed, but it pays that fine and then the Colombian government decides how to use it. It is laughable. It is irresponsible.

My question to the parliamentary secretary is simple. Is this the Conservative tough on crime agenda, that a government that has egregious and consistent human rights violations, and egregious and consistent violations of the fundamental right to organize in the workplace, can simply get away with a little fine to itself? Is that what the Conservatives propose for Canadian criminals?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Speaker. I also welcome my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster back to the House of Commons.

The hon. member talks about Colombia's past and in doing that he studiously ignores the present, the future, and typical of that member, he studiously ignores the facts.

The Conservative government views the pursuit of liberalized trade, and the promotion and protection of human and labour rights as mutually enforcing. In fact, this balanced, responsible approach is guiding the Conservative government's re-engagement with the Americas.

When negotiating free trade agreements, our government's approach ensures that these agreements include robust provisions on environmental and labour cooperation. They commit partners to working together to ensure high levels of protection for workers and the environment. This proves that trade and investment liberalization can go hand-in-hand with labour rights and environmental protection.

Last week the Minister of International Trade signed a comprehensive free trade agreement with Colombia. This agreement and the parallel agreements on labour cooperation and environment signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs will bring real economic benefits to Canada and Colombia. At the same time, these agreements bind both Canada and Colombia to meaningful, enforceable standards on human rights and the environment.

On labour, both countries have committed to ensure that their laws respect the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of 1998, which covers the right to freedom of association and to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of compulsory labour, and the elimination of discrimination.

I am sure the hon. member would like to ignore that part of the agreement, but it is there in black and white.

The agreements also commit to providing protections for occupational safety and health, acceptable minimum employment standards such as minimum wages and overtime pay, and to providing migrant workers with the same legal protections as nationals in regard to working conditions.

The labour cooperation agreement includes binding obligations and provisions that enable members of the public to submit complaints, known as public communications, to the parties concerning perceived failures to meet the obligations under the agreement. We believe as well that trade liberalization and environmental protection can, and must be, mutually supportive.

On the environment, both countries commit to high levels of environmental protection, enforcing their domestic laws and policies, and not derogate from these laws in order to increase trade or investment. The agreement further encourages the use of voluntary practices of corporate social responsibility and honours international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

A key priority of our government's engagement in Colombia is the promotion and protection of the environment and human rights.

Colombia, as a nation, has come a long way.

This member along with myself and other members of the committee were in Colombia only a few short years ago and it was not safe to travel in Colombia at that time. I have friends from Colombia who left that country because of lawlessness and because they were worried about their own personal safety.

Colombia has come light years. It is a changed country. We can encourage that. We can welcome Colombia into the league of nations or we can turn our back on it. We have done the right thing in signing a progressive trade agreement with Colombia.

• (1735)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the response of the parliamentary secretary is kind of laughable.

He was in Colombia with myself and other members of the standing committee. That standing committee voted very clearly not to proceed with an agreement with Colombia until there was a full, impartial and independent human rights assessment.

Parliamentarians disagree with the parliamentary secretary. We travelled throughout Bogota with armed guards, at one point what was almost a regiment of the Colombian military. So much for his pretension that things have improved in Colombia.

The number of trade unionists and organized workers killed actually increased in 2008, and they simply wanted a better wage for themselves and their families.

Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that the cap on the only clause of the agreement that has any weight at all is capped at \$15 million? In other words, the Colombian government can kill as many people as it wants and have a volume discount for that \$15 million fine that it will pay to itself?

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1740)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member continues to ignore the facts and mislead Canadians on this important file. The reality is that the Government of Colombia has taken positive steps to promote security and peace within a framework of human rights protection and the rule of law. Yes, we were in Bogota, and yes, I walked the streets of Bogota by myself, and yes, I felt safe.

Our Conservative government firmly believes that the economic opportunities brought about through free trade can strengthen democracy in Colombia. We also believe that increased business and a spirit of responsibility can go hand in hand.

Let me be perfectly clear: Canada's efforts in Colombia aim to not only promote prosperity, but also to strengthen peace-building efforts and respect for human rights.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 5:41 p.m.)

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