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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem, led by the hon. member for Halifax.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

HOCKEYVILLE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I congratulate my constituents in the township of Woolwich. Woolwich was selected as a top five finalist in the 2009 Kraft Hockeyville competition this past Saturday. Woolwich has the spirit, passion and pride required to be a serious contender in this national competition.

This enthusiastic bid to become Canada's top hockey community is spearheaded by Graham Snyder. I thank Graham for the thousands of hours he and his team have invested. I thank him as well for his heroic efforts in bringing our community together to raise over \$5 million toward the construction of the Dan Snyder Memorial Arena.

Dan Snyder is one star among many that Woolwich has produced. Members may recall other NHL stars, like Daryl Sittler and Rod Seiling, who are proud to call Woolwich their home.

Our community has a love for hockey, from the young to the young at heart, from the pond to the arena. I am honoured to stand beside the parents, grandparents, coaches, players and referees who make Woolwich Hockeyville.

All Canadians will soon learn what my constituents already know. Woolwich is Hockeyville.

SRI LANKA

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the suffering of the innocent men, women and children who have become the victims of violence in Sri Lanka.

In my riding I have heard from hundreds of diaspora Sri Lankans, both Sinhalese and Tamil, and I can say that they are united in their desire for their home country to finally achieve the peace that has eluded them for so long.

If the past few decades have proven anything to the outside world, it is that violence will not solve this conflict. A political solution must be brokered which protects the fundamental rights of all Sri Lankans. That must begin with an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Norway and Switzerland have already called for this so that innocent civilians can leave the conflict zone.

I call upon the Government of Canada to join them and to press the United Nations to appoint a special representative, backed by the full weight of the UN, to help end the violence and protect human life in Sri Lanka.

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[Translation]

KARIM FAYED

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite an injury with the potential to harm his performance, a young man from Laval has succeeded in going for gold in his sport.

Last November, the Toronto tae kwon do open attracted international level athletes from the national teams of a number of countries. This event was particularly special for Karim Fayed of the Laval tae kwon do club.

This was the first time he had taken part in an international level competition, and the 16 year old came away with a gold medal in the under-73 kg category. Despite an injury in his last match, which nearly led him to pull out and settle for silver, his excellent physical condition, coupled with courage and determination, made it possible for him to achieve the top medal instead.

My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois join me in congratulating Karim Fayed for his remarkable determination and for his gold medal.

*Statements by Members***FRANÇOISE DAVID**

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on January 26, a full scale attack against feminism was launched by Quebec City radio station CJMF and on-air personality Sylvain Bouchard. He launched that attack on high profile Quebec feminist, Françoise David, who is mentioned in the text book for an ethics and religious knowledge course.

Françoise David, who is also the spokesperson for Québec Solidaire, was the organizer of the celebrated bread and roses march as well as the world march of women against poverty and violence, in which more than 20,000 people took part. Ms. David has made, and continues to make, an enormous contribution to equality between men and women in Quebec.

Today I would like to express our solidarity with Françoise David and all those who strive for equality between men and women. We salute these women's struggles. We salute the accomplishments of these women in a battle that is not yet over, but where gains continue to be made, thanks to their courageous efforts.

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• (1405)

[*English*]**CANADIAN EXECUTIVE SERVICE ORGANIZATION**

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to the attention of the House a constituent in my riding, Mr. Douglas Johnson, who resides in the town of Fenwick, Ontario. Mr. Johnson recently completed an assignment with the Canadian Executive Service Organization, or CESO, in Serbia.

CESO is a non-profit organization that works to build strong independent communities around the world. Over 2,700 volunteer advisers at CESO work to foster economic development by serving as mentors, advisers and trainers to their clients and partners at home and abroad.

As a CESO adviser, Mr. Johnson spent his time identifying potential export marketing plans and distribution networks in the U.K., Bulgaria and Romania for Serbian businesses, as well as proposing several structural changes to increase management effectiveness.

As a small businessman myself, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate Mr. Johnson for his efforts to promote the economic development needed in these tough economic times being felt around the world.

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[*Translation*]**DI LILLO CONSTRUCTION**

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 4, 2008, I had the pleasure of attending a gala at the Club de Golf Métropolitain to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Di Lillo Construction. During this event, a vibrant tribute was paid to the company's founding president, Antonio Di Lillo. This humble, approachable and unique man is known for his contribution to his community's development and growth.

The story of Mr. Di Lillo and his family is truly exemplary and shows the possibilities that our great country offers. Mr. Di Lillo represents those immigrants who, through hard work, courage and know-how, are able to be successful in life.

As the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, I would like to offer him my respect and my most sincere congratulations on his company's 50th anniversary. People like Antonio Di Lillo make it possible for us to achieve great and wonderful things.

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[*English*]**VISION IMPAIRED CURLING CHAMPIONSHIP**

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand to salute the competitors of the 2009 Canadian Vision Impaired Curling Championship which took place last week here in Ottawa.

I am proud to announce that Team Canada, represented by the Kelowna rink, remained undefeated, winning its fifth consecutive championship.

Coach and skip Dean Martell, lead Bob Comba, second Frank Costello, third Sandy Neddow, designated sweeper Darren Stallnecht, and guide Barbara Hansen-Comba are ambassadors for Canada and the sport of vision impaired curling. They will make us all proud as they go on to compete at the world championships later this year.

This is yet another success story in a year when Canadian athletes are doing so well. Like our winning athletes who are preparing for the 2010 Winter Olympics, Kelowna's Team Canada will be defending its title next year and going for six.

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[*Translation*]**MUNICIPALITY OF SAINT-ÉTIENNE-DES-GRÈS**

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the municipality of Saint-Étienne-des-Grès celebrates its 150th anniversary this year, honour and pride will feature prominently. Everyone will be invited to many festivities recounting the birth and development of this vibrant community in La Mauricie where people stand together through tough times. I can picture the town's evocative surroundings: the stately Saint-Maurice and the La Gabelle hydroelectric power plant, fields as far as the eye can see, the park and the forest.

I would like to congratulate the municipal authorities, the organizing committee, municipal organizations, private-sector partners and volunteers who are working together to put on a worthy celebration. I would especially like to mention René Grenier, chair and coordinator of the 150th anniversary festivities, Alban Bournival, honorary chairman, and Robert Landry, mayor of the municipality.

The people of Saint-Étienne-des-Grès should be proud. They have every reason in the world to let everyone know how excited they are.

Statements by Members

[English]

GEORGES DEVLOO

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has lost one of its truest friends with the passing of Monsieur Georges Devloo, a resident of Vimy, France.

Monsieur Devloo was an exceptional man who, for many years, gave generously of his time helping hundreds of Canadians to visit the Vimy Ridge National Historic Site.

Canadians who travelled to Vimy by train would often find out too late that the Vimy Memorial was a fair distance from the village and that there was no local transportation available to take them to the memorial. That was when Monsieur Devloo would step in. He made it part of his daily routine, even at the age of 85, to stop at the train station to offer weary visitors a lift to the memorial. Such kindness earned Monsieur Devloo the affectionate title of “Grand-père de Vimy”.

This past November the Minister of Veterans Affairs paid tribute to this remarkable man by presenting him with a special certificate of recognition.

On behalf of all Canadians, I would like to express our sincere condolences to Monsieur Devloo's family and his many friends. We shall always remember his continuous commitment to remembrance. He will be greatly missed.

* * *

● (1410)

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week marked the third anniversary of the Conservative government's decision to cancel the historic national child care program signed by the previous Liberal government and all provinces and territories.

The plan would have created hundreds of thousands of child care spaces and provided long-term and stable funding. It would have made a huge impact on working families, especially working mothers, in getting affordable, accessible and quality child care. It was the first step toward a real early learning and child care system that we need, as our last place ranking in child care demonstrates.

The very first decision, the first act of the Conservative Prime Minister was to cancel child care. The decision was driven by ideology and rooted in the old-fashioned idea that Canadian parents, primarily women, all have the choice to stay at home. Many do not have that choice.

A taxable monthly cheque is helpful, but it is not early learning and child care. By cutting that the Conservatives put politics before people.

The Conservatives have failed our young children and failed mothers and working families by turning back the clock on early learning and child care in Canada. That is a shameful record.

CANADIAN FORCES RESERVES

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Forces Base Suffield is in my riding of Medicine Hat and I am pleased to inform the House that in my home province of Alberta, the first bill being introduced into the new sitting of the legislature is a bill to amend the employment standards code to protect jobs of Alberta reservists.

The federal government acted on this a year ago when we brought in historic legislation to protect jobs of Canada's reservists, who work in the federal public sector and in federally regulated industries. We took action on this issue because our government recognized the vital role reservists played. We will do everything we can to ensure that the men and women of our Canadian Forces reserves never have to worry about being penalized for serving their country.

Today, I am proud to stand and congratulate the Alberta government for doing provincially what we have already done federally. Together, we are ensuring that the Canadian Forces reserves have the support they need when they return to their regular working life.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance program no longer meets its own objectives, and many unemployed workers are being unfairly deprived of benefits.

Leading economists are desperately trying to get the government to understand that access to benefits must be expanded and the employment insurance program must be improved in order to stimulate our economy.

In addition to offering a social safety net and mitigating the effects of job losses, benefits help people avoid turning to social assistance and encourage unemployed workers to move towards better employment perspectives.

In these difficult times, why will the government not increase the rate of benefits from 55% to 60%? Why will it not calculate the rate based on the 12 best weeks in the qualifying period? Why not eliminate the waiting period? Why not relax the eligibility criteria?

What does this government have against workers? The NDP is calling for these changes in order to give workers hope.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): The economic action plan presented by the Minister of Finance includes significant investments in eastern Quebec.

This government is committed to investing several million dollars to build the infrastructure needed to welcome international cruise ships to the St. Lawrence River and the Saguenay River, which will greatly stimulate tourism in the region.

Oral Questions

In addition, the government will invest in the construction and repair of three ports in Gaspé—Étang-du-Nord, Gross-Île and Port-Daniel-Est. These are necessary investments and they will stimulate employment in the region.

And what has been the reaction of Bloc members to these important benefits for eastern Quebec? The Bloc is doing what it does best: it is opposing them.

While the government has listened to citizens and put in place tangible measures to stimulate the economy in these uncertain times, the Bloc is playing petty politics at the expense of the inhabitants of eastern Quebec.

I hope the Bloc will soon see the light and support our economic action plan.

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KYOTO PROTOCOL

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, February 16 will be the fourth anniversary of the Kyoto protocol implementation date. Kyoto is the only comprehensive international means of preventing the dramatic environmental and humanitarian consequences of climate change.

Last week, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development reiterated that the federal government's efforts to fight global warming are not credible.

Since 2006, the Conservatives have had the finger of shame pointed at them, which comes as no surprise with a Prime Minister who describes Kyoto as a socialist plot. This kind of attitude shows the Conservatives's lack of sensitivity where the future of our environment and our children is concerned.

The only explanation for the government's stubborn refusal to take climate change seriously is an ideological closed-mindedness that is prejudicial to future generations and to Quebec's economic health.

History will judge those who have ignored Kyoto.

* * *

•(1415)

[English]

MICHÈLE DEMERS

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have very sad news to bring to the House. Michèle Demers, president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, one of Canada's largest public service unions, died suddenly yesterday from a stroke. I will read part of the statement issued by the institute:

[Translation]

It is with deep sadness that the Professional Institute announces the passing of President Michèle Demers. ... Michèle dedicated her professional life to the care of others and was a passionate advocate for the rights of her members. She will be greatly missed.

[English]

Just last week, I had a very informative meeting with Madame Demers and was immediately struck by her passion for and dedication to her work and her colleagues. I ask the House to

acknowledge the sad loss of Michèle Demers and to extend our condolences to her family and her friends.

* * *

MICHÈLE DEMERS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the member opposite. I, too, was saddened to learn of the untimely passing of Mrs. Michèle Demers.

Her work on behalf of the 50,000 members of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada was a testament to her commitment and dedication. She was an energetic, passionate and forthright advocate for her members.

Mrs. Demers was a devoted professional who did the utmost for her country.

We are fortunate in Canada to have a professional and dedicated public service, a public service that operates in an increasingly complex environment marked by demands for faster, smarter responses and greater accountability.

Our thoughts and prayers are with her family and friends during this difficult time. We offer them our deepest sympathy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to set records but of the worst kind. December saw a 50% increase in personal bankruptcies. January was the worst month for job losses on record. Now in February, for the first time in 30 years, Canada is running a serious trade deficit. We are buying more than we sell.

What steps will the Prime Minister take to regain our position as an exporting nation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you will know that these trade numbers are conditioned by a couple of factors: the weakness in world trade markets and the sudden drop in the value of Canadian exports.

At the same time, we expect the change in the value of the Canadian dollar to help that situation, but in the meantime we and all governments of the G20 are trying to stimulate the world economy through a series of coordinated measures that we are taking in Canada and elsewhere.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition, who has no economic policies of his own, to help us by getting on with passing these important measures.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in more than 30 years, Canada has posted its first trade deficit. This is a bad record for the government. One of the export industries most affected is forestry. The forestry industry in Quebec is in full crisis mode.

Will the Prime Minister do something to give this industry hope, or is he planning on letting it die?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our budget contains many measures—including innovation, marketing and environmental development measures—for this industry. It was our government that resolved the softwood lumber dispute with the United States. The continued existence of this agreement is very important for our industry.

I encourage the Leader of the Opposition to change his position and protect our access to the American market.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more jobs were lost in the agricultural and rural sectors of Canada as a proportion than any other sector of the Canadian economy last year.

Rural Canada is hurting. The government has to stop the bleeding and help Canadian farmers survive.

Livestock producers across Canada are in the biggest trouble. They are angry. Why were they left out of the budget?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This is the only party in the House of Commons that regularly brings forward initiatives that affect rural Canada, whether it is forestry, mining or agriculture.

Not only will there be important help for livestock producers, once again, I would urge the Liberal Party to move into the 21st century, to listen to western Canadian farmers and allow marketing choice in the western Canadian—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nipissing-Timiskaming.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week Léo Montpellier, his wife and their children were devastated by layoffs in Sudbury. Another 680 families are also in the same situation.

Contracts and promises were made and broken, while the government stood idly by and watched these families lay abandoned.

Why does the Prime Minister ignore thousands of families across northern Ontario like the Montpelliers?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that we are as disappointed by these layoffs as he professes to be.

We know that these are challenging times for mining companies around the world due to the global economic crisis. That is why we acted. That is why we were engaged in discussions with Xstrata over the last few days. That is why we were able to see Xstrata commit at least \$290 million more to the region of Sudbury. Legal conditions were put in. We expect Xstrata to live up to these conditions.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, either the minister is not listening to northern Ontarians or he just cannot be bothered. The mayor of Sudbury says that they are not getting the help they need now and there is no hope of any help in the future from the government.

Oral Questions

Last December the Prime Minister went to unprecedented lengths to save his own job. Will he explain to northern Ontarians why he has not done the same for them?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually took the time to speak to the mayor of Sudbury. I can tell this House that the mayor of Sudbury understood that we were working around the clock, over the weekend, to fight for Sudburians and their rights, and to fight for their jobs.

He understood that we got further legal commitments from Xstrata to the tune of \$290 million to \$390 million. He also understood that we are working with Sudbury on a host of issues, including the building Canada plan and the economic plan for Canada. He understands.

Why does the hon. member not understand? It is because he does not have an idea of his own. He does not have any ideas of his own for this House, similar to the rest of his caucus.

* * *

• (1425)

[Translation]

CULTURE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the former heritage minister slashed cultural programs without consulting anyone. In contrast, the current Minister of Canadian Heritage travelled across Canada to sound out the cultural community. But this morning, we learned that the artists who supposedly gave their support for the Canada Prizes for the Arts never actually did, and most were never even consulted.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his Minister of Canadian Heritage told us the exact opposite of the truth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. This government established science and medicine prizes to create world-class awards for this country. Now, we want to do the same thing for culture, with the artistic community. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and his department are holding consultations to develop specific proposals. I hope the Bloc leader will support this important prize for the cultural community.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all the groups that he claims to have consulted and that supposedly supported the prizes have said they did not. The government is not consulting, it is just manipulating public opinion.

Does he realize that this is just smoke and mirrors and that he has no intention of reinstating the cultural programs he slashed essentially for ideological reasons?

Oral Questions

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely false. The proposal the Bloc is talking about is a proposal by two people that is not our policy. It is not our policy, but an existing proposal. We are holding consultations about creating a Canadian prize. We will submit a proposal to the House. The Bloc and the other members of the House will be able to look at the details, and we will have a more constructive debate on that proposal. What he is talking about is a proposal that is not ours. We are making unprecedented investments in the arts and culture. Once again, the Bloc is voting against this.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are told that the partners who supposedly support the Canada Prize for the Arts were never consulted. Alain Dancyger, director of les Grands Ballets Canadiens, has been quoted as saying that he was very anxious to add the voice of les Grands Ballets to those of his colleagues, and to point out that, not only were les Grands Ballets never consulted, but also that the very fact of creating this fund and tying up \$25 million at a time when our companies and artists are likely to starve to death as a result of the cancellation of two key programs is disgraceful—not the Bloc's word, but his.

What is the minister's answer to all these critics of his program?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, she is speaking of people's criticisms of a proposal that is not ours. It is a proposal, not our policy. We wish to create prizes for the artists and the culture of our country, as we did last year with the Gairdner Canada award in world health for scientists and physicians.

It is important for the country to draw attention to its creative people. We take pride in the creativity in the arts and culture of our country, and so that is what we are doing. The Bloc is opposing something that is not our policy. When the hon. member has the details, she will be able to discuss it further.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, his Canada prizes for arts and creativity are in his budget, and represent \$25 million. The minister ought to have the sense of honour and responsibility to do the one thing that must be done: set up real programs that can help artists promote culture abroad. That is what all cultural stakeholders are calling for.

The question is simple. Will he listen to reason and will he fund real programs for the dissemination of culture abroad, or better still, transfer those funds to Quebec?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of the demands by the Bloc Québécois are already in the budget it is voting against. We are investing \$22 million this year to help our artists on the international scene. The Bloc is voting against the needs of artists on the international scene. We are the ones making the investments.

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• (1430)

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has posted its first trade deficit in 33 years. The Prime Minister does not care. His economic policies cost Canada's trade

balance \$1.6 billion in December. Canada is an exporting nation, and it is the Prime Minister's responsibility to make sure our export industries, especially manufacturing and forestry, are healthy.

What will the Prime Minister do to boost these key sectors of our economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many measures in the budget will help these sectors. Unfortunately, the NDP decided to vote against these measures before even reading them. That is a completely irresponsible position, considering the families that depend on these sectors.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the policies we are seeing are the result of the government's policies throughout the preceding months and each day we see more evidence of the failure of the policies. In the last few days we have learned that a quarter of a million jobs were lost just in the last 90 days. We have learned that bankruptcies are up 50%. Now we learn that for the first time in 33 years we are running a trade deficit.

How can the Prime Minister still believe that his policies and his so-called stimulus package are up to the job?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Parliament has not even passed these measures let alone implemented them.

That opposition leader talks about trade. That is the same leader who last week was urging the government to use its stimulus package as part of a trade war with the United States. That is why the opposition is not trusted to govern this economy.

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ETHICS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with the economic indicators we are seeing here it is hard to believe how Canadians can have any trust in the Conservative government.

Since Friday the government has steadfastly refused to make any comment on why it has dropped its case against the Liberal Party on the Cadman affair. In March, in this House, the Prime Minister said the issue would “—prove to be in court the biggest mistake the leader of the Liberal Party has ever made”.

Does the Prime Minister now agree with the Liberal Party allegations on the Cadman affair, or is there something else that Canadians should know about why this case was dropped?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already said all I have to say about this case. I would note that the leader of the Liberal Party is no longer in his position. Maybe the leader of the NDP had something to do with that too.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sidney Ebanks is 61 years old. He is a proud man who never missed a day of work in the last 18 years. His wife is unemployed due to a long-term illness and they are supporting an orphaned granddaughter through university. Unfortunately, Sidney was recently laid off with the closing of an auto parts plant in my riding.

So, with no pension, a minimum severance, and EI clearly insufficient to pay the bills, what hope does the minister have to offer Sidney and the increasing number of families who are caught in similar situations?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that so many families are facing situations like this during this global economic downturn. My heart really goes out to them.

That is why we are trying to implement programs that will help them adjust to new jobs in different sectors, where those jobs will last so that families like this can get back to work and continue to provide for their families.

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FOREIGN CREDENTIALS

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, new Canadians in Toronto are particularly hard hit by this recession. On Friday, I am meeting with Mr. Alamgir Hossain, a Canadian citizen who emigrated from Bangladesh. He is a professional engineer who lost his job when his company downsized in December.

What specific plans does the government have to help new Canadians like Mr. Hossain find a job, pay his rent, and keep his two young children fed while waiting for a Conservative stimulus?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question coming from that side of the House is a bit surprising, since it was the Liberals, when they were the government, who froze settlement funding for 10 years, that is, assistance to help newcomers adapt to Canada.

That is why our government, when we came to power, invested significantly in helping newcomers adapt to life in Canada. We have launched offices to help them get their credentials recognized, so that they can put their skills to work, continue to contribute to the economy, look after their families and succeed here.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, General Motors is cutting 10,000 jobs. Canadian production has fallen 50% in one year. In Guelph, auto parts manufacturer Linamar has also cut salaries. The crisis in the auto sector translates into job losses in every corner of Canada, leaving communities devastated. The auto industry is still waiting for the terms of the commercial secured credit facilities to stimulate leasing and purchases.

Why is the government dragging its feet on the auto file? What can it possibly say to the people of Guelph who are losing their jobs?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite the opposite is true. In fact, on December 20, our Prime Minister and the Premier of Ontario, Mr. McGuinty, announced that we are willing to come to the table with the auto sector and the assemblers to make sure that they can continue to produce 20% of their capacity here in Canada.

We have engaged in discussions with them. We were the first movers. We were in concert with the United States and of course this government was in concert with the Ontario government. So, we have acted. We have acted in the best interests of Canadians and we will continue to do so.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, in my riding of Brampton—Springdale, I visited the Chrysler action centre. I met Priscilla, a single mother, who is worried about how she will put food on the table. I met with Randy, a father, who is worried about next month's mortgage payment. Both have lost their jobs in the auto sector. They tried to apply for EI, but they could not get through. When someone does answer the phone, they have to wait weeks to even get their cheques.

When will the Conservatives show some compassion and start caring enough about the women, the men, the families, and the seniors who are so desperately struggling in our country?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not have a monopoly on caring for these people. We do care. That is why we have been stepping up the resources so that people can get their EI in a timely manner. We are currently bringing back recent retirees. We are bringing back people who have been loaned to other departments. We have extended the hours for our call centre. We are accelerating our investment in computer systems.

We are working on a proactive basis with employers to ensure that the Randys and the Priscillas of the world do get the benefits that they need and deserve in a very quick manner.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities appeared in committee, he said he would respect Quebec's jurisdictions in the implementation of this program. However, his colleague from Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean is suggesting the opposite and saying that the municipalities will be able to submit requests directly to Economic Development Canada.

Will the Prime Minister rein in his minister of state and tell him to respect Quebec's jurisdictions?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we always respect provincial jurisdictions, across Canada and in Quebec. Furthermore, we are always open and attuned to the needs, goals and ideas expressed by municipalities in all regions of Canada, and in Quebec.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the Prime Minister aware that in Quebec, there is a provision in the Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif that prohibits municipalities and school boards from concluding agreements directly with the federal government in the context of programs like the infrastructure program?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a clear and simple answer: yes, absolutely.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Minister of the Environment is lobbying for the oil industry. He is trying to oppose a campaign launched by environmental groups in the United States justly condemning the unchecked exploitation of the oil sands and the dirty oil that President Obama wants nothing to do with.

Is the Minister of the Environment not ashamed to have turned himself into a lobbyist for big oil?

● (1440)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. To my knowledge, nobody has asked President Obama for special treatment or any exceptions for the Alberta oil sands. That is not the case.

[English]

The new president, I think it is fair to say, is very focused on the technological innovations that are needed for renewables and clean coal. Similarly, we are very focused on the technological innovations for renewables and clean oil. Our responsibility is to be a clean energy superpower.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister has defended the oil sands so often, one has to wonder whether his name appears on Canada's list of lobbyists. The minister should try to remember that he was not hired to represent oil companies; he is here to represent the people, and they want a minister who will protect the environment.

Will the minister start behaving like a real environment minister and stop acting like an oil company lobbyist?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, I have always promoted greener energy and I have stood up for improved conservation. However, the most important thing to consider in our fight against greenhouse gas emissions is the fact that we will be working with President Obama, which is something the Bloc Québécois will never be able to do.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in committee the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism claimed that Canada would stand alone in maintaining its current immigration levels, but moments later he told reporters that might change, leaving new Canadians confused and puzzled by his contradiction.

What is the real story? What is the real agenda behind his intentional flip-flop, and how can new Canadians trust this minister?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his appointment as immigration critic.

There was no flip-flop. What there is is a remarkable record of bringing new Canadians to this country and successfully integrating them. Last year we welcomed the largest number of newcomers ever to our shores: half a million newcomers and 250,000 permanent residents. We have announced for 2009 a planning level of 245,000 to 260,000, the only developed country in the world to be maintaining immigration levels.

We intend to keep that and we are proud of our record, unlike the Liberals, who in the early 1980s recession cut immigration levels in half.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know how much the Conservative government cares about immigrants. During its term in office, it has allowed 36,000 fewer landed immigrants into Canada, and the word "immigration" was nowhere to be found in the Speech from the Throne.

During an economic recession, immigrants are among the hardest hit. They face higher unemployment, lower pay and higher poverty rates. However, the minister provides no hope and no plan to help those most in need.

Why is his agenda simply to turn his back on immigrants and shut Canada's doors?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): I am disappointed, Mr. Speaker. I thought that was one Liberal who was above this kind of demagoguery.

The reality is that under this Prime Minister we have seen the highest average levels of permanent residents coming to Canada in its history; the highest total annual number of newcomers to this country in history; a new category of immigration, the Canadian experience class, that will allow students and temporary foreign workers a pathway to permanent residency; and the foreign credential referral office.

This Prime Minister, consequent to the last throne speech in the fall, was the first in history to develop an agreement with the first ministers for a national framework for credential recognition. When it comes to newcomers to Canada, we are delivering.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The events that took place in Kabul overnight, the loss of life in the ministry of justice in Kabul, pose a serious security threat. They raise real questions about what is taking place in Afghanistan.

One of the recommendations of the Manley report was not taken seriously by this government, and on our side we believe it very much should be. The Americans have just appointed a senior envoy for Pakistan and for Afghanistan. Why does Canada not do the same? Why do we not have someone senior looking at the overall political situation—

•(1445)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are of course deeply saddened by the events that took place yesterday in Kabul. I would say to my hon. colleague from the Liberal side of the House that there is a special envoy. There are a number of people who are taking care of it, and they are all under the direction of our ambassador in that country.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know he is getting his orders from the minister of defence, but before he does that, it was Mr. Manley who made it very clear that we needed to understand not only what is taking place in Afghanistan but also what is taking place in Pakistan, which is where the Taliban are being trained.

Can the minister tell us why we would not be matching what is taking place in other jurisdictions by putting politics, diplomacy and development far ahead, following that direction and recognizing the problem?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am listening to my hon. colleague's assertions. I can say to him that clearly, on this side of the House, this government stood up. We stood up with a program of six priorities. We stood up and supported our Canadian troops. We stood up and supported a government in Afghanistan to be able to help them rebuild their country, give them democratic institutions and make sure that what was addressed here in this House would be something that we are going to not only meet but be able to deal with. We will get the job done.

Oral Questions

NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the flag that flies from the top of the Peace Tower is the most recognized symbol of Canada across the country and around the world. It is a symbol of our heritage and a source of our collective pride, and once a year we celebrate the day the maple leaf became our national flag.

Would the Minister of Canadian Heritage please share with the House any plans he may have to celebrate National Flag Day?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, I would be glad to. First, I congratulate my colleague from Perth—Wellington on being elected chair of the heritage committee.

It was 44 years ago this year that the red and white maple leaf flag was first flown over the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill for all Canadians to see. National Flag Day is an opportunity for all Canadian to take pride in this incredible symbol of our national unity.

Mr. Speaker, I would take this opportunity on your behalf to invite all members of this House to join the Speaker and me in the Speaker's chambers after question period for a celebration of National Flag Day.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the industry minister stood in the House and tried to take credit for an investment by Xstrata that he claims he brokered over the weekend. He called it “new money”.

However, company financial statements released in January show that the money was committed before the layoffs were announced. Instead of falsely taking credit, why does the minister not stand up for mining families, enforce the legal agreement and tell Xstrata no layoffs?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think I was clear that these were discussions or promises that the company made. They are now legal undertakings signed with the Government of Canada. There is a very big difference, as the hon. member should know.

The fact of the matter is that we acted to protect Sudbury jobs and Canadian interests, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member is two days behind on this issue, and the minister should get his facts straight. That money was announced months before the layoffs and has nothing to do with this takeover agreement. They do not need a government standing in this House taking credit for something it had nothing to do with. They need a government that will stand up for them and enforce this agreement.

The agreement says no layoffs, but 700 pink slips have been issued. Why is the minister caving in to foreign mining interests instead of standing up for the people of Sudbury?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact nothing could be further from the truth. I know it is easy on their side of the House to pooh-pooh the idea that we can secure an additional investment of \$290 million to \$390 million for the people of Sudbury. That is what we did. We got the job done.

These are legal undertakings. They were not legal undertakings before. We expect the company to live by its agreements and we did so for the benefit of the people of Sudbury, the people of Ontario and the people of Canada.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has finally recognized its responsibility in the contamination of Shannon's groundwater by paying \$13.3 million to complete construction of the water system.

Now that the government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Québec has the floor.

An hon. member: What is their responsibility?

[English]

The Speaker: Yes, there will be more.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I am not finished, Mr. Speaker. The government has accepted its responsibility.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: We just saw that.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Does the minister responsible for the Quebec City region not believe that they should now settle the matter of compensation with the Shannon citizens' committee to avoid a court challenge by individuals who are victims of this tragic event?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. Yesterday, our government announced some great news for the population of Shannon. We have had the pleasure of working with several colleagues on this matter.

However, the member for Québec knows very well that a class action is before the courts and no one is allowed to comment on it.

* * *

NATIONAL BATTLEFIELDS COMMISSION

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, more than 80 leaders of Quebec society, including lawyers, former elected members, artists and academics have signed a letter to the chairman of the National Battlefields Commission, André Juneau, asking him to drop what has been quite rightly called an ill-advised plan to commemorate the battle of the Plains of Abraham.

To quote from their letter:

When a project has been announced that is so unacceptable and untenable, there is no way any kind of argument, even if contained in the most attractive publicity kit imaginable, could manage to rehabilitate it in the eyes of public opinion—

The minister responsible for the Quebec City region cannot just tell them to stay home, if they are not happy with it. As Quebeckers, they are already at home.

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have had occasion to repeat several times, responsibility for the historic event that will be commemorated belongs to the chairman of the National Battlefields Commission.

I would be very pleased if the hon. Bloc member were as scathing and vocal toward those who have threatened the people of Quebec, those who have made hurtful and threatening comments. It is the duty of the Bloc Québécois to denounce those comments.

* * *

[English]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage has cut \$45 million in funding for arts and culture while creating the Canadian prizes for the arts based on false information.

I have a document that outlines the program and mentions 40 national and international partners, such as Cirque du Soleil and the National Ballet of Canada, but these organizations were not consulted before being listed as partners.

Why are the Conservatives attacking our cultural industries again?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the document he is speaking of is not ours. It is a document created by two gentlemen in Toronto who have an idea that is not ours.

We are looking at creating a prize similar to the Gairdner prize in medical science. What we want to do with arts and culture, which is what we have done with medical science, is to shine the light and focus attention on the great artists and creators in this country.

We want to do that, and the Liberals have quite some nerve coming before the House and talking about spending on arts and culture. This Conservative government is spending more money on arts and culture than any government in Canadian history, and we are proud of it.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those bodies were not consulted yet they find themselves mentioned in the document and are furious about it. For example, general manager of les Ballets Jazz de Montréal Pascale Corréia uses the words scandalous and shameful to describe the use of her organization's name in this document without consent.

Does the minister plan to issue a public apology to all of these organizations, which once again feel that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages not only does not respect them, but worse than that, holds them in disdain?

Oral Questions

•(1455)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have just said in response to a question from the Bloc, this proposal which is the subject of debate is not ours. It comes from some fellows in Toronto. As for our policy, my colleague has not yet seen the details of our proposal. When he has seen it in detail, he will be surprised to conclude that it is a good idea for the unification of Canada around its arts and culture. When he sees the details, he will perhaps be able to submit facts to the House for a somewhat more constructive debate.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled this week that the federal government, not the province, has exclusive jurisdiction over the management of salmon farms.

Fish farms now make up a huge part of the B.C. fishery industry and there are serious environmental concerns, especially now that wild stocks of fish are collapsing. Fishery workers, fishers and conservationists along the B.C. coast need to know what the government plans to do.

We have known for months that this was coming. What is the plan of the government?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we could not have known for months that this was coming because it is my understanding that the court decision just came down a few days ago. The litigation has been ruled on regarding whether provincial or federal jurisdiction applies in B.C.

We do have a one year window to work with the province of B.C. and we will be doing that. In the meantime, however, we will continue to jointly manage the aquaculture industry through the application of both federal and provincial laws.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is just a load of halibut. We have known about this possibility for months. B.C. just does not seem to be important to the government.

For years, Ottawa has abdicated its role in the proper management of the fishery. During that time, problems around escaped fish, farm pollution and sea lice have all increased, putting a serious strain on local fish stocks.

We need transition funding for closed containment. We need a plan. What are the Conservatives waiting for? Why are there no plans in place? Why is the government not moving to regulate fish farms and protect B.C.'s wild salmon?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the Province of B.C. asked for jurisdiction over salmon farming and that an agreement was reached with the Government of Canada.

However, I can tell the House that the Government of Canada has set aside \$1 billion for communities in need. If there is a need in the

salmon industry in B.C., some funds are available to address the issues that are brought forward.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christians and members of other minority faith groups are often subject to severe persecution in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. Our government is standing up for these victims of persecution.

Would the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism update the House on his recent announcement to assist Iraqi refugees?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are deeply concerned about the plight of Iraqi refugees facing persecution in their homeland, which is why last year our government committed to increase by more than 50% the number of resettled refugees from the Middle East. It is also why yesterday I announced further increases.

In 2009, Canada will accept approximately 3,900 refugees through our Damascus mission, representing an increase of several times since our government took office.

I am pleased to say that the Canadian representative, the UN High Commissioner of Refugees, has said that Canada should be commended in continuing to uphold its humanitarian commitment to finding permanent solutions for refugees from one of the most pressing refugee situations in the world.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because the Conservative government did not take this crisis seriously, our citizens are now suffering. Serge, a citizen of Madawaska—Restigouche, asked me for help recently. After losing his job, like thousands of other people, he filed his claim for employment insurance benefits, but had to wait 55 days before he received his first cheque. In the meantime, he lost his apartment and is now wondering what will become of him.

Why does this government treat unemployed workers and their families like second class citizens, and why is it condemning them to a life of poverty? Why does it not want to help them avoid poverty?

•(1500)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is exactly the opposite. In fact, in our economic action plan we have taken significant steps to help people who have been long-time workers but who are at an age where they do not have many transferrable skills. We are providing the opportunity for them to get acquire new skills and get training for the jobs of tomorrow.

Oral Questions

We are also making that training available to people who are not even eligible for employment insurance because we believe those people also need the opportunity to get those skills for tomorrow.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government signed a free trade agreement with Colombia even though the Standing Committee on International Trade called for negotiations to be suspended because of human rights problems. A recent UN press release condemned the murder of 17 indigenous Awa people by an irregular armed group.

What is the government waiting for to suspend ratification of the free trade treaty with Colombia until it shows greater willingness to protect basic human rights?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Colombia has made progress on human rights, especially thanks to an agreement on labour. That is why we recognized that progress. We want an agreement with that country in order to continue improving the standard of living in Colombia and reinforcing human rights and the rights of workers and organized labour.

* * *

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government made changes to the citizenship law that would discriminate against the children of adopted Canadians. It would strip their children's right to Canadian citizenship and also penalize those who work overseas.

Starting on April 17, the minister is legislating a system of second-class citizens, and that is wrong.

Would the minister tell us how he can justify withholding Canadian citizenship from children born to Canadian parents?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I congratulate the member on her appointment as immigration critic for the NDP.

Second, I completely reject the premise of her question. The bill to which she refers was adopted by all parties in both chambers of the House, including the NDP.

It was a remarkable effort by my predecessor to fix a long-standing problem that had left thousands of Canadians without citizenship, the so-called "lost Canadians". We have restored citizenship to them through these amendments. We have also ensured the value of Canadian citizenship so that permanent non-residents with little or no connection to this country will not be able to pass on Canadian citizenship ad infinitum. As it relates to adoption, we are looking at that issue.

THE BUDGET

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada's economic action plan, the finance minister announced a new home renovations tax credit. This tax credit will allow Canadians who spend up to \$10,000 on home renovations to get a 15% tax credit.

Could the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism tell us about the benefit for small and medium sized businesses and for Canadians?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new home renovations tax credit is excellent news, both for homeowners and for small business across our country. This new tax credit has been warmly received. The IC Interior Design Group said, "It's been incredible". A construction company said, "It is aimed at small business".

This new home renovations tax credit is another example of how Canada's economic action plan will protect and create jobs in our communities.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions and negotiations among all the parties and if you seek it I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, for the purpose of considering the supplementary estimates B, 2008-09, tabled in the House on Thursday, January 29, 2009, each standing committee to which supplementary estimates B were referred, shall report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the said estimates to the House not later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, February 11, 2009;

at 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government orders on Thursday, February 12, 2009, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings then in progress and, put, forthwith and successively, without debate or amendment, every question necessary to dispose of any opposition motion before the House, of any item for the restoration or reinstatement of any item in the said estimates, or any opposed item in the estimates and for the passage at all stages of any bill based thereon, provided that the Standing Orders relating to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment shall remain suspended until all such questions have been decided; that 24 hours' written notice shall be given of a notice to oppose any item in the estimates and motions, to concur in the supplementary estimates, to restore and reinstate any item in the estimates; and

that the business of supply for the remainder of the supply period ending March 26, 2009 continue to be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 81.

● (1505)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. minister could just repeat that.

The Speaker: I can put the motion to the House and read it again, if members want to hear it all again.

Is there unanimous consent to proceed with this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, the chief government whip said that there were prior consultations with all the parties in opposition but I was not given prior notice of this motion. If the whip would like to come over and explain it to me, I would be glad to consider it and give it my approval.

The Speaker: The question for the moment is whether there is consent and I presume that there is no consent at the moment. There will be further consultations, I am sure.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I am pleased to present today the Canadian Wheat Board 2007-08 financial statements in both official languages.

I would also like to draw to the attention of the House a point of concern associated with the Wheat Board's contingency fund. This fund is intended to cover the risk involved in operating the producer payment options program. Page 38 of the report reads:

When other revenues (pricing damages) and program expenses (including net hedging results, interest and administration expenses) are accounted for, the programs generated a net loss of \$89.5 million.

That loss this year is on top of the nearly \$40 million the board lost in the same way in its programs last year. Clearly, the board has not learned from these mistakes and has compounded the problem, continuing on with the same risk management practices. All of these losses add to the contingency fund's deficit which has cost farmers \$120 million.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, it is the duty of the Minister of Agriculture to present the annual report of an agency but it is not his duty to go on a political attack against the agency that he is supposed to be tabling the report on. It is his duty to present the report.

The Speaker: I must caution the minister that if he wants to make a statement, he can do so under statements by ministers. It appears that was what he was doing rather than just tabling. We are on tabling of documents and I would respectfully request that he table the document. It is not an opportunity to make a statement. If he wishes to make a statement, he does that under the other and then all parties get to reply, which is not the case in tabling of documents.

I do not know whether the minister has anything further to say at this point but I think he was getting beyond the tabling.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling these documents for the Canadian Wheat Board on behalf of western Canadian farmers. They have asked me to point out these flaws in the program, and I am happy to do that.

* * *

• (1510)

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2008-09

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we could return to my previous motion. I had the opportunity to discuss with the hon. member from Nova Scotia and he has graciously agreed to grant his consent to the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, for the purpose of considering the supplementary estimates B, 2008-09, tabled in the House on Thursday, January 29, 2009, each standing committee to which supplementary estimates B were referred, shall report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the said estimates to the House not later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, February 11, 2009;

at 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government orders on Thursday, February 12, 2009, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings then in progress and, put, forthwith and successively, without debate or amendment,

Routine Proceedings

every question necessary to dispose of any opposition motion before the House, of any item for the restoration or reinstatement of any item in the said estimates, or any opposed item in the estimates and for the passage at all stages of any bill based thereon, provided that the Standing Orders relating to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment shall remain suspended until all such questions have been decided; that 24 hours' written notice shall be given of a notice to oppose any item in the estimates and motions, to concur in the supplementary estimates, to restore and reinstate any item in the estimates; and

that the business of supply for the remainder of the supply period ending March 26, 2009 continue to be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 81.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation to the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association on its participation in the 35th annual meeting held in Quebec City from September 8 to 15, 2008.

[English]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation to the parliamentary mission to the country that will next hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union and the fourth part of the 2008 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe held in Prague, Czech Republic and Strasbourg, France, September 25 to October 3.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation to the meeting of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region held in Ostersund, Sweden, November 6.

*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 fifth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence on the fifth report later today.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources in relation to supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women concerning government action in support of abused women.

[*English*]

This report asks the federal government to take concrete action to support women and denounce their abuse in Canada and on the international stage.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in relation to supplementary estimates (B) for the year 2008-09.

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates in relation to its study on supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009. I am pleased to report that the committee considered all the votes referred to it and reports the same.

[*Translation*]

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to supplementary estimates (B).

• (1515)

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in relation to supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

[*English*]

HOLIDAYS ACT (FLAG DAY)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Holidays Act (Flag Day).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise to move this bill to create a national flag day holiday. I would like to express my thanks to the hardworking former member for Vancouver Island North, Catherine Bell.

The bill would create a legal holiday around flag day in February, something that does not exist yet. It is acknowledged as a holiday, but there is no legal weight behind it.

Canadian families are working harder and harder for less money. They earn less now than they did 20 years ago, and they are working more overtime hours.

To create a legal holiday in February to acknowledge the pride that Canadians feel about their flag and their country, is a way for families to get together and celebrate the Confederation of which we are all so proud.

I am honoured to move the bill forward to create a national flag day holiday for Canada's maple leaf flag.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-314, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (public transportation workers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, more and more serious incidents of violence toward transportation workers are occurring across the country: in Vancouver, Calgary, Mississauga and Halifax. We have heard recently about a number of different incidents where bus drivers and transit workers have been assaulted.

The bill would create a new category within the Criminal Code that would ensure the protection of public transportation workers by creating a separate first degree murder offence and increasing the punishment for aggravated assault when a victim is a public transportation worker.

Every day the women and men who run our public transportation systems across the country do their utmost to ensure that Canadians arrive at work safely. We must ensure that their workplace is safe. That is why I have moved this bill today.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, Canadians are anxiously awaiting financial relief during this economic crisis. My colleagues in the New Democratic Party have indicated that they still have a number of MPs who want to speak to the budget bill, which under normal circumstances would delay that relief. With unanimous consent, we can change those circumstances and accommodate more speakers and get the relief out to Canadians sooner instead of later.

Therefore, I would seek unanimous consent for the following motion: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the House shall sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment for the purpose of considering the second reading stage of Bill C-10, the budget implementation act, and shall not be adjourned before such proceedings have been completed except pursuant to a motion to adjourn proposed by a minister of the crown.

• (1520)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reluctantly, I rise on a point of order, I have another piece of House business to take care of. I would like to add that it relates to the NDP's efforts to obstruct Parliament, so everyone understands. The NDP delaying tactics will not lead to a single constructive outcome, not one. What it does is prolong the suffering many Canadians are experiencing.

Therefore, I would like to undesignate tomorrow as an opposition day. My apologies to the Bloc members whose day it was, but the budget implementation bill is a priority for this government and Canadians, and that is why we will debate it tomorrow.

Routine Proceedings

PETITIONS

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise again to present a petition signed by citizens from the national capital region, expressing their deep concern with the matter of heavy truck traffic in the core of our capital city and the possibility of building a bridge so these trucks can be removed from the centre of town.

In particular, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to instruct the National Capital Commission to proceed with a detailed assessment of an interprovincial bridge linking the Canotek industrial park to the Gatineau airport, which is option seven of the first phase of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment.

The position is shared and supported by the Government of Quebec and the Government of Ontario.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a total of three petitions, all from organized labour groups in my riding, two of which ask for changes to the Employment Insurance Act to extend benefits.

TRADE

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition asks the government not to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition. The petitioners are asking the government to ease the criteria for employment insurance sickness benefits so that people with episodic disabilities can work part time and receive benefits part time; to make the tax credit for people with disabilities refundable so that people with disabilities can increase their income; and to allow spouses to claim the tax credit for family caregivers.

[English]

SRI LANKA

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present.

The first petition has to do with the very tragic situation in Sri Lanka.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to put pressure on the government of Sri Lanka to not deny the Tamil population food, shelter, medicine and other fundamental necessities.

It is signed by quite a number of constituents from my riding.

The second petition also has to do with Sri Lanka and with religious freedom there.

Routine Proceedings

In particular, the petitioners are upset with the bill entitled Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion. They believe the bill is designed to repress religious freedom and worship in Sri Lanka, particularly by minority groups.

The third petition is also of the same nature and character. Unfortunately, it is not certified for, in my view, very good reasons by the clerk. I wonder if I could get unanimous consent by the House to present the petition, notwithstanding the fact that it is not in the appropriate form.

It is of the matter and substance of the previous petition, namely the issue of prohibition of forcible conversion of religion, a bill in Sri Lanka.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood have the unanimous consent to table this petition, notwithstanding the form of the petition?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

• (1525)

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a series of petitions to present.

The first petition deals with the security and prosperity partnership.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to stop further implementation of the security and prosperity partnership until there is a democratic mandate from the people of Canada, parliamentary oversight and a consideration of profound consequences of Canada's existence.

Over 300 folks have signed this petition.

TRANSPORTATION OF ANIMALS

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the next series of petitions relate to animal transport.

[*Translation*]

The people who signed this petition are asking the House to ensure that animal transport regulations be consistent with the findings of the European Union's scientific committee on animal health and welfare. They want the government to reduce transport time for pigs, poultry, horses, calves and lambs to 8 hours, and 12 hours for cattle, sheep and goats. They also they want the House to ensure adequate enforcement of the regulations. The petitioners ask that the amendments be passed quickly.

[*English*]

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the next petition deals with former Bill C-51. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to vote against this bill if it comes up again, in order to protect their rights as consumers of natural health products. Given that 70% of the Canadian population already uses natural health products, the petitioners do not wish to

have natural health products in the same category as pharmaceuticals.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last petition I wish to present to the House deals with the subject of trafficking of persons worldwide.

The petitioners are asking us, as a duty of Parliament, to protect the most vulnerable members of society from harm, those being the victims of human trafficking. They are requesting that the government continue its work to cull that trafficking of persons worldwide.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of residents in York South—Weston, I would like to present a petition with over 600 signatures. It relates to the proposed air-rail link which is the subject of an environmental assessment that is presently under way.

Originally, the terms of reference for an environmental assessment, which had tremendous public input, would look at alternatives. However, recently, the province accelerated its EA and is now only looking at the corridor within the rail right-of-way.

The petitioners urge that our leaders act now to ensure that the air-rail link is a public transit air-rail link, with fares being in the public transit category, that it be below grade throughout the Weston area, that it include stops to serve communities, including Weston, and that it be electrified.

I am pleased to present this petition. I would like to underscore the point made in the petition, that originally alternatives were going to be assessed. The present environmental assessment is scoped in such a way as it is only looking at the air-rail link within the CN Weston subdivision.

TORTURE

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I really am honoured to rise today and present this petition.

Two nurses in my riding who are very well known and well respected have worked for years and years to point out that there is an anomaly in the Criminal Code of Canada in that there is no criminal offence for torture. If torture is performed in another country by a state, then it is a crime, but there is no crime for torture if it is done by a non-state actor within our country.

It is ironic that Canada is a signatory to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, but we do not have a crime that is described as torture.

I want to thank the two nurses involved, Jean Sarson and Linda MacDonald, who have worked tirelessly for years and have gathered up almost 700 signatures from Yukon to Newfoundland to endorse and support their petition. I am very pleased and honoured to present it today.

INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of 800 fisher people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 1998 the federal government asked fishermen to voluntarily retire from the fishery in exchange for a retirement benefit. However, because of wrong information provided by Revenue Canada, 100% of the benefit was taxed as capital gains, instead of 25%. A hundred and fifty fishermen who had not followed the advice of Revenue Canada at the time saved thousands of dollars, and now the remaining fishermen are asking for just and fair treatment. They are asking the government to reimburse them for the extra thousands of dollars that they did pay and in fact, to which they are entitled.

The petitioners are calling on the government to reimburse this money under the fairness provisions of the Income Tax Act.

• (1530)

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of the over 100,000 volunteer firefighters across this country. I have in my own riding 50 different volunteer fire departments, including Little Dover, Mulgrave, Glace Bay—I will not name them all, but I would like to mention some—Manitou, Whycogomah, Blues Mills, Bateston, Cheticamp, Judique, Port Hastings, East Bay, Howick Centre, and St. Peter's. That is about a quarter of them. All those different departments share one thing: they are there to serve and protect the people of their communities. They do this without any compensation. They do this a great deal of the time at their own expense.

There are over 1,200 signatures on this petition. These people believe that these volunteers deserve some type of recognition and compensation from the government and hopefully that will move forward. There are private members' bills in this regard. Hopefully, as the list of private members' business moves along, a bill acknowledging the work these volunteer firefighters do will be presented. The intent of this petition is to support that principle.

With all due respect to volunteer firefighters right across this country, I am very proud to present this petition.

SRI LANKA

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this petition, as I said earlier, is not in order and I wondered if you would seek unanimous consent to present this petition, notwithstanding the fact that it is not in order.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood have the unanimous consent of the House to table this petition?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-10, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and related fiscal measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: Before yesterday's adjournment motion, the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber had the floor. He has six minutes remaining to finish his comments. The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during my speech yesterday, I emphasized the fact that we have gone from an opposition coalition to a Liberal-Conservative coalition. I gave a few examples of the unfortunate results this has had for all citizens of Canada.

I would like to continue today by talking more specifically about the negative impact of this coalition on Quebec.

I hope to demonstrate that, whether it is the Conservatives or the Liberals in power, or whether it is a coalition of the two parties, like the one before us today, Canada always practices politics based on partisan interests. However, all too often, the interests of Canada unfortunately go against those of Quebec.

In the end, we, as Quebeckers, cannot hope for anything from this federation. The only solution of course is for Quebec to become a sovereign country so that it too, like all countries, can practice politics based on its own interests. Furthermore, being a sovereign country will help Quebec by giving it all the necessary tools to get through this crisis and meet its own needs, rather than the needs of oil companies in the west, for instance.

My first example is equalization, the transfer payments the federal government makes to the provinces and Quebec. In fact, these payments are not gifts, because the money comes from the taxes we pay. The equalization formula is constantly being modified. During the last parliament, the Conservative government, wanting to appear open to Quebec, said it would try to correct the fiscal imbalance. Equalization payments to Quebec were increased, but only thanks to pressure from the Bloc Québécois and the government's minority position.

Government Orders

At the time, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Finance, and I repeatedly said in this House that the government had not corrected the fiscal imbalance because there had been no transfer of tax fields and that whenever it pleased, the government could backtrack, change the formula again, penalize Quebec and go back to the ways things were before.

Unfortunately, my words were prophetic, because that is exactly what happened. At times of economic crisis, when we are faced with serious problems, the federalist parties revert to type and promote the interests of Canada as a whole. I would even say this is not completely abnormal. What is abnormal is that Quebec is not doing the same thing and becoming a country so that it can promote its own interests, especially during an economic crisis.

Even though the equalization formula is a bit abstract and extremely technical for many of our constituents, it is even more revealing when we look at how it is calculated.

In the past, income from non-renewable resources like oil was excluded from the equalization calculation. Clearly, for the purposes of this calculation, provinces that generate such revenue appear poorer than they really are, and provinces that do not generate such revenue and whose economy is based essentially on renewable energy, such as Quebec, seem richer than they really are. These provinces are therefore penalized.

What is more, from the environmental point of view, we wonder why this government, with the backing of the Liberals, wants to encourage industries that use non-renewable energies, when they should be doing the opposite and giving equalization premiums to provinces using renewable energies.

In the last budget, the imbalance was made even greater by the decision that Hydro One revenues in Ontario will no longer be included in the equalization calculations, although it was arbitrarily decided that those from Hydro Quebec will continue once again to be included. This will mean a loss of \$250 million annually for Quebec.

•(1535)

We could go on to the example of the Quebec securities commission. Once again, the federal government, with the backing of the Liberals, wants to centralize finance in Ontario. We could also give the example of this government's environmental policies, which are clearly not in Quebec's interests. In fact, dependency on oil and gas impoverishes Quebec, while an independent Quebec could fully free itself of that dependency and be the richer for it.

Once again, we have a made-for-Ontario budget backed by the Liberals, who have a real partisan interest in Ontario. The big lesson the people of Quebec need to take from this is that, even when governments switch places, nothing can be expected from the federalist parties. Nothing from the Canadian federation either, not because it is bad, but simply because all members in this House, with the exception of the Bloc Québécois members, are looking after the interests of the Canadian nation, which are not unfortunately the same as the interests of the Quebec nation.

For the Quebec nation, the only solution is to do the same thing: acquire its own sovereignty, fly on its own, make its own decisions according to its own values, but also and particularly according to its

own interests. The route to that goal is to acquire national independence, while continuing to cooperate with Canada as a good neighbour. Sovereignty will not be against Canada, and not because we do not like Canadians, but merely because we believe that the best ones to define what is good for Quebecers are Quebecers themselves. We will make decisions, sometimes good ones, sometimes bad ones, but at the end of the day they will be our decisions.

•(1540)

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on the clarity of his speech.

Since we were recently described as sectarian, I would like to ask him if he feels that having the desire to stand up to have one's own country is not precisely what Canada did. Does he not believe that we could remain very good friends and that wanting a country for oneself does not mean one is sectarian? I would like to hear his thoughts on this.

We now realize, as the member clearly said, that the Liberals truly got down on their knees when they ended the coalition. In that sense, one could say that the Liberals were worse than the Conservatives. I would really like my hon. colleague to comment on that.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, it is true. My colleague's last comment made me think about the time I was on television with the member for Bourassa. He asked why I was always criticizing the Liberals. It is because while we had no expectations of getting anything from the Conservative government, the Liberals at least had the opportunity to get a little something in the process. What did they get besides a new cloakroom in the lobby and an end to the lawsuit against them? They got reports to monitor the government. I always thought it was the work of Parliament to monitor the government. In the end, the Liberal amendment is asking the government to monitor itself and to do the work we should be doing. The Liberals got absolutely nothing in this regard. It is quite sad.

As for the accusations of sectarianism, let us be serious. If sovereignty is a good thing for Canada, if it is good for France, Germany, Gabon and any other country in the world, why is sovereignty not good for Quebec? This comment seems a bit ludicrous to me. The comment was made, in France, on the same day that a Quebec premier was being honoured. It is even more ironic that France had already honoured two Quebec premiers in the past, and with higher honours at that. If we are to believe what the French president said, it would mean that they honoured sectarians. I obviously do not believe that. I think that his comments were unfortunate and uncalled for. I do not believe that they reflect the image the French have about sovereignists.

Government Orders

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, allow me to congratulate my colleague for Jeanne-Le Ber, a dynamic and very eloquent member. I would like to come back to a point that he discussed just now, equalization. He said that it is a truly complex matter and I agree. However, it is quite simply a formula which, at the end of the day, distributes wealth based on the capacity of each province, including Quebec, to generate revenue, namely taxes.

This type of formula is mechanical and normally removes any subjectivity. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives have manipulated or fiddled with this formula. I would like my colleague to talk about this, for the benefit of all the Conservatives and Liberals, so that they truly realize what this government has done by fiddling with the equalization formula.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. A number of arbitrary items have been introduced with respect to this formula for redistributing wealth. I cited a few in my presentation. All these arbitrary components, without exception, are detrimental to Quebec. An arbitrary item has never been introduced that would benefit Quebec. It is systematically to the province's disadvantage. Even though Quebec, in absolute terms, receives the largest share of equalization payments of recipient provinces, it remains the province that receives the smallest per capita contribution.

• (1545)

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to share a few thoughts with the House and with the people of Canada who are watching on why it is that I, as a member of the New Democratic Party caucus in Ottawa, cannot support the budget that is being supported by the Conservatives and Liberals.

I will do that by sharing just a small piece of my own story because sometimes it is in telling that story that we are able to more completely or fulsomely understand why a person might take a position which, at first glance, might not seem in the interests of one's home community.

In spite of the fact that the government has packed the budget with investments in communities like my own that will be helpful in the short term, and of course all of us will be thankful for that, it does not move us away from an approach to our economy that got us into the mess that we experienced in the last part of last year in the first place.

It was an approach that saw a government continually and ever more generously give tax breaks to large corporations, which in turn diminished the ability of government to play a constructive and positive role in the protection of communities and the development of opportunities. It diminished the ability of government, without running tremendously large deficits, to help our communities and the economy, and to protect the jobs of working men and women across this country.

I believe that we have a wonderful opportunity in this country at this point in time, if we would only read the signs to understand what is fundamentally happening, to make a significant and fundamental shift that would serve us all better in the long run.

Back in 1959 my father and mother sold everything they had in Ireland and bet that money on a dream. That dream was Canada. They brought their seven children, I was the eldest of seven children, to Canada to give them a future. It was not very complicated. They were not really looking for much. As I sat with my father in his last few years, he explained to me that really, what he was looking for was a good job that would help him put food on the table, provide a home for himself, his wife and his children, and would put some money aside so that we, his children, might go to school one day and have a life for ourselves. That was all. It really was not complicated.

We ended up in the small town of Wawa in northern Ontario, where he got a job mining iron ore. He was paid a decent wage for doing that work, enough so that we were a very happy family. We discovered a community that was very supportive. It was a mix of races, cultures, religions and languages. Because we were fairly isolated, people would get together on occasion for weddings, funerals, and to celebrate with each other in a way that we had not experienced in such a fulsome fashion where we had come from.

We learned as we went along that the iron ore that we were mining in that little town, and 1,200 people worked in those mines, was sent to the big city a couple of hours down the road or by train to Sault Ste. Marie where yet another 12,000 people took the sinter that we produced and turned it into steel. That steel was sent to communities across Canada, to Saint John, New Brunswick, to British Columbia and to Windsor where it was used to make cars, build ships and make buses. It was sent to Quebec for the industries that province had going at that particular time.

• (1550)

Those industries were providing jobs for people, jobs that paid decent wages and allowed families, like my own, to put bread on the table, have a decent home and expect that at some point in the future they would be able to send their children to school so they might have a future for themselves.

We also discovered, in that little town of Wawa in the 1960s and 1970s, that government actually cared about us as well. We watched as the Canadian government, in partnership with the Ontario government, began to put in place programs like health care. If my mother, father or siblings got sick, we had access to a doctor or we could go to a hospital without it being a tremendous financial burden on us. We thought it was wonderful. What a country. What a place to live. What a wonderful way of life that my father and mother had adopted for themselves and us.

We brought in a program called unemployment insurance so that if people lost their job or got hurt on the job, workmen's compensation ensured that they would not be devastated. They would have some money to carry them through a difficult period until they found another job or were able to get back to the same job after they had fixed whatever it was they had hurt on the job. The federal government brought in the Canada assistance plan, a program that was delivered by the province, to ensure that those in our community who were most at risk and vulnerable were also looked after.

Government Orders

What a concept. What a wonderful country, where nobody would be left behind. Those programs, even though never as generous as some of us would have liked them to have been, were certainly more generous than they are today. For the most part, a number of the important programs that were put in place back in those days no longer exist. They were taken out of commission in order to pay down the deficit and the debt and to do a number of other things that I will speak to in a minute.

I was able to go to university with the benefit of a loan and grant program. I was the oldest of seven kids. It was difficult for my parents to put together the kind of money that would have seen them able to pay for my education and then the six coming after me. With the use of student loans and the grants that were available at that time, I was able to go to university and get a degree. Universities and colleges in Ontario in those days were growing. After I got out of university, my first job was with Sault College. It was part of a new introduction for training and retraining in the province at that time, and those colleges were growing in almost every community across the province.

My job with the college was to go out and promote the value of further education and lifelong learning. In every community, from Elliot Lake to Chapleau to Wawa, I promoted further education, training, retraining and lifelong learning.

As we moved into the 1980s and 1990s, we began to see government pull back from that kind of involvement with communities, families, people and workers. We began to see a reduction in the presence of government in our communities. It began with the giving away of taxes by way of tax breaks, particularly to big corporations, which reduced the capacity of government to be as generous as they were with these programs that provided support for families and communities. We moved into a regime that saw us reduce the capacity of government by giving away the revenue that government collected.

My father had very simple dreams and modest expectations of getting up every morning, going to work and getting paid. If the family should get sick or if I wanted to go to university, he expected to get some help from government. However, we began to see that government help became less and less the reality for families.

• (1555)

We saw the giving away of government revenue through tax breaks. We saw—

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired so we will move on to questions and comments. The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments and I understand his concern for people who are facing tough economic times and challenges.

I would like to point out that many of the initiatives in our budget address the issues he was talking about: \$1.5 billion over two years for training programs; \$55 million over two years for youth employment; \$60 million over three years for the targeted initiative for older workers; and \$40 million that will go to the \$2,000

apprenticeship completion grant. These are really important initiatives for Canadians in these tough times.

I would like to ask the member how he and his party could actually vote against something that will help Canadians through these times.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly finish what I was saying in answer to my colleague's question.

In the 1990s and in the last few years, we have moved into a regime where we have reduced taxes and the ability of government to play a major role in people's lives. When the concept of free trade was brought in, many communities, particularly in my neck of the woods, lost plants that had provided work for people not only in those communities but for people in larger centres and the other places where the product was sent.

Now we have a government that does not have the capacity to respond to the real challenges that are facing us, particularly those in the last six to nine months, and will not be able to face the challenges as we look ahead at what economists are predicting will happen.

We are not saying that we disagree with the investments that the government is making but those are things in which it should have been investing all along. Our problem is that when this period of deficit financing is over, the government's capacity to continue to keep that going and to provide the kind of supports that I spoke of earlier, the supports that were there for my family, will no longer be there for communities, for families and for working men and women across the country. That is why we are not able to support the budget.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie for raising issues that are important to a lot of people. I will ask him one specific question about post-secondary education.

When we gleaned through the budget we tried to find where it mentioned help for students. Students are leaving universities and colleges with mounting debt loads, which does not help their communities, the economy and certainly not themselves or their families. The budget has money for some bricks and mortar but there is nothing for students to alleviate the cost of going to school. This has been made clear by national student organizations at every prebudget consultation. The government has said that it was listening.

I would ask my hon. colleague, if the government had been listening to students across Canada and their representatives, how could it possibly have been so tone deaf to the one essential thing that was asked, which was lowering student debt loads.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent question and it goes right to the heart of the argument that I was making as to why we cannot support the budget. The budget does not fundamentally change an approach that both the Liberals and the Conservatives have taken over the last 15 or so years. Both parties continually and aggressively moved the cost of education on to the shoulders of students and their families. We believe education is a government responsibility.

Jurisdictions around the world that are doing really well economically see education as an investment in their future. There are no tuition fees in places like Finland, probably most Scandinavian countries, and Ireland. They understand that if people have the opportunity to go back to school and become the best that they can be and participate in the economy, everyone is better served. However, if financial roadblocks are put in the way, people will not be able to take advantage of that.

In these difficult economic times, when we do not know where the jobs will be or even if there will be any jobs at all, it will be more difficult for students to feel comfortable taking on the kind of debt that many of them are experiencing today. It is a real roadblock for them and more so as we stand here this afternoon.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Compton—Stanstead, who voted me into office for a third time in four years. Just think, three elections in four years. But on to serious issues.

After the loss of 18,000 manufacturing and forestry jobs in the Eastern Townships over the past few years, I was hoping to see significant investments for these sectors so vital to the region's economy in the Minister of Finance's budget. My faint hope has been dashed. This is a political budget and priority has been given to the province with the most federal ridings—Ontario. For members such as myself who were elected to defend the interests of Quebec first, this budget is completely unacceptable.

Let us be clear. I support providing assistance to the auto sector. I am well aware that the latter, in recent years, has become the industrial engine of North America. In my own riding, several hundred jobs in Waterville or Coaticook, in particular, are directly related to the auto sector. Nevertheless, the Eastern Townships needed substantial help for the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

In the Haut-Saint-François regional county municipality, located in my riding, a number of major saw mills have ceased operations, namely those in Bury, Weedon and Saint-Isidore-de-Clifton. The forestry workers of Haut-Saint-François were expecting more from this government and today they are rightfully disappointed.

And what about the manufacturing sector? The plants of the Shermag group, a leading light in the economy of the Eastern Townships, are now all closed. Hundreds of workers have lost their jobs in Lennoxville, Dudswell and Scotstown, to name but a few, because of the indifference of the Conservative government toward them.

The office of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services is still operating as if it were the 1950s. It is being openly said that people just needed to vote on the right side to get assistance. I find that extremely edifying. Yet the powerful political lieutenant for Quebec is in the Townships, in fact in the next riding to mine. The communities hardest hit, the ones I just named, Dudswell and Scotstown in particular, are only a few minutes down the road from his riding. Like all his other Quebec colleagues, he continues to

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show complete docility toward the Prime Minister at the expense of his own region and of the Quebec nation.

During the last election campaign, Conservative candidates kept on saying at every possible opportunity, that there was not, and would not be, any crisis, that Canada was sheltered from it, that people need not fear falling back into the vicious circle of federal deficits. Ninety days later, they had totally changed their tune. Strange, that. Suddenly we were told that prompt and energetic action was needed. The government promised to help the middle class and the victims of massive layoffs. With the budget, and Bill C-10 which implements that budget, we are far from achieving that.

The latest unemployment figures are disastrous. Unemployment has shot up to 7.2% in Canada, to 7.7% in Quebec and now 8.5% in our beautiful Eastern Townships region. With the endless stream of bad news from south of the border, we can anticipate significant difficulties for our local industries and their exports. Thousands of workers are losing their jobs and thousands of others unfortunately are going to share the same fate.

In this kind of situation, the government's duty was clear. It needed to provide better assistance to the unemployed, to make the unjust employment insurance system with which we are saddled more flexible. In my region, the Mouvement des chômeurs et chômeuses de l'Estrie has been calling for EI reform. The government has continued to turn a deaf ear.

And so, employment insurance will remain what it is—an unfair system that cannot be accessed by more than 50% of the people who lose their jobs, the majority of them being women. These workers lose their jobs and are declared ineligible for employment insurance because of some technical detail and they cannot quickly find other work because the economy is currently destroying more jobs than it is creating.

• (1605)

Everyone knows what we proposed: eliminate the waiting period, relax the eligibility criteria and get rid of distinctions between the regions in terms of the number of hours required to be eligible for benefits.

The Conservative government has done absolutely nothing. It has abandoned the unemployed.

This is typical of the Reform-Conservative ideology. This same ideology continues to overlook low-income families. These families, who are having increasing difficulty finding affordable housing, have also been abandoned because this government prefers to fight the poor instead of fighting poverty.

In Sherbrooke, the vacancy rate hovers between 1% and 2%, well below the equilibrium point. Instead of constructing affordable housing units with two or three bedrooms, the government prefers to invest in renovating existing homes. Only the Prime Minister, proudly wielding a nail gun in a chic Ottawa neighbourhood, seemed happy with his ill-advised decision.

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To kick-start the economy, the Conservatives have pulled the old infrastructure trick. On the substance, I fully agree: building infrastructure has a ripple effect and contributes to job creation. However, the proposed infrastructure programs require investments according to the following formula: one-third from the federal government, one-third from Quebec and one-third from the municipalities involved.

I was on Ascot's municipal council for eight years, and I can say that financial decisions are always painful. Small municipalities in rural regions already have so few resources with which to meet their needs.

Had it been possessed of some foresight, the government might have proposed a funding model consistent with each level of government's ability to pay, that is, 50% from the federal government, 35% from provincial governments and 15% from municipalities, as suggested by the Bloc Québécois.

This government seems to be making a habit of downloading problems to the Government of Quebec. In Bill C-10, the government is showing its true colours and going ahead with its proposed changes to equalization. These changes will penalize Quebec severely. According to the new formula, Quebec will lose some \$3 billion over three years. Not only is the government not investing in Quebec, but it is also denying the Quebec government the means to do so itself. Then the government will turn around and say that the fiscal imbalance has been resolved.

Unlike the Liberals, I swear that my party and I will not get down on our knees before the Conservatives.

This government's budget and budget implementation bill introduce measures that are clearly not in Quebec's best interest. We, the members of the Bloc Québécois, are not prepared to vote for a bill that deprives Quebec of billions in equalization payments, that creates a federal securities agency, and that reopens a matter that has already been resolved: women's right to equal pay for equal work.

I got into politics to defend the interests and the values of our people. I did it for justice. I did it so that Quebec could get the tools it needs to develop, to reach its full potential, and to take its place in the world.

What the government is proposing is diametrically opposed to the interests of the Quebec nation. It tramples on our values. The members of the Bloc Québécois will stand up and vote for Quebec. That is why I represent a sovereignist party.

•(1610)

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her heartfelt speech on the plight of the most vulnerable members of our society.

With respect to employment insurance, the government thought it had come up with the idea of the century—the only idea of the century—when it decided to tack five weeks of benefits onto the end of the benefit period. That is not a bad idea, but there is no way people will be convinced that the government made a real effort. In addition, there is a time limit on this measure. It will be in effect until 9-11-2010. Maybe the government chose 9-11 to symbolize the fact

that what is happening in the employment insurance system is a real disaster. In fact, that has been the case for the past decade.

In addition, the government deliberately sets the contribution rate so as to limit possible benefit increases. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the financing board the government created, which has sole authority to set contribution rates.

Ms. France Bonsant: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, whose riding is struggling with high unemployment.

During the 39th Parliament, when I was a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, we worked together with this government to create an employment insurance financing board. Its mandate, paid for by the government, was to set the premium rates pursuant to section 66 of the Employment Insurance Act. The strange thing about all this is the board exists and the Conservatives are already meddling. They began setting premium rates themselves.

That is not the only promise they made that they have not kept. They also promised, by introducing a bill, to have fixed election dates. If that were the case, we would have an election again in October 2009. Also, they promised not to appoint any senators, saying that elections would be held and that mandates would be for eight years. What did the government do? Eighteen new senators were appointed, and it is not over; I assure this House, more senators will be appointed.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that in 1996, the maximum employment insurance rate was \$604. Now it is approximately \$447. Overall, those who can benefit from it receive approximately \$355 a week.

I would like to ask my colleague if she agrees that one of the best ways to stimulate the economy would be to reduce poverty and ensure that unemployed workers can access EI?

Ms. France Bonsant: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. The Bloc Québécois asked that the two week waiting period be abolished and that more people be eligible for employment insurance. Even if you extend employment insurance by five weeks, more than 50% of workers do not even have access to it. In reality, people are not all lazy as the government is saying.

We also suggested an increase from 55% to 60% of the rate of—

An hon. member: insurability.

Ms. France Bonsant: —of insurability. Excuse me, I cannot find the words. I am overcome with emotion. It is true: to eliminate poverty, we have to provide employment insurance benefits. Many people who worked all their lives are eligible for employment insurance on a short-term basis. These people are losing their homes and watching their savings evaporate. That is why you have to have a heart to eliminate poverty. I believe that this government forgot to order this heart, because it really did not think about poverty, about women especially, about the unemployed, about all those losing their jobs.

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•(1615)

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is with some pleasure and yet frustration that I rise today to address this budget, the so-called stimulus budget, simply because on so many fundamental measures and so many fundamental points the government has missed the opportunity.

I think that in budgets, particularly those presented in times of crisis, there are a few fundamentals that we must address in order to judge the merit of the government's economic agenda.

One is around balance. One is around understanding the needs of the country and the needs of the economy in a given moment in time. Obviously we saw in the so-called fall economic update that the government continues to miss the moment and continues to miss the mark on what economists and Canadians have been asking for consistently.

Another question is around fairness. What ability does the government have to address issues of equity and issues of justice in the policies it ascribes to this country at this most critical time?

Finally, it boils down to a matter of choices. It is no different from a family putting together a budget or an individual deciding what to spend on and what not to spend on. Choices are made, choices that sometimes only have short-term, immediate consequences, but that often have very long-term consequences.

Over a succession of budgets and over various governments we have seen that the choices made have contributed to the over-extension of the economy and to the underperformance and inefficiencies that our economy continues to see, including over-polluting and not respecting pay equity rules.

In some strange irony, the government has decided to bury within a budget document the disassembling of pay equity legislation in this country. Women in this country are receiving 70 cents for every dollar that a man makes for equal work. In this moment of economic crisis, the government decided to slide in some ideological opportunism.

It also seems to speak to the idea and the concepts of the role of government. There are moments of convergence in the House, moments when the parties can come to agreement, as was the case in the apology to first nations over the residential school travesties, but while there are those moments of convergence, moments when the House actually operates well, this is a moment of divergence in the role of government at this time.

We heard the President of the United States speaking last night to the American people about the role and capacity of government in times like these to aid and assist in the Keynesian economic model, for those who follow those different theories and treaties. As the Prime Minister, like the leader of the New Democratic Party, is a trained economist, he should understand that there are moments and times for governments to step in.

This goes against some of the fundamental, formerly reformist, currently Conservative ideologies related to the role of government. One can detect that. The government does not own this budget, does not love this budget, and does not understand how it can cause so

much discussion and concern in the markets. On one day it presents a budget with a fictional surplus of some hundreds of millions of dollars. Then it describes the economy is recession-proof, as the Conservatives have described it.

In October 2008 the Prime Minister said that if Canada was going to have a recession, we would already have had one. Then we had a finance minister swing radically over to another side and describe this, within weeks, as potentially one of the greatest economic recessions, leading potentially to a depression. This does not build confidence in the Canadian system. It does not build confidence in the Conservative government.

British Columbia, and in some sense Skeena—Bulkley Valley, the place I represent, have unfortunately been on the leading edge of this recession for a number of years. I have communities like Hazelton, Fort St. James, Burns Lake and beyond that have suffered 50%, 60%, and 70% unemployment rates as the forestry sector has been virtually wiped out. Mill after mill has closed.

We have gone to the government and said that we need some structural change, even a plan, from the federal government for our manufacturing sector. Is there one available? This is not a recent phenomenon. For years and years we have seen this storm coming. A botched softwood lumber deal, an increase in the Canadian dollar, and an eventual slowdown and popping of the American housing market all led most economists and forestry experts to say that the forestry sector was in trouble and would need a plan, would need some sort of coherent strategy from government.

Instead we see a hodgepodge in a budget that lumps everything together. We are looking through this budget, trying to find the pine beetle money that has been promised to British Columbia. The best estimates from government are that 30 cents on the dollar of what has already been promised and committed in previous budgets has not gone out the door.

•(1620)

The government calls it a crisis. It acknowledges it as a crisis, sends out the press releases and makes the announcements, but does not spend the money.

This is a fundamental question of trust. Canadians, families who are suffering through days of uncertainty, through job losses and having to migrate out of their communities, turn to a government who says it promises them more. But a promise must be based on some mutual trust.

When we look at the infrastructure announcement from the government for British Columbia, when the dust settles, it is a year later. When we look at the budget numbers and see what actually was spent on the ground in the creation of real jobs, we see figures like 15¢ on the dollar, 20¢ on the dollar. This does not build up the confidence of Canadians in the government's ability to perform.

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Much has been made of employment insurance, and this is an important factor. The government's small measures on employment insurance only affect those who actually qualify, ignoring the fact that the problem lies in those who cannot qualify. We see a majority of women in the work force, for example, who do not qualify, even though they are paying into this insurance program. We will soon have to call it a scheme because a program that people pay into but cannot collect on sounds like a scheme to me.

Over the years, government has used the employment insurance fund as a slush fund, simply to transfer money from workers and employers, collected for the purposes of employment insurance, and used it for other purposes. That is unconscionable, and now we see, in times of need, the government further says, "What we will do is extend out the other end. After you have been collecting for a number of weeks, we will toss a few more weeks your way". It is putting on blinders, ignoring purposely, very cynically, the fact that most people do not even qualify.

We have lost 35,000 jobs in British Columbia in January alone. We all know, as members of Parliament, how difficult it is to work with a new employer, to bring a town council on side and bring new jobs into our constituencies. It takes a lot of effort, especially if we are hoping for good paying jobs, manufacturing jobs. This is no easy feat to even bring 1,000 in, and our province lost 35,000, gone like that.

We are looking to the place of where those will come back. We are looking for a government and industries that will start to promote the types of economies that Canadians can believe in, and the government refuses to respond to what is in front of it.

In the north there is a fantastic example of a community that struggled to survive and found innovative ways, as its forestry sector was going down. The community of Telkwa, with 3,500 people, got together with their farmers and their community and said, "Let us build a co-operative abattoir so we can get some people to work and support the farm industries because we do not want to ship to southern British Columbia. It is not good for the animals. It is not good for the planet. It is not good for anybody, certainly not for farmers, so let us build this abattoir together".

This government and the one before it put roadblock after roadblock in the way, and when we have asked for some small assistance for this, that would help sustain jobs and create more in a sustainable conscious way, the government has been nowhere to be found.

The Tsimpsean connector outside of Prince Rupert would help connect the first nation village of nearly 1,000 people to the port of Prince Rupert and to the community, thereby cutting all sorts of expenses to government itself. We need the government to step up and to pay some attention.

We had the opportunity of having the new Minister of Natural Resources in front of committee and I had a very simple question for her. After I congratulated her on her appointment, I said that I would like the minister to please define what green energy, clean energy is under this government? Her response was to turn to one of her officials with a quizzical look on her face. There was no working definition, yet when we pick up the budget, page after page refers to

green energy, clean energy. What exactly does the government mean by that? It is looking backward at technologies that Canadians have subsidized, such as the nuclear industry, to the tune of billions upon billions of dollars, with inherent risks and all sorts of ethical challenges.

Carbon capture and sequestration take up the vast majority, the lion share, of what the government is talking about as renewable. The last time I heard "coal was a renewable energy" was out of a Conservative minister's mouth. Nobody else in the world believes this.

It seems like fiction placed upon fiction, and when we look for trust, when we look for confidence, when we look for the balance of choices that every government must make, we find the government lacking. It is unsupportable and I think at the end, while the Liberals are choosing to support this budget for political expediency, philosophically this actually fits. This marriage, this convenience alliance and new coalition actually fits. They believe in these measures. The unfortunate thing is Canadians will suffer for it and our economy will become no more efficient, no more green, and no more looking to the future than it was before.

● (1625)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note, when we talk about this country of ours from coast to coast to coast, how interrelated it is in so many facets. Unfortunately, in this particular interrelationship it really is one of decimation in his riding and mine when it comes to unemployment.

We see the struggles of the folks who live in our ridings and what they suffer through day in and day out. Those folks are looking to us for hope and for us to say to them, "Here is the way forward". What we do not see in this budget is a way forward or any sense of hope for those folks who are asking us to simply show them the way and they will work toward it.

They are not asking for a hand out. They are asking for a hand up. They are saying, "Put the effort into us and we will repay it tenfold. We will put forward effort like you have never seen before". "Let us get back to work" is what they are saying. They do not want to be unemployed. This is no choice of theirs.

My question for the hon. member is this: Does he see hope in the eyes of his constituents and in this budget?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, prior to this budget being released I went on an economic tour across my region, northwest of British Columbia. That particular constituency is enormous. I spent a few weeks on the road going from town to town and putting the call out. This was not an invite only special guest public forum that was organized by the government. We saw some of those come through town and people laughed them off. At my meetings all were welcome.

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What I heard from constituent after constituent, voter after voter, family after family and town after town was that they were simply looking for willing partners. In Fort St. James people had ideas about bioenergy that they need support with. In Burns Lake people were saying that they were ready to put their kids back to work. In Terrace, Prince Rupert and Kitimat they were all suggesting options in economic possibilities. They recognized the challenge within their industries. They recognized in the fishing villages up and down the coast that more processing must be made available and they were willing to play their part, but they had been dancing alone.

It seems to me that when a government is unwilling or unable to listen to the people on the ground, unwilling to listen to the people who have their finger on the pulse of what is happening next, people lose trust and a sense of hope. That is something that we cannot afford to lose no matter how dark the days get because the northwest of British Columbia has seen some dark days and challenging times.

Yet, people come together and find strength in new ways. However, they need the role of government to be certain and determined. They need to have an essence of trust and faith in their government not to break promises and appoint 18 buddies to the Senate, not to break promises time and time again because people will hold the government to account when it finds itself in some sort of cynical position.

A budget is being presented, supported somehow by a party that may find ideological alliances, and at the end of the day, after the effects of this budget are fully seen, my greatest worry is that more people will suffer and end up further down than they are right now. It is very difficult to get them out of that position once they are there.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Questions and comments.

The member for Chambly—Borduas has the floor for a very short question.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my NDP colleague for the clarity and pertinence of his speech. I would like to ask him the following question.

Does he not find that an important segment of society is negatively affected by this budget? I am referring to women. One of the budget measures deprives women of the right to go before the courts to obtain employment equity. Another is related to the issue he raised with regard to employment insurance. We know that a large majority of women do not qualify for employment insurance benefits. However, contribution rates are frozen making it impossible to improve the system.

• (1630)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has 30 seconds to answer the question.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, that is a good question.

I cannot believe that the government would use the economic crisis as an excuse to trigger a crisis of rights. Under this government, women's rights have been completely dismantled and thrown in the trash.

I cannot believe that cabinet ministers would say that this is a good thing for women, a good thing for the country now. That is incredible. It is just politics.

I do not understand how we can have a government like this in 2009. It is incredible.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Before recognizing the next speaker, I want to read the following:

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, Status of Women; the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, Infrastructure.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are repeating the mistakes that federal governments made in the past when dealing with economic crises. I am talking about the crisis of the early 1980s and the one of the late 1990s. Each time, the federal government tried to get through the crisis by making the provinces and Quebec shoulder part of the federal responsibility for various programs, particularly social programs.

After the crisis of the late 1990s, two successive governments, the Conservative government in the early 1990s and the Liberal government beginning in 1993, adopted the same policy to withdraw their contributions to funding programs in areas like municipal infrastructure, social housing, health, education and employment insurance.

In health, for example, they introduced a rule that the government's contribution had to be proportional to the population. In Quebec, that federal government policy resulted in an imbalance that reduced funding for health by 8% compared to the early 1990s. The same thing happened with education.

Municipal infrastructure was especially devastated. From 1992-93 to 2001, the federal government stopped contributing to upgrades for municipal infrastructure. Funding did not resume until 2001. That led to a deficit in infrastructure upgrades for water systems and roads, with the result that municipalities today no longer have the means to modernize their infrastructure. A large number of municipalities have infrastructure more than 40, 50 or 60 years old, when normally it would be considered outdated after 35 or 40 years. Maintenance is required, but now the money is just not there.

According to a study on this topic, there is a real deficit of \$144 billion. That is a huge figure. If all we had to do was upgrade infrastructure, it would cost approximately \$144 billion. That is an enormous amount for municipalities.

These terrible policies are being repeated today. One of the policies adopted in the past saw the Canadian government offload its responsibilities onto the municipalities, the provinces and individuals and start paying down the debt and avoiding deficits, much to the detriment of those who were struggling.

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Take, for example, employment insurance. As others before me have said, employment insurance leaves some 55% of the unemployed out in the cold. They cannot receive benefits. It makes no sense. Over the past 12 years, \$57 billion has been siphoned off. If that is not offloading a national responsibility onto the backs of the most vulnerable, I do not know what is.

I have come back to this because not only have things not changed, but the budget that was passed and that they want to implement shows that nothing will change either.

● (1635)

This budget freezes premiums at the 1982 level, and there has never been a lower level since then. In other words, the employment insurance program will not be improved. This is in total contradiction to what has been said, particularly by the Liberals. The Conservatives have said so too, but we do not believe them any more.

We tended to believe the Liberals when they said an effort had to be made to improve access to EI and that they were committed to doing so. That is what they said when they were campaigning. They said that the burden had been borne by the unemployed for too long. They therefore made a commitment to ensure that EI was made more accessible. Then, at the first possible opportunity, they jumped into bed with the Conservatives and said they were going to pass this budget, regardless of its negative impacts on the least well off, the people the Liberal Party leader calls the most vulnerable members of our society.

It is absolutely shocking that they can say such things and then vote for the opposite.

What are they seeking to do today? They say they are investing, and they are spreading money around more or less everywhere, including for infrastructure—I acknowledge that—but they are doing nothing for the most vulnerable, as the Liberal leader calls them, nothing for them. As far as infrastructure is concerned, I too was once a municipal council member, and even when I was just an ordinary citizen, I have always been concerned about the money available to our municipalities.

Look at the situation our municipalities are being placed in now, with the money being allocated to them. Hundreds of millions of dollars in past budgets were not used. Why not? Because the municipalities do not even have the means to pay their share. Normally, that share should be 15% but it is often 25% or even 30%. For the announced programs, particularly community recreation infrastructure, the federal contribution is 50%. If the provinces—or in our case, if Quebec—cannot contribute because of prior commitments to other programs, it is obvious that the municipalities will not be able to shoulder 50% of these projects. Thus the Canadian government is sure that it will be able to keep that money in its coffers. Even if the contribution rate were 30%, most municipalities cannot manage it. Why not? Because of the phenomenon I referred to a while ago, the famous policy in the past, when the government had the idea of offloading its responsibilities onto the provinces, including Quebec, and the municipalities. The burden was so heavy that now they no longer have the means to take on implementing new projects, or even just to renovate what needs renovating.

As I have only one minute left, I will try to conclude my remarks. I would also like to talk about social housing. For nearly 12 years, previous governments cut funding for social housing, with the result that we have a serious shortage of social housing now. The government says it is reinvesting \$2 billion, but most of that money is going to renovations. That does not leave much for new units for people who have no choice but to go into social housing.

In conclusion, to the people wondering why the Bloc Québécois is voting against this budget, I say that it is clear. My colleagues spoke about other aspects of the budget. We will stand firm and not accept something that is unacceptable. To us, this budget is unacceptable.

● (1640)

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, in the budget there is really no long-term funding for a national housing policy. It is a missed opportunity.

Thousands and thousands of people are waiting for affordable housing. In Toronto alone, people have to wait at least 6 to 10 years to get affordable housing and many of them are seniors. They are waiting and they say to me that by the time they get affordable housing, they probably will not be alive. They are very worried about where they are going to live. They cannot afford to rent because the costs are going up, but their pensions are not going up.

What does the hon. member think about this so-called one-time provision of money which will not build any affordable housing in the long term? There is a complete lack of a national housing policy in this budget.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for her question. She is right to be concerned.

We believe that at least 2% of the \$2 billion for this year should be recurrent funding for building new social housing. There are problems when the vacancy rate is no more than 3%.

There are 12 municipalities in my riding, and not one of them has a vacancy rate above 3%. Two of these municipalities have a 0% vacancy rate, and the rates in the other municipalities range from 0% to 2%.

What does this mean? First, people with low incomes are forced to spend too much of their income on housing, often 50%, 60%, 70% and even 80%. This makes no sense. What does that leave them for food and clothing?

Often, these people are forced to move away from their own families to find affordable housing in other cities. Let us be clear. When I say “affordable”, I mean housing that is financially affordable, but not necessarily acceptable from a cleanliness standpoint.

The government needs to make a massive injection of money to build new social housing. My colleague is quite right.

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Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to congratulate the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas on his excellent speech.

I would like to raise two points. I represent the riding of Manicouagan, one of the largest ridings in Canada, located between the Betsiamites River and Blanc-Sablon.

I had the opportunity to serve as a municipal councillor in the City of Baie-Comeau for 14 years. Since becoming a member of this House, I have noted that the tax burden of many small municipalities is carried by the residential sector. This does not affect industrialized cities, but rather it affects the towns that do not have access to business taxes and various property taxes. These municipalities therefore depend on their citizens.

The Bloc Québécois proposed a policy to the federal government that would give money to the regions in order to help municipalities. The contribution rate would have been 50% from the federal government, 35% from the Quebec government and 15% from the municipal level.

The Conservatives have come back once again with a division of contributions into three equal parts. The municipalities in my riding will have to let that train go by, since they do not have the means to get on board.

• (1645)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas has 40 seconds to answer the question.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, you keep chipping away at my time.

I thank my colleague who is quite right. That is what I was talking about earlier and he is right to bring it up again. I can give the example of a water treatment plant in a municipality in my riding, a municipality that had to move quickly a few years ago and assume more than 50% of the cost of the water treatment plant. I can say that this municipality is on the verge of bankruptcy simply because it assumed more than 15% or 25% of the cost of the water treatment plant.

This example demonstrates that most small and medium-sized municipalities are facing incredible challenges when it comes to infrastructure.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Madam Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak to the budget.

Over the course of the last few days, I have heard a great deal of comments from all members on this side about the inadequacies of the employment insurance system, as it is now called. I prefer the old title of UIC. If people are employed, they would not need to collect it in the first place. Nonetheless, I digress.

Let me put it in more concrete terms around what it is like to be unemployed, not from the perspective of someone who is unemployed, but as someone who has helped folks with claims since 1992. I will walk members through the life of a claim.

We have heard about the statistics, the hours and the five weeks, which is nothing. We have heard all of those things, but we have not

heard about what it is like to walk all the way through it, to actually go and apply for the unemployment insurance, to go to an office that is understaffed and has fewer computer kiosks than it had before to take care of those folks, to be unable to get a piece of paper to fill it out with a pen or pencil because they want it on a computer. They tell people to go to their public library if the office is too busy or if they do not have computers.

From the get-go of walking through that front door, there is a barrier for those who may not feel they are technically literate enough to do it on a computer. There is a refusal on part of the Employment Insurance Commission to give them a piece of paper, even though the act says it is required to provide it when asked for. Too many claimants are refused and that is wrong. It should be made easier for them because it is their money.

The life of a claim really starts when people apply. However, when they apply, all it means is they have put in an application. There is no guarantee of acceptance because then they base themselves on the rules. The rules are rather prohibitive in a lot of cases. However, let us assume that people do indeed qualify. They apply. There has to be documentation. Their employers must send a record of employment, colloquially called the ROE. If the employer forgets or just does not bother because it has gone out of business, the claim is delayed. Without an ROE, people cannot get unemployment insurance, even though they qualify. They might have been working for ten years, but the fact that their employers did not do something simply delays it.

Let us assume that people do indeed qualify immediately. For the first two weeks, they do not qualify for any money because the rules say they do not get paid for those two weeks. It means they get paid for weeks three and four. However, they do not receive any money in weeks three or four because they have to fill out more paper, or do it on a computer if they are capable, or phone it in, to explain that they did not work during those weeks. This means that, if they are lucky, they get paid in week five.

Think about that. The people are unemployed. Perhaps their employer has gone bankrupt. Perhaps their employer is leaving the country, like John Deere is doing, even though it is profitable. Nonetheless, people may not have had any money since week one. They are now in week five and they receive their first cheque. What did they do in the intermediary period? What do they do from week one to week five? They are about to qualify, not someone who has a hiccup in the sense that perhaps the claim has been pushed to the side because it needs to be looked at or because there is no documentation.

Government Orders

When we look at those just from the claim phase timeline, people who are unemployed will not receive money at the very moment they need it. Instead, they will have to wait well over five weeks. I ask the government what its sense is of what those people should do for those five weeks. Sit on their hands? Look for work? We accept that they look for work. In fact, the unemployed are the best folks who look for work because they are always looking for work. Because they were working before, to suggest that they would not be a slap in the face of those workers. To qualify for unemployment insurance, they need to have a work history, which means they are able-bodied workers who really want to work. From that perspective, it is a non-starter.

On this side of the House, I have heard my colleagues ask about what we need to do to the system to enhance it. What we need to do is wipe out the two-week waiting period so when people apply for unemployment insurance, they will actually collect unemployment insurance.

● (1650)

I reiterate that it is our money, those of us who pay into the EI system. It is not taxpayer dollars. It is not collected from the tax base. It is collected from those who work for a living and contribute to an insurance program.

The Liberal government changed it from UIC to EI, but kept one letter in that system, "I" for insurance, and that is exactly what it is. I pay the premium, then when I need my insurance, I get to collect it. The problem is the government has decided to put enough rules in place that we do not get to collect it. One in three in the Niagara Peninsula, in the southern part of Ontario, are now collecting unemployment insurance. Almost two-thirds do not, yet, they paid their employment insurance premiums.

How many folks would like to pay their car insurance, have an accident and have the insurance company say, sorry, that they are in the 62%, so they do not get to collect on their car insurance because they are not in the other third? I do not think too many folks would put up with that. Yet the unemployed, at the most vulnerable point in their life, are faced with that type of restriction.

Therefore, waiving the two-week waiting period, which puts money into the pockets of those who need it at the point they need it, is where the government should have gone. Instead, the government chose to tack five weeks to the back end of a claim, if they qualified.

There is a song, and I am not sure how to sing it, and certainly I would not try in the House because I cannot carry a tune, that talks about nothing from nothing is nothing. Five weeks of nothing truly is five weeks of nothing. Ultimately, what they have gained is absolutely nothing at the tail end, and the government knows that through its own statistics.

The other side is, how to make people qualify. Reduce the hours. It is an hours based system now. We are not asking the government to go to a weeks based system. Three hundred and sixty hours would ensure that at least two-thirds, if not 70%, of those who were working would now qualify. However, that did not happen either. The government decided it would keep it at the lowest level possible so the least number of people could qualify.

Where are we with that? I talked about the claim phase. Let me tell members what they are doing in the Niagara region when it comes to the EI office. As I said earlier, I worked in conjunction with that office in a previous career since 1992. That office is about a third, if not a quarter of the size of what it used to be in 1992. At the very moment in time, when we need people in that office to service the unemployed, it has decided to restructure and the head office will now go to London, Ontario. Thank goodness it did not pick London, England, although I am surprised it did not try to go that far. At least it went to London, Ontario. The problem is that London, Ontario, in the greater southern Ontario area, now has more than 2.5 million to 3 million people in it rather than the 500,000 that our office looked after initially. Now it has four times the number of claimants to look after.

The minister said in the House earlier that its service would get better. Right now in the Niagara region people do not get money in week five. They get money in week six. Sources have said to me that if the backlog continues, they will not get money until week eight. It is reprehensible that we cannot make this system work better.

If we want a stimulus plan to put people back to work, the office has to re-hire and re-fill the positions in the EI office that they have simply let go under the government over the last number of years. We would create jobs in that particular environment, not jobs that we necessarily want because it means more unemployed, but it is something we would like to see.

As we can see, the unemployment piece is an economic driver. Don Drummond of the TD Bank said that we needed to do ensure that those who were unemployed would collect unemployment insurance because that unto itself was a stimulus. Think about that. That is a stimulus in itself. We do not have to do much else because that is a stimulus.

I would like to add one more thing from a personal perspective. We have talked about things that are missing from the budget. Let me talk about something that is in the budget, and that is equity for women. I will do this as a father.

My wife and I were blessed with a millionaire's family, as it is called. The first time we had children, we had two. We had a boy and a girl. I find it absolutely abhorrent that somehow my daughter will be treated, when it comes to equity, less than her twin brother. They were born three minutes apart. To suggest that somehow my daughter, who is now a young woman today, and her twin brother, who is a young man, both out in the workforce, would have less of an opportunity to have less pay for work of equal value than him, after nine months of living together, is abhorrent. That one aspect is enough to defeat the budget.

● (1655)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Madam Speaker, I take exception to my colleague's position regarding the budget, particularly since he decided to vote against it before he had seen or read a single thing about it. He has done a disservice to Canadians.

Government Orders

He mentioned changes to EI. In this very budget we are talking about \$1.5 billion over two years for EI and non-EI training programs. We are talking about \$500 million to extend EI benefits for workers in longer term training. We are talking about \$50 million over two years to cover severance pay. We are talking about extending EI for an additional five weeks. These are all positive measures. I do not understand how my colleague can vote against these measures. They are positive measures.

He says that he sees they are positive measures. However, he is voting against them because they are not exactly the way he would like to see them. That is where the disservice to Canadians comes in.

How can he reject such positive measures?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Madam Speaker, let me talk about severance pay, since I know a lot about severance pay and EI. It does not get people one dollar more from employment insurance to get severance. EI claws it back, dollar for dollar, which means they do not qualify, so that is a non-starter.

Let me just quote for the member what the Association of Community Colleges in Canada said about the training programs, "We do not have the places." They do not have the infrastructure in place to accept all those folks that perhaps the money would help, if the government can get it out the door fast enough. The problem is, if we look at the last program, the money did not get out the door.

If the government did get the money out the door, we would simply have folks lined up at community colleges waiting to get in. That is what the community colleges said. They said that they needed \$7.4 billion, of which they expected the federal government to come up with \$3.4 billion, to help them build the spaces to get those folks in and retrained. What they did get instead was \$300 million this year and \$200 million next year, which by my count is a shortfall of about \$2.9 billion.

It seems to me we will have people lined up outside community colleges waiting to get to those seats to be retrained. Standing and saying "we will", does not get it done.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague for Welland. He is correct, contrary to what the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell said. What our Conservative colleague must tell us is what he would do with those who are unemployed, who cannot find another job, who cannot be retrained because they cannot go to another job. Would he adopt the same measures, for example, as those he adopted for women? The conservatives have taken a right-wing stance.

Before asking my question, I will quickly remind them of the following: the Conservatives cut the national day care program; they cut assistance to women's offices—only 4 of 16 remain; they cut literacy programs. They even put in their economic statement—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would like the hon. member for Welland to have the opportunity to respond to the comments and the question.

The hon. member for Welland.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more with my colleague when it comes to daycare. Clearly that is a critical component when it comes to the issue of allowing folks to have the opportunity to look for work.

If we do not have daycare facilities, if we do not have that space for our child, how are we to get out in the marketplace to look for that job, especially if that daycare space dried up when our job dried did. If it were tied to our job, it disappears. If it were tied to our income, it disappears because we can no longer afford it.

On retraining, let me just speak to what the gentleman who owned the—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Hamilton Centre

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. I want to commend my colleague from Welland for articulating very carefully what happens to people when they are unemployed. It is important to do that because we can get caught up in the loftiness of national programs and billions of dollars this and billions of dollars that. At the end of the day, however, everything we do is about, or is supposed to be about, people in their homes, raising their families, hopefully going to work and going about trying to enjoy as much as they can the quality of life this great country can offer.

I want to address this very quickly because I suspect one of the backbenchers will want to jump up for their moment of fame and ask me to address why it is that I can come in here and, before even seeing the budget, say that I will be voting against it.

I have a great answer for that one. I spent eight years in the Ontario legislature watching the Mike Harris government dismantle all the things that were great about the province of Ontario. After one budget from Mike Harris, I did not need to read any other budgets. I did but I did not need to because I knew the destructive path that premier and that government were on and I knew the damage they would do. A lot of what is happening in Ontario is the result of those chickens coming home to roost.

Not only is it a government with the same direction, but the chief of staff to the Prime Minister of Canada just happens to be the same chief of staff that Mike Harris had.

I look at the front bench, I listen to QP, I listen to ministers talk and what do I hear? I hear a finance minister going on and on about tax cuts and corporations, and this, that and other thing. He is the same finance minister we had in Ontario. I know the damage that finance minister did.

There are other cronies from that era. Make no mistake, many of us in this House knew exactly what that budget would do, whether or not we had the details. We knew that even if there were something in there that was halfway good, we could not count on the government to implement it. We could not count on the government to keep its word. It passes laws and goes against them. It makes promises and goes against them.

Government Orders

Why, for one minute, would we believe that the government would suddenly be different? All the government had to do was get past the vote, remember, and the Liberals made sure it did. Now, whether it is implemented in a way that is acceptable or not, time will tell. I have no doubt in my mind how all of this will ultimately play out.

I want to raise a couple of issues—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1705)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The member for Hamilton Centre has the floor and there will be an opportunity for questions and comments.

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that but please do not ruin my fun. Half the fun is watching them react and getting them going because that is when we start to see the real members. I would ask that they not be shy on my account and let it rip.

There are a couple of things I want to raise that are here. The Conservatives talk about us not knowing what is in the budget, and our friends in the Liberal caucus are having fun with that drumbeat too, but I have something to tell the House. There is something called the strategic review of programs, which sounds pretty official. What it means is that over three years the government will eliminate \$1.3 billion in current money being spent in programs, but we do not know which programs.

Therefore, I say to everyone who is watching who feels that there are parts of the budget they like, that they had better keep an eye on the prize. Until we know what those cuts mean, it may be a program that affects someone who is watching or someone who knows of a family member, a business or a community that is using a program. The \$1.3 billion coming out of program spending will hurt somewhere, someone and something. We just do not know what.

Then, of course, thanks to my friend from Ottawa Centre who has been following this like a laser beam, we have almost \$10 billion that shows as revenue. Where will the revenue come from? We are not really sure. The government just tells us that it will sell things. What things? We do not know, but \$10 billion means a lot of things will be gone. What a lousy time to be selling anything, if we are talking about real estate, which is what most of it is, unless it is going to tap into the art gallery and start selling pieces of art.

I say, with respect, that members do not need to talk to me about passing a budget that members have read or not read. There are things in the budget that no one in this entire House knows in detail what will be cut.

I want to take a minute to talk about EI. I know it has been talked about by a lot of people but I am from Hamilton and we are hurting. We are losing thousands and thousands of jobs every month. When we talk about the manufacturing sector being hit hard, that is Hamilton. This hits home for me.

For every \$60 in corporate tax cuts that the government could find, it found \$1 to help the unemployed. On the five week extension, let me put on the record what Don Fraser, president of the Hamilton and District Labour Council, said about that. He said:

That extra five weeks, in the greater scheme of things, is just window dressing.

It is all window dressing because the government still has not made the fundamental changes to the system. Even if someone were to benefit from that, the total dollar value for that five weeks is \$11 million. This year the national budget is about \$258 billion, give or take a few million. The give or take is probably more than the actual increase in benefits that unemployed workers saw.

It is unfathomable in this day and age in the middle of a crisis, with people losing jobs hand over fist, and the one thing the government does not do is help those people and families survive. What an abdication of responsibility.

What is the government's rationale, one might ask reasonably. Let us ask the government. This is the minister responsible, in her own words, "We do not want to make it lucrative home and get paid for it".

• (1710)

I defy any member of the government to repeat that in front of unemployed Hamiltonians who have just been rejected for EI, who do not know how they will pay the rent or make the mortgage payment, who have birthdays and graduations coming up, but who have no money and no hope. Eleven million dollars are pitiful.

Of the 100% of people who pay EI, 32% of women and 38% of men qualify. Let me put it the other way around. We have an insurance program run by the national government, but paid for by premiums from workers and employers, not tax money. This means that 68% of the women and 62% of the men who paid into EI will not even qualify.

We are worried about people who are on EI because it is not enough to sustain them, but what about those who do not even qualify? Those people get to go on welfare after a lifetime of working.

The Conservative government had a chance to treat Canadian workers, particularly those who are or going to become unemployed, with dignity and give them hope and recognize that their lives and their challenges are important, but it failed them.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, 28,000 Canadians aged 15 to 24 lost their jobs in January. The unemployment rate has gone up to 12.7% and in the last three months alone that rate has gone up by 2.9%, which is roughly about 75,000 jobs. Many of these people do not qualify for employment insurance.

It is scandalous that the Conservative and Liberal budget has zero dollars to help cities, young people and keep child care spaces open. The budget has zero dollars to help the unemployed in Toronto. The budget is a direct cause of the painful municipal property tax increases our families are experiencing.

I know the member has had municipal experience. Could he tell us what kind of impact the budget is having on the city of Hamilton?

Government Orders

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, the budget is absolutely devastating on many fronts, not the least of which is on people who do not qualify for EI. This is moving from the human factor to the mechanics of running our communities, but if people do not qualify for EI, they will have no choice but to go on welfare. Welfare is cost shared by the municipalities and they are the order of government that can least afford or manage their way through this recession. We are not only hurting individuals, we are hurting municipalities as well.

What really hurts is that when the NDP was in the same position with the Liberals in power in a minority situation, we managed to get over \$4.5 billion in exchange for us allowing their budget to pass.

Where was the official opposition on this bill? Why did it not use that power to leverage improvements for the unemployed, to help our communities and to provide child care spaces? Why did it just give it away for nothing?

• (1715)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, I need to comment on the passion that my hon. colleague brings to this debate.

Unfortunately, we have all heard over the last few days about the layoffs at Xstrata in Sudbury. Seven hundred families are being affected. We are now trying to get the government to look at the legal binding agreement that Xstrata has with Investment Canada through the Minister of Industry.

The Employment Insurance Act will not allow individuals who have severance packages to claim EI. My colleague and I come from similar communities. How will the choice between making \$400 a week or taking a severance package affect families in his riding?

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, my friend from Sudbury is right. Our communities have a lot of similarities. In fact looking at the history of the ups and downs of our communities, I think we are on track, and Welland would be similar, as would Windsor. Certainly a lot of the older communities, and I speak of Ontario as it is what I know best, are facing the same dilemma.

What really troubles me, and this is why the passion in terms of what is happening, is that if people are not in absolute, destitute poverty before they reach out for a program, the government seems to insist that they take the last hit and get knocked down and when they have absolutely nothing, then they will be offered bare subsistence help.

We are looking for two things: help for families and workers who need it now, and so importantly, hope for the future for those workers and their families. Our children in high school, universities and colleges are terrified right now. They are looking around and saying, "Mom and dad are getting crushed. Everybody I know is getting crushed. Where do I find my place in this world? I thought Canada was one of the greatest countries in the world. Why is it that people seem to be doing so, so well and my future looks so, so bleak?"

That is what the government has given us. We had the opportunity to make a change. All Canadians can hope for now is that change comes sooner rather than later.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to the budget implementation bill, a bill that

covers a budget which really has no vision or direction. It is a budget that represents a scattergun approach to stimulating the economy, one which, at the end of the day after a considerable sum of taxpayers' money has been spent, will not have accomplished what is needed to be accomplished.

It was clear from the very beginning with the economic statement in December that this type of situation would happen, that we would be faced with a budget that simply would not do the job. We cannot expect Conservative ideology to turn around in two months. I am sorry, but that will not happen. We cannot expect that people who have built their dogmatic behaviour around the confines of neo-conservatism would use the finances of this country to provide what Canada needs.

We in the NDP knew that. That is why we formed the coalition in December. We knew very well that in January we would not get what was needed for this economy. Today we hear the Liberals say the same thing. They supported the Conservatives last week for political reasons, but today they are saying the same thing, that the budget is not adequate, that it is not enough. We knew that before. We did not have to wait until the budget was presented. We understand the Conservatives after three years in opposition to them in Parliament.

Once again we saw the mean-spiritedness of a government that would create a budget bill designed to stimulate the economy and get the economy working full of measures that have nothing to do with that, measures that really preserve the Conservative ideological base in this country, to pander to that type of support. We see that so clearly.

Bill C-10 attacks women through its assault on pay equity. It really provides nothing for women who are out of work. We do not see any improvement in EI. We do not see a more understanding nature around child care. We do not see any of that vision that people who are going to be most disenfranchised during this downturn in the economy need to have.

It tears up collective agreements. My inbox was full of emails from RCMP officers in my riding in the Northwest Territories. They said that not only did the government cut the collective agreement for all of Canada, but it also picked on the extra money that is provided as support for the RCMP in carrying out law and order in very isolated places.

I wish the Prime Minister and his cabinet would have gone into a grocery store in Inuvik before the election and looked at the prices of goods for northerners. Perhaps then they would understand what it means when there are cutbacks for the professionals who come in to take care of our communities and provide the services which we hear the Conservatives talk about so eloquently when it comes to taking credit for anything they do.

Government Orders

This budget weakens control on foreign ownership, especially Air Canada. The aviation industry is so transportable. Many of the workers can be replaced by people in other countries. The maintenance work can be done in places that will provide no benefit to our country. We need to hold on to the ownership of our aviation industry. That is not happening. This budget would actually change that.

It attacks student loan recipients. How low do we want to go? How low do we take this?

Today I am going to move away from that and talk about how the bill attacks the environment through its changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

• (1720)

I was in committee the other day when the minister took great pains to say how old this act was, that it dated from the time of our first prime minister. He seemed to have disdain for it because of its age, that this was a good reason to move on from it, to change to something different.

The fact that this law is one of the oldest on the books says to me how important the protection of Canada's waterways is. The role of a national government in protecting its waters dates well before Confederation. There were provisions in the Magna Carta protecting against the construction of fish weirs across the rivers in England. We know that from day one it is so important to look at how our rivers are being taken care of.

Despite this historic precedent as to how important the role of a national government is in protecting water systems, the government wants to eviscerate protection for Canada's waterways. Under the changes the Conservatives want to make, rivers would only be considered navigable under the sole discretion of the minister. There would be no consultation, no forewarning and no appeal, not even any limitation on the type of waterway which could be excluded.

Under these amendments, it is conceivable the minister could declare that the St. Lawrence is not a navigable waterway. What kind of power and authority are we turning over to the minister in this regard? What is this about? We would also turn over to the minister the sole discretion to determine whether any proposed work would have an impact on navigation, once again without prior consultation, no warning and no appeal. With this type of amendment, large structures, such as dams across a river, depending on where they are located and which river they are on, could be considered as not having any impact on navigation.

The amendments give the minister the authority to change at any time the criteria used in assessing whether a waterway is navigable or whether a type of work may interfere with navigation, once again without the ability of Canadians to say anything about it, without any ability to appeal these types of decisions on these waterways which so many Canadians hold sacred.

Canadians identify with their rivers. They identify with the land, the water. Nature is so important to all of us. Why would Canadians want this type of legislation put in place?

The minister said that these changes need to be made because the law has been holding up vital infrastructure projects. Can the

minister name one project that has not gone ahead because of the Navigable Waters Protection Act?

Why has the Conservative government put this odious change to the laws which protect Canada's natural environment into a budget bill? Could it be because the Conservatives know Canadians will oppose these changes and will voice strong opposition? The Conservatives sneak it in through the back door knowing that the Liberals will support it in order to get the budget passed. This is how they are working.

When the Navigable Waters Protection Act was reviewed by the transport committee in the last Parliament, the committee recommended more consultations, especially with aboriginal people, recreational users, anglers, canoeists, tourist operators, cottagers, and river advocacy groups. Only one group like that was represented in the committee discussions.

The government likes to say it is here for the people, but if it does not listen to the people, it is not here for them.

Another way the government is not listening is in its approach to stimulating the economy of the Northwest Territories. For years the people and the Government of Nunavut have been calling for a deep sea port at Iqaluit. Instead, the government is pouring \$17 million into a harbour in Pangnirtung, on top of the already existing contribution of \$8 million last year.

After the budget was released, the Premier of Nunavut asked about the funding and was told to use it or lose it, that a port in Iqaluit would take too long. Pangnirtung needs a small craft harbour and it should get an excellent one for \$25 million, but all of Nunavut needs a harbour in Iqaluit as well, and that funding could have gone toward making that a reality. Why did they not do it? The Conservatives think they know better than the people of the north.

Another example from the north is funding for an Arctic research institute.

• (1725)

I will sum up by saying that this budget does not work and we are not supporting it.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, aside from the environmental impact of changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, there is also a situation here. This is a question I have for the hon. member. That act was originally enacted in 1882. It is one of Canada's oldest pieces of legislation. There is no doubt that it needs a little modernization.

In the name of cutting red tape, to speed up the building of infrastructure projects and stimulate the economy, the government is introducing changes that will remove navigable status from thousands of waterways in Canada. It is one of the things that is not talked about that much. It is not a monetary item in the budget. I wonder if the hon. member would have a comment to make on that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Madam Speaker, I will certainly go back at it. Once again, we see here the minister taking on the authority for laying out different conditions under the law, for making changes to things that people hold very valuable without consulting them, without having a process of appeal. This is wrong.

Government Orders

This is a process that goes against our very democratic nature. It goes against the sort of strong feeling that people have for our river systems across the country. There are millions of people who use those river systems for navigation in small boats and canoes. These people have rights, too.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the member for Western Arctic for his speech. It was brilliant as always. He is a very passionate and outspoken advocate for the north. We appreciate his presence in the House. He brings the north's voice right here to the House of Commons.

I am interested in the budget implementation bill and the fact that essentially the Conservatives pulled a fast one. They tucked a whole bunch of things into the bill that Liberals obviously did not read or did not care to take the time to understand, including allowing the opportunity for more foreign takeover of Canadian companies including in transportation sector.

I know the member is the transportation critic for the NDP. My question is simple. Does he think that this allowance for more foreign takeovers is going to be helpful to Canada, helpful to the transportation sector? My second question is, why are the Liberals voting for it and allowing these takeovers to go through?

• (1730)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Madam Speaker, as I pointed out in my speech, the ability of foreign interest to take over companies like Air Canada could mean a significant amount to the workforce that works within the aviation industry. It could mean that we will be seeing offshore maintenance supplied to the aircraft. That could be accelerated through ownership by companies that come from other places.

The only hold that we have over the aviation industry right now is that we insist that the majority ownership is Canadian. In some cases that has already been circumvented by clever legal means. Nonetheless, the principle remains. The aviation industry being an industry that can utilize services from any part of the world needs to have a significant portion of the ownership reside within Canada.

Why did the Liberals support this bill? I think it goes back to the basics of what I was talking about earlier. We simply do not trust the Conservatives to deliver on their promises. We did not trust the Conservatives to come up with a budget that was a budget that could bring Canadians together. The Liberals made a choice to support the budget for the reasons that they felt it was politically expedient. They have chosen to go into an alliance with the Conservatives to put forth their somewhat considerable connections they have within their ideological grounds as well.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, as I rise to speak today, I think I owe the House a little bit of an explanation because as I speak members will hear my voice tremble and see my hands shake. The reason is simple. It is not that I am frightened; I am damn angry. I am angry at what is hidden in this document that is hurting the workers, the families and the seniors in my community.

In light of the times, we had a chance with this bill for a dawning of a new age. We could have joined with what is happening south of the border. Clearly, there is a new day dawning in that country. It is

not without some turmoil, following two right-wing Republican governments, but times are changing. The U.S. federal government, with the lead of the new Obama administration, is very clearly with its people.

That is a role our federal government should play. It should be with the Canadian people. Day to day it should show the Canadian people where government belongs in their lives. Instead, it is trying to withdraw government from their lives. Times of turmoil such as these are the most important time for government intervention in our economy. Here in Canada our government could have chosen to join that progressive view that is coming out of Washington and out of the U.S.

The government could have had provisions which aided municipalities by addressing the huge \$122 billion infrastructure deficit. The government could have recognized the need to lift municipalities in a time of crisis by paying, along with the provinces, for measures to address the significant infrastructure problems. Clearly, many municipalities simply cannot afford the one-third upfront cost of sharing in these projects.

In addition to truly missing a huge opportunity for real national leadership, Canadians once again were hit by backdoor politics. During a time of crisis, the Conservatives have moved to advance their ideology by inserting into the bill provisions that are detrimental to our environment, to women and even to students in universities.

Bill C-10, if we listened to the rhetoric, was supposed to be about stimulus. Why are there so many non-monetary provisions in this document? Why in the world are there no significant measures for seniors, the people who built our country, who are the very backbone of Canada?

I want to tell a story, which I have told before in the House but it is worthy of repeating. About two months ago, maybe three now, a man in his mid-seventies came into my office with tears in his eyes, talking about a letter he received from the government announcing a stupendous increase to his pension: 42¢ a month. That says so much about how the government and previous governments have looked at seniors as an invisible group in our country.

Today I met briefly with the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation. Its members had a brief they were trying to present to the government. Where was the government when it was asked to protect seniors from poverty? These seniors cannot even get a hearing from the minister. They have a brief that outlines measures they believe from their experience would protect seniors. For instance, when a senior's husband or wife passes away, if they have no other means but OAS and CPP, why are we condemning them to poverty? Why are we doing this as a country? There must be other ways to ensure dignity for seniors in their final years. There is no time that it is acceptable in Canada for one single senior to sleep on the streets of our country.

Government Orders

The government can give away \$60 billion in tax breaks to profitable corporations, and I stress the word “profitable”. It is not even helping the companies that are in trouble. It is giving it to the profitable corporations. By doing so it is taking billions of dollars out of the fiscal capacity of our country, money that could have gone to help our seniors and the unemployed.

It cannot even set aside a \$1 billion out of that \$60 billion for the seniors of our country, and I will tell the House why. The seniors of Canada are an invisible population. They are certainly invisible to the Conservatives. They are not flashy, like the friends of the Cadillac Conservatives that we see around here, but I guarantee that members will be hearing more from seniors and they will be hearing more from me as the seniors critic for the NDP.

● (1735)

If the House wants to hear just how removed from working people and seniors these Conservatives are just listen to the remarks of the Minister of Human Resources when she said on January 30:

We do not want to make it lucrative for them to stay home and get paid for it, not when we still have significant skill shortages in many parts of the country.

In Hamilton, this so outraged the Hamilton District Labour Council that it put out a media release calling for the minister to resign and I support that recommendation. In Hamilton, 8,000 of my friends and neighbours lost their jobs in one month alone, January, with another 17,000 last year. Households across Hamilton are reeling as our industrial sector gets hammered again and again.

Seniors on retirement incomes in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek are watching and have watched their savings disappear. They are questioning what is going to be done to protect their pensions. To show the grossness of some of the taxation policies of this country, a man came to my office who took the responsibility to bury his cousin who was single. He took that responsibility and paid for the funeral. He was not a man of means. Imagine his shock when he found that the measly death benefit from CPP was taxable. He had taken that responsibility and he had to now pay tax on it.

On the environment file the Conservatives' ideology once again rears its nasty head. They have amended Bill C-10 which, in their words, will streamline the Navigable Waters Protection Act. This should alarm anyone who is used to Conservative spin. This is code for removing many environmental safeguards at a time when Canadians want their government to move to protect the environment, not be part of its devastation.

This ideological war continues with further attacks on women's rights which follow the pattern set when they discontinued funding for the Status of Women in the last session. Now it is pay equity that is under attack.

Clearly, the budget fails students. It fails seniors. It fails the workers of Canada and that is why I will not be supporting the budget. I will do everything in my power to ensure that those people who are left behind learn about the disgraceful measures contained in the budget.

At this point my frustration level is getting to the point where I am starting to lose my place, but that never means for a minute that I will lose my passion for the workers of Hamilton, for the citizens of

Hamilton, and the people who have been sold out by the government and its new partners, the Liberals.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on his speech and ask him to talk specifically about one of the poison pills hidden in the Conservative budget, that is, the fact that they are taking away women's right to equal pay for work of equal value.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Speaker, the member for Outremont is very accurate when he calls it a poison pill. It is tucked into the budget because we know that there are some Liberals who have principles. There are some good Liberals who have fought for many years, along with the Bloc and the NDP, for human rights and for women's rights. However, by slipping this in once again it is like the last session of Parliament when forty-some times the Liberals supported aspects of the government's ideology, a plan to save their own hides. Once more the Liberals in particular are willing to join with the Conservatives to sell out women on pay equity.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, seniors tell me they do not go out because they cannot afford the bus fares. They are cutting off their cable TV because they cannot afford it. They are even thinking of cutting off their phone service because they cannot afford it. Some are on waiting lists for affordable housing that they will never get because in Toronto there is a 6 to 10 year wait list for affordable housing. These seniors are not getting any help because in the budget there is no increase to the guaranteed income supplement, no new money for the Canada pension plan, or old age security. There is nothing in it for them.

Instead, some seniors are facing property tax increases caused by unemployed workers who are unable to get employment insurance and have to go on welfare. Guess who picks up the welfare tab? Between 10% and 20% comes from municipalities which have to get it from their municipal property tax. Many of the seniors cannot afford it.

My question is for the seniors critic in the New Democratic Party. In his experience what is happening in Hamilton to seniors? What is happening to their lives because the budget does nothing for them?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Speaker, something very devastating is starting to happen across our country. The fastest-growing suicide rate in our country is that of 85-year-old males. That is because our country has let them down. This government has let them down, and it is very clear that it let down the workers of our country as well with the sellout around EI.

Government Orders

I am stymied and upset. Earlier, I was talking about my anger. I cannot for the life of me understand the Liberal Party. If the Liberals want to support this government, for goodness' sake, they should get something for it. They should get unemployment fixed. If they are going to support the Conservative government, they should at least get something for the workers of Canada.

● (1745)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, many may not know that my friend for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek is not only a former president of the Hamilton and District Labour Council, but the longest-serving president.

A lot of people make the argument that unions do not care much about the unemployed, because they do not pay dues. I ask the hon. member what we can expect from the Canadian labour movement in terms of standing up for these unemployed workers.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Madam Speaker, it is very simple. I was very proud when I was part of the Canadian labour movement because we battled Mike Harris in Ontario, and we are going to battle the Prime Minister. We are going to battle this government.

The labour movement is our partner, and it is going to be there leading right beside us.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to debate Bill C-10, Budget Implementation Act, 2009. Addressing the House is certainly an honour for me, but I cannot say I am happy to do so on this bill. It is especially appalling that the Liberals have decided to support such a flawed bill.

This bill, which was supposed to represent a new beginning for this government, instead brings it back to its roots, its Reform Party roots. It is an incredibly political measure. It really does not meet the needs of Canadians and I simply cannot support it.

The Conservatives would have Canadians believe that the NDP opposes the idea of this government helping Canadians because we do not support this budget. Nothing could be further from the truth. I cannot imagine how the Conservatives themselves can believe what they are saying when they make such scandalous statements. No sensible person would oppose something that helps our citizens. What we do oppose, however, is the way this budget, which is supposed to stimulate the economy, deceitfully targets specific political objectives: attacking women, punishing the public service, deceiving Canada's aboriginal peoples, and ignoring the needs of small communities and those in the north.

[*English*]

It is important to remember during this discussion that we are talking about all kinds of public servants. It is not just number crunchers or pencil pushers. It includes the people who defend us. It is the RCMP officers who put themselves in harm's way time and again so that we can feel safe in our country. It is the men and women of our armed forces who are being asked to perform very dangerous missions, such as the one in Afghanistan.

We are being asked to vote for a document that says to these proud Canadians who are putting their lives on the line that they do not deserve to earn a decent living. I think that is a shame.

What I find particularly troublesome is that these same Conservatives who extended the mission in Afghanistan, made so much political hay out of those who did not want to support this course for Canada, and accused any and all who did not agree with them of not supporting the troops now turn around and do this to those same troops they say they support. That is pure ignorance. I cannot agree with that.

In the name of economic stimulus, this bill ends pilot projects for EI that extend benefits. That is just crazy. At a time when it is clear to all, except the Liberals and the Conservatives who support this budget, that employment insurance needs to be more responsive, more flexible and more accessible to Canadians, they are closing the doors instead of opening them.

The government will point out that it has extended benefits by five weeks, and that should be enough, because it does not want to make it too lucrative. What the government should really be doing is ensuring that more people are able to make claims. Sure, they should extend benefits; it is a measure that will help people. However, it is of no use if people cannot collect the benefits. It is window dressing.

This government's only concern is to be seen to be doing something. What it is actually doing is basically either nothing or, worse, exacerbating the situation.

The problems with employment insurance are well known. Among the worst is that it takes money from people who will never be able to collect from the fund when they find themselves out of work. It is, in many instances, a tax on having a job. Most people do not mind paying the premiums and see the value of a collective response to unemployment. It would be easier for many more to accept if they were actually able to access those same benefits should they find themselves out of work. On EI, the government is really missing the boat.

The finance minister received a prebudget submission from Ian Lee, the director of the MBA program at the Sprott School of Business, just down the road at Carleton University. That submission told the minister in very clear language that the best available bang for the buck in terms of government spending for stimulus was employment insurance. He showed that EI had the best multiplier, a term to describe the value of a dollar spent by the government. The multiplier for EI was \$1.64. EI is the single best choice for economic stimulus, even better than infrastructure spending. Not only does EI have the best multiplier, but it also flows quickly and is not likely to find its way into a person's saving account. It goes to those communities in need and is spent in local businesses in a way that will stimulate the economy.

The government needs to see the light on EI. This budget shows no sign of that happening, and again I have to say I cannot support it.

Government Orders

In the name of economic stimulus, the government has short-changed our aboriginal communities. It has provided some money for much-needed housing and schools, but it has not responded to calls from that community for an investment in education and social infrastructure or for a repayable loan fund to help with economic development.

For economic development, they were asking for 0.5% of the \$200 billion that the government put into the credit system. The government did not deliver. It seemed like a reasonable request, given that the on-reserve population makes up 2% of our population, but the government ignored their needs.

The government does have some money for infrastructure in aboriginal communities. Housing and schools are important, and the construction of them will provide some good short-term jobs.

● (1750)

However, the lack of actual investment in education in these communities condemns today's school-age children to a subpar education, an education with a high school graduation rate far below graduation rates in other communities across our country, and a future in which they will be fighting the same battles that their parents are fighting today.

We simply have to do something about this, and we have to do it now. The Centre for the Study of Living Standards released a report in 2007 which stated that if the high school graduation rate of aboriginal people caught up with that of non-aboriginal people by the year 2017, it would mean an increase in the country's gross domestic product of \$62 billion.

It is impossible for me to conceive of a reason for the government to do anything but work with these communities and address this need. The budget does not do anything toward that, and I cannot support it.

There is so much more we could speak about, more than I could cram into this speech. I could tell the House about the 82-year-old pensioner from Elliot Lake who contacted me, furious about the way the banks are being bailed out, but the investors are left with empty accounts and nothing else. This particular man is going to have to sell his house because of the losses he took on the investments. Countless others are worried as they watch their pension funds and RRSPs underperform.

What is the government's response to these seniors? The Prime Minister told them to pick up some quick bargains while the stock market crumbled.

Those seniors built this country. We owe them much more than that. They worked hard and honestly and assumed that their hard work would be rewarded with a comfortable retirement. They deserve better from us. The bill does not address their needs.

[*Translation*]

I could talk about my constituents who live in areas where the price of gas is incredibly high, even though the price per barrel of oil has dropped to levels we have not seen in years. I could talk about how this bill will make it even harder for students to get the loans they need to pay for their education. I could give an entire speech about the problems the forest industry is facing because of the

government's inaction. I could talk about the 92-year-old woman in my riding who has to travel more than 60 kilometres to see a doctor. Many seniors have to drive six hours to see a family doctor in Toronto because there are no doctors in Elliot Lake.

● (1755)

[*English*]

It is these deficiencies that define the budget bill. It is the political attacks buried inside it that will be this bill's legacy. The government will wear that legacy, and those who support it, like the Liberals, will also be responsible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing on having delivered a speech that was dedicated to her riding, a speech that revealed, or perhaps did not reveal the values of the Liberal Party of Canada.

I know that the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing has a lot of first nations people in her riding. I would like her to tell me what this budget fails to do for the first nations people in her riding.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, in my riding, as in other aboriginal communities, there is a lot of poverty and a lack of services. The Conservative government, like the Liberal governments that preceded it, has repeatedly failed to give aboriginal communities the support they deserve.

There is a significant shortage of funds, particularly for education. It is very difficult for them to find teachers who will agree to work for less money than they would earn working in a school that is not in an aboriginal community. It is disgusting that the Liberals and the Conservatives have allowed this kind of thing to go on.

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question relating to her comments on the RCMP. This past weekend in Sudbury I had the honour to attend the tri-force gala ball. All police forces were attending, celebrating and raising funds for some great community programs.

We all know the great work that police forces do right across the country and especially in our community. I had several conversations with RCMP officers who were in attendance at this event. They were expressing their outrage at not being recognized for the work they are doing.

I would like the member to comment on how the RCMP and the police forces in her riding are feeling about these wage rollbacks.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, it is extremely important we recognize the work that not only our RCMP officers are doing, but also the work of our soldiers are doing in defending our country.

It is shameful what the government has done with regard to reneging on collective agreements. It is awful. That is not the way to support our troops and that is not the way to support our RCMP brothers and sisters.

Government Orders

The government's pay equity attack is atrocious.

None of this has to do with economic stimulus. It is an attack on workers. It is an attack on families. It is an attack on children.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have had the opportunity to see just how this budget contains certain provisions aimed at doing secretly what the Conservatives would never have the nerve to do publicly: deprive women of the right to institute legal proceedings, that is to say, to go before the courts in order to obtain equal pay for work of equal value.

I would like my hon. colleague to describe the reaction of women in her riding to the fact that the Conservatives, backed up in this by their Liberal accomplices, are preparing to take this fundamental right away from the women of Canada.

• (1800)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The women of my riding, and women all over Canada, are not pleased with what has gone on in this House this week and last with respect to pay equity.

It will soon be International Women's Day and I believe it will be a sombre celebration this year. I am very disappointed in our Liberal colleagues. Women who have fought for pay equity did not stand up, as the members for Newfoundland and Labrador did, to vote against this budget. In the meantime, the Liberals changed their minds and rose in support of it. That is really disgusting!

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I looked at the Conservative-Liberal alliance budget implementation bill and I was disappointed. I was disappointed to see little for Canadians and especially little for the citizens of communities in northwestern Ontario. I was equally saddened to see that the Leader of the Opposition had chosen to lead the Liberal Party, as his predecessor did, condemning the budget with one breath while rubber stamping it with the next.

Recently I held broad public consultations on the hoped-for budget in my riding and what was asked for is not in the budget. The budget implementation bill does not address the major issues my constituents brought up during those public consultations.

The things that were especially at the forefront of those consultations again and again, in 13 communities, by hundreds of people and dozens of organizations, were a fairer employment insurance system, support for our struggling forest industry and workers and real money for local infrastructure needs.

Employment insurance remains in desperate need of reform. Most workers who pay into it are not eligible for benefits. In Ontario almost 70% of the unemployed do not qualify even though they have paid into it. Paul Martin's Liberals gutted EI and the Conservatives have not fixed it. Nothing was done in the budget to make EI eligibility fairer. The program still maintains regional disparities, keeps the waiting period and there is still a clawback of severance pay.

Over half of the casework at my constituency office, the work of two people, is about EI problems and the failure to access EI fairly

and efficiently, and it is growing by the week. Constituents often are unable to get through to the toll-free call centre and do not get the promised callback within 48 hours, or 84 hours, or sometimes weeks. Claims are delayed, deadlines are missed, appeals stretch out for months.

The system is not serving hardworking Canadians who have paid into it, sometimes for decades. This is simply not acceptable. We need a responsive EI system that works for workers laid off through fault of their own.

Thunder Bay—Superior North relies on the forestry sector. The industry has been just about done in by years of neglect by Liberal governments and now the Conservative government. The \$170 million over two years announced for marketing is woefully and totally inadequate for the needs of this industry, which has the potential to sustain northwestern Ontario and many northern Canada communities for many years and decades.

There was no mention of loan guarantees to help companies like Thunder Bay Fine Papers, Longlac Wood Industries and others. In northwestern Ontario and across Canada mills are shutting down and many are in danger of being scrapped. When will the Minister of Industry support the mills and workers in northwestern Ontario?

The AbitibiBowater plant recently announced shutdowns, affecting 1,100 workers in Thunder Bay. Just days ago the Thunder Bay Fine Papers mill narrowly avoided being sold for scrap metal. Three hundred and twenty direct workers and thousands of indirect jobs in Thunder Bay still face an uncertain future due to the credit crisis because the Minister of Industry will not act.

The Minister of Industry has done absolutely nothing. He has one more chance to help this mill survive and the citizens of Thunder Bay are praying that he will take that chance. I have asked him repeatedly and I implore him again. When value-added mills like these are closed, the capacity and workers may be gone for good.

On municipal infrastructure, the lack of vision and strategy is problematic as well. Alleged municipal infrastructure money is a rising tide of red ink and red tape.

• (1805)

There are glaring omissions in the government's implementation of the budget in that there is no preference for Canadian products or Canadian materials, even when billions are planned in stimulus spending, allegedly. What a waste of Canadian dollars to stimulate the economies of the U.S. and China.

Government Orders

Our domestic procurement policies were in the news recently with the buy America amendment to the stimulus bill that was before the U.S. senate. The U.S.A. already had strong domestic procurement rules in place since 1933 and even stronger in the last seven years. Most other industrialized countries have similar rules.

Canada sits alone among the G7 countries in failing to defend domestic jobs and industries with our own made in Canada government buying policy. Where direct federal procurements are somewhat constrained because of NAFTA and WTO agreements, federal transfers to provinces, or states or municipalities for infrastructure are not. All of our other trading partners have already figured this out.

Conservative and Liberal governments in Canada have ignored our rights to buy Canadian. This is a consistent failure of our governments to show courage and resolve in trade negotiations and disputes and to stand up for Canada.

Canada must pass an act mandating made in Canada requirements. Let us really stimulate the Canadian economy and not just the economies of the U.S., Mexico and China. Let us get the most value from hard-earned Canadian taxpayer dollars.

Abandoning key rights in the free market makes no more sense for our industrial strategy than it does for the banking industry. These measures will just bring us in line with other countries. For example, the buy American act has mandated 60% U.S. made products in federally supported transportation projects. The new buy American amendment would take that even further.

In Canada in the last three years we have had B.C. ferries purchased from Germany, York region buses purchased from Belgium, Vancouver sky train, the Canada line, sourced from Korea, just to name a few. Instead let us stimulate Canadian shipyards like the ones in Thunder Bay, vehicle assembly plants and rail production like Bombardier. Millions in tax revenue and spinoff jobs would be created in Canada for a change.

When will the Minister of Industry of the republican party of Canada buy into Canadian industries and stick up for our Canadian workers?

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's enthusiasm. Canada is a trading nation and there are clear benefits to trade agreements. We have a number and we have just dealt with others.

All of a sudden, if the member follows through with the enthusiasm, the requirement would then be that people would start to do business in a manner which would not be prudent to the investors or the shareholders, or in the case of government procurement to the taxpayers. When one wants a Pontiac but has to get a Cadillac because it is all that is sold, it is not a good idea. Price issues become an issue and the economies of scale in the relationship.

Although I appreciate the enthusiasm, the wish to have a made in Canada requirement would tend to undermine the fundamental principles of good business sense and fair trade.

● (1810)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, I have three small businesses. I do understand business principles.

I recently read with interest Pierre Berton's book, *The National Dream*. At that time, as now, the Liberal Party of Canada wanted to have the Americans build the international dream of the CPR to the west coast.

Interestingly, at that time, the leader of the Conservative Party, Sir John A. Macdonald stood up for Canadian industry and for Canadian provinces. What a shame that we have lost the Conservative Party of Canada. I hope we can get it back some day.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I share the concern of the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North about the forest industry. Abitibi just recently closed a mill in our province and, in fact, closed it early. It could not wait to close it because it saw the opportunity for support from the government, but it did not come.

A few moments ago, the member for Outremont talked about some poison pills in this budget implementation bill. There are a lot of them there but there is no bigger poison pill to me in this budget than the actions that were taken by changing the formula for the equalization payments, such that the promises under the Atlantic accord to compensate Newfoundland and Labrador were gutted to the tune of about \$1.5 billion for that province. That is \$3,000 per capita, which for Ontario would be \$22 billion and \$14 billion for Quebec. Here we are talking about a province with the highest rate of per capita debt of any province in the country.

Would the member care to comment on the kinds of poison pills that the government is prepared to insert into this budget's measures?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, I have been to Newfoundland many times on consulting business and recreation. You are the friendliest people in Canada and among the friendliest people in the world. You are also smart enough to have figured out—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would remind the member to make his comments directly to the Speaker. I am not from Newfoundland.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, thank you for reminding me. Our friends from Newfoundland have been smart enough to figure out, as I commented a minute ago, that the great tradition of conservatism from well over a century ago has failed us. The Premier of Newfoundland has accurately identified that our Prime Minister is not a man to be trusted.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are living in historic times and in these times the work of this House has never been more important. We parliamentarians are being called upon to meet this crisis with new ideas and bold action. We should be taking inspiration from moments of unprecedented, creative and unifying action in our history. We should be meeting the challenge to act with vision and purpose, to unite our country in this period of crisis and build the Canada that we want.

Government Orders

A budget is not just a set of numbers. A budget is a vision for the future. This budget, more than any other, has to meet the test of history.

We should look to history when we think about this budget. In Nova Scotia, a historical figure we celebrate is Joseph Howe. We celebrate him because he fought against patronage and corruption. He fought for democracy and he did it with style and grace. It was the approach as well as the outcomes that mattered for Joseph Howe.

One of the most famous stories about Joe Howe involves his writings against the Halifax elite in *The Novascotian*. Howe's opponents sought to silence him once and for all by challenging him to a duel. Joe Howe accepted the duel with the full knowledge that he might lose his life, but on that day in Halifax, his opponent shot and missed. In response, Howe raised his pistol and he fired into the air. He was able to rise above the violent and vindictive mentality of his opponents, presenting an honourable alternative through his actions. I am afraid that the government has little in common with Joseph Howe.

When it became clear that the crisis in the financial sector was spilling over into the real economy, the government used the circumstances to ram through its own regressive agenda, attacking the right of women for equal pay for work of equal value, selling off public assets at a bargain basement price, attacking workers through removing their right to strike, and silencing political opponents through the gutting of public financing that keeps our democracy fair.

We all know what happened next. The nature of the economic update forced opposition parties to set aside differences and do the work that government refused to do, namely, provide a stimulus package to protect jobs, help those who have lost them and create jobs for the future.

After a convenient prorogation, the government returned with a tremendous about-face, building up a budget that secures its own job but that does little to help save the jobs of average Canadians.

Joseph Howe could prove to be a positive role model for the current government, but where else can we look for examples of a vision for a greater Canada? Baldwin and LaFontaine had a vision of French and English working together. Under Macdonald, we built a rail system to join this great land. We united to bring about the strong social safety net that defined us in the 20th century, including medicare and employment insurance.

However, what have we seen in this budget? It is the opposite of a greater vision for Canada. We see the government once again using politics of division for its own gain. Just as when it was faced with defeat by a coalition of opposition members and pitted west against east and Canada against Quebec, it has now turned its sword to the Atlantic, dramatically adjusting the equalization formula. This adversely affects provinces such as Newfoundland and Labrador, which my colleague, the member for St. John's East, addressed earlier in this House.

Questionable activity by that party in the previous election also illustrates some of the divisive strategies that now appear in the budget. Sadly, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley was forced to rise in this House to defend his

reputation because of this type of vindictive, obsessively partisan behaviour. The member, I should mention, exemplified the dignity of Joseph Howe in standing up to one of the government's previous failed budgets. For taking a stand for his province, he now sits alone, but he commands the respect of all Nova Scotians.

This divisive approach continues with this bill. Despite its cobbling together of some of the opposition's suggestions, it is fundamentally flawed. It is at odds with the approach that needs to be taken for Canada to be the great country that it is.

Our history has taught us time and time again that greatness in this country cannot be based on the type of strategies practised by the current Conservative government. For Canada to work, we must not pit one group against each other or single out particular groups or particular people for attack and derision just because we can.

● (1815)

In times like this, with a quarter of a million jobs lost in 90 days, the House should be rising to the call of history. Workers in all regions of our country are losing out and they need support to transition to the new economy, the one that is just waiting for a government with some vision, a green, new deal where we achieve prosperity and security for our planet as well as our people and our economy.

With dwindling fossil fuel supplies, sure to lead to higher energy costs for all Canadians in the future, we could have grasped this opportunity to build a less fossil fuel dependent economy, an economy that is more innovative and productive, creating new jobs throughout the country by becoming more efficient and harnessing the wind, water and solar resources that we have in abundance.

Instead, we see the government kneecapping the wind energy industry by cancelling an incentive program. We see that there is absolutely no understanding of the huge potential to save money and energy through energy efficiency programs. We see no funding for building the type of sustainable transportation infrastructure that is necessary to build a creative and knowledge-based advantage for Canada.

New energy efficient buildings are most needed in the affordable housing sector. We know this is the best way to move people off the streets and into better living conditions. It can create construction jobs, help our forestry sector and trigger innovation in green design technologies and techniques but we have a government that does not want to do this because of its ideological blinders.

There was an opportunity in the budget to provide immediate support by expanding employment insurance in all regions of the country. This has been shown to be the most effective form of stimulus because it gets money out quickly to the people who have been hurt by the recession and to the people who will spend it.

Government Orders

It is unfortunate that I have to remind the House, but employment insurance is a fund that is paid into by workers for exactly this reason, so that when times are tough they can be protected. For a government that talks so much about putting money back into the pockets of Canadians, why is it so reluctant to let workers access a fund that they built?

The government has not solved the regional inequalities that exist in this program. This could have united our country but instead we are left with divisions. When we have a minister who thinks that fixing the program makes it too lucrative, it does not give one much hope for the kind of action that is needed here.

On housing, there is plenty of language in the budget about social housing but when we look closely, there is no new money for people already on the street and there is a deliberate move to prevent anyone from confusing this with a national housing strategy. A national strategy is what has been called for by virtually every major housing and poverty advocate in the country. In the face of this housing crisis, the budget proposes tax credits for people who already own their homes to build backyard decks.

I want to return to my point about the politics of division. I regret to say that women remain a prime target in the budget, not a funding target, but a political one. The removal of a woman's right to fight for equal pay for work of equal value was one of the most audacious parts of the November economic statement. It survived the Conservatives manufactured political crisis and will pass through the House with the support of the Liberal Party. Not only that, the stimulus investments that are being made are predominantly in male dominated sectors. A woman who has a job and is not getting equal pay for equal work, well that is too bad, but if one is a woman looking for a job, the Conservative government will not help her.

The budget represents an attack and a neglect of women in Canada. This is not how we build a country. This is not how we unite people.

I have spoken about history and now I would like to speak about the future. Since the decisions we make at this pivotal time will greatly impact the future, it is worth thinking about. In a couple of years, when Canada goes to climate change conventions and other countries have prepared their economies for the transition by investing in renewables and energy efficiency, when home heating and gas prices are again heading skyward and becoming unaffordable, how will we justify the lack of action? Will we say that we are still dependent on fossil fuels but that we have created a lot of backyard decks?

In a couple of years, when other countries have used their strategic investments to reduce their rates of poverty and include a greater number of citizens in society, will we be saying that we did not really get that affordable housing stuff off the ground but we did build a lot of backyard decks? There is nothing wrong with building backyard decks but the budget will fail the test of history because it has failed to produce any vision for the type of country we want for the future. Instead, it deceives and divides.

Canadians do not deserve this. They deserve a vision for a country that will move them forward. In Canada, we move forward when we protect the vulnerable and respect minorities, whether based on

ethnicity, gender, or economic status. We move forward when we present an economic alternative to the tired economics of yesterday. The budget and the conduct of the Conservative government takes us in a very different direction, in a direction that our history has shown is quite dangerous. This is why I voted against the budget and the government.

• (1820)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Halifax made a very fine speech. She laid out very eloquently what is not in the budget, what is missing and why it is so disastrous.

The member for Halifax has the honour of having more post-secondary educational facilities in her riding than any other place in Canada. One of the nasty little poison pills that is in the budget is it brings in some new measures and rules that will be very punitive to students who access the Canada student loans program. I am sure as a new MP she is just beginning to learn what it is like when her office is flooded with students who are battling this archaic system of Canada student loans, the penalties they face and the problems they have with a system that is very inaccessible and creates huge amounts of student debt.

It is incredibly outrageous that in the budget which is supposedly there to help people, we see punitive measures that will impact students. Rather than helping students get ahead, making the system work better and making sure that loans are accessible and affordable, we are seeing more penalties being brought in.

I wonder if the member would comment on that, because I am sure it will have a big impact in her riding of Halifax.

• (1825)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, Halifax does have the highest density of students per capita of any city in Canada. With all these post-secondary institutions, I have been visited by a lot of students in the riding.

The budget is a poison pill, absolutely. I want to know, what does disclosure or non-disclosure of certain documents have to do with a budget? What does a minister's power to extract information have to do with the current financial crisis?

This is about ideology. This is not about the budget or the economy. I would point out that we could pick our poison pill; if we are talking about equalization for Newfoundland, if we are talking about getting rid of pay equity, there are lots of them and they have absolutely nothing to do with the current financial situation.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member for Halifax on such an insightful speech. It is easy to see she spent a lot of time on this budget document.

Most of us in the House know that the families, the workers and the people of the Maritimes literally thrive on community spirit. What is the hon. member hearing about the way they feel about their national government slapping them in the face with the changes to equalization?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, admittedly in Nova Scotia, we have a different situation from what has happened in Newfoundland, because apparently there has been a side deal made with our premier.

My constituents are not talking to me about what is happening with Nova Scotia on equalization, but it is a community affair and Atlantic Canada is Atlantic Canada. We are certainly very concerned about the unfair treatment that Newfoundland is receiving as a result of the budget.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was intrigued by the hon. member laying out how important it is that we build these backyard decks. I am wondering if she has done any research as to how many we will build.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, that is a very interesting question. I have not done those calculations. Perhaps I should. I will not be building a deck because I do not own a home, although perhaps I could build one for somebody who does not have a home and that person could live on it.

That is some very good research that I will look into.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin with a quote:

There was a time in this fair land when the railroad did not run
When the wild majestic mountains stood alone against the sun
Long before the white man and long before the wheel
When the green dark forest was too silent to be real.

I thank Gordon Lightfoot for those words.

For some members in the House who are city dwellers, they may not know that that kind of wild Canadian land still exists in this country. In my part of Canada, in northwestern Ontario for centuries the waterways were how the fur traders got around. In 1803, people in Fort Frances, named after Lady Frances, were trading using the waterways. Now in this budget implementation bill our free and I would say ancient responsibilities to our navigable waterways are going to disappear.

Amendments will be made to the Navigable Waters Protection Act to streamline approval processes, the government says, to give more authority to the minister to allow construction without further environmental assessments. It will exclude work on certain classes of navigable waters from the approval process.

The act was first implemented in 1882 and there is no doubt that it needs a little modernization, but—

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I regret that I must interrupt the hon. member. He will have eight minutes left in his speech when the House resumes.

Adjournment Proceedings

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last Thursday I rose in the House during question period and I asked a question which focused on the substance and on the seriousness of implementing key recommendations from the United Nations periodic peer review which was conducted last week in Geneva. This review included recommendations from some of our very close friends and allies, including the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland.

Criticisms from the peer review included: Canada's failure to address violence against aboriginal women; the failure to uphold CEDAW obligations; the lack of effective remedies for particular rights violations, such as those in the area of economic and social rights of the most vulnerable; Canada's failure to support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially in light of an opposition motion supporting its full implementation; and the fact that Canada has no strategy to eliminate poverty and homelessness, just to name a few.

My question focused on a number of these serious criticisms and asked about the government's plan to address them. In his answer, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development did not address the substance of my question and provided the House with information and quoted a reputable international rights lawyer from Winnipeg, David Matas, I think out of context.

In an email Mr. Matas sent to me on Friday, the day following the question, he points out that the minister “plays on an ambiguity. He takes something I said, about Canada's presentation, out of context. I was talking about form not substance. The drift of his answer suggests I was talking about substance and not form”.

In his comments, Mr. Matas continues in saying that the best one can say of the minister is that “he uttered a non sequitur, reacting to a question about how bad Canada is in substance by answering that Canada is in good form. It is illogical to respond to a charge of weaknesses in the Canadian human rights record by saying that Canada has presented a good report on those weaknesses...it looks to me that he has fallen into verbal game playing, undercutting at home what Canada is doing abroad. In Geneva, Canada is taking the UPR seriously, setting an example in the hope that other countries will also take the UPR seriously. This effort is undermined when Canada at home does not also take the UPR seriously but instead plays the kind of verbal games in which the minister has indulged”.

The government has still failed to adequately respond and give the House and indeed Canadians the answer they were looking for. Will the government finally stand and address the seriousness of this matter and let us know how it will address these recommendations, or will it continue to ignore the recommendations from international bodies and continue to embarrass Canada on the world stage?

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1835)

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the question from the member for Winnipeg South Centre. I would like to add my regards to Mr. David Matas, a man I have met and respect greatly.

Our government has a strong record of supporting and advancing aboriginal rights at home and abroad. As a leader in human rights, we take our commitments in this respect extremely seriously.

In fact, we recently passed Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act, critical legislation which underscores this government's strong commitment to protecting the human rights of all Canadians.

What is more, we have reintroduced in this Parliament the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act. This bill would finally resolve the intolerable and inexcusable legislative gap of on reserve matrimonial real property.

Our government recognizes the vital place that aboriginal women hold as the emotional and spiritual centre of their families. We also recognize that to support aboriginal women is to bolster the entire community. However, there are some very real challenges facing aboriginal people both on and off reserve. It is often women and children who are the most affected and the most vulnerable. That is why we are focused on making progress on quality of life issues such as education, drinking water, health and housing.

Budget 2009 provides \$1.4 billion over two years for specific initiatives aimed at improving the well-being and prosperity of aboriginal people in Canada.

Aboriginal families and communities will benefit from almost \$1 billion in immediate investment toward urgent infrastructure needs on reserves like housing construction and remediation, school construction and improved access to clean drinking water.

Budget 2009 builds on the progress we have made together over the last couple of years, progress that is the result of genuine collaboration between aboriginal women's groups and the federal government. The greatest asset we have going forward is the determination and drive of aboriginal people themselves.

Hon. Anita Neville: Madam Speaker, I too was part of the discussions that saw Bill C-21 pass, which resulted in the rescinding of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. It was a long journey that required many discussions and many amendments, and I was pleased to be part of it.

I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's comments. However, it is vitally important that the government address these responses on the international stage and respond to the CEDAW criticisms that it has one year to respond to. I urge the parliamentary secretary to urge his minister and those he works with to ratify the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Nothing would give aboriginal people more hope than to see the government ratify that agreement.

The government is one of four countries that has chosen not to ratify it, and it has taken the attitude that because it did not ratify it, it does not have to honour it. I urge him to urge his minister to ratify that agreement.

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, with regard to Bill C-21, yes, it was a long journey. It did have the effect of amending the Canadian Human Rights Act and it does bring full legal access to the Canadian Human Rights Act on reserves. This marks a turning point in the relationship between first nations and the Government of Canada.

This legislation and other measures we have talked about clearly demonstrate the Government of Canada's strong commitment to protecting the human rights of all aboriginal people in Canada.

• (1840)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on January 29 I asked a question in the House and I did not receive a satisfactory answer from the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I asked whether the Conservative government was actually getting money out the door for crucial infrastructure projects across the country or simply conducting serial photo opportunities. Specifically, the minister could not confirm for me whether the federal government's \$50 million contribution to the Ottawa Congress Centre had been delivered, although there had been three announcements, including one from the Prime Minister.

In addition to that, the minister gave a cynical and misleading response. He stated, "Mr. Speaker, this government was very pleased to support the Canada Line that goes through guess whose riding". I would hope that the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities knows his geography well enough to know that the Canada Line does not go through this member's riding of Vancouver Quadra. It actually begins in a Conservative member's riding in Richmond, and it was a project that was approved and funded by the previous Liberal government.

In fact the Evergreen Line, for which the Conservative government recently announced funding while not putting it in the budget, strangely enough, is primarily in the riding of the member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, a Conservative member.

For three years the government has failed to act in good faith for all Canadians, putting partisan advantage ahead of principle, and it is doing it again. Members will remember the broken promise around income trusts, which cost seniors billions; the Cadman bribery scandal; the RCMP raid for cheating on election advertising; the broken fixed-election-date law; and the massive cynical Senate appointments. That is why the Liberals have put the Prime Minister on probation.

For three years the Prime Minister has failed Canadians through his mismanagement of the economy of the country, spent wildly to try to buy his way to a majority government when economic times were good, drained the structural surplus left to him by the Liberals by cutting the GST, denied Canada would be impacted by this global crisis, failed to act, and tabled a fudge-it budget in November showing surpluses on which there had to be an about-face within a couple of weeks. That is why the Liberals are putting the government on probation.

The Liberals recognize the urgency of moving forward on behalf of Canadians whose jobs are lost or at risk. That is why the Liberals have supported this budget, flawed as it is. Now the Conservative government actually has a chance to redeem itself. What I would contend is that the Conservative government has to change to honesty, competence and non-partisan government for all Canadians, which it has not been demonstrating.

The Conservatives have two options now. One is to exploit this crisis and the misery of Canadians who are losing their jobs, their companies, their pensions and their homes with a program of partisan photo opportunities, announcing and reannouncing cynically their building Canada fund projects while not cutting cheques. The second option is for Conservatives to redeem themselves by stewarding Canadians' tax dollars into investments with openness, sincerity and non-partisanship.

I would first ask the minister to tell us whether a cheque has been cut for, and delivered to, the Ottawa Congress Centre; second, to table a list of all building Canada fund projects that have been announced, and the dates they were announced; and third—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would ask the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to respond in his four minutes.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to answer the question. I never got the opportunity to hear the question, of course, because the member ran out of time.

Our Conservative government is committed to working with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners to get projects moving and to provide a much-needed shot in the arm to our economy. All Canadians recognize this and this government, with this Prime Minister, is moving forward to get the job done for Canadians. Canada's Minister of Finance outlined our economic action plan to address the current global economic uncertainty. Our plan will indeed stimulate economic growth, create jobs and support Canadian families, which all of us in this place want to do.

In budget 2009, we announced almost \$12 billion in new infrastructure spending to stimulate the economy. This includes a \$4 billion 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 to help the students, \$1 billion to create a new green infrastructure fund to help Canadians for generations to come, and \$500 million to support construction of new community recreational facilities, which we have been asked for time and time again.

Adjournment Proceedings

We will be accelerating seven years worth of provincial/territorial base funding of \$25 million annually to each and every province and territory over the next two years. That is great news. The redevelopment of the Ottawa Congress Centre is just one of the many projects that are now underway. This \$160 million project was announced by Canada's transport and infrastructure minister on September 5, 2008. It is great news for the people of Ottawa. It has the potential to create hundreds if not thousands of jobs, in addition to providing long-term benefits for the National Capital Region. Preliminary road work on Colonel By Drive is complete. Demolition work is already underway and construction of the new centre will start this spring with weather permitting.

Recently, Canada's transport minister asked the man appointed by Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty to head up this project if he was satisfied with all of the support he was getting from the federal government. Madam Speaker, do you know what he said? He said yes, he is satisfied with what this government is doing.

As part of this government's commitment to getting shovels in the ground faster, we are also streamlining the approval process. We are cutting the useless red tape that surrounded Liberal administrations before. We are cutting other impediments in order to get projects moving and to stimulate the economy to create jobs and a better quality of life for Canadians. This Conservative government is getting that job done.

We are also delivering for municipalities across the country. This is what the mayor of Stratford and chair of the southwest economic alliance had to say about our recent investments:

We put on the table our priorities: an economic development agency to drive economic growth and modernization; accelerated investments in our infrastructure to create jobs and lay the foundations for a more competitive economy; and investments in skills so that we would retrain to retain our workers. Today I can say that the government has delivered.

That is right. This Conservative government continues to deliver for Canadians.

• (1845)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, I am disappointed that the member opposite has come with a full-blown message box and is apparently not responding at all to the concerns I am raising. He talks about announcing funding. That is the very problem I am pointing at. The Ottawa Congress Centre was announced in 2006, 2007 and 2008, before a single dollar ever flowed.

I will repeat my questions about accountability to the member opposite. Will the minister table a list of all building Canada fund projects that have been announced, the dates they were announced, all of those dates if there were multiple announcements, and the dollars that have actually been delivered?

Adjournment Proceedings

Second, will the minister commit to this House that the ridings receiving the funds will be proportional to the seats in this House and not skewed to Conservative ridings as they have been so far, with 78% of the dollars going to Conservative ridings—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Brian Jean: Balderdash Madam Speaker. First of all, businesses pay on receipt of invoices. All of the invoices that this government has received are within 30 days overdue. In other words, there is nothing past due over 30 days. That is normal business practice. This government actually pays when we receive a bill, not

before, because we have to answer to the people. I would like to know what this member has against building the Ottawa Congress Centre and what she has against the people of Ottawa?

● (1850)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:50 p.m.)

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