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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, January 26, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, January 26, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

OPENING OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE 40TH PARLIAMENT

The Parliament, which had been prorogued on December 4, 2008, met this day at Ottawa for the dispatch of business.

The House met at 1:30 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

The Speaker read a communication from the Secretary to the Governor General announcing that Their Excellencies, the Governor General and Jean-Daniel Lafond, would arrive at the Peace Tower at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, January 26, 2009, and that when it was indicated that all was in readiness, Their Excellencies would proceed to the chamber of the Senate to formally open the second session of the 40th Parliament of Canada.

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, it is the desire of Her Excellency the Governor General that this honourable House attend her immediately in the Senate chamber.

Accordingly the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And being returned to the Commons chamber:

* * *

•(1330)

[*Translation*]

ORDER PAPER

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that, pursuant to Standing Order 55(1), and at the request of the government, the Chair has ordered the printing of a special order paper giving notice of a government motion.

[*English*]

I now lay upon the table the relevant document.

•(1430)

[*Translation*]

OATHS OF OFFICE

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-1, An Act respecting the administration of oaths of office, and sought the unanimous consent of the House to have the bill printed.

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.

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

* * *

[*English*]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that when the House of Commons did attend Her Excellency the Governor General this day in the Senate chamber, Her Excellency was pleased to make a speech to both Houses of Parliament. To prevent mistakes I have obtained a copy, which is as follows:

*Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

In these uncertain times, when the world is threatened by a struggling economy, it is imperative that we work together, that we stand beside one another and that we strive for greater solidarity.

Today, in our democratic tradition, Canadians expect that their elected representatives will dedicate their efforts to ensure that Canada emerges stronger from this serious economic crisis.

Once again, the people's representatives have gathered to consider the priorities of another parliamentary session.

Each Throne Speech is a milestone on the remarkable 142-year Canadian journey. Your predecessors, too, were summoned to this chamber at times of great crisis: as Canada struggled to claim her independence, in the shadow of war, during the depth of the Great Depression and at moments when great policy division tugged the very bonds of this union.

Today we meet at a time of unprecedented economic uncertainty. The global credit crunch has dragged the world economy into a crisis whose pull we cannot escape. The nations of the world are grappling with challenges that Canada can address but not avoid.

Opening of Parliament

The Government's agenda and the priorities of Parliament must adapt in response to the deepening crisis. Old assumptions must be tested and old decisions must be rethought. The global economy has weakened since Canadians voted in the last general election. In fact, it has weakened further since Parliament met last month.

Our Government has listened to Canadians who are concerned about how the worldwide recession is affecting their jobs, their savings and their communities. Our Government has reached out to Canadians in all regions, in all communities and from all walks of life.

Our Government has consulted widely:

- with those who work, those who invest, those who create jobs, those who build infrastructure and those who provide non-profit services;
- with municipal, provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal leaders and representatives of communities;
- in fact, with everyone whose input might help chart a course through the present storm.

Our Government approached the dialogue in a spirit of open and non-partisan cooperation. There is no monopoly on good ideas because we face this crisis together. There can be no pride of authorship—only the satisfaction of identifying solutions that will work for all Canadians.

Acting on the constructive thoughts and suggestions that have been received, our Government will tomorrow present Canada's economic stimulus plan. The plan will protect our economy from immediate threat, while making investments to promote long term growth.

The economic stimulus plan will be a plan of action.

- Our Government is stimulating the economy, both through direct government action and by encouraging private expenditure.
- Our Government is taking immediate action to build Canada through new investment in infrastructure.
- Our Government is acting to protect the stability of our financial system.
- Our Government is acting to ensure access to credit for businesses and consumers.
- Our Government is acting to support Canadian industries in difficulty—including forestry, manufacturing, automotive, tourism, agriculture—and to protect the families and communities who depend on those jobs.
- Our Government is acting to protect the vulnerable: the unemployed, lower-income Canadians, seniors, Aboriginal Canadians and others hit hardest by the global economic recession.

These actions will be targeted, they will inject immediate stimulus while promoting long-term growth and they will avoid a return to permanent deficits.

These actions will protect the jobs of today while readying our economy to create the jobs of tomorrow.

Canadians face a difficult year—perhaps several difficult years. In the face of such uncertainty, our Government has developed a clear and focused plan. Our Government will spend what is necessary to stimulate the economy, and invest what is necessary to protect our future prosperity.

As Canadians expect, the economy will be the focus of our Government's actions and of the measures placed before Parliament during the coming year. In pursuing measures to support the economy, our Government will also attend to the other important priorities that it set out in the Speech from the Throne to open the 40th Parliament.

The present crisis is new, but the imperative of concerted action is a challenge to which Parliament has risen many times in our history. What will sustain us today will be the same strengths of character that have pulled Canada through critical times before: unity, determination and constancy of purpose.

Honourable Members of the Senate,

Members of the House of Commons:

As you unite in common effort and in common cause, may Divine Providence be your guide and inspiration.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC) moved:

That the Speech of Her Excellency the Governor General, delivered this day from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, be taken into consideration later this day.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

●(1435)

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

DESIGNATION OF ORDER OF THE DAY

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I request the designation of an order of the day to allow the presentation of a budget speech at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, January 27, 2009.

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the business of supply be considered at the next sitting of the House.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: I would like to make a statement concerning private members' business. Standing Order 86.1 states that items of private members' business shall stand from session to session.

[English]

In practical terms, this means that the list for the consideration of private members' business, established by a random draw at the beginning of the 40th Parliament pursuant to Standing Order 87, shall continue for the duration of this Parliament.

There were 267 motions on the order paper at the time of prorogation and they shall stand on the list of items outside the order of precedence. Bills that had received first reading shall also stand on that list. Bills that had met the notice requirement and were printed in the order paper, but had not yet been introduced, will be republished on the order paper under the heading "Introduction of Private Members' Bills". However, bills that had not yet been published on the order paper need to be re-certified by legislative council and resubmitted for publication on the notice paper.

[Translation]

Items of private members' business will keep the same number as in the first session of the 40th Parliament.

[English]

Finally, Standing Order 87 provides that the order of precedence shall be established on the 20th sitting day following the draw. Eight sitting days having elapsed in the previous session, the order of precedence will be constituted on the 12th sitting day of this session. Members who are at the top of the list will have until 6 p.m. that day to introduce a bill or place a motion on notice and two further sitting days to select which item will be placed on the order of precedence. Private members hour will begin shortly after the tabling by the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business of its report on the items that will remain votable.

[Translation]

I trust that this will assist the House in understanding how private members' business will be conducted in the second session. The Table Officers can answer any other questions members may have.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE WHOLE

APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose, for the ratification of the House, a candidate for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Ms. Denise Savoie for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

The motion is deemed moved and seconded.

[Translation]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: I would like to congratulate the hon. member.

Opening of Parliament

● (1440)

APPOINTMENT OF ASSISTANT DEPUTY CHAIR

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Mr. Barry Devolin for the position of assistant deputy chair of committee of the whole.

This motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Thank you, and congratulations to you both.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, after consultation with the party whips, the Clerk of the House be authorized to convene for Tuesday, January 27, 2009 a meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs; and that on Tuesday, January 27, 2009, the House shall meet at 2:00 p.m. when members may make statements pursuant to Standing Order 31; not later than 2:15 p.m. oral questions shall be taken up; and at 3:00 p.m. the House shall proceed to the ordinary daily routine of business; following the ordinary daily routine of business the House shall, if necessary, suspend until 4:00 p.m. for the presentation of the Budget.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

HOUSE OF COMMONS CALENDAR

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you will find consent for the following motion. I move:

That notwithstanding the calendar tabled by the Speaker pursuant to Standing Order 28(2)(b), the House not sit on Friday, May 1, 2009; that, notwithstanding the Standing Orders and usual practice of the House, on Thursday, April 30, 2009, after Question Period, no dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Speaker, and that any recorded division that is deferred to or requested on Thursday, April 30, 2009, be deferred or further deferred, whichever the case may be, to the end of Government Orders on Monday, May 4, 2009.

I would remind members that this means the House will be sitting this Friday, January 30.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Chief Government Whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

The Address

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*English*]

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House proceeded to the consideration of the speech delivered by Her Excellency the Governor General at the opening of the session.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I bring greetings from the wonderful people of Miramichi, a community as beautiful and unstoppable as that great river which runs through our riding.

While I was home it was wonderful to be able to renew my grounding of the issues facing our remarkable riding. I am grateful to be back in the House so we can all get down to the action that our constituents are trusting us to accomplish for them.

To all my fellow MPs, I offer a heartfelt welcome back. I am quite sure they share my sentiments. I especially want to thank Her Excellency for her eloquent speech. I want to thank the Prime Minister for asking me to move the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

As a teacher, I am in the habit of paying particular attention to both the spoken and the written word, but I am sure I was not the only one who noticed that the throne speech was quite succinct compared to its precedents, but this is an unprecedented time. It is well known that the world economy and by extension Canada's economy are facing a time of unprecedented challenge. The question that we and governments and legislatures around the world face is, what are we going to do about it? How will we answer this challenge?

I know how we will not answer this challenge. This is not a time for words, for empty promises or for sitting idle on the orthodoxies of the past. This is certainly not a time for backroom partisan games, particularly as hardly three months have passed since Canadians made their wishes very clear about the government they wanted.

This is a time for action, a time for putting people first. The Governor General's remarks cut to the heart of the serious challenges facing all Canadians. We are caught in a serious global recession. Markets are in turmoil. Jobs are being lost. Pensions are at risk. Individuals and businesses are finding it harder to get credit.

It is true that Canada has a stronger foundation and is better prepared to weather this global storm than almost any other country, yet we are not immune. These are troubling times for all Canadians.

Brief news flashes or abstract facts and figures rehashed in 10 second sound bites do not tell the real story. For my part, having just returned from my riding of Miramichi, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker,

that the worry my constituents feel about the jobs they have and the jobs they are looking for is palpable. We are a tourism and resource rich riding. Mining, forestry and fishing are ways of life for many of my constituents. This is a trying time for Canada's resource industries.

Job losses are not about statistics. They are about real people who are worried about their pensions, who are worried about their bills, who are worried about the future. Uncertainty and turmoil in the markets does not hurt just the rich and affluent, it hurts the savings and pensions of Canadian seniors, those who have worked hard and saved diligently for peace of mind in retirement.

I know that seniors in my own riding, many of whom are already struggling with issues such as affordable housing, are very concerned about what will happen to their quality of life in this unprecedented time. Access to credit is not an abstract concept. It is about young families trying to get mortgages or car loans. It is about small businesses trying to obtain the capital they need to expand, to stay in business, and to create and protect jobs. Hard-working Canadian families, seniors, small business owners: these are the people who are hurting. These are the people who are worried. These are the people to whom all of us in the House are responsible.

● (1445)

In addition to the hurt and the worry, these Canadians share another commonality: they have no use for partisan bluster. They do not care whether or not elite academics and special interest groups have bestowed their blessings on backroom political games. They just want to see that the man or the woman to whom they entrusted their vote is working to represent their interests and to deal with these problems, problems like the economy.

It is not a lot to ask that politicians actually follow through and search for common grounds on this huge challenge that our country is facing today. We have a window of opportunity to do just that, and for our government's part we are reaching out in good faith. Tomorrow the Minister of Finance will present us with a budget, an action plan for the coming year and beyond. This will be our test, a test for all MPs and all parties, a test that will clearly demonstrate who is prepared to put national interests ahead of partisan interests and who is not.

Like other Canadians from coast to coast to coast, I look forward to hearing the finance minister explain our action plan in full detail, but we already know the broad strokes of what to expect. Our action plan will contain significant new investments to stimulate the economy and create jobs, to take immediate action to build roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure that Canadians see and use every day, and to help protect those hardest hit by the recession. In short, this will be an unprecedented action plan for an unprecedented time.

Canadians will be watching parliamentarians to see how we react. Will politicians once again angle for partisan advantage with the public interest coming a distant second? Or will MPs work to ensure that the action plan is quickly passed so support goes to those who need it most?

The Address

This government has made its intent clear in words and in deeds. We are putting Canada first. We are inviting all MPs in all other parties to do likewise. Over the past few months we have conducted an unprecedented consultation with Canadians from coast to coast to coast, a consultation on which my colleague from Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar will elaborate in a moment.

We also reached out for ideas from other parties. We offered, and we still offer, the path of consensus. Different parties may not agree on everything, but especially at a time like this, Canadians deserve to see their representatives working together for the greater good of the country.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those members of the opposition who did reach out and offer suggestions and ideas that they felt would be of benefit. I want to thank those members who made a sincere effort to publicly demonstrate, even if they do not particularly love our government, that they do love our country enough to set aside petty partisanship and do what they can to give everyday Canadian families the peace of mind they deserve.

For those who have not yet publicly demonstrated this big national spirit, there is still time. Yes, the budget has been sent to the printer, but the action our economy needs will go far beyond one budget or any one bill. The challenges we face are many and they will not disappear overnight.

● (1450)

In the last election Canadians gave our government a much stronger mandate, but it was still a minority mandate. They told all MPs to work together. They told us to get things done.

There is still time for big ideas that span political ideologies and different regions. There is still time to present constructive solutions for the future. There is still time to share concrete ideas on how to ensure individuals and businesses have access to the credit they need, time to identify building projects and get shovels in the ground, and time to help protect jobs today and create jobs for the future.

There is still time to prove that the system works, not just for politicians and special interests but for everyday Canadian workers, families and businessmen. I ask everyone to consider this and to come forward to ensure that we can all succeed together.

Canada is on a strong financial footing today. Canada is prepared to face a global recession because the big national parties, the parties that have formed credible national governments, both the Conservatives and Liberals alike, were able to make these big national decisions. This is particularly true on the economy.

For our part, the government introduced corporate, personal and sales taxes, including the GST. This was and remains early stimulus. We acted to provide stability in mortgages and real estate markets, and to ensure essential credit remains available to families and businesses. We partnered with the provinces to provide targeted support to industries and communities in need and we paid down billions on the federal debt, which is precisely the kind of move that allows us to enter a short-term deficit without putting our long-term economic security at risk.

At the same time, let me say, in that big national spirit that our country needs, that the Liberal governments of the 1990s also deserve their share of the credit for laying this foundation. Not many of those Liberals are left in the House these days and I do not presume to speak for those who are, but my guess is that they took very little pride or pleasure in cutting funding for health, education and other social programs. However, they made the tough choices they felt were necessary.

This government too, also a big national government, is doing what it thinks is necessary. Our government takes no pleasure in running a deficit. As Conservatives that is not normally in our DNA, but we are prepared to do what is necessary to improve access to credit, stabilize our economy, and protect and create jobs.

Tomorrow, my colleague, the Minister of Finance, will explain our next steps, additional action that we think is necessary. Our actions will be targeted. They will inject stimulus into the economy. They will promote long-term growth and avoid long-term or permanent deficits. This is the kind of plan Canadians expect. This is the kind of action Canadians deserve.

We are prepared to deliver the plan, the leadership and the action that Canadians need. No action plan can satisfy everybody, but I hope that all Canadians will look at our plan and find items that they can support and get behind.

● (1455)

To that end, it is my honour to move the following motion, seconded by the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar. I move:

That the following Address be presented to Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the House of Commons of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

● (1500)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the midst of this economic crisis, the government has given Canadians two throne speeches, but absolutely no plan.

The work of Parliament was suspended when what Canadians needed was for Parliament to get to work to protect their jobs, their savings and their retirement funds.

Now the government is sending its ministers to announce certain parts of the budget before presenting it here in the House of Commons tomorrow. It is disappointing to see that the government is still not ready to act in the professional, responsible manner that Canadians expect.

The Address

The budget must meet three important criteria. It must protect those who are most vulnerable in these difficult times. It must protect Canadian jobs in all regions of the country. And, most important of all, it must create jobs for the future and not saddle our children with a deficit and massive debt.

Why was the government so far off the mark when it announced a surplus to Canadians in its fall economic and fiscal update?

Why did the government spend so unwisely when conditions were better, thereby leaving us without the means we now need in this time of crisis? Why is it imposing on Canadians their first deficit in over ten years, without even considering the stimulus measures that are needed?

Seven months have passed since the House adjourned last June. Because of this government's decisions, Parliament has not been able to take concrete action to manage the financial crisis—

The Speaker: Order, Please. There is a time limit on questions and comments and many members would like to participate in the debate. Therefore, I encourage honourable members to limit their comments during this brief 10-minute period.

The hon. member for Miramichi.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the opposition for this question and I must assure the opposition that over the past six weeks the Prime Minister, ministers and members of Parliament have participated in pre-budget consultations right across this country. I am happy to say that in the Miramichi we had consultations. We listened to the needs and the cries of the people of the area. We are ready, with our economic plan, to act on their behalf, and to find the stimulus that will bring work and jobs to our area.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in this new year, I would first like to extend my best wishes to the people in my riding as well as to all parliamentarians present, especially my Bloc colleagues. I also wished the Prime Minister a happy new year, but he answered that I was very generous and that most were only giving him a month.

I am surprised by the speech of the member who just spoke. She stated that she visited her riding and noted that her constituents were most worried about the economic problems. I wonder where she was during the election campaign, when she and her party pretended that the economy was doing just fine. I also wonder where she was when consultations were held on the Conservative Party's first economic statement. Even then, they said there were no economic problems. Now, all of a sudden, they have discovered a multitude of problems.

Can she explain the contradiction between what was said during the election and what was said today?

• (1505)

[*English*]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne is the next step in Canada's action plan for the economy. This is an unprecedented throne speech for an unprecedented time. I know that my constituents back home agree with our Prime Minister,

that we do hope the MPs will give us a good month, that we can get started and get some work done around here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Miramichi told us she was a teacher and that she had learned to listen to what was said and carefully read what was written.

I would ask her to listen to the following statement, made in 2005 by the former leader of the opposition, when it was believed that the government had intentionally leaked budget information. He said:

This information was circulated before being made public. That is completely unacceptable.

Her leader said that in 2005. It was the same person who said and wrote that they would not fill Senate vacancies because it was inappropriate. Today, they swore in 18 senators.

I would like to know what the member for Miramichi would say to her students. Can they trust someone who says one thing and does the opposite?

[*English*]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that these are not leaks regarding the budget. These are, honestly, announcements that the people of Canada wanted to hear. They had questions they wanted answered. Our ministers focused on these questions and answered them at a time when Canadians were worried about things that were going on. I am very happy to be part of a government that listens to Canadians and answers their questions.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to compliment the hon. member for Miramichi for her fine Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Clearly, the uncertain economic situation around the world has provided challenges for Canada. However, by working together, I am confident that we will face these challenges head on. I wonder if the hon. member would elaborate to this House some of the issues that are important to her constituents to strengthen the local economy in her riding at this important time.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, as I had said earlier, during my time at home I did meet with many constituents in our round table consultations and I am happy to say that our government is prepared to take immediate action to build roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure, provide tax relief, and to help and protect those hardest hit by this recession.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the throne speech lays out a plan for some stimulative spending that will come in the budget. However in the current fiscal year there are still two months remaining and I wonder if the member would indicate whether the government is prepared now to start spending rather than wait until the next fiscal year.

The Address

• (1510)

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I am not prepared to speculate on what is in the budget tomorrow. I encourage the member to wait until tomorrow like the rest of us to hear what will be in the budget. Like they say in school, just one more sleep, so wait.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Governor General for her gracious remarks. I also thank the Prime Minister for offering me the opportunity to second the motion in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I want to thank my colleague from Miramichi for her eloquent opening address and I am delighted and honoured to second her motion. She and I represent very different parts of the country. Saskatchewan and New Brunswick are miles apart geographically: different places, different traditions, different ways of life. However, I am confident that if we compared the constituents of Miramichi with the good people I have the privilege of representing in Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, we would find many similarities. We would find hard workers and people who believe in personal responsibilities but are also generous and kind. We would find people who want to raise their families in safe communities, free from crime and intimidation. We would find people who are proud of Canada and believe in the limitless possibilities of our country. We would find people who disagree on many issues. Indeed, just as we would find many people within a given community, a given province or a given party who disagree but still share values. They would agree on the things that matter: health, happiness, security, peace of mind, a stable livelihood, a bright future. I believe we could take Canadians from any province or region of Canada and find these shared values.

It does not matter whether we live in B.C., in Newfoundland, in southern Ontario's wine country or the beautiful reaches of Canada's north or whether we live on a farm or in an urban centre, people still want to have peace of mind in their jobs, incomes and livelihood. It does not matter on which side of Canada's traditional linguistic divide one lies. A farming family in Quebec and a farming family in Saskatchewan may not speak the same language but they share many of the same values, hopes and dreams: a chance to make an honest living doing what they love.

What unites us all also transcends cultural divides. We are a large, diverse country filled with Canadians of every conceivable background but across different cultures and regions people still want to build a better future for their children and they are proud to call Canada home.

In my own riding, my constituents are divided into those in the urban community of west Saskatoon and those rural communities that spread out across our beautiful prairie province. However, urban or rural, I know that my constituents want their children to grow up and raise their families in their own communities. This is no different from anywhere else in our great country.

I believe what unites us also crosses the partisan divide. Good people and optimistic people vote Conservative just as they vote Liberal, Bloc and NDP. While Canadian voters may disagree on the given issue, there is more that unites us than divides us.

Tonight, somewhere in this great country, a Liberal will be having a Conservative over for dinner. A Conservative is helping his or her NDP neighbour and a Bloc supporter is having a lively debate with a New Democrat.

The point I am making is that throughout Canada good people might disagree on their politics but still manage to successfully live, work and enjoy time together and they will stand together when it counts. If Canadians of different political persuasions can disagree on politics and still work together when it really counts, why can their representatives not? Why can we not?

The most disheartening thing about this point is not that MPs of different persuasions are more divided than everyday Canadians. It is that if we are not careful we will increasingly become divided from Canadians. This risk does not just extend to MPs. It extends to staff members, lobbyists, journalists, academics, interest groups and even public servants. MPs must work hard to ensure that the concerns of their constituents come first.

• (1515)

For all of the Governor General's eloquence, her real gift to this Parliament was allowing us the opportunity to return to our constituencies and be reminded of what is really important to all Canadians.

Beginning in December, I took the winter break as an opportunity to conduct community consultations in my riding of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar. These consultations provided an opportunity for me to learn more about each community, as well as listen to their concerns. A number of individuals, as well as members representing various organizations, took the opportunity to call my office and meet with me. In total, I held meetings in or visited more than 15 communities within my riding.

If any of my hon. colleagues' experiences were like mine, they know what is on people's minds. People are worried about the economy, and rightfully so. Canada, like every other country around the world, is being buffeted by the global recession. Unlike other countries around the world, we are well prepared to weather it. Our real estate market is well regulated. Our banking system is strong. Our debt to GDP ratio is low. We entered the recession late. We are not plunging as deep as other countries and we are expected to come out of the recession early.

Relatively speaking, that is very good news, but for many Canadians there are still plenty of reasons to worry and we must not forget them: workers who have lost or are in danger of losing their jobs; Canadians living in single industry towns who are wondering what is next; pensioners worried about their income and savings; and small business owners concerned about the tight credit market and whether they can stay afloat.

The Address

The worries of Canadians cannot penetrate the bubble of Ottawa unless their representatives listen. Canadians' priorities cannot shape our policies and actions unless we are prepared to hear what they have to say. We need to reach out and we need to consult across regional lines and party lines to anyone who has a good idea that they are willing to share.

Tomorrow the Minister of Finance will introduce an action plan that addresses the priorities of Canadians. We know this because our government has made an unprecedented effort to consult far and wide and to give all Canadians the opportunity to have their say.

Here is what we have been doing. The Prime Minister and ministers have personally made 88 separate visits to cities, both large and small, from Toronto, Montreal and Halifax to Fort McMurray, Saskatoon and Kenora, to listen to Canadians. Ministers have held 74 round tables to solicit the views of business and community leaders.

Our government has met with 836 organizations, big and small. Our government has solicited online submissions from the public and received more than 7,400 responses from interested and concerned citizens and organizations who wanted to get involved, while another 5,400 wrote to our government directly with their ideas and thoughts.

Our government has had 102 discussions and face-to-face meetings with representatives from our provinces and territories and has met with representatives from 76 Canadian cities, counties and towns. These numbers do not even begin to include the number of Canadians, organizations and businesses that took the time and effort to contact their individual members of Parliament.

Furthermore, we have consistently reached out to the opposition parties as well. Those opposition parties that took up our offer in good faith and made suggestions, however broad, will hopefully see an action plan that at least, in part, respects their ideas and their priorities.

Tomorrow, members of Parliament and all Canadians will hear our Conservative government's action plan, which is what Canadians elected us to provide, but it will not be an exclusively Conservative plan. It will reflect the input we received from Canadians from all political persuasions and it will reflect the extraordinary character of these times. Rather than be a Conservative plan or a Liberal plan or so forth, it will be first and foremost a Canadian plan.

• (1520)

It will be a plan for protecting and creating jobs today and for helping Canada to create jobs for the future, a plan that provides strong fiscal leadership and delivers a meaningful action in a very uncertain time, a plan that will help to preserve the quality of life enjoyed across this country in both urban and rural communities, a quality of life that is worth preserving.

No plan can satisfy all the demands of all the people, but this action plan will get the big things right. It will be Canada's action plan for uncertain times. I invite all my colleagues to use their very best judgment when reviewing it.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and pleasure to second this motion.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the budget must meet these tests: it must protect the most vulnerable, it must provide the jobs for today in every region of the country, and it must create the jobs for tomorrow without leaving a legacy of debt and a permanent deficit for our children.

In September the government was telling Canadians that there would not be a recession. In November it was projecting a surplus. Now it has given us our first deficit in a decade.

Why has the government been so wrong about the state of our economy, even when every other G8 country was taking action? Why did it spend the cupboard bare when the times were good, harming our ability to protect our country when times were tough? Why has the government failed to act when more than 100,000 Canadian jobs have been lost since Parliament was shut down a month ago?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, these are unprecedented times. The government is listening to Canadians. Canadians were anxious and needed answers to alleviate their concerns regarding our economy. As I am sure the hon. member is aware, it would be inappropriate for me to speculate on specific items within the budget that is to be announced by the Minister of Finance tomorrow, or to reflect back. We want to look ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the past two years, my riding has been through a lot of plant closures. It started with the textile mills in Huntingdon, and then the Gildan and Goodyear plants in Valleyfield, where more than 1,000 jobs were lost.

Then, last week, we learned that the closure of the Rio Tinto Alcan plant in Beauharnois would put 250 people out of work.

For the past two years, Quebec's manufacturing sector has been in crisis, but this government, with its right-wing non-interventionist ideology, has refused to acknowledge the problem, has failed to do anything about it, and has allowed the economy to wreak havoc.

How can the member explain the fact that, from the moment the Conservatives came to power, they abandoned Quebec's manufacturing sector? Factory workers in the manufacturing and forestry sectors have been abandoned. Can she explain to us why that is?

• (1525)

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, the government has listened to Canadians, who are concerned about the worldwide recession and how it is affecting their jobs, their savings and their communities. The government has reached out to Canadians in all regions.

The government is putting forth a stimulus package that will be a plan of action. The government will be stimulating the economy, both through direct government action and by encouraging private expenditure.

The Address

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is asking Canadians to have confidence in him to implement economic measures he has been opposed to for his entire political life, measures he has opposed in the House—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain has the floor.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, he was opposed to these measures in the House, in the last election campaign and even in his economic update just seven weeks ago. How can the government be trusted to do what it says it now believes?

Let me offer just one example: infrastructure. In the 2008 budget, the Minister of Finance announced, in his words, “the largest single federal investment in public infrastructure since World War II”. The problem is that the money just did not flow. Provinces and municipalities desperate for that money are still waiting for it today. Why should we have confidence in the government this time around when it announces and reannounces the same promises over and over again with no intention of keeping them?

I ask the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar why any voter should believe her now, why any Canadian should trust her, and why any MP should have confidence in her government.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, these are unprecedented times that need to be taken care of in an unprecedented way. I can reassure the hon. member that Canada will be taking serious, substantial and multi-year action to protect workers, businesses and families during this global recession. The Minister of Finance will provide more detail on our action plan when he introduces a new federal budget in the House tomorrow.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar for her speech, which so eloquently outlined the challenges Canada is facing during these uncertain economic times.

Could the hon. member point out some of the measures she believes will be beneficial for Canada in helping our economy during these challenging times?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, the throne speech states:

Acting on the constructive thoughts and suggestions that have been received, our Government will tomorrow present Canada's economic stimulus plan.

The economic stimulus plan will be a plan of action.

Our Government is taking immediate action to build Canada through new investment in infrastructure.

Our Government is acting to protect the stability of our financial system.

Our Government is acting to ensure access to credit for businesses and consumers.

Our Government is acting to support Canadian industries in difficulty—including forestry, manufacturing, automotive, tourism, agriculture—and to protect the families and communities who depend on those jobs.

Our Government is acting to protect the vulnerable: the unemployed, lower-income Canadians, seniors, Aboriginal Canadians and others hit hardest by the global economic recession.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer the member just gave and the throne speech mentioned specific industries, but there is no mention of the north, no mention of the Arctic, and no mention of one of its biggest industries, mining. Why is that?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the hon. member is aware, it would be inappropriate for me to speculate on specific items within the budget that are to be announced by the Minister of Finance tomorrow. However, I can reassure the member that Canada will be taking serious, substantial and multi-year action to protect workers, businesses and families during this global recession throughout all of Canada.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised to hear my colleague opposite say that she cannot talk about the upcoming budget, which will indeed be introduced tomorrow.

Aboriginal communities have been waiting exactly eight months to receive over \$300 million. Can my colleague opposite tell me this: where is the money? Where is the \$300 million that aboriginal communities have been waiting eight months to receive?

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that our Conservative government has done more for first nations and aboriginals in this country than any other government did.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is astounding to hear the member say that she has been listening to Canadians and that the government will deliver. One just needs to look at what has gone on in our large cities with the infrastructure deficit and the lack of housing. What happened to the child care promise? It is beyond belief. Since the government has failed to deliver on any of those questions in all of the time it has been in power, why should we have any confidence that it will deliver this time around? It will yet again let down the people of Canada.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, over the past six weeks our Prime Minister, our ministers and MPs have participated in prebudget consultations right across the country. It has been the most comprehensive and inclusive prebudget consultation process in Canadian history. The Prime Minister himself has held round tables right across the country. He and government ministers have made over 84 separate visits to cities across the country. We have heard the concerns of Canadians. We have heard the concerns of our communities and of those individuals who are leading communities when it comes to infrastructure. Members will have to wait until tomorrow so they can hear the rest of the budget.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to compliment the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar and the member for Miramichi for very spirited contributions to our debate.

Before I move adjournment, I simply want to make one observation. The Speech from the Throne speaks of open and non-partisan cooperation, which are touching words.

*The Address**[Translation]*

Yet I cannot forget that, just six weeks ago, the government was singing a different tune when it introduced its fall economic update. Back then, its refrain was provocative and partisan, and it had no plan, nothing at all, to protect society's most vulnerable, to protect jobs, or to create the jobs of tomorrow.

[English]

That is why there is a problem of trust with the government. We do not know which discourse, which language, to believe. It has a split personality, if I may say so. We will have to wait until tomorrow to see whether the government has resolved this conflict of personality and whether it can present a budget in which this side of the House has confidence.

In the meantime, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(On motion of Mr. Michael Ignatieff the debate was adjourned)

● (1535)

The Speaker: Just before I recognize the government House leader, I wish to invite all hon. members to take the opportunity to renew acquaintances in room 216 immediately following the adjournment of the House, which I think is imminent. I invite all hon. members to come back there.

[Translation]

It is a pleasure to welcome you back to the second session of our 40th Parliament.

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I do hope that it is imminent. Therefore, I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted earlier this day.

(The House adjourned at 3:37 p.m.)

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