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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will start my first words in the House of Commons by thanking the voters of Richmond for their trust in me. I also wish to thank my campaign team, the volunteers and especially my husband for their unwavering support all these years.

Richmond is home to Canada's Pacific gateway and one of the most multicultural ridings in Canada. In fact, yesterday marked the beginning of the widely celebrated lunar new year.

This year is the year of the ox. The ox traditionally symbolizes prosperity through perseverance and hard work. With economic uncertainty, the year of the ox beckons all of us here to work tirelessly, bringing stability to the economy, maintaining jobs and caring for the most vulnerable.

In 2010, Richmond will showcase to the world the magnificent speed skating oval and a brand new Canada line that connects Richmond with the Vancouver International Airport and downtown Vancouver.

Working with the spirit of the ox, Richmond will prosper. On behalf of Richmond, I wish all Canadians a healthy and prosperous lunar new year. *Gong hei fatt choy.*

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JIM FULTON

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Parliament lost one of its finest sons just before Christmas. Jim Fulton was an unforgettable presence in the House for 20 years as the member for Skeena and I am very proud to have served with him as a friend and a colleague.

Jim's humour, eloquence, brashness and capacity for great and good work on behalf of the Canadian people and the environment

made him friends in all parties. After leaving this place, he transformed the David Suzuki Foundation.

Jim lost his battle with cancer and left us too soon but he remains in our hearts as a great fighter. To know Jim was to love him.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PIERRE ROUX

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the City of Victoriaville is in mourning. One of its outstanding citizens, Pierre Roux, died last night at the age of 70. Mr. Roux was the mayor of Arthabaska and Victoriaville for 27 years.

A renowned businessman and administrator, Mr. Roux was greatly involved in the community and participated in various community, sports and cultural causes. Despite his retirement from politics, Mr. Roux was still committed to the region through chairing local organizations such as the Fondation Hôtel-Dieu d'Arthabaska. He was, without question, a source of inspiration and a role model for many of his colleagues on municipal council and for the public in general.

No one will forget the role he played in the project to amalgamate Victoriaville, Arthabaska and Sainte-Victoire, in helping to bring the Tigres, a major junior hockey team, to Victoriaville, and in running Thiro Inc., a business established in Victoriaville in the middle of the last century.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to offer condolences to the friends and family of Pierre Roux.

* * *

[*English*]

JIM FULTON

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a sincere honour for me to rise today and pay tribute to a great man and Parliamentarian, Jim Fulton. As his sister recently told me, Jim was larger than life and he lived a very large life.

As an MP for Skeena for 14 years, Jim was, at times, outrageous but always fearless. He was a big and early supporter of first nations rights and, as a natural extension, the protection of our planet.

In all the epic struggles, laughter was never far from Jim. After raging on some poor minister of the Crown he would cross the floor, share an inappropriate joke and soon be picking up the tab at the local pub.

Statements by Members

For those touched by Jim's deep sense of humanity and respect for our planet, we will never know another. It was said that he loved life and, indeed, life loved Jim Fulton. We will miss you, buddy.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN BEAUPORT-LIMOILOU

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment thank a number of organizations in my riding which help the least fortunate members of our community. These organizations include Bouchée Généreuse, Maison Agapè, Patro Roc-Amadour, Knights of Columbus and many others we know we can rely on. In these difficult times, I find it especially important to highlight their dedication to the community of Beauport-Limoilou.

Their efforts to give hope, to ease people's pain and suffering, to listen and to help make a significant impact on the lives of our constituents.

They know that they can always count on me to help them—as a resident of Beauport-Limoilou, as a fellow human being, and as a member of Parliament. Thanks to all.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

FAMILY LITERACY DAY

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Family Literacy Day, an occasion for families, young and old, from coast to coast to coast, to celebrate the many benefits of reading and learning.

Literacy is the foundation of any successful society, a skill that opens not only minds but doors of opportunity for children and adults alike.

Instilling at a young age the value of reading comprehension, the empowerment of scholarship and the gratification of learning should be our common pursuits in creating an early childhood education system.

The values promoted by Family Literacy Day and other causes like it are only a small step toward this goal. Much more work needs to be done.

I commend all literacy organizations in their ongoing support for literacy and call on the government to provide a worthy partner in efforts to make Canada the most literate country in the world.

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ANGUS MCKENZIE

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 19, 2009, the citizens of London lost a tremendous community hero.

I lost my very dear friend, Angus McKenzie. His 82 years with us was too short. He was a successful lawyer and founding partner with McKenzie Lake Law Firm.

Angus was a giant in terms of community service; a legend who cannot be replaced.

He helped most every charity in London and, more important, thoughtfully challenged others to do the same. He brought out the best in us and elevated our commitment to community.

All the while, Angus was a true gentleman, very gracious and very humble.

His involvement will be deeply missed and yet his enduring influence will be the living legacy of community leaders he inspired. That was his great gift to us.

On behalf of London and Canada, I wish to thank his wife Jean and his children Kate, Carol and Ian. They sacrificed so much so that we could spend time with Angus.

We will miss our dear friend.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC FLAG

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 61 years ago, the people of Quebec decided to make a statement by adopting a national flag. Since then, Quebec has asserted, loudly and clearly, that it is not part of another nation, but a nation unto itself, and has conducted itself accordingly. The people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot can proudly lay claim to the origins of our national flag, which was inspired in part by the flag that Father Filiatrault, parish priest at Saint-Jude, hoisted above his presbytery in 1902. That flag bore white fleur-de-lis.

Our national flag symbolizes the glorious past and bright future of a people ready, determined, steadfast, and resolutely looking to the future. As the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, I will work very hard to protect Quebec's interests and to achieve my dream, which is to see our fleur-de-lis flag flying alongside the flags of other sovereign nations.

* * *

[*English*]

BULLYING

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, bullying is a problem that Canadians have faced for generations. Today one in four kids is bullied, one in five is a bully and 282,000 high school kids are attacked each month nationally.

Bullying has changed over the years. While there are still bullies in the schoolyards, advances such as the Internet and text messaging allow bullying to happen anytime, anywhere, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Sadly, once there is a habit of childhood bullying, this behaviour can continue into the workplace.

However, bullyingcanada.ca and individuals like Katie Neu and Rob Frenette are working to change that with the recognition of December 17 as blue day, our stand against bullying.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

I am proud to be working with my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst and all of the organizers across Canada to promote this initiative in the House of Commons by means of a petition to be tabled very soon.

Please join us in doing what needs to be done to keep our young people and our communities safe.

* * *

● (1410)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those who want to understand what is going on have only to open their eyes. Today, the Conservatives are in an excellent position to confirm the truth of that statement. We warned the Conservatives of the magnitude of the economic crisis, but they kept telling us that everything was fine and that they were not worried.

Let us not forget that this Minister of Finance, the very one presenting a red-ink budget boasting the biggest deficit since Brian Mulroney, is the same one who predicted a surplus in his latest economic statement. Before, during and after the holidays, dozens of Canadians who lost their jobs did not really feel like celebrating.

Would the Conservatives be helping those people today if we, the Liberals, had not twisted their collective arm? The answer is obvious.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many Canadian farm families strongly supported our government in the last election because they know that we keep our promises. And they can expect nothing less at this time. In addition to stimulating the economy, creating jobs, and investing immediately in roads, buildings and bridges, I expect the economic action plan to produce concrete results for farmers and to protect those who have been hardest hit by the recession.

Farmers should have access to new funding to increase their slaughter capacity. This is the perfect opportunity for our government to support our beef and pork industries, as well as other producers. Our economic action plan should include a flexible program for agriculture. Such a program should help farmers tackle the challenges of the market and exploit significant opportunities in each province and territory.

I am very honoured to work with the Prime Minister and our Conservative government for farmers and for all Canadians.

* * *

[English]

OPPOSITION PROPOSED COALITION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, happy new year of the ox. Just like Canadians, the ox is strong, determined and hard-working.

The lunar new year deserves a new beginning, a fresh start. Hard-working Canadians need a new political direction and a new government that believes in a green economic recovery for men and women, a new government that will change direction and cast aside the old mantra that corporate and general tax cuts are solutions to all problems and instead invest in women and children.

Will we see a national child care program and a real reduction in child poverty in the year of the ox? I doubt it. That is why members of Parliament should celebrate the new year with strong, determined action and boldly bring about a stable and hopeful new Liberal-NDP government.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remind the House of our government's unprecedented commitments to infrastructure projects nationwide.

Above and beyond our \$33 billion building Canada plan, Canada's transport and infrastructure minister announced yesterday a further commitment of \$4 billion for an infrastructure stimulus fund to help provinces, territories and municipalities get projects started as soon as possible, \$2 billion to accelerate construction at colleges and universities across Canada and \$1 billion to create a new, green infrastructure fund to encourage sustainable energy infrastructure.

This is additional funding that will help get shovels in the ground from coast to coast to coast. It is important that all three levels of government, provinces, territories and municipalities, work together on these important projects in order to create jobs and strengthen our economy.

* * *

[Translation]

BATTLE OF THE PLAINS OF ABRAHAM

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 2008 marked the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City and the birth of New France. The federal government's political hijacking of this event is raising concerns about the commemoration of the battle of the Plains of Abraham, which led to the fall of New France 250 years ago.

Through its battlefields commission, the federal government is proposing an ill-advised, divisive plan to recreate what Quebeckers consider the most significant defeat in their history. For the sake of tourism, Quebeckers are being asked to celebrate the conquest. What would people say if someone suggested recreating the Acadian expulsion?

We think this event should be reconsidered. We feel it would be best for the Quebec National Assembly to decide how to commemorate the occasion.

Since this government claims to recognize the Quebec nation, it should have the decency to show that nation the respect it deserves.

Oral Questions

• (1415)
[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Canadians will receive the federal budget with a certain degree of disappointment. Two months ago the finance minister proudly boasted that the Conservative government had paid off \$37 billion of federal debt. Yet, within a matter of weeks, the same finance minister suddenly tells a different story.

Instead of a surplus, the Conservatives will run a massive \$64 billion deficit over two years. This effectively wipes out any Conservative progress on reducing the federal debt. How can Canadians have confidence in the government when the Conservatives took over a \$13 billion surplus from the Liberals in 2005 and simply blew it? Why should Canadians trust the Conservatives to weather this recession when they could not manage in a healthy economy?

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that my colleagues and I in the Liberal caucus will assess this budget very carefully to ensure that it is in the best interests of Canadians.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past six weeks, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, other ministers and members of Parliament have participated in a series of economic consultations from coast to coast to coast. These consultations have been the most comprehensive and inclusive in Canadian history, laying the groundwork for a multi-year plan.

Canada's economic action plan will help Canada weather the global economic crisis. We have heard the views of thousands of Canadians through round tables, online consultations, by mail, email and through submissions by groups and individuals.

In my riding the Minister of Finance held one of the largest public consultations, with 480 participants. Our government has met with representatives from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and had face to face meetings with numerous municipalities about the bridges and roads they needed for the future.

There were 102 discussions with our provincial and territorial counterparts, leading to a successful first ministers meeting. The Minister of Finance has met four times with his newly established economic advisory council.

I look forward to hearing about Canada's economic—

The Speaker: Oral Questions, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I spent all month listening to Canadians from across

Canada. They are afraid of losing their jobs, their pensions and are worried about their children's future.

In this regard, where was the government's plan in October, November and December, when the governments of other G8 nations were taking action?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): I would like to begin by congratulating the leader of the opposition on becoming leader of his party and of the opposition.

This government took action more than a year ago at the beginning of the crisis. Today, the Minister of Finance will present his budget to the House, the earliest in contemporary Canadian history.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for his kind words. The point is the actions come late.

Yesterday's throne speech goes against everything the government was saying last autumn. As late as October, the Prime Minister was denying we were headed into a recession. As late as the economic statement, the Prime Minister was actually denying we were going to head into deficit. Now we know the truth.

Why did the Prime Minister tell us we were in surplus on November 27 when we were actually in deficit?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Prior to the budgetary actions we will take in the upcoming budget, the government has been in surplus for the current fiscal year.

I indicated at the G20 meetings in November and after at APEC that this government did intend to run a deficit in coordination with other countries around the world to stimulate our economy. We have a strong balance sheet and we will do whatever it takes to keep our economy strong.

• (1420)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us turn to infrastructure.

The government claimed that infrastructure would be a priority, but it failed to get \$2 billion in commitments out the door that would have created jobs and helped rebuild communities.

How can Canadians trust the Prime Minister not to fail them again? What assurances can he give us now that the promised money will actually get out the door this time?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that in every year the government has been in office actual federal infrastructure spending has increased. Even before this budget, federal infrastructure spending was scheduled to double in the coming year.

There will be new good news in the announcement. I urge the opposition to join us to undertake this action and get that money out and get the economy going.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the announcements increased; the money out the door did not.

Exactly two months ago the Conservative government promised to balance its books, this fiscal year, not next year, 2008-09 and each of the four following years, surpluses all the way. That is what the Conservatives promised.

Now they admit that next year they will be in the red by some \$34 billion and then by another \$30 billion the year after. What about this year, 2008-09? They promised a surplus of close to a billion dollars.

Will they tell us whether they are already hiding a hidden deficit for 2008-09?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the hon. member, as the Prime Minister has, to take a very serious look at what is going to be tabled here later today.

This is far too important an issue to play partisan politics with. I would encourage everyone to support the budget. It is important to Canadians, it is important to their jobs and it is important to the future and the strength of our country.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is the master when it comes to partisan politics.

The Minister of Finance, as well as his parliamentary secretary, is used to dodging these types of questions. When he was at Queen's Park, he hid a \$6 billion deficit. It took years to get things back on track.

Today, how can we believe him, and his government, when it comes to the numbers in his budget for fiscal year 2008-09?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my hon. colleague to remember the fact that Liberals suggest that we have not been dealing with this. It was the fall statement of 2007 that the Prime Minister and the finance minister recognized what was on the horizon. In fact, some in the opposition suggested we were being too cautious.

We put in tax cuts that actually prepared Canadians and this country for the challenges that lay ahead. We work proactively and we encourage the opposition to support what we are going to present this afternoon.

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion calling on the federal government to maintain the current equalization formula and opposing the proposed Canada-wide securities commission.

How can the Prime Minister, who recognized the Quebec nation, go against this unanimous motion by going ahead with an equalization ceiling and a single securities commission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under this government, the provinces have received much larger equalization payments, and that will continue in the years to come.

As for the securities commission, this government intends to act in accordance with its own constitutional authority and with the willing participation of the provinces.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by capping equalization, the Prime Minister is taking over \$1 billion away from Quebec, depriving it of a means of combatting the economic crisis. The Prime Minister prefers to help Ontario and the west, which benefit from the new equalization formula, at Quebec's expense.

How can we have confidence in this Prime Minister, who is going back on his March 19, 2007 commitment to the Premier of Quebec to make, and I quote, "a fundamental return to fiscal balance in Canada"?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under this government, federal transfers to Quebec have risen to nearly \$17 billion, an increase of \$5 billion a year since we came to power. And those levels will rise in the future.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the same unanimous resolution, Quebec's National Assembly reiterates its firm opposition to the proposed Canada-wide securities commission. The business community in Quebec also opposes this pet project of the Conservatives.

Why, with yesterday's throne speech, is the Minister of Finance still stubbornly taking this centralist route, which goes against Quebec's interests?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know from the Hockin report that there is a need for a common securities regulator across this country. Our concern is protecting Canadians' investments. That has to be primary here. We will respect provincial jurisdiction, but we encourage all provinces to get on board and help protect consumers.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is using the financial crisis as a pretext to try to impose a single commission. Businessman Purdy Crawford, who led the restructuring of commercial paper in Canada, stated categorically, “The crisis took everyone by surprise, and a single regulator would not have changed anything.”

Will the minister admit that his only goal is to make Toronto Canada's financial centre, which goes against Quebec's interests?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it came as no surprise to Canadians. We have been talking about this in fact in the House. We have answered questions on this many times. Canadians are calling our offices and asking for some sort of a common securities regulator. We have 13 jurisdictions across this country. When one company wants to invest in Canada, it has to apply 13 times. It only makes sense that we encourage Quebec and all provinces to get on board to help protect our investors.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): The fact is, Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister does not know what to do with this economy because the actions that we need right now run counter to his beliefs. This is the problem.

For the last two months, while he was locking the doors here in Parliament, 100,000 people were thrown out of work. He did not listen to the warnings from members of Parliament, from the forecasters, or even from the people who were losing their jobs. The fact is that he denied that there was a problem altogether.

Could the Prime Minister explain to Canadians now why, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, he denied that there was a problem with the economy for so long?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me read a quotation into the record:

MPs should not say how they will vote on a budget or a bill until they see it...we have an economic budget coming...where we announce billions of dollars of spending in deficit...So I think we should at least have a look at it before you say yes or no.

That is wise advice from the NDP member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): The problem, Mr. Speaker, with what the Prime Minister says is that he then does the opposite. That is the problem.

Billions of dollars were announced in an infrastructure program in three consecutive budgets, but if we were to ask the mayors of this country whether they ever received the money, they would tell us they got a big fat zero. The fact is that we cannot have confidence.

The Prime Minister said he was against appointing unelected senators. Yesterday, 18 more were sworn in by the Conservative government.

The Prime Minister is proposing measures now for the economy that he has spent his life fighting. Why should we believe him now?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member speaks to different mayors than we do. Mayors appreciate that infrastructure spending in this country has been increasing. Obviously, they are looking for further increases and we will be looking to work with them to make sure that happens to sustain this economy.

As for the Senate, I think the only issue for the leader of the NDP is that I got to appoint those senators before he did.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1430)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): When it comes to the Senate, Mr. Speaker, I remember a time when the Prime Minister rose in the House and said that he liked our idea of having a referendum to abolish the Senate.

[*Translation*]

This Prime Minister has changed his mind too often. He brought in fixed election date legislation, yet he himself called an early election. He announced all sorts of infrastructure projects, but governments did not receive a single penny. He just has to talk to the mayor of Montreal.

How can we have confidence in such a Prime Minister?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP at one time said he would bring forward a motion to the House to debate abolition or potentially some other reforms of the Senate. Of course, that motion never came. I would encourage the leader of the NDP to actually look at our Senate reform legislation before he takes a position and give it his consideration.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. President Obama has closed the prison in Guantanamo and suspended proceedings against Mr. Khadr.

My question for the minister is simple. Mr. Khadr is a child soldier. Why is Canada not shouldering its responsibilities and bringing Mr. Khadr back to Canada?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Our position on Mr. Khadr remains unchanged. In fact, two previous Liberal governments took the same position. Mr. Khadr has been charged with serious crimes, including murder, attempted murder, conspiracy, providing material support for terrorism and spying.

We are continuing to monitor the situation and the work of the American committee set up to consider the fate of the detainees in Guantanamo, including Mr. Khadr.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Khadr was recruited at the age of 13. He was arrested at the age of 15. He has been incarcerated for nearly seven years. I wonder how the minister can, in all conscience, not recognize that while the position of the Government of Canada may be unchanged, regardless of the circumstances, the fact remains that the President of the United States, who we will be welcoming here shortly, has in fact carried out a whole series of changes.

When will somebody turn the lights on over on that side of Parliament and recognize that the world is changing around them and that Canada needs to take its responsibility for one of our own citizens?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position regarding Mr. Khadr remains unchanged. It is exactly the same position as two previous Liberal governments. The problem here is that no charges have been dropped against this individual, on the one hand.

Where there is inconsistency in the Liberal Party's position. As a matter of fact, the leader of the Liberal Party would want to have this individual come back to Canada; whereas the hon. colleague who has just asked me the question, the member for Toronto Centre, would want to set up a special committee to look at this problem. So, what is the issue? In—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax West.

* * *

[Translation]

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government was so busy leaking budget highlights that it forgot to let Canadians know about serious security issues at Chalk River. In December, there was a spill involving radioactive material at the nuclear facility. Why did the accident happen? What human health and environmental impact assessments were carried out, and why was the public not informed?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of Canadians is always our foremost concern. In fact, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and AECL, the operator, were on the ground working together during the stoppage of the NRU and, as well, they were working together during this incident at Chalk River. I have been informed that Chalk River has had no adverse effects on human health or the environment during this period of time. As I mentioned, CNSC was on site, and the communications were in place between AECL and CNSC. Regardless, I have asked for a written report on the incident and CNSC officials continue to work with AECL in these matters.

• (1435)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve the truth and transparency when it comes to nuclear safety and oversight, but they have a government that interferes with

Oral Questions

independent regulators and keeps them in the dark. The leak remains ongoing, with thousands of litres of low-level radioactive water being dumped into the Ottawa River.

What is being done to solve this and why was the public not informed?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as indicated already, at no time did any of the events that took place at Chalk River have an adverse effect on human health or the environment. The health and safety of Canadians is always our foremost concern.

The reactor at Chalk River continues to operate consistently and meets all safety regulations and security regulations. We continue to work with CNSC to ensure safety requirements at Chalk River labs continue today.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the environment was not mentioned even once in the Speech from the Throne shows just how little this government cares about climate change issues. One of the first things the Minister of the Environment did was defend the oil sands, thereby demonstrating his utter submission to the oil companies.

Can the government explain why the Speech from the Throne was silent on the subject of the environment despite the fact that the future of the economy is inextricably linked to the environment?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we disagree. It is right there in black and white in our platform, and we have now made a commitment in this area. We will implement a North American cap and trade system for greenhouse gas emissions and atmospheric pollution, and we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020. These major commitments represent more than any other party has done.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the minister says one thing one day and another the next. He needs to understand that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. Take, for example, the mayor of Rivière-du-Loup, who said that his city cannot be listed on the European carbon exchange without clear Canadian targets. As a result, the city's disposal site is losing hundreds of thousands of dollars every year.

How can the government fail to realize that, even at that level, the environment can be profitable?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. We are working on that issue with the United States. For example, the government has decided to harmonize its plan with the provinces, to adopt North American automobile fuel standards, and to introduce a regulatory system for greenhouse gas emissions for various industries.

*Oral Questions***ARTS AND CULTURE**

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's minister of culture is taking up the cause again and has stated that artists must recoup the money cut last year by the federal government in order to continue obtaining international exposure.

During his recent tour of Quebec, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages demonstrated that he is a good listener. However, can he confirm for us today that he is also very capable of taking action by announcing that he will restore the monies eliminated for international tours?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. She ought to know that our government will invest \$21 million in our artists working internationally.

We will also invest \$2.3 billion in our artists, the largest amount ever budgeted by the federal government. We are investing in our artists to add to the quality of life of Canadians in every region of our country. We are giving to artists. It is a real problem for the Bloc Québécois, because every time that we increase our investments, the Bloc Québécois votes against it.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government is incapable of understanding the importance the Quebec nation sees in promoting its artists abroad.

The minister should perhaps think about using some of his energy to convince his colleagues to transfer to Quebec all responsibility for arts and culture, together with their budgets.

• (1440)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this idea was presented to Quebecers by Ms. Marois during the last provincial election campaign and Quebec rejected the proposal.

What Quebecers and all Canadians want is a federal government that makes good investments for the arts and culture of our country. That is why, in each budget, our government has increased spending and investment related to arts and culture. This year, the amount is \$2.3 billion and, in about one hour and twenty minutes, we will see that our government continues to support artists in our country.

* * *

[English]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when 10,000 forestry workers lost their jobs in B.C., we asked the government to help. Instead, it prorogued Parliament. During that time more jobs were lost, 940 at Potash Corporation, 380 at Agrium, 400 at Teck Cominco, and the Conservatives still did nothing.

In yesterday's throne speech the government said that the present crisis is new. New to whom? Why did the government fail so completely to protect Canadian workers?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the past few weeks an unprecedented number of consultations have taken place with Canadian companies, Canadian workers and Canadian municipalities dealing with the issues

associated with forestry, mining and other sectors that are affected by this economic recession.

I look forward very much to hearing from the Minister of Finance later today exactly what he will be offering to the forestry sector. I anticipate that the forestry sector will be very pleased, because we do care.

* * *

[Translation]

INDUSTRY

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two of Quebec's flagship manufacturers, Bombardier and Alcan, just laid off nearly 1,500 workers. The unemployment rate in Quebec has reached 7.3%.

Why did the government not take preventive action in its November economic update? Why did the Conservatives do nothing?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear. We invested in the aerospace sector in the 2007 and 2008 budgets, and we will increase our investments in the current budget, I hope. I think the Minister of Finance recognizes this problem as a challenge to be addressed. If we work together, we can increase assistance to the aerospace sector and to other industries.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in October we had an election during which the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance both assured Canadians repeatedly that the economy was doing wonderfully. The very next month, in November alone, over 70,000 Canadians lost their jobs. That same month the Conservative government's economic statement seemed to have missed that little fact and continued to pretend that all was well.

I ask the government, what are the real job loss forecasts that it is working with and what layoffs will this budget prevent?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for being able to get that question out.

Seriously, we are always troubled when Canadians lose their jobs. It is very serious and very important to this economy. What we talked about in the fall economic statement is just a reflection of the job losses that we may see in the future. We need to remember that since this government took power in January 2006, there are still over 190,000 net new jobs.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we all already know, this Conservative government has problems with facts and figures. I will try again with a very simple question, a precise question, that requires a simple and precise answer. By how much will this budget decrease the job losses already anticipated?

• (1445)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard an eloquent speech in the House yesterday that encouraged all hon. members to recognize there was one more sleep before the budget. I would love to be able to share what is in the budget, but if the hon. member goes back for a nap, there is one more nap before the finance minister delivers the budget.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the last few weeks we have heard from provincial premiers and municipal leaders across the country that increased spending toward infrastructure projects can provide a vital shot in the arm for our economy.

Would Canada's transport and infrastructure minister please tell the House what steps our government will be taking to make sure that construction on key projects can begin as soon as possible?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Newmarket—Aurora knows how loath I am to divulge any details that could be contained in the budget that will be presented in this place at four o'clock.

We have lots of rules and laws in place to stop bad things from happening, but we do not have enough rules in place to facilitate good things to happen. We came forward with a five-point action plan designed to speed up and encourage the creation of jobs, encourage the construction of roads, bridges and sewers right across the country. We brought that plan to Canada's 13 premiers and they all agreed to support that plan.

We are going to get on with creating jobs and providing hope and opportunity.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE BUDGET**

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the previous government leaked parts of the budget, the current Prime Minister hit the roof. It was completely reprehensible; it threatened market stability. Yet the Prime Minister ordered a series of announcements in recent weeks totalling billions of dollars in spending, thereby breaching budget confidentiality.

Why threaten market stability? Why did he do the opposite of what he said? How can we trust this government?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of openness, there was an awful lot of numbers floating around and we felt that it was only appropriate to share some of those numbers.

Canadians are genuinely concerned about the economy. They are genuinely concerned about their future and about their jobs. It is highly disrespectful to Canadians to suggest that one is not even going to read the budget before one votes against it. That is what we are hearing from the leader of the NDP.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the same gang that was telling people to call their MPs, telling them to vote for a budget that we had not even seen yet.

[Translation]

The shameless breach of budget confidentiality through leaked information and announcements is part of a strategy designed to manipulate public opinion. Today's newspapers are reporting that the Conservatives will cap interest rates on credit cards. Yet they laughed at that very idea when it was proposed here in the House. They said the only thing to do was to shop around for a credit card.

Did the government really change its mind? Is it going to cap interest rates? Can we trust this government?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our minds are made up that Canadians expect this government to lead. That is what this government will do.

It is very important that we take a very serious and hard look at this budget. Many members in the House of Commons spent the entire Christmas season out talking to their constituents. I recognize the importance of the Christmas season. A lot of members gave up their Christmases to consult with Canadians. At least they deserve the respect to take a serious look at the budget. We would ask for their support in passing this budget.

* * *

*[Translation]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government's lack of respect for the rights of young Omar Khadr, who is being held in Guantanamo, is despicable. The Prime Minister's statement that in order to be a child soldier you have to be in a real army is not only ludicrous, but it is also contrary to international law.

Will the government finally bring Omar Khadr back to Canada, as numerous organizations such as Amnesty International and the Canadian Bar Association are asking?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Oral Questions

The Government of Canada has not changed its position. We have heard about and are well aware of the decisions that the new American president has made. We will continue to closely monitor any progress. We will not speculate on all of the aspects of the decisions that could be made by the American government as it continues its review. We are awaiting the Americans' decision.

• (1450)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the new President of the United States, Barack Obama, is going to close Guantanamo. Young Omar Khadr is the only western national being held in that prison. What is more, Canada has ratified the protocol on the rights of children involved in armed conflict. This government is losing credibility and continuing to say that the trial has to run its course, but the proceedings have been suspended.

Omar Khadr must be brought back quickly. What is the government waiting for to bring this young man back to Canada?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Khadr was and is still charged with very serious crimes, including murder, attempted murder, spying and terrorism. The American authorities will be reviewing his case. Clearly, the wisest course of action is to wait for those authorities to make their decision.

* * *

[English]

OTTAWA TRANSIT STRIKE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow marks the 50th day of the public transit strike in the city of Ottawa. Students are dropping out of school, cancer patients cannot get to their treatments, and seniors cannot get out to buy their groceries. This is under the authority of the federal government. Ottawa's economy has been badly hit, with almost half a billion dollars in lost economic activity, jobs lost, and businesses closing.

The federal government chose to intervene by forcing a union vote. Do the Conservatives actually have anything further planned to help the parties settle their dispute and bring an end to this transit crisis?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share the frustrations of the hon. member. I know he is from the Ottawa area and I can assure him that I have heard from his constituents as well. This strike has hurt the people of Ottawa, especially those most vulnerable, such as seniors, students and people who use public transit.

I can assure him that we have been working very closely with both of the parties, urging them to show some compromise and flexibility. We will continue to work through our mediators to try and find a negotiated settlement as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government employs tens of thousands of public servants in Ottawa and Gatineau, and these employees are being affected by the OC Transpo strike.

Can the President of the Treasury Board state that he has done everything in his power to mitigate the impact of the strike on these employees? Has he created new, flexible hours of work? Has he authorized more work at home? Has he provided all the additional parking spaces needed, and is he open to other measures if, unfortunately, the strike should continue?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this strike is a very great hardship for the people of the Ottawa area. In particular, I know that the public service and the federal government have allowed people to work from home. I know people are carpooling. People are sharing. In this area people have gone to great lengths to help their neighbours.

I continue to urge both parties to come to a negotiated settlement. I urge them to make sure they show flexibility and compromise in this situation in order to get back to a negotiated settlement as quickly as possible so that we can get buses back on the streets.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised mayors infrastructure money but did not deliver. He promised child care spaces but did not come through. He promised to make fuel-efficient cars more affordable and then reneged. He promised police officers a raise and then took it away. He said he would protect consumers from ATM fees but buckled from pressure from the banks.

When it comes to standing up for people, why should any Canadian have confidence in the government now?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the Prime Minister who promised to bring real accountability and who brought in the Federal Accountability Act. This is the Prime Minister who promised to cut the GST and delivered. This is the Prime Minister who promised choice in child care and delivered. This is the Prime Minister who promised to stand up and protect health care and promised to stand with ordinary Canadians. This is the Prime Minister who is providing leadership to this great country at this time of greatest need.

What we need is for the NDP to read the budget and support our great plans to provide hope to Canada.

• (1455)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have not forgotten that just nine weeks ago the government was blaming the economic downturn on women seeking pay equity, on civil servants who had the right to strike, and on political financing. It was a partisan and mean-spirited approach and it has been the hallmark of that Prime Minister and his government.

After the contempt he has shown for the poor, for the unemployed and for the most vulnerable in our society, why should any Canadian have confidence that he will help the very people he has spent his political career leaving behind?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now is the time for all members of Parliament to focus on the economy and on the budget that the Minister of Finance will present in a few hours.

What we ask of the NDP is what we ask of every member of this House: we ask that they read the budget and that they look at the new measures we have put in place, the responsible measures to support employment growth, the responsible measures to encourage infrastructure spending, and the responsible measures to provide some hope that there are opportunities out there in the future.

We are prepared to build Canada. We would like the NDP to join us.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian workers across the country have been hit hard by job cuts and hiring freezes. Now very many of these Canadians need our help and our support to upgrade their skills so that they can compete in the job market and get the jobs back.

Can the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development please tell us what measures she expects the government to provide to help our Canadian workers?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, later today in the budget I expect to see significant investments in skills retraining for those who are eligible for employment insurance and for those who are not. I expect to see targeted support for long-tenured workers and additional resources for apprentices in the skilled trades. I expect to see help for new Canadians so that they can get their credentials recognized and get to work here.

Our government will be there for Canadians who want to work and provide for their families.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the listeriosis outbreak had tragic consequences. Twenty people died and confidence in our food system has been undermined, yet the Prime Minister ordered nothing more than a whitewash instead of a comprehensive inquiry. The investigator has no power to compel witnesses to testify, no authority to order documents, and no authority to do an investigation into the minister's office or the PMO.

Why did the Prime Minister break his word? Why is there not a full judicial inquiry into this serious matter?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member for Malpeque back to the job in opposition as the agriculture critic. I wish him many happy years over there.

Food safety has been and continues to be a number one priority for this government. I know the member opposite puts a lot of credibility in the *Toronto Star*. Here is what it says:

And it's not clear to us that Canada needs another costly and lengthy forum for lawyers to cross-examine those involved in the outbreak. All indications are that the main players will co-operate.

That says it all.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 425 employees of the Domtar plant in Lebel-sur-Quévillon learned that they were losing their jobs and would receive no employment insurance benefits. First they were locked out, and then, finally, Domtar announced last December that the plant would close for good. The legislation does provide for exceptions to the qualifying period, particularly for inmates, but there are no exceptions for employees who are locked out. That is ridiculous.

Will the government support the bill that the Bloc Québécois will be tabling to remedy this situation and give many workers the right to employment insurance benefits?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that it is always difficult when someone loses their job. That is why I am expecting changes in the budget this afternoon. I am expecting that there will be increased employment insurance benefits in this budget.

I invite the member to wait for this afternoon's budget and to support us so that we can rebuild the economy together.

• (1500)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while increasing numbers of workers are losing their jobs and applying for employment insurance—and in spite of repeated calls for the elimination of the two-week waiting period and improved eligibility and training opportunities—the only reform this government has made has been to steal billions of dollars from the employment insurance fund.

How can workers have any hope that this government will make the changes to employment insurance that are needed to protect the unemployed?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we want is for everyone here in Canada to be able to work. We do not want workers to be unemployed; we want to help them return to work with new skills. I expect this budget to include help for teaching and for training so that they can work for a long time.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the other place the Governor General delivered a focused Speech from the Throne.

I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance how the Speech from the Throne fits into Canada's economic action plan.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. friend from Edmonton—Leduc not only for all the hard work he has done on committee but also for all the pre-budget consultations he did within his riding and across this country.

Before I answer the question, I would like to clarify a statement that was not exactly correct. I was asked about the number of new jobs. In fact, there have been 807,000 new jobs since this government has been in place.

However, to answer the hon. member's question, the Speech from the Throne leads into an incredibly valuable budget that I would also encourage all members to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in its first two years the government failed to deliver over \$2 billion in national infrastructure projects that it had promised. The minister did not use it, so municipalities and provinces lost it for good.

Incredibly, the government has sat on billions more from last year's budget, money that is now set to disappear as well.

Can the minister explain this high level of dysfunction and why Canadians should believe anything he says on infrastructure funding, given this truly abysmal record today?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, some provinces had not submitted lists with respect to the base funding under building Canada.

I have good news for the member opposite: those funds do not lapse. We approved another round of projects just this morning.

We are committed to working with municipalities, with provinces and with territories to get infrastructure projects on the ground. We have come forward with a five-point plan to support quicker decisions that will get shovels in the ground and will get Canadians working again.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

TRADE

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the government's global commerce strategy, which includes opening up markets for Canadian products and services, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled "Free Trade Agreement Between Canada and the Republic of Peru", "Agreement on the Environment Between Canada and the Republic of Peru", and "Agreement on Labour Cooperation Between Canada and the Republic of Peru".

[Translation]

NATIONAL DNA DATA BANK

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), to table, in both official languages, the annual report of the National DNA Data Bank for 2007-08.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 2007 annual report on the use of electronic surveillance, as required under section 195 of the Criminal Code.

* * *

• (1505)

[Translation]

SECURITY INTELLIGENCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 53 of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Annual Report of the Security Intelligence Review Committee for 2007-08.

The Security Intelligence Review Committee plays an essential role in ensuring the effective accountability of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the independent review of its work.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last document being tabled is quite substantial.

Pursuant to subsection 20(5) of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act, I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the biology casework analysis agreements for the fiscal years 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Since 2000, these agreements have provided jurisdictions with ongoing access to federal and provincial DNA laboratory services and to the national DNA data bank, which assists law enforcement agencies in solving crimes.

These agreements send a clear message that the Government of Canada is committed to working in collaboration with the provinces and territories in the very important fight against crime.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 52 petitions.

*Routine Proceedings***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

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

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(viii), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding matters related to the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons.

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

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

DECORUM

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, you will recall that I rose on a point of order on Wednesday, December 3, 2008 and that you were to come back to the House with your ruling as to whether members could read hateful or offensive emails using unparliamentary language in this House. We are still waiting for your answer. You said that you wanted to consider the question, which is important. You will recall that I referred specifically to language used by the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and three or four other Conservative members. I rise again on this question.

Are members allowed to do indirectly what the rules do not allow them to do directly? Can parliamentarians in this House read hateful and blasphemous emails from members of the public that use unparliamentary language? We would like your opinion on this.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the same point, I recall that one of the emails quoted said that francophones should not sit in this House. The member repeated that. That is an insult to all the francophones sitting here. It is intolerable that such things should be repeated.

● (1510)

The Speaker: Normally, at the end of a session or a parliament, and especially after a prorogation, points of order or issues raised during the session no longer stand, and the Speaker does not come back to the House with his ruling on such matters. This point of order has now been raised during this session. Consequently, I will be sure to give very careful consideration to the point of order raised by the hon. members, and I will come back to the House shortly with my ruling.

[English]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-254, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (exception to inadmissibility).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing this bill as the way of righting a wrong in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The section that is in contention currently allows the exclusion of persons with disabilities from immigrating to Canada.

The bill would put some restraints on the present government which has a tendency to use this section, section 38, of the act beyond its original intentions and to arbitrarily and unilaterally exclude persons living with disabilities. It is a step toward ending the hypocrisy of signing a UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities while systematically undermining it by falling back on ill-founded stereotypes, as was so graphically illustrated by the deportation of Chris Mason, a Winnipeg resident welcomed to Canada with open arms originally but booted out after becoming physically disabled.

I urge all members to see this as an important beginning to ensure equal rights for all persons in Canada.

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

* * *

BANK ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-255, An Act to amend the Bank Act (automated banking machine charges).

She said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to amend the Bank Act to prohibit ATM fees. The bill would stop banks from charging their customers fees for transferring their money or account information through automated banking machines.

As we know, Canadian banks currently charge customers these fees for accessing their own money through the bank's own ATMs, other banks' ATMs and privately-owned machines. These fees, in our view, are excessive and unnecessary and are fees that could be easily waived by the banks.

During the present economic circumstances, it is more imperative than ever that we deal with the banks that refuse to pass on relief to consumers, and the bill would do just that. It would help the government do what it promised to do but failed to do. I believe all Canadians would benefit from this change, particularly those on tight budgets.

I urge all members to support this initiative.

Routine Proceedings

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

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PENSION OMBUDSMAN ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-256, An Act to establish the office of Pension Ombudsman to investigate administrative difficulties encountered by persons in their dealings with the Government of Canada in respect of benefits under the Canada Pension Plan or the Old Age Security Act or tax liability on such benefits and to review the policies and practices applied in the administration and adjudication of such benefits and liabilities.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for seconding this bill, which I am introducing on behalf of all Canadian pensioners.

The bill would mandate the government to create the office of a pension ombudsman so that Canadian pensioners having difficulties with the Canada Pension Plan or Old Age Security would have an avenue of recourse, an advocate or champion willing to undertake their issues and bring them forward on their behalf. The ombudsman would then make a report to the minister for HRSD or to a House of Commons standing committee, if necessary, and that report would be presented to Parliament so members of the House of Commons would know if our pension system was being provided in a fair and equitable manner to the beneficiaries of those plans.

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

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● (1515)

LABOUR MARKET TRAINING, APPRENTICESHIP AND CERTIFICATION ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-257, An Act to provide for the establishment of national standards for labour market training, apprenticeship and certification.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I again thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for seconding this bill.

As a journeyman carpenter by trade, I feel very strongly that the skill shortages in the building trades in our country are not being addressed. The bill seeks to address the failure of the human resources strategy of the government. The bill points out that hiring temporary foreign workers is not a human resources strategy at all. In fact, it is the polar opposite of a human resources strategy.

The bill would standardize and harmonize the curriculum, the entrance requirements and the craft jurisdiction of all skilled craft trades and would create national training advisory committees in each of the skilled trades so that those curriculums could be created and standardized to meet the needs of industry and to further ease the mobility of skilled workers so they could go across the country and have their credentials recognized in the jurisdictions in which they worked.

This is a much needed reform and I hope it attracts and retains the support of all members of the House of Commons.

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

CANADA BUSINESS CORPORATIONS ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-258, An Act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act (qualification of auditor).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Thunder Bay—Rainy River for being present to second this important legislation.

The bill is based on the premise that white-collar crime is, in fact, a blue-collar issue. Working people need to be able to trust the financial statements of the companies where their pension plans are invested. As it stands now, there is no independence of auditors. In fact, the auditor that reports on the financial statements of a company may be the same financial adviser that gives it advice on its income taxes. How can an auditor give advice for one financial service and then audit the veracity of that very same work?

The bill would make it such that a person might not become the auditor of a corporation if that person had provided other professional services to that corporation or any of its other spinoff corporations within two years of the person's proposed appointment as the auditor. This would ensure that working people could trust the integrity of the financial statements of the companies where they would be investing their hard-earned pension dollars.

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

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CANADA BUSINESS CORPORATIONS ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-259, An Act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act (annual financial statements).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to again thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for being present today to second this important legislation.

We believe that if an auditor has undertaken other work for a business or a corporation, that information should be freely disclosed on the company's financial statements. In other words, there should be a mandatory declaration by the auditor clearly outlining what other financial services either he or the firm that he or she works for have provided for that corporation.

We call this the Enron article because that was exactly the situation in the historic collapse of Enron. Auditors were selling financial services to the company at one end and then auditing those same books and finding them to be A-okay. We do not want that to happen to Canadians. That is why this is necessary legislation.

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

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● (1520)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-260, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (legal duty outside Canada).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for seconding this important legislation.

Let me introduce the bill by recognizing and paying tribute to the Hon. Ed Broadbent who fought for this very issue in his terms of office as a member of Parliament.

The bill is based on the premise that Canada recognizes the fundamental rights of workers, including their right to be free from unhealthy and unsafe working conditions within our country. We want to extend the recognition of that right to the activities of Canadian companies when acting abroad. In other words, we believe a majority of Canadians want Canadian corporations to meet the same minimum health and safety standards for their employees abroad as they do in this country.

We point to the precedent that the Criminal Code currently contains a provision aimed at protecting children in other countries from Canadian sexual predators. That same reasoning and logic should apply to the international activities of all Canadians when abroad.

We can set international standards for health and safety if Canadian companies act abroad as they are obliged to act in this country.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-261, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (failure to stop at scene of accident).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River again for seconding this important bill.

The legislation would amend the Criminal Code. A person in control of a vehicle, or a vessel or an aircraft who was involved in an accident and who failed to stop at the scene of that accident would be guilty of a separate stand-alone offence within the Criminal Code.

The bill would provide harsh penalties. If a person suffered bodily harm and died as a result of an accident, or if a person suffered bodily harm but was not killed in an accident, the legislation would contemplate a minimum punishment of four years imprisonment and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. These provisions would apply whether or not the person was aware that another person suffered bodily harm by virtue of their actions.

This is strongly worded legislation that has been crafted to address a serious shortcoming in the current Criminal Code.

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

* * *

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-262, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (monthly guaranteed income supplement).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for seconding this bill that seeks to speak for Canadians who are receiving old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. This enactment would amend the Old Age Security Act

Routine Proceedings

to allow eligible pensioners to receive the guaranteed income supplement without having to apply for it.

We were shocked to learn recently that hundreds of thousands of Canadians who are eligible to receive the guaranteed income supplement are not receiving it because they have not proactively filled out the forms and made application to receive it. We argue that the Government of Canada knows who these people are by virtue of their income tax records. They should simply be allocated the guaranteed income supplement when they become eligible by virtue of their income in the preceding year. This would address the issues of literacy and mobility that may prevent eligible people from making that application and would put that much needed guaranteed income supplement into the hands of people who need it most without delay, interference or any duty or obligation on their part.

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

* * *

● (1525)

REFERENDUM ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-263, An Act to amend the Referendum Act (reform of the electoral system of Canada).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to amend the Referendum Act so that a referendum may be held on any question relating to the reform of the electoral system in Canada.

We kept the bill simple and straightforward for a specific purpose. We do not want to cloud the issue with what the changes should be to the electoral system but we do want to ask Canadians directly if they are or are not satisfied with the current first past the post system. If they are not, we want to consult with Canadians on whether they would be willing to entertain what we believe would be good, which is a system of proportional representation.

The first and necessary step is for the members of the House of Commons to amend the Referendum Act to contemplate such a referendum being held on questions related to the reform of the electoral system in Canada.

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

* * *

FAMILY FARM COST-OF-PRODUCTION PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-264, An Act to provide cost-of-production protection for the family farm.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River, who also supports our efforts today to speak out on behalf of farmers across the country.

The purpose of this enactment is to provide cost of production protection to family farms where the weighted average input cost of products typically produced or suited to production in a farming zone exceeds the weighted average net back to the farm gate of such products averaged over three years.

Routine Proceedings

The costs, as contemplated in this bill, are to be calculated on the basis of marketable product and, thus, will take into account bad weather conditions, pests and other crop loss factors. The calculations are to be based on normal crops or livestock produced for food or breeding and are to be approved by an independent auditor, which is a very important clause of the bill.

I will take this opportunity to clarify that this enactment would not provide for support on a product-by-product basis and, therefore, is not a direct product subsidy. It is simply to provide cost of production protection to family farms in cases where the weighted average input cost of products exceeds the weighted average net back to farm gate of those same products.

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

* * *

PENSION BENEFITS STANDARDS ACT, 1985

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-265, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985 (protection of assets).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for supporting this pension initiative. Pensions are on the mind of many Canadians and this particular enactment would provide further protection of the assets of pension plan members and beneficiaries by three important measures: first, to ensure that members have adequate representation on the boards of trustees of pensions, pension committees and pension councils; in other words, mandatory representation of the employee and the beneficiaries of the plan.

Second, it would provide that not more than 10% of the total value of the assets of a pension plan could be held in securities issued by the employer or by a corporation associated with the employer. This is a lesson learned from Enron where employees were strongly encouraged to invest all of their retirement savings in a company they worked for, with all their eggs in one basket, and the results, as we know, were catastrophic.

Third, it would prevent pension plan administrators and beneficiaries from being restricted in the sale of the employer's securities unless those directors and officers of the employer are similarly restricted. In other words, the beneficiary administrators are not allowed to promote the sale of the employer's own stock unless there is some distance put in between them.

Finally, the bill would require that information that affects or is likely to affect the value of securities be provided to pension plan administrators and to persons with the power to trade in those securities at the same time that it is provided to anyone other than the directors, officers, management and advisers of the employer to stop the difficult situation of insider trading.

We believe anything to do with adding to the security of pension plans is necessary and timely in this session of this Parliament and we encourage unanimous support of the legislation and we hope we can find it.

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

● (1530)

CREDIT OMBUDSMAN ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-266, An Act to establish the position and Office of the Credit Ombudsman, who shall be an advocate of the interests of consumers and small businesses in credit matters and who shall investigate and report on the provision, by financial institutions, of consumer and small-business credit on a community basis and on an industry basis, in order to ensure equity in the distribution of credit resources.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, for seconding this bill as well.

The purpose of the bill is to provide for a review of the possibility of using proportional representation in federal elections. A Standing Committee of the House of Commons will be designated to conduct this review and to report with recommendations after public hearings. It also contemplates that a referendum may be held and the question shall be whether electors favour replacing the present electoral system with the process proposed by the proportional representation committee as concurred in by the House, and that referendum, if any, must be held at the same time as the next general election.

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

* * *

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION REVIEW ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-267, An Act to provide for a House of Commons committee to review the possibility of using proportional representation in federal elections.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

The bill that we are putting forward today would provide for a review of the possibility of using proportional representation in federal elections. A standing committee of the House of Commons would be designated to conduct this review and to report with recommendations after public hearings. A referendum may then be held and the question shall be put whether electors favour replacing the present electoral system with a process proposed by the proportional representation committee as concurred in by the House of Commons and the referendum, if any, would be held at the same time as the next general election.

Routine Proceedings

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

[English]

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in. This report concerns the membership of committees of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the member to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented earlier this day be concurred in. This report concerns the disclosure forms for the Conflict of Interest Code.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1535)

[Translation]

PETITIONS

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the citizens of the entire national capital region—in Ottawa, Aylmer and Orleans—I would like to present a petition regarding a proposed interprovincial bridge that would link the two shores of our community and possibly eliminate heavy-truck traffic in the downtown core.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to force the National Capital Commission to conduct an in-depth study regarding a possible bridge linking the Canotek industrial park and the Gatineau Airport, namely, option number 7 of the first phase of the environmental assessment of the interprovincial crossings.

I would point out that, in a motion passed on January 14, 2009, the City of Ottawa also supported this petition.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the unexpected and premature prorogation of the House in December, I am so pleased to finally have the opportunity to table a petition on behalf of residents in my riding of Hamilton Mountain who are calling on the government to launch a full investigation into the granting of Canadian citizenship to Mr. Gideon McGuire Auger.

The petition is premised on the investigation by CTV's *W-FIVE* which raised serious questions about the Department of Citizenship and Immigration's handling of Gideon McGuire Auger's application for Canadian citizenship. It would appear that the ministry did not act with due diligence in investigating background information before granting citizenship to Mr. Auger and the integrity of Canada's entire citizenship process has been called into question.

The former minister of Citizenship and Immigration promised to investigate the handling of Mr. Auger's file and the petitioners are anxious to learn about the findings of that investigation and seek assurance from the government that the findings will be acted on forthwith by the minister.

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I already presented dozens of petitions regarding Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Today I have a petition on the same theme signed by 1,650 Canadians who are very concerned about the government's intentions to reintroduce legislation, supposedly in the name of protecting consumers from unsafe drugs and products, while in fact decreasing accessibility to natural health products.

The petitioners call on the government to reassess this legislation in light of serious flaws identified with this bill, particularly when it comes to natural health products, but also considering the fact that the bill may not do the job that is required with respect to pharmaceuticals that are now on the market or being considered for the marketplace. There are serious concerns by the petitioners that the bill may actually reintroduce a system of progressive licensing which may deny serious surveillance at the post-market end of the process.

The petitioners urge the government to prevent anyone in the government from reintroducing Bill C-51 and bringing forward a much more sensible package that will protect consumers.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians from right across the country.

The Budget

The petitioners bring to the attention of Parliament that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known, yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. They point out that last year more people died from asbestos than from all other industrial causes combined, and that Canada allows the exporting of 200,000 tonnes of asbestos per year into third world and underdeveloped nations. They also point out that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and even blocks international efforts to curb its use by other countries.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all its forms, to institute a just transition program for asbestos workers, to end all government subsidies with respect to asbestos, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions which protect workers in other countries, such as the Rotterdam convention.

* * *

● (1540)

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 Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 26, 2009, the sitting is suspended until 4 p.m.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 3:40 p.m.)

● (1605)

[English]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 4:07 p.m.)

The Speaker: Order. It being 4 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceedings No. 1 concerning the budget presentation.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved:

That this house approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the budget 2009 documents, including notices of ways and means motions. The details of the measures are contained in these documents.

[Translation]

I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion. I also wish to announce that at the earliest opportunity the

government will introduce bills to implement the measures in this budget.

[English]

Budget 2009 is Canada's economic action plan. It is Canada's plan to stimulate our economy, to protect Canadians during the global recession, and to invest in our long-term growth. It is Canada's response to the challenge of our time.

Since last fall the global economic situation has deteriorated further and faster than anyone predicted. The global economy has weakened since Canadians voted in the election last October. It has weakened further since Parliament met last month.

As the crisis emerged, our government took immediate action to ensure Canadian businesses could get the financing they need to reinvest, grow and maintain jobs.

● (1610)

[Translation]

But developments since then require further action. Canadians are feeling the effects of the global recession, and they are concerned. They are concerned about their jobs and their savings. They are concerned about their families, their businesses, and their communities. Our government has listened to these concerns.

[English]

We have consulted Canadians, including my economic advisory council. We have found a remarkable degree of consensus. From Corner Brook to Kamloops, from Iqaluit to Kitchener, Canadians agree we must do what it takes to keep our economy moving and to protect Canadians in this extraordinary time. Making new investments is more challenging in such a time, but it is also more necessary than ever.

Today we present Canada's economic action plan. It is our plan to protect Canadians during the global recession, to create new good jobs for the future, and to equip our country for success in the years ahead. In Canada's economic action plan we are helping families and stimulating consumer spending. We are providing additional tax relief, especially for lower and middle income Canadians. This will put more money in the hands of Canadian families to help them weather the current storm and to help stimulate our economy.

[Translation]

In Canada's economic action plan we are helping those hit hardest by the global recession. We are providing extra support to Canadians who lose their jobs. We are strengthening employment insurance benefits and expanding skills-training opportunities.

[English]

In Canada's economic action plan, we are protecting jobs and supporting businesses.

We are supporting Canadian industries in difficulty, and the families and communities that depend on them for work.

We are helping these industries, including forestry, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, fisheries and the automotive industry, to find long-term solutions to the challenges they face.

The Budget

We are providing additional support for businesses and industries that play a unique role in Canada's regional economies.

In Canada's economic action plan, we are ensuring access to financing for businesses and the stability of our financial system.

We are providing new ways for businesses to get the financing they need, to innovate, expand and create new jobs for Canadians.

We are establishing the means to ensure consistent regulation in financial markets across Canada.

[*Translation*]

In Canada's economic action plan we are taking immediate action to build infrastructure.

We are launching one of the largest building projects in Canada's history.

In the next few months, we will start construction of roads, bridges, public transit, broadband Internet access, schools and social housing, in every region of the country.

We will create jobs for Canadians now, while providing the infrastructure Canada needs to grow in the years to come.

[*English*]

Let me say a few words about meeting short-term needs while serving long-term goals. In response to the global recession, the industrialized countries of the world are taking unprecedented action to inject money into their economies.

Our government will spend what is necessary to stimulate our economy and we will invest what is necessary to protect our future prosperity.

To finance Canada's economic action plan, our government is making a deliberate choice to run a substantial short-term deficit.

This temporary deficit is an investment which is necessary to stimulate our economy. It allows us to meet our short-term needs while serving our long-term goals.

The United States and many countries in Europe are in a much more difficult position. Having entered the recession after years of heavy deficits, the massive deficits they are undertaking now will continue for many years.

Fortunately, Canada has the freedom to respond effectively to the current crisis, without putting our long-term prosperity at risk. In fact, the situation provides an opportunity to speed up investments that are necessary for our future growth and quality of life. Canadians can be proud of this.

Together we made the right choices when times were good. Now, when times are difficult, together we can continue moving forward with confidence.

● (1615)

[*Translation*]

I want to say a few words about our economic and fiscal projections.

As a result of the global recession, we expect the Canadian economy to contract by 0.8% over the next year. This means that tax revenues will decrease.

At the same time, we will need to spend more to protect our economy and help Canadians hit hardest by the global recession. This in turn means that a temporary deficit cannot be avoided.

As a result, our government projects a budget deficit of \$34 billion for the next fiscal year; and \$30 billion the year after that.

[*English*]

With the participation of our provincial partners, the stimulus provided in Canada's economic action plan represents 1.9% of our economy for the next fiscal year; and for the year after that 1.4%.

Not only does this fulfill Canada's commitment at the G20 leaders summit in November, it exceeds the target recommended by the International Monetary Fund.

The stimulus initiatives in Canada's economic action plan are for this year and the next. There will be no long-running or permanent deficit. Our plan includes tax relief that is permanent but affordable over the long-term.

As the economy recovers, we fully expect to emerge from deficit and return to surplus within five years.

We will use future surpluses first of all to pay off the debt incurred during the recession.

By 2011 we project the deficit will fall to \$13 billion; by 2012 it will fall to \$7.3 billion. By 2013 we project a return to surplus, and for that year, a surplus of \$700 million.

In spite of these temporary deficits, by the end of our program our total government net debt as a share of the economy will still be the lowest in the G7, by a wide margin.

While our projections are based on the best information available, we cannot guarantee them absolutely.

Forecasters all agree that there is substantial uncertainty, so some flexibility is advisable. If circumstances require it, our government will consider enhancements to the measures in Canada's economic action plan.

Canadians regret the need to run a deficit in order to invest in our economy. Our government shares that regret.

We have chosen this course because it is necessary and because we know it will be temporary. We have chosen it also because we know it is what Canadian families and businesses need.

In Canada's economic action plan, our government is taking action to help. We are taking action to protect Canadians during the global recession, to stimulate our economy, and to invest in our long-term prosperity.

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•(1620)

[*Translation*]

I would now like to say a few words about action to help families and stimulate consumer spending. Since first coming into office, our government has provided substantial tax relief to Canadian families. This has given families more freedom to meet their needs. It has provided, and is continuing to provide, both short- and long-term stimulus to our economy.

In these difficult times, tax relief is more necessary than ever. It is necessary to help families. And it is necessary to help keep our economy moving. That is why Canada's economic action plan includes additional tax relief for Canadians.

[*English*]

A few words about personal income tax relief and the need to stimulate consumer spending.

Canada's economic action plan provides immediate benefits, especially to low- and middle-income Canadians.

Effective January 1, 2009, we will increase the basic personal amount. This means that a greater portion of Canadians' earnings will not be subject to federal income tax.

Effective January 1, 2009, we will also increase the upper limit of the two lowest personal income tax brackets. This means that a greater proportion of Canadians' earnings will be taxed at a lower rate.

We will increase the amount that families could earn while still receiving the national child benefit supplement and the Canada child tax benefit.

As a result of these changes, a single parent with two children earning \$35,000 will be ahead \$500 per year. A two-income couple with two children earning \$70,000 will be ahead \$275 per year.

The tax relief would help low- and middle-income Canadians and it will stimulate consumer spending. This in turn will help stimulate our entire economy.

To provide additional help to low-income Canadians, we will also increase the working income tax benefit, or WITB.

Many low-income Canadians, especially those receiving social assistance, would like to take a job, but they face disincentives, in the form of higher taxes and reduced benefits. The WITB supplements the earnings of low-income workers to help ensure they are better off by taking a job.

Our increase to the WITB will effectively double the tax relief that this measure provides. We expect that for the 2009 tax year more than 1.5 million individuals and families, many of them single women with children, will benefit as a result.

In Canada's economic action plan, we will also provide further tax relief for Canadian seniors.

We will increase the age credit amount by an additional \$1,000 dollars. This will provide each eligible senior additional savings of up to \$150 per year. However, more is needed to help our seniors.

The global financial crisis has caused them added worry, as they see the effect on their retirement savings.

To provide some relief, we will reduce the amount seniors are required to withdraw from their RRIFs, by 25% for 2008. This will provide one-time tax relief of \$200 million for Canadian seniors.

The personal income tax relief in Canada's economic action plan will put more money in the hands of Canadian families.

Most important, this year and over the next five years these measures will inject approximately \$20 billion in stimulus into the Canadian economy.

•(1625)

[*Translation*]

Canadian workers benefit from relatively low payroll taxes. This allows them to keep more of what they earn; and it encourages businesses to create more jobs.

We need to keep these taxes low, especially during this difficult period. For many families, right now every dollar counts.

For many businesses, an increase in payroll taxes would make it harder to sustain existing jobs.

And so, in Canada's economic action plan we will freeze employment insurance payroll taxes for the next two years.

[*English*]

Let me now turn to home construction and home renovation; that is household infrastructure. There is more we can do to encourage spending and help create jobs. For the Canadian economy, the home construction and home renovation industries are major sources of jobs and growth.

First, to encourage home ownership and home construction, we will increase the amount first-time home buyers can withdraw from their RRSPs to purchase or build a new home from \$20,000 to \$25,000. We will also establish a first-time home buyers tax credit, saving Canadians up to \$750 in closing costs in buying a new home.

To stimulate spending and to help Canadians invest in the long-term value of their homes, we will provide a temporary home renovation tax credit. Effective tomorrow and extending until January 31, 2010, this measure will provide tax relief for home renovation costs, saving Canadian families up to \$1,350 on their 2009 taxes. The home renovation tax credit is available for renovations to the house or the cottage, for everything from a new furnace to energy efficient windows to a new deck. It may be claimed in addition to support from the existing eco-energy retrofit program and the medical expense tax credit.

These measures to support home construction and renovation will help stimulate our construction and building supplies industries. This in turn will support forestry and other Canadian industries.

The tax relief provided in Canada's economic action plan will encourage long-term economic growth. It will help working families to manage the effects of the recession. It will give an immediate boost to our economy and help to create jobs.

The global recession has begun to make things difficult for many Canadian workers and their families. Some have lost their jobs. More, we fear, will lose their jobs. In Canada's economic action plan we are taking action to help.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Many Canadians who find themselves out of work will look to employment insurance to help make ends meet. They will need greater support in this time of recession.

During the next two years, we will extend maximum EI benefits by five weeks, bringing the total to a maximum of 50 weeks.

This will give EI recipients more time to get the extra training they need and to find the right job.

We will extend work-sharing arrangements by an additional 14 weeks, to help employers avoid layoffs and to keep Canadians working.

[English]

We will provide better protection for workers whose employers go bankrupt, we will provide special assistance to long-tenured workers in transition and we will establish an expert panel to advise on the best way to provide maternal and paternal EI benefits to self-employed Canadians. This will be of special benefit to many Canadian women and families with young children.

Beyond this, we need to help Canadians who are out of work to find new, good jobs. For that, we need to increase our investment in skills development. In Canada's economic action plan we will provide new opportunities for short and long-term skills upgrading. This will include targeted programs for apprentices and older workers, additional support for skills development and training for aboriginal Canadians and new investments to create job opportunities for aboriginal Canadians. We will also provide support for workers who do not qualify for EI benefits. In the coming weeks we will announce a major, new youth summer job initiative.

[Translation]

I would now like to say a few words about protecting jobs and supporting businesses. The global recession has affected not only families, but also Canadian businesses. Many Canadian businesses are in a relatively strong position, compared to their foreign competitors. As a result of our government's actions, by 2010 Canada will have the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7. But Canadians have agreed that we need to do more. We need to do more to encourage long-term growth. We need to help sustain Canadian jobs and to help all Canadian businesses to weather the current storm.

[English]

Sectors of our economy are facing special difficulties. These are industries upon which hundreds of thousands of Canadian families depend for their livelihood, upon which many communities and

The Budget

regions depend for their vitality. To help meet this challenge in Canada's economic action plan, we are creating a two year \$1 billion community adjustment fund. The fund will support economic diversification in communities affected by distress or decline in their local industries. This will help communities across Canada facing unique challenges, from the mountain pine beetle infestation to the declining global demand for seafood.

Our government is taking action also to help sustain key sectors of the Canadian economy.

In Canada's economic action plan we will provide additional support for our forestry industry. Over the next two years, we will support the industry in developing new products and processes and in seizing new opportunities in the international marketplace.

We will invest new funds over the next five years to help Canadian farmers to innovate, to increase competitiveness and to achieve greater environmental sustainability.

We will support Canada's shipyards through the procurement of 98 new Coast Guard vessels and repairs to 40 aging vessels.

We will extend the mineral exploration tax credit by one year to help mining companies raise capital for exploration.

We will provide new support for the promotion of Canadian heritage and culture through events and exhibitions, national parks and heritage sites, broadcasting and community newspapers, the arts, tourism and sport.

To help all Canadian industries to reduce their impact on the environment, we will establish a new clean energy fund. We expect this funding will generate more than \$2.5 billion in investments such as carbon capture and storage over the next five years.

Let me now say a few words about regional economic development.

Our government will also continue to foster economic development in the regions of Canada's most vulnerable in any downturn.

We will increase funding available to the regional development bodies for Atlantic Canada, Quebec and western Canada. For the first time, we will provide support for regional economic development across the province of Ontario.

While continuing our support for northern and eastern Ontario, we will provide \$1 billion over the next five years to establish a new southern Ontario development agency.

We will invest \$50 million over the next five years to establish a new regional economic development agency for Canada's north.

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Let me now turn to tax relief for businesses.

To continue growing and creating jobs, Canadian businesses need to be free to invest. In our last two budgets our government temporarily accelerated the accelerated capital cost allowance treatment of investments in machinery and equipment. This has allowed manufacturers to restructure and retool their operations to remain competitive in the global economy.

In Canada's economic action plan we will extend the 50% accelerated CCA rate by two years. That is not all. We will also provide a temporary 100% CCA depreciation rate for eligible computer hardware and software acquired over the next two years.

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

Our government has already provided permanent tax relief to Canadian small businesses. We increased the amount of income eligible for the small-business tax rate, from \$300,000 to \$400,000.

In Canada's economic action plan, we will increase that amount again, from \$400,000 to \$500,000. The result of all these measures will be greater freedom for Canadian businesses to create jobs and growth in communities across the country.

They will be better able to sustain jobs during the global recession, and to expand opportunities for Canadians in the years to come.

•(1640)

[*English*]

Allow me now to speak about action to ensure access to financing for businesses and stability in our financial system. The global financial crisis requires that we take further action to support Canadian families and businesses. The crisis in the United States financial system has sent shock waves around the world.

Canadian financial institutions have been less willing to lend. Families with a good credit history find it difficult to get a lease for a new car. Well run businesses find it harder to finance the purchase of new machinery. This shortage of financing can make a difficult economic situation much worse.

Our government took action to increase access to financing when the global crisis emerged in the fall. Because the situation has continued to deteriorate, our government is taking additional action.

In Canada's economic action plan we will build on our previous measures to increase access to financing. We will make available to Canadian businesses up to \$200 billion in liquidity and financing to keep our economy moving. This new extraordinary financing framework will have several components. We will extend the insured mortgage purchase program through the first half of the next fiscal year to encourage private sector financial institutions to increase lending. We will also establish a new Canadian secured credit facility to help consumers and businesses in financing the purchase of vehicles and equipment.

In November, our government committed additional capital to our financial crown corporations: Export Development Canada and the Business Development Bank of Canada. EDC and BDC are key sources of financing for the small and medium size businesses which

create so many of Canada's new jobs. They can now leverage this additional capital into billions of dollars of new lending ability.

In Canada's economic action plan our government will build on this success through the business credit availability program. This new program will give EDC and BDC greater lending powers. It will also encourage partnerships between the public and private sector financial institutions to ensure that credit-worthy borrowers can get access to financing.

We also will provide additional support for Canadian small businesses by expanding the Canada small business financing program and we will give greater flexibility to the Canadian Deposit Insurance Corporation to enhance its role in safeguarding the stability of Canada's financial system.

Taken together, those measures will help restore confidence and encourage lending and that will encourage Canadian businesses to keep investing, growing and creating jobs.

[*Translation*]

I would like to say a few words about enabling quick protective action. Such action will help restore confidence. Even so, recent history tells us we must take nothing for granted.

Canadians need to be confident that their government has the ability to respond to unforeseen crises.

For that reason, our government proposes to give the Minister of Finance the authority required to act quickly to protect the country's financial system, should it ever come under significant additional pressure. This will include the authority to provide loans and lines of credit, and the provision and payment of guarantees. And it will enable the government to inject capital directly into federal financial institutions, should such a measure ever be necessary.

We do not foresee the need to use this authority. But we have a duty to be prepared, should the unforeseen suddenly emerge.

•(1645)

[*English*]

For all its strengths, Canada's financial system does have one glaring weakness. Our patchwork system of 13 securities regulators spread across the provinces and territories causes uncertainty for investors and unnecessary red tape. In Canada's economic action plan, our government is providing a solution.

The Budget

Following the recommendations of the expert panel, chaired by the hon. Tom Hockin, we will establish an office to manage the transition to a Canadian securities regulator.

Later this year, we will table a federal securities act for Canada and the transition office will deliver an administrative plan within 12 months.

We will respect constitutional jurisdiction and participation in the Canadian securities regulator will be voluntary. For those provinces, territories and companies that choose to participate, it will sharpen our competitive edge. It will put Canadians in a better position to seize new opportunities as the global economy begins to recover.

With respect to infrastructure, in Canada's economic action plan our government is taking immediate action to improve our roads, bridges, harbours, public transit, railways, border crossings, schools, universities, social housing, waste water treatment plants, recreation centres and broadband Internet access. These and other infrastructure form the backbone of our future prosperity.

Since Sir John A. Macdonald laid a railway across this continent, infrastructure has been both an immediate response to an urgent need and a hopeful act of nation-building. When chosen carefully, infrastructure projects can provide a much needed short-term stimulus to our economy.

Most important, infrastructure creates new, good jobs in construction, engineering, science and technology, and manufacturing. This in turn creates new opportunities in other industries.

In Canada's economic action plan we are launching one of the largest infrastructure building projects in our country's history. Over the next two years we will provide \$4 billion in new funding for local and regional projects. We will provide \$2 billion over the next two years for deferred maintenance at Canadian universities and advanced skill training facilities at community colleges. We will provide \$1 billion for a green infrastructure fund to support projects such as sustainable energy.

Our government has already committed \$33 billion for longer term projects under the building Canada plan. These new investments we are announcing today will be focused on projects ready to start construction. Most of this new funding will be available only for the next two years when our need for economic stimulus is greatest.

To make the money flow, we will need the continued cooperation of the provinces and municipalities. To break ground on these projects more quickly, we must take action now to reduce red tape and needless duplication.

Here are some examples of projects from coast to coast to coast.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we will proceed with improvements to the Tshiuetin railway, which provides a rail link for communities lacking year-round road access.

In Nova Scotia, we will renew bridges on the national highway system.

In Prince Edward Island, we will invest in the Summerside wind energy project.

In New Brunswick, we will complete the Fundy Trail Parkway.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

In Quebec, we will upgrade roads in the Quebec City metropolitan area, and upgrade water and sewer systems across the province.

In Montreal, the Champlain Bridge, Canada's busiest, will be rehabilitated. Quebec City will see progress on plans for the future of its majestic armoury, the Manège Militaire.

[*English*]

In Ontario we will help twin key sections of the Trans-Canada Highway along northern Highways 11 and 17. Also, bridges at the crucial border crossings at Sarnia and Fort Erie will be rehabilitated, as will bridges in Burlington and Kingston, and bridges connecting Ontario and Quebec in the national capital region. Railway stations in Hamilton, Windsor and Belleville will be improved. The crucial commuter hub for the greater Toronto area, Toronto's landmark Union Station, will at last be revitalized.

In Ontario and Quebec we will take a big step forward in improving travel along the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor. We will add a third railway track at key locations between Montreal and Toronto, which will allow more express trains and make the express trip shorter by 30 minutes.

In Manitoba work on Winnipeg's CentrePort project will accelerate, and the province's Keewatin Railway Company will receive new investments.

In Saskatchewan we will help build the Highway 39 truck bypass in Estevan.

In Alberta work will proceed on the TELUS science centre in Calgary, and we will help twin the Trans-Canada Highway through Banff National Park.

In British Columbia funds will flow for the Evergreen transit line and for a more modern railway station in Vancouver, key projects as the city prepares to host the Olympic Winter Games.

In Yukon investments will be made in water treatment projects.

In the Northwest Territories we will help build the city of Yellowknife bypass road.

In Nunavut we will speed up construction of the small-craft harbour at Pangnirtung.

We will upgrade key Arctic research facilities, and we will conduct a feasibility study for the proposed high Arctic research station.

The Budget

[Translation]

Canada's economic action plan will support additional infrastructure projects that transcend provincial boundaries. These are, quite literally, nation-building projects.

Over the next two years, we will make major, new investments in aboriginal communities, to build and renovate schools and health services facilities, to improve wastewater treatment, and to provide safe drinking water.

We will provide funding for urgently needed repairs at Canada's universities and colleges. We will give priority to projects that will advance our universities' work in research and development, and our colleges' role in advanced skills training.

We will modernize Canada's federal laboratories and scientific facilities. We will start work on extending broadband Internet access to every community in Canada.

•(1655)

[English]

We have a special initiative for our communities and hockey fans. We will launch a national project to renew thousands of community recreational centres across the country. Recreational Infrastructure Canada, which has the lovely acronym RInC, will provide \$500 million over the next two years to build and renovate hockey arenas, swimming pools and other recreational facilities. RInC funding will help leverage non-profit and community fundraising efforts. It will encourage all Canadians to get involved in renewing Canada's infrastructure right in their own neighbourhoods.

In Canada's economic action plan we are also investing in social housing facilities, another key part of our country's infrastructure. Many of our social housing units need general renovations, energy efficiency upgrades and improved accessibility features. Our government will invest \$2 billion in new funding over the next two years to meet these needs.

We have designed this measure to ensure quick implementation through co-operation with the provinces. It will include new funding over the next two years to build homes for low income seniors and Canadians with disabilities and to build and renovate housing in aboriginal communities and in Canada's north. As well, over the next two years we will make available another \$2 billion in lost cost loans to municipalities to invest in sewers, water lines and other housing related renewal projects.

The result of all of these investments will be a better quality of life for Canadians in need and safer, healthier and more modern communities. Like our other infrastructure investments, our investments in social housing will help stimulate our economy and create jobs across the country.

Finally, we will make ourselves accountable to Canadians in following through on these projects. Over the spring and summer of this year our government's focus will be on implementing Canada's economic action plan. The ministers responsible will provide progress reports in the fall.

Canada's economic action plan is consistent with our government's long term plan to strengthen Canada's economy, Advantage

Canada, to allow Canadian businesses to succeed in the world economy. We are developing a competitive edge, a Canadian advantage in five areas: lower taxes; a smaller debt burden; better regulation and a better climate for growth; a highly educated workforce; and modern infrastructure.

We have already made great progress in implementing this long term strategy. Canada's economic action plan is consistent with it and advances it on key fronts. We are, as the experts say, building capacity. We are making the investments that are needed to ensure our long term quality of life, investments that would be required regardless of the current global crisis.

In Canada's economic action plan we are meeting the challenge of our time. We are stimulating our economy to protect Canadians during the global recession and to ensure our country's long term prosperity. We are meeting our short term needs while serving our long term goals.

Most important, Canada's economic action plan meets the needs of Canadians. It helps Canadians who are out of work, it protects Canadian jobs and businesses, it builds up our communities and it puts more money in the hands of Canadian families. Canada's economic action plan is a truly national plan, a strong consensus among Canadians on the way forward.

•(1700)

Our government will lead, but our country's success depends on all of us, all levels of government, business and financial leaders, community leaders and all Canadians.

We must work together in this House. The representatives of the Canadian people assembled here in Parliament must make a decision. Deciding whether and how to spend the resources of our fellow Canadians is one of our most serious responsibilities. In this extraordinary time in our history it is also one of our most urgent responsibilities.

Our government has presented Canada's economic action plan. I invite and urge the hon. members to support it for the good of the country.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has given us a budget. We will be reviewing it with the care and consideration that Canadians and these economic circumstances demand and deserve.

The Budget

What we do know from the minister is that Canada will face a \$34 billion deficit this year. This from the same Minister of Finance who told Canadians before Christmas that our country was in surplus, an astounding reversal from the minister. This from the same government that told us in September that there would not even be a recession in Canada and that falling stock prices meant good buying opportunities, not cause for concern.

We now know we were in deficit and the government delayed in developing a plan for the crisis. We know that 100,000 Canadian jobs have been lost since the government prorogued Parliament rather than act to protect Canadians.

How will the minister explain his inaction to Canadians whose jobs, pensions and savings have vanished while his government has failed to act?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the hon. member knows, we are living in an extraordinary time. We are presenting the budget at the first available opportunity. As members know, Parliament resumed yesterday. This is one of the earliest budgets in Canadian history.

We have also consulted widely, as I am sure the hon. member has consulted with her constituents. Assuming she has, then the hon. member will know that the provisions in the budget today are provisions which she should support on behalf of her constituents for the good of the country, and I trust she will.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in this time of economic crisis, we expected the federal government to consider the needs expressed by the people of Quebec and their elected representatives. In anticipation of this budget, Quebec was very clear about its needs, and the National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion in that regard. The Bloc Québécois acted responsibly by presenting a detailed, costed, realistic plan last November. Our plan addresses major points of consensus in Quebec, and our role is to stand up for those points here in Ottawa.

The Conservative government decided not to take Quebec's demands into consideration. Moreover, instead of helping Quebec, the government decided to deny it the tools it needs to face the crisis. Instead, the Conservative leader decided to give in to the demands of Ontario and the west. For example, the government has put forward nearly \$4 billion worth of measures chiefly benefiting Ontario. The auto sector—which is concentrated in Ontario—will receive \$2.7 billion. Southern Ontario will receive a billion dollars, which happens to be the amount deducted from Quebec's equalization payments. The manufacturing sector will get nothing but crumbs.

I would like to ask the minister what happened to the Conservative government's supposed openness to Quebec and Quebeckers, who also have to make it through this crisis?

• (1705)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question. I hope that the member will support the economic action plan. We are facing a worldwide recession.

[*English*]

With respect to the question of transfers, this budget is rather different than what went on in the 1990s. What we have done is not reduced transfers to the provinces. We are maintaining the health transfer increase at 6%. We are maintaining the CST at 3%. We are not imposing on the provinces in terms of health or education because in a time of recession they need to maintain those services. Those services and the federal contributions are being maintained.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for a week now government ministers have leaked budget proposals and said “trust us”. Today's budget just proved that they cannot be trusted to deliver.

In this economy, when workers are worried about losing their jobs, the government just announced that it prioritized \$60 billion in corporate tax cuts and it found only \$1.15 billion for the unemployed. Clearly, the leopard could not change its spots. This government still cannot be trusted to act on the concerns of hard-working Canadians.

Let us look at it in more detail. This budget fails to reform employment insurance; it does not freeze weekly rates; it maintains the two-week waiting period; and it does not improve eligibility requirements. There is absolutely no commitment to child care spaces. This budget maintains the attack on women's rights to pursue pay equity complaints. There are absolutely no initiatives for veterans or seniors by increasing old age security. Infrastructure commitments remain out of reach for most municipalities that simply cannot match the funds. There is absolutely no strategy for a green car industry.

Yes, this government is full of rhetoric, but rhetoric is not real change and Canadians deserve better.

Would the minister tell us why hard-working Canadians should trust him this time when they have not been able to trust him since he has come into office?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, we conducted one of the most extensive broad consultations in the history of Canada in the preparation of this budget. The measures in the budget that relate to employment insurance are what we were told was necessary by Canadians from coast to coast to coast: to extend benefits and, most important, to ensure that retraining is available and to make sure that work sharing is available, so that as we go through this difficult time together as Canadians we will take care of those Canadians who will be moving into new industries. We want to ensure they get the training they need in order to accomplish that.

That is what we can do for our fellow Canadians, including WITB, the working income tax benefit, which I certainly hope the member opposite would support because it helps the poorest people in our society get a job.

The Budget

• (1710)

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure all members will certainly want to join me in congratulating the Minister of Finance for not only tabling this record-setting fourth consecutive budget in a minority Parliament but also the earliest budget in modern history.

We all appreciate the challenges this has inevitably presented, especially during this period of global economic turmoil, and we thank him for his tireless work. Budget 2009 is a positive plan, with measures that will help our economy over both the short- and long-term; a plan that all parliamentarians should endorse. One measure worthy of special praise is the new home renovation tax credit.

Would the Minister of Finance please explain how this measure would help my constituents in Saint John and our local economy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saint John for his constructive question.

Canada's economic action plan does include the home renovation tax credit. This will benefit about 4.6 million Canadian families and individuals performing home renovations. Eligible renovation costs could include planting trees, installing a new energy efficient furnace or water heater, finishing a basement, remodelling a kitchen or resurfacing a driveway. Expenses eligible for the credit will include permits, professional services, equipment rentals and incidental expenses. Most important, this tax credit will result in a significant immediate stimulus to the Canadian economy, helping employ Canadians, helping our retail sector, and helping the forestry industry as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has delivered a budget that we are going to examine and analyze carefully. We should have been presented with this economic plan a long time ago. What the government is saying

today is different from what it said last fall. Then, the government said there would be no deficit and no recession. Now, the government has changed its tone, changed its target, changed its direction. The opposition parties are to be thanked for a job well done.

Millions of Canadians have lost their job since the House adjourned.

[*English*]

We stand here today at the end of January with thousands of Canadians out of a job since the House was adjourned. The government did not make the right choices when times were good. Now that times are hard, times are tough, it is up to this party to decide whether the choices the government has made today are the right ones. The House should know, this will be a close call. This will be a tough call. However, we will make that choice calmly and serenely.

[*Translation*]

We will make our choice calmly and serenely. That is what Canadians expect of us.

[*English*]

I move, therefore:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed adopted, and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 5:15 p.m.)

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