



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Wednesday, September 16, 2009**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

The House met at 2 p.m.

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*Prayers*

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• (1405)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### NORMAN BORLAUG

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize the contribution of a great man with whom I worked during my time at the Canadian International Development Agency.

Dr. Norman Borlaug spent his lifetime working to improve the conditions of those less fortunate. His Nobel Prize winning high-yielding wheat research led to the green revolution, which has saved over one billion lives. He continued his research into a rust-resistant wheat variety for Africa well into his nineties.

Canadians can be proud of our record of taking a principled stand when it comes to international development and feeding the world's hungry.

Today Canada is the fourth largest contributor to the World Food Programme. Last year alone we helped feed an estimated 102 million people in over 75 countries.

This week the world lost a tremendous humanitarian in Dr. Norman Borlaug. Our thoughts are with his family.

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### BILL HARRIS

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the residents of Richmond Hill, I rise today to give tribute to my friend and respected community leader, Bill Harris, who passed away on July 8.

I have known Bill for 25 years and will always remember his kindness and gentle nature. His smile could light up a room and he always looked on the positive side of all situations.

Bill was known as a community man, a family man and a dedicated ambassador for Richmond Hill.

As a long-time member of the Richmond Hill Rotary Club he worked with dozens of exchange students, was a leading force for the annual Terry Fox run and was recognized as Rotarian of the year twice. He truly exemplified the Rotary motto "Service Above Self".

As a member of the horticultural society he was the founder and catalyst for the millennium garden.

Bill believed strongly that a community is only as good as those who volunteer their time and talents to ensure that the less fortunate are provided with a helping hand.

God made special people like him to always be there for us, to see us through. In the words of Peter Newman, he will be known as our "prince".

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### QUEBEC ARTISTS

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Edem Awumey, whose second novel, *Les Pieds sales*, has been shortlisted for the prestigious Goncourt literary award. This native of Gatineau, of Togolese origin, joins other Quebecers in the literary awards race.

I would also like to honour Dany Laferrière, whose narrative *L'Énigme du retour* is on the short list for the Medis, Wepler and Femina awards in the French novel category. Quebecker Neil Bissoondath was nominated for the Femina award in the category of foreign novels for *Cartes postales de l'enfer. Le Ciel de City Bay* by Catherine Mavrikakis was also nominated for Wepler and Femina awards.

I must also mention the awards handed out yesterday to several author-composers by the Fondation de la Société professionnelle des auteurs et des compositeurs du Québec. Congratulations go out to Clémence DesRochers, who received the Sylvain Lelivère award in honour of her exceptional career, and to the other winners: Fred Pellerin, Jim Corcoran, Daniel Lavoie and Renée Claude.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I congratulate all of these Quebec artists who are making us proud here and around the world.

*Statements by Members*

•(1410)  
[English]

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has made significant changes to the language used by DFAIT, changes that echo adjustments the Conservatives made to the Status of Women when they had the audacity to remove equality from that mandate.

Changes include the removal of “humanitarian” from each reference to “international humanitarian law”. The minister also replaced the term “gender equality” with “equality of men and women”, and switched focus from justice for victims of sexual violence to prevention of sexual violence.

According to *Embassy* magazine, these “language changes...water down many of the very international human rights obligations Canada once fought to have adopted in conventions at the United Nations”.

The minister has made it clear that this reflects policy changes in some cases and claims it is “just semantics” in others.

The language changes at DFAIT, like the ones made at Status of Women Canada, are an attempt to control the message for partisan reasons.

These changes impact human rights and are an embarrassment to Canada on the international stage.

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**CANADA LINE**

**Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on August 17, I was privileged to participate in the opening of the Canada Line, a new rapid transit line that links Richmond to the Vancouver International Airport and the City of Vancouver. It connects commuters from Richmond to downtown Vancouver in just 25 minutes.

The Canadian government's \$450 million investment in this \$2 billion project will return large dividends.

The people employed to construct the Canada Line worked hard and the project was finished ahead of schedule and on budget. The Canada Line is expected to serve 100,000 riders per day and this number will certainly grow in the years to come. It is a critical piece of the rapid transit infrastructure in the metro Vancouver region.

Our government was pleased to partner with the Government of B.C., the Vancouver Airport Authority and TransLink to finish this great engineering project.

I invite all members, Canadians and visitors from all around the world to come to Richmond in February 2010 to ride the Canada Line, watch the Olympics and enjoy Richmond.

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**RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS**

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a long-serving and dedicated individual in the riding of Random—Burin—St. George's. After

working for 36 years as town superintendent in Harbour Breton, Harold Brace has retired.

He was only the second person to serve in that capacity in the town's history. From the beginning he took his job very seriously. To quote Mayor Don Stewart, “Mr. Brace is a gentleman who knew his job and was a great resource to the town”.

Responsible for day-to-day operations, Mr. Brace was required from time to time to make and carry out decisions that placed him in conflict with residents, but he always exercised sound judgment in carrying out his responsibilities. Whether it was enforcing the town's bylaws or representing the town at various meetings, Mr. Brace was indeed a gentleman and was well respected.

While Mr. Brace's career with the town has ended, he said he will never leave Harbour Breton and has offered to help the new superintendent, Palmer Strowbridge, adjust to his job.

I invite all members of the House of Commons to join me in recognizing Harold Brace of Harbour Breton on the south coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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**NIAGARA WINE FESTIVAL**

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is good to see you back.

Every September, those of us in the Niagara region celebrate the grape harvest with the Niagara Wine Festival in St. Catharines. This Friday evening, in my hometown and in my riding, the 58th year of the festival will commence and it will attract hundreds of thousands of visitors who will participate in over 100 events.

The festival is a chance for Niagara to put its best foot forward and show the world what the spirit and ingenuity of our community can achieve. The grape growers and vintners of Niagara have put the region on the map as a premier international tourist destination, producing some of the finest wines in Canada and in the world.

This is an industry that all of Niagara and the rest of the country can be proud of. I call upon my colleagues in this House to join me in wishing them the best of luck as this year's celebration begins this weekend.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**AGRICULTURE**

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Quebec consumers could find an uninvited guest on their plates next summer, with the introduction of a new, highly genetically modified corn called SmartStax. Health Canada has authorized this GMO without conducting any analyses.

*Statements by Members***H1N1 VIRUS**

Yet eight new genes were grafted onto this GMO, including two that produce herbicides and six that produce insecticides. The government has shown complacency on this issue by putting financial considerations before the health of the public.

For years, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for mandatory labelling of GMOs and for more in-depth studies on these products. Here is one more file where the Liberals and Conservatives are in lockstep with the multinationals.

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•(1415)

**LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY**

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for weeks now, people in my riding have been asking me some very good questions: why does the opposition leader want an election at all costs? Does he realize that we are going through an economic crisis?

I think that his time abroad once again put him out of touch with our reality. He does not even realize that his actions threaten Canada's economic recovery. Like the grasshopper, he sang and played all summer. The south of France and the beaches of Bermuda are a long way away from the reality of the ongoing crisis in Canada. His member for Papineau was absolutely right when he said that his leader-to-be did not have "the wisdom required". He also said that "Canadians do not want elections".

I have no idea what kind of wine they served him in France or what kind of cocktails he drank in Bermuda, but maybe he should switch drinks and switch out his political lieutenant for Quebec.

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[*English*]

**GREYHOUND CANADA**

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with the recent announcement that Greyhound Canada would be cutting its services to rural areas, many towns and cities have been let down.

When these changes come into effect, residents in rural communities will be left with limited or non-existent options for travel. For thousands of communities between Sault Ste. Marie and Winnipeg, Greyhound is indeed their lifeline to the world.

By not working with Greyhound, by not working with the provinces and local communities to find solutions, this Reform-Conservative government has let rural Canadians down. Where is the Prime Minister? Why is he not sitting down with Greyhound, the municipalities and the provinces to deal with this very troubling issue?

This is not an issue that requires years of study or philosophical thought. We are talking about people not being able to travel down the highway in order to get medical checkups or prescriptions.

Immediate action is required. It is clear that the Prime Minister is not willing to stand up for rural Canadians. Canadians deserve better. Canada can do better.

**Mr. Robert Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it has come to my attention that the Leader of the Opposition used taxpayers' dollars to send an offensive flyer to my constituents in Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

These municipalities and first nations have worked hard with federal and provincial officials to be some of the most prepared in our country. With one flyer, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore seemed intent to undermine all of their hard work.

This flyer represents the worst kind of politics. He used the image of a first nations child to create fear and anxiety among my constituents over the H1N1 virus.

First, it was denigrating the Canadian flag, now fearmongering in the first nations communities. How low will the Leader of the Opposition go to achieve power?

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**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues back in this place after a long summer of catching up with constituents in my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River, and I am certain they heard the same message from their constituents that I heard from mine. The message was: "Go back to Ottawa, help fix the economy and make Parliament work".

In the riding I represent the forestry sector directly and indirectly employs thousands upon thousands of people, but our communities continue to suffer severe job losses. Hundreds of families are slipping into poverty and many more are facing an uncertain future.

To honour the wishes of my constituents, I am inviting each member with forestry dependent communities in his or her riding to join me in establishing an all-party forestry caucus.

Together we can work to raise awareness about the problems of that sector, develop new working relationships with each other, with industry and workers, and prove once and for all that members of this Parliament can work together in the interests of all Canadians.

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•(1420)

**VICTIMS OF CRIME**

**Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is doing what the Liberals failed to do. We are reaching out to victims and giving criminals what victims have been demanding for years: serious time that fits the crime.

In fact, during the Liberal reign, a review of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act recommended the creation of a victims ombudsman. Yet, the Liberals did nothing.

### Oral Questions

When we formed government, we made it a priority to establish the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, and we continue to support this important organization. In addition, we established a four year \$52 million boost to programs, services and funding for victims.

This government is committed to ensuring that victims have a greater voice in the criminal justice system. Victims and their families expect and deserve no less.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### PAULINE PICARD

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on June 29, 2009, our colleague Pauline Picard passed away after battling cancer, a terrible disease that has taken far too many. Having retired in October 2008, she found her dream of freedom and a new life suddenly cut short.

She was the first woman from Drummondville to be elected to Parliament. She truly loved the work of Parliament. She loved people. She loved serving people and defending their interests. Pauline was always passionate. She loved seeing a job well done, a job done right. She was also passionate about Quebec. A committed sovereigntist, she wanted to bequeath a country to her daughters and her granddaughter.

She often talked to us about her life and happy times, particularly her Sunday suppers with her daughters, Katia and Marie-Ève, and her granddaughter, Maèva, whom she adored. Now we grieve their loss, and we offer them our deepest sympathies.

Pauline Picard will be remembered as a genuine, strong, accessible and engaged woman who was fully committed to serving her fellow Quebecers.

Adieu, Pauline, and thank you for everything.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### PRIME MINISTER

**Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, he called Canada a second tier socialist state. Now he wants to rule this country with absolute power. After the most disastrous fiscal management in Canadian history, the Prime Minister is doing whatever it takes to hold on, even entering into a coalition with groups he brands as “separatists” and “socialists”.

The Prime Minister still claims he is against raising taxes, but now his coalition is introducing one of the largest tax increases ever: \$13 billion, paid for by middle class families and small business owners.

The Prime Minister was against raising taxes, but then he was for it. He was against deficits, but now he has the largest one ever. He was against Senate appointments, but now he has appointed more senators this year than anyone since Confederation.

Canadians are confused. Can we believe anything he tells us? I am here to tell the Prime Minister, the summer is over; it is time to put away the flip-flops.

#### LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues to prove why Canadians should not trust him.

He says one thing in public and another in private. He says one thing in the west and the exact opposite in the east.

His most recent act of doublespeak was with regard to the Ontario government's decision to harmonize its sales tax with the GST. In early September the Leader of the Opposition said, “—the thing that concerns us is that the [Prime Minister]...basically pushed sales tax harmonization across the country”. Yet yesterday, we learned that his office has quietly told Ontario's premier that he is okay with the plan.

Sadly, this has become a pattern. In B.C. he said that there should be no money for the auto sector, but in Ontario he said the exact opposite.

What are the Leader of the Opposition's views on anything? That depends on the time zone and whether he is behind closed doors or not. It is becoming clearer by the day that the Leader of the Opposition is not in it for Canadians. He is in it for himself.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

#### CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has concluded his 42-minute photo op with President Obama. Canadian workers and businesses were disappointed when the Prime Minister refused to make any progress on the serious challenge of buy America.

Sitting with the president, he dismissed buy America as a “small irritant”. Tell that to workers who are losing their jobs to protectionism. He boasted he had seven meetings with the president and yet he has accomplished absolutely nothing.

Why should Canadians trust a Prime Minister who is worried more about saving his own job than their jobs?

● (1425)

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to read this:

[The] Prime Minister...has brought this up with me every single time we've met. So he's been on the job—

But in addition, we're pursuing, on a bilateral track, efforts to make sure that these sources of tension diminish.

Who is crediting the Prime Minister for being on the job every single time on this issue? Those comments were made today by the President of the United States.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Beauséjour has the floor.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, not only was the Prime Minister's trip to Washington today a failure, but now the OECD is projecting that Canada's unemployment rate could reach 10% next year.

Our country needs a government that believes it has a constructive role to play in getting Canada out of this recession.

The Conservatives do not believe it is their responsibility to protect workers, women and minorities in Canada. They are only worried about their own jobs.

*[Disturbance in the gallery]*

*[English]*

**The Speaker:** Order. I think perhaps we had better hear the question again. The minister may have forgotten it. I have.

The hon. member for Beauséjour has the floor.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Speaker, not only was the Prime Minister's trip to Washington today a failure, the OECD is projecting that Canada's unemployment rate could reach 10% next year.

Our country needs a government that believes it has a constructive role to play in getting Canada out of this recession and preparing for the future.

The Conservatives do not believe it is their responsibility to protect workers, women and minorities in Canada.

They are only worried about their own jobs. How can Canadians place their trust in this government?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of International Trade.

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that my friend might ask a better question when he spoke the second time, after the disturbance, but he did not.

In fact, it was the President of the United States, Mr. Obama, who said today that our Prime Minister Harper has made the situation created by the Buy American Act a priority. Furthermore, it was the President who agreed that we may have a solution. We will continue to work on a solution.

•(1430)

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of International Trade is well aware that he cannot name a member in either an answer or a question. I hope he will not make that mistake again.

The hon. member for Beauséjour.

*[English]***EMPLOYMENT**

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today the OECD announced that Canada's unemployment rate is expected to rise to 10% next year. The Royal Bank is making the same prediction.

Now, more than ever, Canada needs a government that believes it must take a positive active role to dig out of the recession and to build for the future. The government does not believe it is its responsibility to protect Canadian workers, women and minorities.

How can Canadians trust a government that worries more about protecting its own jobs than those of Canadian workers?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite quotes selectively from the OECD report. The OECD said that the Canadian unemployment rate would remain much better than that in the United States. That is the first time that has happened in a generation.

The OECD also said that Canada's fiscal stimulus package should have a relatively large effect in stemming job losses.

The question the opposition Liberals need to ask themselves is why they are voting against the economic stimulus package. Why are they doing that when Canadians need it and when Canadians need the job help? Why are the Liberals voting against those things?

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the budget, the Minister of Finance announced to Canadians that jobs would be created by May 27.

In June, the Prime Minister announced to Canadians that 80% of the stimulus programs had created jobs.

Is the minister able to tell the House and Canadians today how many jobs have really been created by the infrastructure stimulus fund?

*[English]*

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to Canadians in the process of preparing our third economic report to Canadians which will be ready soon.

I can say that the job creation and the job maintenance figures are even better than we had in the economic action plan.

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**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we know the minister and his fellow cabinet ministers have been too busy dividing up the pork to keep track but we have examined hundreds of announced projects across the country. As of the beginning of September, only 12% of the main infrastructure fund is creating any jobs at all. That is an 88% failure rate.

The Prime Minister misled Canadians. The Minister of Finance misled Canadians. The infrastructure minister responsible has failed them.

*Oral Questions*

Would anyone over there care to explain why they are letting down hundreds of thousands of unemployed Canadians and the Canadian economy so badly?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is working hard. We have put politics aside.

We are working hard with Dalton McGuinty's Liberal Government of Ontario. We are working with Danny Williams in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are working with Jean Charest's Liberals in Quebec. In every part of this country we are working in partnership with 3,700 different municipalities. We are working hard with the 13 provincial and territorial governments.

We are getting the job done, and all the carping from the member opposite will not change the jobs, hope and opportunities that are being created in every part of this country.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has introduced a bill to abolish parole after one-sixth of the sentence has been served, including for white-collar criminals. This bill could have been passed in a single day, but for crassly partisan reasons, the Conservative government decided otherwise. If our bill were passed, it would apply immediately to Earl Jones and Vincent Lacroix, if they are found guilty.

How does the Conservative government explain its refusal to proceed with a bill that would have actual, immediate effects on the fight against white-collar crime?

• (1435)

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the Bloc has decided to add justice to its agenda, that is all to the good. It is better late than never because the Bloc has constantly blocked our initiatives. Now it emerges, senses the simmering public discontent, and shows up with bills it has quickly cobbled together. The parole system cannot be reformed in two days, and the Bloc knows it.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if someone should sense the simmering public discontent, it is the party opposite. We have been proposing this since 2007. The minister found the bill complex. A bill with two clauses is too complex for the minister. It is unbelievable.

What is he waiting for to give the go-ahead to a bill that would have an immediate impact, when they have no plans for abolishing parole after one-sixth of the sentence has been served? What are the Conservatives waiting for? The Liberals and the NDP are in favour. Now—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of Public Works.

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the parole system needs to be reformed. Our government is working on it. They have this magical way of thinking across the aisle and cannot even understand that this comes under Public Safety. The excellent announcement we made yesterday, which is in line with what victims want, was to

establish minimum sentences to deal firmly with sordid crimes and not allow people to serve their sentences in the comfort of their homes. In these cases, they do not even serve one-sixth of their sentence. It is a disgrace. This is grandstanding.

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, those who commit white collar fraud are manipulative and commit fraud on a grand scale because they think they can get away with it by making use of tax havens to shelter the proceeds of their fraud. Rather than put forward specific solutions, the government tells us that it is going to study the problem.

Does the government realize that by signing free trade agreements with tax havens such as Panama that it is having a direct hand in protecting those who commit fraud?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, allow me to point out that this government is making real progress in attempting to eliminate these very tax havens. It is not illegal to have a bank account in a foreign country. What is not right is the failure to declare amounts earned on this money for taxation in Canada. We are continuing to work on this. I would just point out that, recently, in the case of UBS among others, the matter has become so public that people know they will be found out and have begun making voluntary disclosures.

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on the subject of progress, we will see how quickly progress is made. The Minister of National Revenue claims that the voluntary disclosure program is effective against the tax havens as it has made it possible to recover \$4.5 million. That is nothing compared with what the five major banks in Canada themselves report having saved thanks to tax havens—\$2.4 billion in 2007 alone.

Does the minister realize that, by refusing to take action against tax havens, he is an accomplice to fraud?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, as previous governments did not act, we feel that we must make progress on the matter of the tax havens in order to find these people who are evading taxation in Canada. We are working to expand our powers with legislation to enable us to better do our job. In addition, with UBS, in 36 cases people have called to make a voluntary disclosure, and 12 of these cases have already been settled.

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[English]

**TAXATION**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, despite what the Prime Minister used to say about taxes, he has a finance minister who confirmed last week that he will be proposing a \$19 billion payroll tax increase on workers and businesses.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has come out strongly against this job-killing initiative. Why would the finance minister want to bring forward a huge tax increase on the backs of Canadian families and Canadian businesses at this time, or any time for that matter?



*Oral Questions*

•(1440)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have been fortunate to be elected five times to the provincial legislature and here. I have served for 14.5 years and I never thought I would see a day in my life when the leader of the NDP would stand in his place and complain about high taxes. Where has he been? It is this government that has been cutting taxes. We cut the GST by two points, which the leader of the NDP and the NDP voted against it. This government cut income taxes. The leader of the NDP and the NDP voted against it.

Every time this government and the Conservative Party stands up to vote against taxes we are opposed by the NDP. I say shame on him and shame on his party.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, he did not deny the tax increase that the government is about to bring in.

[*Translation*]

Under the Liberal government, the surplus in the employment insurance fund reached \$57 billion at the expense of unemployed workers. Both this government and the Liberal government that preceded it looted the employment insurance fund.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that the \$57 billion must be put back. Will the government do it? Will it put an end to this increase in its tax on employment?

[*English*]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance and this government sought to freeze these premiums, the NDP, each one of them, stood in their place and voted against those tax freezes, and the member opposite knows that.

What the member really needs to wonder is what the leader of the Liberal Party will do. On April 14, he said that federal taxes must go up, that we will have to raise taxes.

Can members believe that the leader of the NDP was going to join a government whose leader would say that?

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on top of the payroll tax increase, which the government today is refusing to deny that it is bringing in, the Conservatives are imposing a new tax. It is the HST on the citizens of Ontario and British Columbia.

The Prime Minister has united with the Liberal premiers of Ontario and British Columbia and with the Leader of the Opposition to impose a new tax on the families of these provinces. It is a raise the tax coalition; 7% more in B.C. and 8% more in Ontario on everything from vitamins to funerals.

Why would the government do this at this—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of Transport.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP knows that decisions taken in the provinces by the governments of Ontario and British Columbia are just those. They are decisions taken in the provinces.

It is hypocrisy of the highest level for the leader of the NDP to stand and talk about high taxes. When the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and this government took major initiatives to cut the GST we could count on one thing day in and day out: for the NDP to stand in the way of middle class families from getting the real tax breaks. I say shame on them.

The good news is that the Minister of Finance and the government will keep working to reduce the tax burden on hard-working middle class families.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, even though economic recovery is far from a sure thing, the Conservatives are planning to increase the tax burden on workers.

The Conservatives are going to increase employment insurance contribution rates. That means more tax deducted from every paycheque. Conservative cronyism is worse than ever, and still they attack workers.

Why do they not care more about what is in Canadians' best interest?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member is aware that her party is the one that left the table even though we agreed to a bipartisan committee at the end of June—her party and our party, our government—to come up with measures to help the unemployed. Her party abandoned the unemployed, not ours. We tabled our plan to introduce a bill to help long-tenured workers by giving them between five and 20 extra weeks of benefits.

•(1445)

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, there was never really an opportunity for discussion because the government ran away. We never got any answers to our questions. The government became adept at avoiding them.

The problem is that household expenditures, which is how workers spend their paycheques, are what keep our economy going. Everyone knows that. If the Conservatives raise employment insurance premiums, it will be like siphoning fuel out of the Canadian economy's gas tank.

Are they planning to pump even more out of workers' pockets because they know that they are about to run out of gas?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are two ways to help people who are going through a hard time because of a recession. The first is to stimulate the economy. That is what our government is doing with infrastructure measures across the country. The second is to implement measures to help the unemployed, to help those who are in trouble. The four measures we have brought in will enable 790,000 people to take advantage of the new assistance we are offering. For 2009-10, employee contributions have been frozen at \$1.73 per \$100.

*Oral Questions**[English]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Finance said that he would not raise taxes, while at the same time booking a huge EI payroll tax increase. Yesterday the minister's parliamentary secretary actually told the truth, saying "that after a two year period the premiums will increase".

Today, will the minister follow the lead of his parliamentary secretary and tell the truth to Canadians, admit to the payroll tax increase and tell Canadians how much?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as part of the economic action plan, we included freezing EI premiums for two years at substantial cost. After the economic statement, it is finished. It is a temporary plan. It is what Parliament voted for.

After the stimulus ends, and it will end, then we will move back toward surplus. EI premiums, as set by the board with the authority of Parliament in 2008, will go forward in the normal way.

What we will not do is raise taxes like the member for Markham—Unionville says, "raising taxes is certainly a mathematical possibility in one way or another".

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, rising payroll taxes is a mathematical certainty under the government. Because Canadians cannot trust the government, I have asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer to tell Canadians the truth about the amount of additional premiums that they will pay.

Will it be \$300? Will it be \$400? Will Canadians have to wait for the PBO to tell them the truth or will the minister stand up right now and tell Canadians how much more they will pay?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance program is an important social program. We agreed in Parliament, Parliament supported it, that the program should pay for itself except during the time of recession, when we need to stimulate the economy.

That is why we froze premiums for a period of two years. This was supported by Parliament. It should pay its own way and not what the party opposite did. When the Liberals were the government, they built up a slush fund and used it for their private projects and for their own edification.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, older workers who have received over 35 weeks of employment insurance over the past five years will be excluded from the measures announced by the government. Not only is it inadequate, but this program unfairly excludes thousands of workers who have endured multiple work interruptions over the past few years.

How can the minister so cruelly raise the hopes of older workers, when in reality, she has nothing meaningful to offer them?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, I hope the Bloc Québécois member also noted that it was the Liberals who abandoned the bipartisan committee that was supposed to look at measures to help the unemployed.

We, on the other hand, did not abandon them. We have introduced several measures. The latest measure, specifically for long-tenured workers, will provide them with an additional five to 20 weeks of EI benefits. That measure will cost \$935 million, and 189,000 people will benefit from it. There are still a few in Canada who need it.

● (1450)

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since April 2005, some 25,000 jobs have been lost in Quebec in the forestry sector, while in the auto sector, which is concentrated in Ontario, thousands of jobs have been lost, mainly in the last year. The economic downturn has been affecting forestry workers for several years now, and they risk being excluded from a program that seems to target primarily the auto industry.

Do the ministers from Quebec realize that they are proposing a program designed mainly for Ontario, and that they have done nothing to help the Quebec forestry industry since 2006?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we tried to come up with ways to help long-tenured workers, to help those who have been paying into the system for many years, and to ensure that, when they go through a rough patch, they have more time to find a job. We are giving an additional five to 20 weeks. Exactly who will this help? It will help people who work in mines, in forestry, in the manufacturing sector and yes, in the auto sector. We are very aware of what is happening in the Quebec forestry sector.

\* \* \*

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, only the Conservatives were opposed at the industry committee to the Bloc's proposal to increase the amount of lumber used in the construction and renovation of federal buildings. In a dissenting report, they called this recommendation troubling.

What really is troubling is the grovelling of the two ministers from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. What troubles them? Defending forestry workers? Defending the interests of dozens of Quebec communities whose economies depend on forestry?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can say only one thing and that is that the members for Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean have really delivered the goods.

We have an economic action plan that has been very successful. Go and see any town, go and see the province of Quebec, and the results are there right now.

Insofar as federal buildings are concerned, I will say it for the third time. They are hard of hearing and fail to understand. Some \$323 million has been invested in economic stimulus for building renovations. That means more demand for lumber. It is not hard to understand. This is good news, but still they try to run it down. Our colleagues here are really delivering the goods. So much the better for Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this government has not done anything good for the forest industry. Owners of private woodlots have suffered major losses but are being left on their own. There are solutions, however. The Bloc Québécois has proposed changes to the tax rules to relax the rules on the deduction of expenses for forest resources management and to introduce a registered silviculture savings plan.

How can the minister responsible for economic development go on justifying his inaction in regard to the owners of private woodlots?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the members of the party on the other side know, when the economic action plan was adopted, a community adjustment fund was established that has enabled our government to help the forest industry all over Canada, including in the province of Quebec.

We announced \$200 million for silviculture and forest resources management, and \$30 million has gone to the industry for private woodlots. Thirty million dollars is no small amount. It sure is more than the Bloc has come up with in 18 years. As usual, they voted against that too.

\* \* \*

[English]

**MEDICAL ISOTOPES**

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, inaction on the part of the Conservative government has left hospital budgets stretched to the limit. It has put at risk thousands of Canadians in need of cancer tests and medical treatment.

Now it appears the government has decided to try to blame the provinces and doctors for their medical isotope shortage. The Conservatives are claiming that the Chalk River shutdown has nothing to do with the 25% of Ontario cancer patients and other patients not receiving their treatment.

Does the minister really think Canadians are that gullible?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the nuclear file, there is just one Liberal mess after another with which we have to deal. The Liberals tried to replace an aging NRU with a faulty design. When that did not work, they did nothing, no contingency plans, no backup plans.

It was this government that acted, and this government continues to clean up the messes left by that party. We will take no lessons from the Liberals on this file.

•(1455)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is a typical Conservative government ploy. It rewrites history so as not to take its share of the blame.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke claims there is no connection between the closure of the Chalk River reactor and longer wait times for cancer detection and treatment.

When she answers questions about this crisis, she blames the provinces and the doctors.

Is this the position of the Conservative government? Is this the latest excuse it has found for not having a plan B?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, this Conservative government has been working diligently on the matter. We are helping with respect to the facilitation of an isotope shortage in our country. We are directing AECL clearly to repair the NRU as quickly as possible.

It is very clear as well, now that they are in opposition, the Liberals will stoop to anything to score political points off of their own disasters, knowing very well we are doing everything that is absolutely appropriate on this matter.

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**CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS**

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it has now been months and months, yet we have seen no change in the protectionist buy American provisions that are killing Canadian jobs.

A few diplomatic words from the President do not actually change any facts. Indeed, all we see are words in unanswered letters and photo ops, but it is not even federal. A major problem is the individual states and municipalities, which are outside of NAFTA.

What specific results, not words, could the minister report to us from Washington?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat disappointing to hear my colleague opposite diminish the words of the President of the United States. It is somewhat reminiscent of how the Liberals dealt with the United States when they were in government, always diminishing what the U.S. was doing with us.

Directly related to the procurement agreement, the premiers and territorial leaders came together several weeks ago, in rather an unprecedented and historic way, and they agreed on a procurement agreement among provinces and territories. It was unprecedented on their part and they should be congratulated for that. They should not be diminished for doing it.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, again I repeat, it is not words but action we want from the United States. That is not how it works in the United States. It is not enough to write letters, to have nice words and provide weak protest. It was 42 minutes with the President, giving the Prime Minister a photo op, and a few pat on the back words, but that is it.

We should have had people on the ground right from the beginning, not only our premiers and territorial leaders but in the United States, and not just in Washington but working with those individual states and municipalities, which are not bound by NAFTA.

*Oral Questions*

When can we expect results? Only when it is too late?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend is being a good soldier and continuing to read out the questions that have been hastily written out and handed to her.

However, I can add some more words to President Obama's evaluation. Upon hearing the proposal that has been brought forward, a proposal that was worked on by premiers and territorial leaders, he also said today that it appears there may be ways to deal with this bilaterally, that we are working together on this and that this in fact might be one solution.

We are not there yet. There is more work to do, but progress is being made on this.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that our government is hard at work preparing for a potential second wave of the H1N1 pandemic and we are focused on ensuring that Canadians are informed and protected.

Could the Minister of Health provide the House with an update on co-operative efforts in this regard with the provinces and territories?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, tomorrow I will be meeting with my provincial and territorial counterparts in Winnipeg to build on the excellent co-operation that we have seen thus far.

We remain on target in producing a safe and effective vaccine for Canadians. Other necessary elements of our pandemic plan are also being implemented, working with the provinces and the territories.

Our commitment to co-operation and the health of Canadians stands in stark contrast to the leader of the Liberal Party, who is only interested in playing politics with H1N1. The leader of the Liberal Party should take—

• (1500)

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

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**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in January the government promised to deliver infrastructure dollars to cities and municipalities to get our economy moving.

In my riding of Vancouver Kingsway, we are counting on those federal dollars to boost business and create jobs. However, just this weekend I spoke to the mayor of Vancouver and was shocked to learn that Canada's third largest city had not received one single penny of infrastructure funds. We have many worthy projects ready to go, from housing to roads to bridges, but nothing in nine months.

When will Vancouver receive its fair share of infrastructure stimulus spending?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I find that most interesting. I wonder if he told the mayor of Vancouver that he voted against any

money going to any community in the country. That is the real outrage.

I am happy to correct the record. This government is investing \$416 million in the Evergreen public transport line. Where is that? Vancouver. We are putting \$450 million into the Canada Line. Where is that? Vancouver. We are putting \$365 million into the South Fraser Perimeter Road. Where is that? Vancouver.

It sounds like we are getting the job done.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Actually, Mr. Speaker, those are not Vancouver. He should look at a map.

The Conservative government seems to have forgotten the action in its own action plan. The government cannot get infrastructure dollars into Vancouver, but it has no problem getting money out of people's pockets through the HST.

This new tax created by the Conservatives and supported by the Liberals has British Columbians feeling betrayed. From haircuts to home heating, this tax makes life harder for British Columbians. It is bad policy during a recession.

Is this the Conservatives' economic action plan for Vancouver, wherever the minister thinks it is? No stimulus spending and—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was in Vancouver last week and I saw the Canada Line. It was actually in downtown Vancouver.

The decision on harmonization, as I said in the House the other day, is a decision for the provinces that have not yet harmonized. There is a federal proposal that is the same for every province, and some provinces over the years have chosen to harmonize and others have not. Ultimately of course it is a decision for the provinces to make.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, and this is the Liberal Party position, I think, "We support harmonization. We have no criticism of the Ontario government's budget. We think it is—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in July, the Quebec Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food wrote to his federal counterpart, calling for an organic certification equivalence. Not just the Government of Quebec, but the entire organic products industry wants to have its products for foreign markets recognized. Unfortunately, Quebec's request was turned down by a government official via the media.

Will the minister listen to reason and say yes to Quebec's request?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we agreed that it is important for Canada to have standardized certification across the country for all provinces. We make up a country called Canada, and we are trying to set a single standard for all provinces.

That said, we have also reached an agreement with Quebec whereby we will accept organic products certified according to its standards until 2011, while waiting for this measure to apply to the whole country.

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, not only has it imposed needless administrative demands on organic producers, but the Conservative government has also upheld the unrealistic 98% standard for labelling goods as "Product of Canada".

Will the real Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, who claims to have conducted consultations all summer long, finally listen to producers, processors, consumers, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, and even his own officials, who agree that the standard should be 85%?

• (1505)

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would remind the Bloc Québécois that when we conducted the first consultation, people agreed with the 98% standard for labelling goods as products of Canada.

That said, while his party was doing nothing but complaining, we met with processors. We organized a meeting with them recently. They shared their concerns, and we are working on the issue to find a solution to protect consumers and help our processors at the same time.

\* \* \*

[English]

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the depth of the economic crisis is touching every industry and every household, with the loss of 269,000 jobs in southern Ontario alone.

Seven months have passed since the announcement of the southern Ontario development agency to help small and medium business survive or start up. Not one penny of the billion dollars promised has flowed from it into southern Ontario. No criteria has been set up and there are no application forms.

The SODA program is nothing but an empty storefront with hundreds of business owners trying to create jobs for Ontario families knocking at the door facing unfilled promises. When will the door open?

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the member to pay attention. The door is wide open and it might hit him.

Our government has acted very diligently and responsibly to create jobs and stimulate the economy in this downturn. We have helped communities. We have helped venture capitalists. We have helped industry through IRAP. Money is already flowing. I note there are 12,000 new jobs in Ontario alone in June.

We do not want to interrupt this progress with an unnecessary, opportunistic election. That is not what Canadians need.

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister knows he is misstating the facts.

I have just spoken to Community Futures in Wellington, Waterloo, Simcoe, Bruce, Collingwood, Orillia, Welland, Niagara, and they expressed overwhelming concern, frustration, and a lack of communication or direction from the minister. There is no money, no ability to staff their offices to receive applications, and if the money finally comes they feel they would be forced to rush it out, compromising the opportunity for meaningful results.

They urge the Liberal opposition to shake money out of the government. How does the member answer the accusations from the—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of State.

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member can yell all he wants. Here is a quote: "It's clear that we're on the right track and our approach is transforming the economy of this region and FedDev Ontario will play a critical role...".

The rhetoric is up and loud by members of that party, whose intent is to go to an election to find a job for themselves.

This government is focused on creating jobs for Canadians, supporting Canadian businesses in southern Ontario and every community in between, regardless of their selfish priorities.

*Routine Proceedings*

[Translation]

**TAXATION**

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has decided to stimulate the economy by having families and consumers pay more taxes. The Liberals are also in favour of harmonizing the sales tax. That means that gas, heating and even funerals will cost more. People living in northern Ontario and British Columbia do not want tax increases.

Why is the minister intent on raising taxes?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member ought to look at the last generation in Canadian history and go back to when the previous governments worked with the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador when they decided to harmonize their taxes, more recently with the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia, and the province of Quebec may as well at one time.

There are other provinces that have not made the decision to harmonize. As I have said repeatedly, this is a decision for the provincial governments, not for the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government does not understand the extent of the problem in northern Ontario. The Constance Lake First Nation lost its post office in November 2008. People have to travel 80 kilometres to mail a letter or pick up their GST rebate. With another gas tax, it will cost more. Furthermore, there is no public transportation for this community.

Are remote and first nations communities not entitled to the same services as all other communities?

● (1510)

[English]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have a very ambitious plan and a very good budget allocation that came out of Canada's action plan because we care very much that first nations have the same opportunities as every other Canadian.

The member calling for rapid transit in these isolated communities is not part of the answer. What is important are the things we are working on: education reform, housing allocations, water and waste water action plans. Those are the sorts of things that mean something in aboriginal communities, and that is why we have money to make that investment and to make it happen.

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**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

**Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last year Canadian producers exported high-quality beef to more than 55 countries. Unfortunately, many countries continue to close their doors to Canadian beef despite Canada's cutting-edge animal health care systems.

Can the Minister of International Trade tell this House what the Conservative government is doing to stand up for Canadian producers?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge how my colleague stands up for producers in her own constituency.

On the ban on beef from Colombia alone, in fact if we did not have that ban in place right now, we would have about a \$6 million access for our producers. I wish the opposition parties would stop their grandstanding and help us move along the Colombia free trade agreement.

On the issue of Colombia's ban, the Minister of Agriculture and I have continually pursued this issue. I am pleased to announce that the country of Colombia has announced today that it is lifting that ban on beef.

**The Speaker:** Order. That will bring to a conclusion our question period for today.

The hon. member for Hochelaga, on a point of order.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[Translation]

**RESIGNATION OF MEMBER**

**Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I will be leaving my position as a member of Parliament and that my resignation will be effective today. I could not leave without saying that I have loved my work here in Parliament. As parliamentarians, we have chosen to transform our communities, our society and our world through ideas, and of course, through debate.

I would like to thank the people of Hochelaga, who placed their trust in me six times. Of course I would like to thank my assistants. Working with them has been a pleasure. I would like to thank Benoît Demuy, in my constituency, and Mario Lalancette, who has been with me for 13 years, which makes him practically a saint, I know. I would also like to thank my riding assistant, Denis Bourgeois, my riding association president, Maxime Bellerose, and my colleagues. I would like to thank my leader, who always gave me responsibilities that made my work here in Parliament a pleasure. I would also like to thank my party whip, who has always been so understanding and has so graciously fulfilled his duties. I leave this House knowing that I have friends in all the parties. It has been a pleasure to serve democracy and the people of Hochelaga.

● (1515)

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the distinct honour of paying tribute to the hon. member for Hochelaga, who has decided to leave the House to pursue a political career at another level of government.

*Routine Proceedings*

I should point out that, when I first came to the House of Commons nearly four years ago, the member for Hochelaga was the first Bloc member with whom I crossed swords.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to appreciate his work, even if we did not always agree on the basis of the various pieces of legislation that we introduced. Representing his party on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, he was remarkably eloquent, as many can confirm, and he always found the right words to set out his party's ideas.

On many occasions, he defused conflicts between his party and the others represented on the committee because of how good he was at playing with words and paying each of us compliments to smooth things over.

This member, alongside whom I have worked for nearly four years, impressed us all in this House. Whenever he spoke, he did so from his heart, without a written speech in hand. His speeches were very well structured and gently led us to his desired conclusion.

We have appreciated the melodious voice with which he would manage to enchant us while putting his point across. He was and will remain one of the great parliamentarians I have worked with these past few years.

The people of Hochelaga put their trust in this fiery parliamentary orator for many years.

Personally and on behalf of my party, I want to thank him for his great contribution to Canadian federalism because, over the course of all these years, he has made Canada better through his work.

I would also like to wish him equal success at the municipal level. I think that the City of Montreal will be the better for his involvement.

Farewell, Réal.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether "smarmy" is unparliamentary, but my colleague's speech seemed rather funereal. We will be a little gentler.

I want to talk about the contribution of the member for Hochelaga. We have known one another for many years. We have had some epic battles, but we were able to be adversaries and still respect each other. It has always been conducted in good taste.

When I think of him I will remember his exceptional contribution to respect for diversity. He has never been afraid of his sexual orientation and has been an advocate and a defender of his group. All to his credit, in my opinion.

There is something else I found exceptional. We had a very unfortunate occurrence in Montreal. It was the death of young Daniel Desrochers. Members will recall that a bomb exploded during the war between the Rock Machines and the Hells Angels. I know that the member for Hochelaga worked extremely hard to make us aware of this matter in order to help us carry out our role as legislators fully.

We obviously do not share the same opinion on what Quebec's role should be, but I have always respected those who work full-time in the interest of their constituents.

The member for Hochelaga was always learning. He studied at the University of Ottawa, where he got his law degree. I have done an MBA while I have been a member, and I know that one has to work doubly hard. I think his sense of sacrifice and his commitment to lifelong learning round him out as a person.

I wish him good luck. It is unfortunate that I am a lad from Montreal North and that I am not in Hochelaga, because I cannot tell him I will help him. I wish him good luck even though we may not support the same candidate for mayor.

There is one thing I know, however, and that is that he has always served his constituents well. Each time he speaks, he will speak the truth and will speak truly in support of the interests of his neighbourhood.

Good luck, sir.

• (1520)

[English]

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise, as the NDP House leader, on behalf of New Democrats, our caucus here in the House, and to express our sadness that the member for Hochelaga is resigning. We have come to appreciate his very fine work as a member of Parliament and his great sense of humour. I cannot remember how many times I have sat in the House and listened to his great debates and how he would sometimes turn around 360 ° as he would look all around the chamber to ensure everybody was listening.

Since I was elected in 1997, I have come to appreciate the member's work and his fine sense of humour. Our justice critic, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, says that he now will not have anyone to tease at the justice committee.

However, if truth be told, I know that at the justice committee and on many issues the member for Hochelaga and our members have worked very closely. I have sometimes worked with the member on very difficult issues dealing with justice and human rights. I am particularly proud of the fact that when we had the debate in the House, sometimes a very difficult debate on the same sex marriage bill, we formed a very small pink triangle caucus. The member for Hochelaga, the member for Burnaby—Douglas and myself wrote a letter to all the leaders of the parties expressing our concerns about the impact and tone of that debate. It was great evidence of the kind of cross-party alliance, solidarity and interest that we have sometimes managed to find in the House.

I have always known the member for Hochelaga to be a member who reaches out beyond partisan lines. I know he has been a fine member of his own caucus and well respected. All of us in the House, and particularly us as New Democrats, have the greatest respect for all that he has done. As he now enters a new era of his political dedication and activism, I hope he will serve his new constituents well. We wish him all the best in his new endeavour and his election, because he has much to offer the people of his community.

I thank the member for Hochelaga for all his work.

*Routine Proceedings*

● (1525)

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Hochelaga, who was my MP for a number of years. The Montreal ridings change boundaries with nearly every election. He was an excellent MP. I was born in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. It is my part of the country. The member for Hochelaga was continually involved with all of the community and economic development associations in Montreal east. He was very present there and he was very present here in the House of Commons as well. He liked the role of MP, and I am sure he will enjoy public life in the future, but at another level.

He was responsible for a number of files within the Bloc, but in recent years, in particular, he looked after justice and health. He did so rigorously, and he gave the same attention to human rights, as colleagues have pointed out.

I would like to point out another aspect of his work, that of promoting the role of private members over these many years, by insisting that greater importance be given here to private members' bills and by working as well with the parliamentary associations. He is one of the founding members of the Quebec-Palestine association. He has performed all aspects of the work of a parliamentarian rigorously, with great skill and with great ability.

I will close by saying that he is an ardent sovereignist who has shown the rest of Canada what sovereignists want and what sort of country they want to live in. This he has done in friendship with the rest of Canada. The speeches we have heard make this amply clear. I thank him deeply. I was lucky to have such an MP in our caucus.

**The Speaker:** I would like to add my comments regarding the hon. member. I take this opportunity too to congratulate him. The other members will doubtless be sorry he has reached this decision. We will miss him in the House. I wish him well and hope that he will come back to visit us.

\* \* \*

**VACANCY**

HOCHELAGA

**The Speaker:** It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Mr. Ménard, member for the electoral district of Hochelaga, by resignation.

*[English]*

Pursuant to subsection 25(1)(a) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I will address a warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a new writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

\* \* \*

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits.

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

**INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour today to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-China Legislative Association respecting its participation to the annual co-chairs' visit held in Beijing, Nanchang, Guangxi, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province and Shanghai, China, March 12-22, 2009.

\* \* \*

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to the report of the independent investigator into the 2008 listeriosis outbreak.

\* \* \*

● (1530)

**MADE IN CANADA PROCUREMENT ACT**

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-435, An Act to favour Canadian procurements.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as we know, we have seen a massive loss of jobs of Canadians over the past 20 years, good jobs that are being replaced by lower minimum wage jobs. We have also seen a reduction in family income over the last 20 years due, in large part, to bad trade policy.

What the NDP is presenting today, and what I am presenting, is a made-in-Canada procurement act that would ensure that taxpayer money that is being spent would actually benefit Canadian workers and Canadian jobs.

Smart governments protect jobs.

As we well know, and the Conservatives obviously do not, around the world most industrialized economies are putting in strategies to protect and support their jobs, whether it is the Jones act in the United States or the most recent infrastructure investment moneys in the United States as well. We have seen smart governments moving to protect jobs.

This bill would give Canada negotiating power to allow for Canadian exemptions on things like the made-in-America act. In other words, Canadian jobs would benefit both from a Canadian procurement policy and from the results of the discussions that we would have.

As a final point, this is NAFTA and WTO compliant. This is smart trade policy. What we have seen is a softwood sellout. We are putting forward—



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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I would remind hon. members, and perhaps over the summer they have forgotten, but there were some problems before the summer break, that in introducing bills they are to give a brief summary of the bill, not a debate. I think the hon. member may want to think of that the next time he is introducing a bill, as will the ones who are about to introduce private members' bills today.

\* \* \*

#### URANIUM MINE OWNERSHIP ACT

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-436, An Act respecting ownership of uranium mines in Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this legislation is to give the uranium industry the same ability to receive foreign investment as is commonly noted in other mining and natural resource sectors.

While it is not known by many members of the House, there are specific restrictions on foreign investment in uranium mines dating from the same principles and behaviour of the national energy program in the same era and philosophy.

It should also be noted that this bill also puts in national security provisions noting that uranium is a natural resource that has certain applications that are not always peaceful.

Finally, I would like to note the principles of this legislation have been widely supported by different political parties in Saskatchewan.

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

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

#### ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE ACT

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-437, An Act to Amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act (labour relations).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I assure you that my comments will be very appropriate.

[*English*]

It is my pleasure once again to introduce this bill, An Act to Amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act. I am pleased to have the support of not only my caucus colleagues in the Liberal Party but also more important, our critic in the area of public safety, the member for Ajax—Pickering.

The bill would provide the RCMP with the right to collectively bargain, a right our national police force surprisingly has never had. This bill would also provide the RCMP with a proper and appropriate grievance process, one that would replace the staff relations program, which was struck down by the courts earlier this year.

Hopefully, collective bargaining rights can help protect officers in the RCMP from situations such as the one that occurred earlier this year when the government unilaterally rolled back the RCMP's promised wage increases.

#### Routine Proceedings

The time to move on this is now. I ask for the support of all members to do just that.

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

\* \* \*

• (1535)

#### WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 9

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

That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, on Friday, September 18, 2009 at 10:00 am, Ways and Means Motion No. 9 standing in the name of the Minister of Finance, be deemed moved and seconded, that a recorded division be deemed requested and that the bells to call in the Members for such a division shall ring for not more than 15 minutes.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

#### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

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

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows:

Paul Calandra for Kelly Block

And that the Associate Membership for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows:

Kelly Block for Paul Calandra.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

*Routine Proceedings*

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

**PETITIONS**

## ONLINE SUICIDE PREDATORS

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by over 600 people from Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

The petitioners are calling on the government to recognize that those who experience depression and mental illness need to be protected by the law. They are calling on the House of Commons to enable prosecution of those who encourage or counsel someone to commit suicide by updating the Criminal Code to reflect the new realities of 21st century broadband access and also to fund education programs that will empower people who experience depression and mental illness to protect themselves from online predators.

[*Translation*]

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present today in this House a petition signed by about 4,000 people from the riding I have the honour of representing: Berthier—Maskinongé.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to shoulder its responsibilities by acting quickly to eliminate the two-week waiting period that workers encounter after they lose their jobs and must turn to employment insurance.

That is why I urge all members in this House to vote in favour of the Bloc's Bill C-241, which would abolish the waiting period once and for all.

[*English*]

## CONSUMER PRODUCT LABELLING

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I table three petitions today in the House.

The first petition is from people in Norman's Cove, Newfoundland, Indian Head, Saskatchewan, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, Halifax, Chilliwack, Nanaimo, Scarborough and London to name only a few.

The petitioners wish to bring to the House their concern that as many consumer products, including cosmetics, contain carcinogens, developmental and reproductive toxins and endocrine-disrupting chemicals, there is no duty currently in federal law on manufacturers to notify or inform consumers. They state that Canada should show leadership on the fundamental right to know.

The petitioners call upon the House to strengthen laws to meet the European REACH standards on these substances and require mandatory labelling on cosmetics.

## CANADA POST

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the next two petitions are on the subject of post offices.

The petitioners come from Edmonton, St. Albert and Sherwood Park in Alberta. They state that post offices play a key role in healthy communities and businesses. They call upon the Government of Canada to maintain the moratorium on post office closures and to withdraw the legislation to legalize remainders.

## PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition signed by Canadians calling upon Parliament to pass legislation for the protection of human life from the time of conception until natural death.

I would like to underline the support that Canadians showed for this petition. It was reinforced by the impressive turnout of over 12,000 Canadians here on the Hill in May for the March for Life.

● (1540)

## CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, violence against workers and members of civil society by paramilitaries in Colombia who are closely associated with the current Uribe government has been ongoing with more than 2,200 trade unionists murdered since 1991, as well as a host of violence committed against indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, human rights activists, workers, farmers, labour leaders and journalists.

Under a NAFTA-style agreement, Colombia's ability to adopt autonomous and sustainable economic, social, cultural, environmental and public policies such as health care and public education will diminish. In addition, labour side agreements under NAFTA have not been effective in protecting and improving labour standards as has been the case in Mexico where over one million agriculture jobs have been lost since NAFTA was signed.

All trade agreements must be built upon the principles of fair trade which fundamentally respect social justice, human rights, labour rights and environmental stewardship as prerequisites to trade.

Thousands of Canadians are calling on Parliament to reject the Canada-Colombia trade deal until an independent human rights impact assessment is carried out. They are requesting that the agreement be renegotiated along the principles of fair trade which would take environmental and social impacts fully into account while genuinely respecting labour rights and the rights of all affected parties.

[*Translation*]

## GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT

**Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by more than 550 workers from the Nova Bus plant in Saint-Eustache, in my riding. This plant is a leading manufacturer of intercity buses.

In this petition, the workers are calling on the government to set a Canadian content requirement for all of its purchases, such as intercity transportation purchases that fall under its jurisdiction, and also military buses, like the ones the government purchased in Germany a few months ago.

This would ensure that these workers can keep their jobs and avoid finding themselves among the too many unemployed workers in Quebec.

[English]

#### INCOME TRUSTS

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions I would like to table in the House today.

Pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the clerk of petitions, I am pleased to present yet another income trust broken promise petition on behalf of my constituents of Mississauga South. These individuals are all known to me and I am delighted to do this for them.

The petitioners remember that the Prime Minister was boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud is a promise not kept.

The petitioners want to remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts. He recklessly broke that promise. He imposed a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners call upon the Conservative/Canadian Alliance/Reform minority government to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise, and to repeal the 31.5% tax on income trusts.

• (1545)

#### PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' COMPENSATION FUND

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is one that I have presented often. It relates to public safety officers, particularly police officers and firefighters.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that police officers and firefighters are required to place their lives at risk in the execution of their duties on a daily basis. They state that the employment benefits of police officers and firefighters provide insufficient compensation to the families of those who are killed while on duty, and that the public also mourns the loss of police officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty. The petitioners wish to support, in a tangible way, the surviving families in their time of need.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to establish a fund known as the public safety officers' compensation fund for the benefit of families of public safety officers who are killed in the line of duty.

#### LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the final petition is another that I have presented many times over the last 16 years or so.

#### Routine Proceedings

Pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the clerk of petitions and supported by some of my colleagues in the NDP who are applauding at this time, I am pleased to present a petition concerning the risk associated with the misuse of alcohol.

The petitioners from my riding of Mississauga South would like to bring to the attention of the House that the Food and Drugs Act is designed to protect Canadians from potentially harmful effects related to food and drug consumption. They state that the consumption of alcoholic beverages may cause health problems. They also state that fetal alcohol syndrome and other alcohol related birth defects are 100% preventable by avoiding the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy. They further state that the consumption of alcoholic beverages may also impair one's ability to operate machinery and automobiles.

Therefore, the petitioners from Mississauga South call upon Parliament to require the labelling of alcoholic beverages to caution expectant mothers and others of the risks associated with the misuse of alcohol.

#### ASBESTOS

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by thousands of Canadians.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to take note of the fact that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known. In fact, more people now die from asbestos than all other industrial diseases combined. Over 80% of all the industrial diseases and deaths in the province of Quebec are due to asbestos. Yet, Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms, to end all government subsidies to the asbestos industry, both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

\* \* \*

#### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

#### 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.

*Government Orders*

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

**REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE**

## SOCKEYE SALMON

**The Speaker:** The Chair has received a notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. I am pleased to call upon the hon. member now to give his reasons for the application to the House.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter requiring urgent consideration, and of immediate relevance and concern throughout Canada.

The sudden disappearance of nine million sockeye salmon a few weeks ago during the summer's migration to the Fraser River highlights a crisis of unprecedented scale which is dramatically affecting the way of life and the livelihoods of west coast communities, first nations, recreational fishers, commercial fishers and businesses.

This crisis is similar in magnitude to the collapse of the Atlantic cod stocks which devastated the east coast, and you will recall, Mr. Speaker, that this House was able to debate the collapse of the cod stocks in an emergency debate held on May 1, 2003.

An emergency debate is required in order to allow parliamentarians to immediately explore the facts of this crisis and address whether or not the government has fulfilled its duty to effectively and responsibly manage this fishery. There is no government legislation on this issue before the House, which would allow a debate at this critical time on the collapse of the sockeye salmon run in British Columbia.

It is for these reasons that I request, seconded by a number of my B.C. and Atlantic Canadian colleagues, including the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, an emergency debate on this issue.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for his submissions. I am going to take the matter under advisement and come back to the House in due course, having heard what he had to say.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION**

The House resumed from June 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-37, An Act to amend the National Capital Act and other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a servant of the national capital region in this House, I am especially pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-37, our government's action plan for the National Capital Commission.

Allow me to also note that I will be splitting my time with our wise chief government whip. I speak of the hon. member for Carleton—Mississippi Mills.

● (1550)

[Translation]

I am delighted to rise in this House to speak about the amendments to the National Capital Act introduced by our government.

[English]

Members of this House will not be surprised that my wife and I have walked, cycled, and skied every centimetre of every trail in this region. As a boy, I also swam at Petrie Island and at Britannia Bay. As a teenager, I even took forbidden midnight dips in Pink Lake. Come to think of it, my first date with my wife was a 40 kilometre bicycle ride to Pink Lake and back, 36 years ago today, during the Rosh Hashanah holidays of 1973.

I know well the scenic beauty and unique experiences that our capital has to offer to all who live here and to those who come to visit.

[Translation]

With my family and friends, I often enjoy the charms and treasures of our wonderful capital. This would likely be impossible were it not for the vision and hard work of the National Capital Commission.

It was at Camp Fortune that my wife, our four children and I learned to downhill ski and snowboard. Closer to home, the Mer Bleue cross-country trails, sheltered from the icy wind, are just superb.

[English]

A strong NCC means a strong national capital region, and we must ensure that the NCC is as effective and as responsive as possible. This includes increasing transparency and accountability. This has been a cornerstone of all our government's policies since taking office 1,319 days ago.

Let us not forget that this is the government that introduced the Federal Accountability Act. Our government has listened and we made changes to the NCC that will make it more open and more accountable to residents, to taxpayers and to all Canadians.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister's decision to appoint Marie Lemay as head of the NCC 20 months ago was an enlightened one.

[English]

The appointment by the Prime Minister of Russell Mills as NCC chair also was an inspired stroke of genius.

[Translation]

Naturally, they are supported by Maureen Hayes and a team of seasoned professionals.

*Government Orders*

[English]

Now, by introducing amendments to the National Capital Act, our government is presenting a vision for the future of the NCC. In order to ensure that Crown lands and historically important sites can be enjoyed by Canadians for years to come, we must act now.

[Translation]

The NCC plays a key role in protecting and preserving these lands.

[English]

Take the Greenbelt, for example. This great swath of land encircling urban Ottawa includes farms, forests and wetlands that total over 20,000 hectares. These lands provide places for people to experience outdoor pursuits and appreciate natural beauty, in some cases literally at their doorsteps.

The Greenbelt encircles Ottawa from Shirleys Bay in Ottawa West—Nepean to Green's Creek in Ottawa—Orléans. Nearly three-quarters of the total area is owned and managed by the NCC on behalf of the taxpayers of Canada. The rest is held by other federal departments and private interests practising sustainable farming and forestry.

[Translation]

More than one million visitors a year go walking, sliding down hills, cross-country skiing or snowshoeing there, among other places.

[English]

The environmental protection provisions in Bill C-37 will help protect fragile ecosystems in the Gatineau Park and in the Greenbelt while also ensuring that residents in urban and suburban Ottawa-Gatineau have a greater say in issues that affect them and their families.

[Translation]

The NCC also administers the Rideau Canal on behalf of Parks Canada.

[English]

Now a UNESCO world heritage site, the construction of the canal is one of the single most important developments in Ottawa's and likely Canada's history.

The Rideau Canal was a vital economic and military safeguard for the country in the 1800s. It is a tribute to the genius of Colonel John By and his Royal Engineers. I did not mean my engineers, just the Royal Engineers.

Today, it is a favourite route for boaters. In winter, a nearly eight kilometre stretch of the canal is transformed into the world's largest naturally frozen skating rink. It is a cornerstone of our heritage and the centrepiece of our national capital that continues to awe visitors from around the world.

Here I would like to pay tribute to Henry Storgaard and to all the board members of the Rideau Canal festival. The work that they did this year was amazing. I was thrilled to support them.

• (1555)

[Translation]

By the way, I also commend Michel Gauthier's efficient organization.

It is important for children across the country to learn about the Rideau Canal, a cornerstone of our heritage and the centrepiece of our national capital that continues to awe visitors from around the world.

[English]

On behalf of Canadian taxpayers, the NCC owns and maintains many green spaces and parks. Many people who visit the region remark favourably on the quality of these facilities. In downtown Ottawa near the National Arts Centre we have the luscious Confederation Park. In my youth, it was an ugly parking lot. Before that, it was a luxury apartment building.

Now, it hosts various cultural events throughout the year, such as Winterlude, the Ottawa International Jazz Festival and the National Capital Marathon Race Weekend, just to name a few.

[Translation]

Those who live and work here know that these parks are delightful places to escape to, at lunchtime for example, to read, meditate or simply relax.

These are but a few examples of what the NCC has to offer, on a daily basis, to both locals and visitors.

[English]

I encourage all hon. members to vote in favour of this bill and to help keep the national capital region and the National Capital Commission doing the good work that they are doing right now for the benefit of all Canadians.

[Translation]

I encourage hon. members from all sides to vote for Bill C-37, thereby helping the NCC to continue the excellent work it is doing for the benefit of all Canadians.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed with the speech by my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans. He bursts his buttons extolling the virtues of the parks of the National Capital Commission. He boasts on behalf of the National Capital Commission about the use made of the greenbelt and the parks in the region, where, he says, people can go and read.

I would say that Bill C-37, as it now stands, is unacceptable.

My colleague spoke about the greenbelt. I do not think he took the time to read the bill. If he had, he would know that the preservation of the ecological integrity of NCC properties does not include either the greenbelt or properties in the greenbelt.

I would like to know why he thinks Bill C-37 is so good when it refers solely to Gatineau Park and not to the greenbelt at all.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Mr. Speaker, I think the partisan tone of the question I just heard is rather unhealthy.

*Government Orders*

Of course the benefits of the greenbelt and the other acquisitions of the National Capital Commission preceded the government of which I am a member. The pleasures we enjoy now existed previously. They are the result, actually, of the genius of Jacques Gréber.

I think it is really inappropriate for the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer to take advantage of an occasion like this to engage in partisan attacks.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to be nasty or engage in partisan attacks, but I think my colleague from Hull—Aylmer asked what is basically a very legitimate question.

Bill C-37, which is before us now, talks about protecting the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park. That is clearly what it says. Nothing is said at all about protecting the ecological integrity of the greenbelt.

My colleague asked a question of the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans, that is to say, what is his reaction to this gap in the bill.

It is very important, in my humble opinion, to protect the ecological integrity of the greenbelt on the Ontario side of the National Capital Region, and I include in that the parts of the greenbelt in the riding represented by the hon. member across the aisle.

I therefore want to repeat the question asked by my colleague from Hull—Aylmer, namely, whether my colleague across the way thinks that the ecological integrity of the greenbelt should also be protected.

• (1600)

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate the fact that the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier was able to ask his question without falling into a partisan tone.

The prime objective of Bill C-37 is precisely the accountability of the commission to Canadians. That is the main focus of the bill.

If the members across the way think the bill should be improved, I encourage them to propose amendments during the debate.

[*English*]

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak on one key feature that is highlighted in Bill C-37, An Act to amend the National Capital Act, and that is the protection of Gatineau Park. Gatineau Park is an outstanding feature that represents about 7.5% of the total land area in the National Capital Region. Within a 15-minute drive of Parliament Hill and downtown Ottawa, one can appreciate the natural environment. The park is so far removed from the bustle of city life that deer, bears and even timber wolves reside there.

There are many sites and facilities in Gatineau Park that attract people who like to enjoy the outdoors, not just during the summer months, but in all four seasons of the year. For instance, camping is permitted in specific sites in the Lac Philippe area during both summer and winter months. Also the network of cross-country ski trails is considered one of the greatest in North America with close to 200 kilometres of trails.

Another feature is the Eardley Escarpment which hosts the richest and most fragile ecosystem in Gatineau Park. The escarpment, which divides the Canadian Shield and the St. Lawrence Lowlands, provides for spectacular views from its highest point at 300 metres.

The idea of a park in the Gatineau Hills dates back to the 1800s. There were two reports commissioned in the early 20th century recommending that the Canadian government create a park in the hills. The Government of Canada recognized the concept of Gatineau Park with the introduction of a budget on July 1, 1938 for the purchase of land in the Gatineau Valley.

Today, the park's visitors, who are both residents of the region and tourists, enjoy its trails, forests and lakes in summer as well as winter.

Federal interest in Gatineau park is under the responsibility of the National Capital Commission which manages a number of properties, parks and green spaces in the national capital.

Gatineau Park is included within the National Interest Land Mass. Such designation indicates a formal expression of the federal government's interest in the long-term use of these lands to create a capital that will inspire Canadians with pride and be passed on as a legacy for future generations.

Gatineau Park is facing a number of challenges that could have long-term impacts on the park. The population is increasing in the national capital region, and the southern portion of the park is increasingly surrounded by urban neighbourhoods. There is a greater range of activities taking place in the park, and the number of park visitors has also increased to the point where there are now over 1.7 million visits annually.

In 2006, an independent panel was commissioned to study the mandate, mission and activities of the National Capital Commission. Many people and interest groups who were consulted felt the long-term sustainability of the green capital lands, especially Gatineau Park and the Greenbelt, were at risk and strongly advised some formal protection be bestowed on these lands.

In December 2006, the panel published its report with 31 recommendations regarding the commission's operations, governance and resources. One recommendation was that the NCC's environmental stewardship role be strengthened with respect to the federal green spaces in Canada's capital, including Gatineau Park.

I want to point out two actions the government has taken to help the NCC in its overall management of Gatineau Park. First, budget 2007 provided for an increase in annual ongoing funding of \$10 million in capital expenditures for the NCC. The increase will enable the NCC to rehabilitate assets, particularly those within the National Interest Land Mass such as Gatineau Park.

Second, in September 2008, the National Capital Commission was granted approval to purchase private properties in Gatineau Park without seeking Governor in Council approval of each specific purchase. With this new approach it will be more efficient and effective for the commission to increase its ownership within the park's boundaries.

*Government Orders*

Admittedly Bill C-37 does not specifically create a new national park in the context of the Canada National Parks Act. One of the key objectives of the national parks system is to have a good representation of each of the natural regions of Canada. Gatineau Park is located in a region that is already represented by the Mauricie National Park. Also, since title of some lands in Gatineau Park still remains with the Province of Quebec, the Government of Canada has no intention to change that ownership.

Although Gatineau Park is not recognized as a national park, the bill does introduce several mechanisms that serve to greatly improve the protection of Gatineau Park. In developing these mechanisms, consideration was given to the provisions found in the Canada National Parks Act.

The government proposed legislation including a legal description of the boundaries of the park. Any changes to the boundaries could be made only by the government through an order in council.

•(1605)

Second, Bill C-37 requires that the National Capital Commission give due regard to maintaining the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park through protecting its natural resources and processes. This would mean that the commission would have to take into account the impact on the lands, fauna and flora in the park before making any decisions regarding the park. In fact, it is worthwhile noting that the objective of maintaining ecological integrity in managing parks is stipulated as the first priority of the minister responsible for the Canada National Parks Act.

To enable the National Capital Commission to fulfill the requirements regarding the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park, the bill also introduces a provision that allows for regulations to protect not only the natural resources and process on all NCC properties but also specifically the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park.

As we know, the commission presently has a schedule of fees for various uses of different sections of Gatineau Park. For example, campers at Lac Philippe and cross-country skiers who use NCC trails are asked to pay specified fees. This practice is similar to charging fees for the enjoyment of Canada's national parks. In accordance with the bill, the commission would also have to obtain government approval prior to introducing regulations that prescribe user fees.

With respect to the question of the impact on private properties, I should first point out that there are approximately 300 private owners in Gatineau Park. However, these lands collectively represent only 2% of the total area of the park. Bill C-37 respects the rights of private property owners.

In recognition of the importance of consolidating the lands in Gatineau Park to safeguard their natural integrity, the National Capital Commission has explicitly identified the acquisition of properties in the park as one of its priorities and has set aside funds for this purpose. To the extent that properties in Gatineau Park remain privately owned, any plans for their development would be subject to applicable environmental laws and zoning regulations.

In closing, I want to reiterate the government's commitment to protecting the future of Gatineau Park for Canadians not only for the present but for decades to come.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on a theme that the minister raised in his remarks about ecological integrity.

The work on ecological integrity was driven largely by a former Liberal minister of the environment, Sheila Copps, who convened a national panel on ecological integrity and then took the findings and results of that panel and sorted them, integrating them into the National Parks Act and beyond in the federal government.

One of the things we learned through that process was that ecological integrity is something that is difficult to achieve when a land mass of park like this one is not properly connected to other ecological zones or is not properly buffered.

The worst case scenario is what has happened in the city of Boston, where a similar park, though smaller in scope and size, has had its ecological integrity completely reversed and there is not a single remaining indigenous species of flora or fauna in that park today.

Can the minister help us understand exactly how the government will move to make sure ecological integrity is in fact achieved?

•(1610)

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, the act commits the government and the NCC to the proper responsible environmental stewardship of the park. It is innate within the nature of the NCC to protect the green lands in the Ottawa area and the green lands on the Gatineau side. The boundaries of Gatineau Park are being clearly set.

We also have money for purchases of private properties if they become available, to continue to generate a pure park. The intention long term is to have a pure park there as much as possible.

We will be looking after the ecological effects of the park.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question of course is for the minister.

I would like him to explain to me what is meant by the expression "pure park" in relation to Gatineau Park, number one.

Number two, my understanding is that the minister also has a large section of the greenbelt in his riding, and I am wondering how he feels about the fact that no mention has been made of the need to protect the ecological integrity of the greenbelt in his riding.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, there are two questions.

Regarding the first, the long-term intention is that if private properties within the park become available, the government has provided money to purchase them so that we can continue on a long-term basis to create a park that does not contain alien buildings.

With respect to the greenbelt in my own riding and the greenbelt itself, the NCC has the mandate to maintain that greenbelt. From time to time there may be minor adjustments to the greenbelt because of the need to widen roads, et cetera, but the greenbelt itself is being protected and has been for many years.

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have been listening carefully, but the minister recognized in his comments that during the public consultation phase in 2006, the public clearly said they also wanted the ecological integrity of the greenbelt to be protected. In response to the question, he did not specify whether or not he would be prepared to support an amendment to the bill whereby the protection of the ecological integrity would apply not only to the park, as it stands now in the bill before us, but also to the greenbelt.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, I am one of the great supporters of the greenbelt. I believe it is part of our heritage and it must last as long in the future as possible. The greenbelt allows the growth on the Ottawa side to be controlled, so that there is growth on one side of the greenbelt and growth on the other and we can protect this belt.

The long-term goal of the NCC would be to try to protect as much of the ecological basis of the greenbelt as possible, and if members visit the greenbelt, as I do quite often on a day-to-day basis, they will be doing that.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to address the bill. It seems the National Capital Commission exists by virtue of the simple fact that there is not likely to be in this country a federal district, ever is a long time, but not soon for sure, because I do not think there is any appetite for it in either province, Quebec or Ontario, other than that the concept comes up every once in a while only to be shot down. Given that there is not likely to be a federal district any time soon, the National Capital Commission takes on even greater importance, because it is basically, therefore, the only tool that exists, the only agency that exists, to see to the appropriate development of not just green areas, but the capital itself. Therefore, I place a great deal of importance on this matter, since I represent a riding that is in the heart of the nation's capital, and I firmly believe in the importance to any country that its capital be a good reflection and accommodation of the entire country.

There is another concept that has to play in the crafting of legislation and consideration of such legislation, and that is the evolution on both sides of the river of the municipal authorities over the past three or four decades. If one were to take a close look at the growing maturity of the planning capacity of both the municipality on the Outaouais side in Gatineau and on the Ontario side in Ottawa and trace the history of the evolution of that authority and that power, one would see a greater capacity, a greater sophistication, and a greater maturity in the planning capacity of each.

However, when the National Capital Commission was created many moons ago, that was not the case. Therefore, the legislature at the time thought it best to give the National Capital Commission perhaps wider planning authority and less of a consultation mandate than I think it should have today.

These are some of the overriding, overarching considerations that will be reflected in my comments on this proposed bill.

[*Translation*]

The first element on which I would like to focus is one that was mentioned by my two colleagues, the members for Ottawa South and Hull—Aylmer, as well as by myself, and it deals with ecological integrity.

•(1615)

We, on this side of the House, obviously agree with the concept of protecting and maintaining ecological integrity. However, does the bill do what must be done? I believe this is a perfectly legitimate question in two respects.

First, is the concept of ecological integrity given enough priority? Second, is it applied equally enough throughout the land? We asked that question but it still remains unanswered.

Regarding the importance, at least from my point of view—and I think my colleagues on this side of the House share this concern—I believe that the issue of ecological integrity should be a priority. If one looks carefully at the wording of this bill, such is not the case. I could find the exact wording, but it says that in its planning, the National Capital Commission must give consideration to the maintenance of ecological integrity. That is not giving priority to ecological integrity. If one draws a comparison with the way this legislative assembly has dealt with national parks—and I am not suggesting that Gatineau Park has the same status—and if one looks at this issue in particular, one can see very quickly that in the case of national parks, ecological integrity is a top priority. It should be the same for Gatineau Park, but that is not what the bill does. That is a first observation and a bit of a disappointment with regard to the government's proposal. I think this should be amended should the bill make its way to committee.

The second concern is equally important. It is the whole concept of a greenbelt, which is as important on the Ottawa side, in the National Capital Region, as Gatineau Park is on the Outaouais side of the region. The bill, as far as I know and unless I have misread it, makes no provision for protecting the ecological integrity or even for maintaining it. There is no mention of priority here, even. There is the whole issue of the entire greenbelt.

I can tell you as an MP for the Ontario side of the National Capital Region that this is of paramount concern to me and that it concerns many of my fellow citizens. I am pleased to note, however, that the member for Carleton—Mississippi Mills recognized in his remarks that, in the consultations conducted by Mr. Paquet in 2006, and as indicated in his report, this concern for preserving the greenbelt and its ecological integrity had been raised by the people of our region.

However, the wording proposed by the government expresses no interest in protecting the ecological integrity of the greenbelt. This risks becoming an issue because it is quite important.



*Government Orders*

The second question concerns the whole issue of the plan for the national capital. Bill C-37, An Act to amend the National Capital Act and other Acts, proposes that every 10 years the National Capital Commission submit a 50-year plan or plan for the development over 50 years of the National Capital Region to the Governor in Council and that the plan be submitted for approval only to the Governor in Council. For those watching us, the Governor in Council means cabinet. In the 30 days thereafter, if I am not mistaken, the Governor in Council must table a bill in this House.

It does not go far enough. Like Parliament, the House is called on to approve master plans for national parks. It is sufficiently important that members representing all ridings in Canada decide on the development plan or the comprehensive development plan for their national capital.

It would be a golden opportunity to have a debate and a vote in this House at least every 10 years so that the duly elected representatives of the people of Canada can decide on the sort of capital they want.

• (1620)

That is not asking too much. The fact of ratifying the plan—if it or they were ever ratified—would simply confirm Canadians' perception of their capital. To ask only cabinet, the Governor in Council, to approve these plans every 10 years is inadequate. If the bill goes to committee, I will certainly insist that an amendment be called for as well to permit those who represent Canadians, the members of this House of Commons, to make decisions on their capital.

The other advantage of such a measure would be that once every 10 years all members would be asked to think about their capital, its development, its future and how Canadians in their riding, regardless of where they are in the country, connect with their capital. This sort of debate and interaction between members from across the country and the national capital could only benefit the country. We all know that people often tend to be critical of Ottawa. However, we must make our capital a place of pride that all Canadians can be proud of and where they can find something for themselves. That is the second point.

[*English*]

Third, I do not believe there have been consultations by the government on the legislation after the Gilles Paquet exercise, and that is too bad. I asked Ontario representatives, Quebec representatives and municipal representatives on both sides of the river if they had been consulted on the legislation and the answer was no.

It is a bad way to start. The government, having received the report from Gilles Paquet, should have taken it upon itself to consult the municipal and provincial authorities, if only to start creating a consensus and also to show that this would be the way of the future.

There is an incredible importance in the fact that the National Capital Commission itself would consult its municipal and provincial partners on a regular basis. The government, not having done that, shows a terrible example. Perhaps we should even consider amendments to the legislation that would create a mechanism that would oblige the National Capital Commission in this consultation on a regular basis.

If we are to create a plan for the National Capital Region, which hopefully would be approved in the House every decade, I think the strength of that plan would obviously be greater if it were the result of some serious consultation with municipal and provincial authorities in the National Capital Region.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

The fourth point has to do with the role of planning. The land-use planning in the entire National Capital Region, its economic development, and the location of jobs must necessarily be included in the master plan that the National Capital Commission will prepare to submit to the Governor in Council and, I hope, to the House for approval every ten years.

The role that the National Capital Commission will play in the plan is not very clear insofar as this development and the integration of it is concerned. I have supported the famous 75-25 split in public service jobs—75% on the Ontario side and 25% on the Quebec side—ever since it was formulated and it should be built into the legislation and into all NCC plans, at the very least.

The distribution of these jobs within each of the regions on both sides of the river is also important. There has to be a balance within these regions, which should also be reflected in the plan. Why do I emphasize this? Because it should also be included in all the planning around transportation.

When we are talking about transportation, we are talking about public transit and the network of roads and bridges. As soon as the issue of transportation is raised, we fall into discussions which, I hope, will not be interminable, even though they have always seemed to be so far. The government had a golden opportunity to introduce a bill and make amendments to the National Capital Commission Act that would have given it the ability and authority to do what needs to be done in order to plan appropriately for economic development and the integration of road and public transit networks on both sides of the river.

In the Outaouais, there are plans for Rapibus. Very good. In Ontario, there is light rail. How will these two networks be integrated? The National Capital Region is an integrated economic unit and this fact should be taken into account in the rules, in the legislation governing the National Capital Region, and in its mandate and its planning obligations. However, this does not seem to be the case. I am rather concerned about this deficiency in the bill that the government introduced in June, if I remember correctly, and that we will now spend a few minutes discussing. It is very important because it concerns the future of our community and the future of the Canadian capital. We need to do our homework and do it right. I think there are some problems in this regard.

[*English*]

There are a number of areas where we may agree on the technicalities of the various authorities that the NCC should have in terms of its flexibility for acquisition and disposal of land, as long as the ecological integrity is respected. That is why it is so important to put it in for the Greenbelt as well.

*Government Orders*

If we are to say that we will not protect the integrity of the Greenbelt but give the NCC the authority to acquire and dispose of lands without coming back to the higher authorities, whether it be the Treasury Board or cabinet, then we may open the door to some things we do not want to see. Therefore, it is attractive to tie in both ends.

I have no problem as a legislator in granting some authority to institutions and agencies such as the National Capital Commission. I come from an milieu where we had delegated much higher authority than we seem to in this Parliament. Therefore, I am quite open to that. However, it has to be done within the context where the expectations of preserving certain things, such as the ecological integrity of a Greenbelt, are well spelled out and cannot be deviated from.

If we do not spell out the fact that we expect the ecological integrity of the greenbelt to also be respected, then I would be very hesitant to increase the authority of the NCC in acquiring and disposing of land, perhaps in the greenbelt. That is how it ties in. If we have protection of the ecological integrity of the greenbelt as well, the rest flows very easily.

Finally, this is a personal bone that I have with the government. Here would have been a very good example of a bill that could have been set up for referral to committee before second reading. We have heard a willingness to co-operate from all parties. We have heard some concerns from the three opposition parties so far, and we may hear some more, about some things that are in the proposed bill and some things that are not in it.

I would hate to be forced into a situation, should the bill go to committee after second reading, to be told that we could not amend it a certain way because it might be seen to be expanding the bill, that we could not do a certain thing because blah, blah. Whereas if we had referred to committee before second reading, after five hours of debate or less, whichever committee would get this would have had the opportunity to really bite into this legislation and do what was best.

When we were on the other side in a minority situation, I was a deputy House leader. We made it a point to ensure that as many bills as we could were referred to committee before second reading, because we wanted to trust the committees. We wanted to give leeway to the committees and their members to do what was right, and it worked.

The fact that the government refuses time and again to refer any bill to committee before second reading shows that it does not want to work with the opposition parties. It shows that it does not trust in the capacity of individual members to get along in a committee setting to do what is right for the public good, to do what is right for legislation. The government refuses to acknowledge, when it comes down to it, that we all have the same interests in protecting the nation's capital, in this case, or protecting the interests of our fellow citizens, in most legislation, but it does not want to give us that. It seems to say "It's my way or the highway".

In great part that sometimes leads to the situation we now see in the House, where it is very difficult. That side has no desire whatsoever to listen to anything from this side.

Should the bill go to committee and should there not be a willingness to accept certain amendments, I will not support the legislation after second reading. That has to be very clear. I have said this after having spoken for 20 minutes, and those guys were not listening. I detailed quite clearly the legitimate preoccupations that I am conveying to the House on behalf of my constituents, but it does not seem to sink in.

It is unfortunate that we may end up in that situation, but if that is the desire then so be it. As for me, I will continue to work positively to try to improve the legislation should it go to committee.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I assure my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier that I listened to all his remarks attentively. I would also remind him that on more than one occasion we have worked with him on a series of files he considered important and that we are prepared to continue to do so in this matter, including on the amendments he feels might improve the bill.

Naturally, environmental matters are important for the greenbelt. The contents of this bill reflect the results of public consultations we conducted. Parliamentarians' views are equally important, as is most certainly the view of the member opposite.

Now it is rather regrettable that they are voting against a bill that represents a significant improvement over what existed when they were in the department because they were there for 13 years and did not do it. Now they complain that we are doing it badly or inadequately.

• (1635)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Speaker, I said that I was prepared to support this bill at second reading so long as many of the problems I have raised are resolved in committee. That means that I hope the government is prepared to consider and support certain amendments. We have submitted questions to the minister. I put the question to the member for Carleton—Mississippi Mills on this subject specifically. He was not prepared to answer. That leads me to assume that all the amendments may well be blocked. If that is the case, when the bill goes to committee after second reading and the government does not permit improvement of the bill, we will vote accordingly. I personally am prepared to let it go to committee after second reading, but on a number of conditions, which I insist on. We will see what happens.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the remarks by my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier. They reflect his wisdom and planning.

He touched on an important matter when he spoke of the administration of the bridges in the National Capital Region. As we know, the NCC currently administers the Champlain and Portage bridges. The Chaudière and the Alexandra, better known as the Interprovincial, and one third of the Macdonald-Cartier are administered by Public Works and Government Services Canada.

*Government Orders***REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE**

SPEAKER'S RULING—SOCKEYE SALMON

I would like my colleague to tell me, given that the government wants the National Capital Commission to be involved in the planning, whether he thinks it wise for the five existing bridges and future bridges to all be under the administration of the National Capital Commission, with appropriate funding, of course.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that management should always be made as simple as possible. The fact, though, is that a number of bodies are responsible for the bridges in the same region. There is another bridge too that could be included, although it is used by trains and not vehicles. It is obvious that we need to be consistent if we want sound management of all the various elements in the network of roads—including the bridges in the National Capital Region—and if we want to give the National Capital Commission a certain ability to plan transportation, something that is desired in the bill and that I very much support. If a piece of road heads for the river but stops there because there is no bridge, it is hard to get across. The road system is therefore far from complete. It would be logical for the National Capital Commission to manage all the bridges and have the credits it would need to do so.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Mr. Speaker, getting back to the question on the protection of the environment, I would like to assure the hon. members for Ottawa—Vanier and Hull—Aylmer that the protection of the environment is just as important on this side of the House as it is on theirs.

The government will ensure that the NCC is carrying out its responsibilities to manage the environment by examining its annual report and business plan, which are submitted each year for approval by the Governor in Council. In addition, the government will ensure that the NCC carries out its obligations to manage the environment by examining and approving its 50-year master plan.

I will also invite the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier to talk these things over a little with me after this session. We will find ways to improve the bill.

• (1640)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to hear these words from the minister because that would mean they were coming from the government.

I have another problem with what I just heard. The 50-year plan mentioned in the bill will be adopted or approved solely by the Governor in Council. First of all, the House will therefore not have a chance to address the famous plan mentioned here, and second, there is no mention in the bill of the ecological integrity of the Greenbelt. So there is an inconsistency here.

If the government is serious, which I do not doubt, one of the government ministers or a parliamentary secretary who can speak on behalf of the government needs to make a statement like this.

With all due respect, my colleague knows what I am talking about. It is the Governor in Council who has to speak out. So far, the Governor in Council has not confirmed what my colleague across the way just said. If the Governor in Council wants to confirm it, I think the situation would be better than it is now.

**The Speaker:** Before resuming debate, I would like to make my ruling on the matter raised by the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

[*English*]

He asked for an emergency debate in respect of the salmon stocks on the west coast. I have considered the matter and reviewed what information I have on this issue. In my view his request does not meet the exigencies of the Standing Order at this time. I know the crisis is a serious one, but I am not sure that it constitutes an emergency within the meaning of the Standing Order.

Accordingly I am going to refuse the request at this time. I can always hear more on it at another occasion if necessary.

I also wish to indicate to the House that it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche, Employment Insurance.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**ACTION PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-37, An Act to amend the National Capital Act and other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my speaking time with my hon. colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse.

[*English*]

By introducing amendments to the National Capital Act, the government is presenting an action plan for the National Capital Commission. The National Capital Commission and its predecessors, the Ottawa Improvement Commission and the Federal District Commission, are part of a planning and building legacy of over 100 years.

Over time, the mandate and tools that Parliament gave to the NCC have evolved to reflect current issues. For instance, in 1969, the mandate of the NCC was expanded to encompass implementation of a new policy for increased presence on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River. In 1988, the NCC was given the additional responsibility of organizing, sponsoring or promoting public activities and events in the national capital region.

The NCC is the largest federal landowner in the national capital region. It owns 470 square kilometres of land, including Gatineau Park, the greenbelt, 2,100 hectares in the urban area, 40 kilometres of parkways, 170 kilometres of recreational pathways and some 1,300 buildings, 63 of them being heritage properties. The NCC also owns and operates six official residences in this region.

*Government Orders*

Given the important mandate of the NCC to plan the development of the capital region and maintain the assets under its custody, Parliament decided many years ago that the NCC should be subject to more government oversight with respect to its real estate transactions. We have to realize that this was at a time where government was smaller and ways of conducting business in general were different.

However, times have changed and the current thresholds set out in the National Capital Act are such that virtually every real estate transaction that the NCC seeks to enter into requires Governor in Council approval. This is not efficient for a crown corporation that is expected to operate at arm's length from government and as much as possible like private entities.

Not only does the requirement for GIC approval affect the NCC's ability to quickly seize business opportunities, it also prevents private companies from making good use of NCC's properties in a timely fashion so they can also contribute to making the capital a vibrant place.

That is why this government proposes in Bill C-37 to remove the obligation for the NCC to obtain GIC approval of each real estate transaction.

Appropriate oversight of the NCC's operations, including its real estate transactions, presently exists through Governor in Council approval of its annual corporate plan. The NCC may decide to designate any property as part of the national interest land mass if the property is considered to be essential to the long-term character of the national capital region.

The NCC is not required to seek the approval of third parties or other levels of government in order to designate properties as part of the national interest land mass.

The independent panel that reviewed the mandate and functions of the NCC reported that the nature of the national interest land mass and the process that underpinned its delineation have been shrouded in secrecy and raised several questions, including criteria used to designate properties. Similar concerns were raised in the Auditor General's 2007 special examination report of the NCC.

That is why Bill C-37 provides a process for greater transparency and predictability in the national interest land mass process. The bill introduces a definition of "national interest land mass" and requires regulations governing the relevant criteria and process. This would enhance the oversight of the NCC by having regulation-making powers in the act regarding these criteria and a process subject to public consultations in accordance with the usual regulatory process. Obviously the NCC could not effect the management, development, conservation or use of those properties if it did not own or otherwise control them.

In previous speeches made in this House regarding Bill C-37, some comments were made regarding the regional representation on the NCC's board of directors. The National Capital Act already requires certain representation from Quebec and Ontario as well as from other regions of the country. More specifically, other than the chairperson and the chief executive officer, two members of the NCC board must be residents of local municipalities in Quebec, including one from Gatineau, and three members must be from local

municipalities in Ontario. The act allows for an additional eight members from elsewhere in Canada, including places in Quebec and Ontario outside the national capital region to be appointed to the NCC board. Bill C-37 maintains the representation of local municipalities in Quebec and Ontario to ensure adequate representation of other regions across the country.

● (1645)

The government takes the matter of effective governance of crown corporations seriously. Through the GIC appointment process, the government ensures that individuals appointed as chairs meet the selection criteria and that the directors appointed meet the needs of crown corporations, based on advice received from the board of directors. The NCC is no exception.

The proposal that municipal councillors be on the NCC's board has not been adopted, since their participation could lead to potential conflicts of interest and the need to recuse themselves. This would render such appointments ineffective.

While the views of local residents are taken into account, given that the NCC's decisions often have an impact on people living in the national capital region, the main focus of the NCC has to remain the building of a great capital for our country.

An important component of the government's action plan for the NCC is the efficient protection of Gatineau Park. Among other measures, Bill C-37 proposes to oblige the NCC to give due regard to maintaining the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park. Although not defined in Bill C-37, the term "ecological integrity" is defined in the Canada National Parks Act as "a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes".

There is enough already enshrined in legislation to say that what is proposed in Bill C-37 sends a pretty clear signal to the NCC of Parliament's expectations on how Gatineau Park is managed.

Gatineau Park is not the only fabulous green asset we have in the national capital region, and this is why Bill C-37 also proposes to clearly add the obligation for the NCC to manage its properties in accordance with the principle of responsible environmental stewardship.

All in all, Bill C-37 proposes amendments that address issues that have been voiced in the last few years and updates the NCC's enabling legislation to ensure it can continue to build and maintain a great capital that fully reflects the beauty of our country as well as its cultural and natural diversity.

● (1650)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will ask the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell the same question that I asked the member for Carleton—Mississippi Mills.

Would he support an amendment to this bill that would address the concerns of many citizens vis-à-vis the greenbelt? That is, if there were an amendment proposed that would ask that the ecological integrity of the greenbelt also be protected, and not just of Gatineau Park, would he, as parliamentary secretary, support that amendment?

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member's concern in this respect.

As I mentioned in my speech, the National Capital Commission is obligated to oversee the environmental integrity of both Gatineau Park and the green space. It is called the green space.

This bill will go through its normal process. It will go to committee, and if there is an amendment to be made, I would ask my colleague to make that amendment or make it through his colleagues who are sitting on that committee. I would have to see the wording of the amendment before I would comment. Listening to the intent and the spirit with which my colleague is speaking, I would not be adverse to it. Again, I would have to see the wording before I could commit to whether I would be able to support that amendment.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell on his defence of a bill to modernize the legislation governing the National Capital Commission.

Listening to the opposition, the thought crossed my mind that we have not had an opportunity like this in a long time to finally pass legislation that will modernize the NCC and bring it up to date.

Are we not putting the cart before the horse by talking about amendments already? It is important to get this bill through the House first. Does the member agree that it is important for those who want to move forward on this bill to vote for it in this House?

[*English*]

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, the intent of this bill is to upgrade, modernize and increase the transparency of the act to make it more accountable, to modernize the NCC in carrying out its roles and responsibilities. This will follow the normal process of bills of this nature, being first reading, second reading, to committee and back to the House for final reading.

I would encourage my colleagues on all sides of the House, from all parties, to support this important bill.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the parliamentary secretary's own remarks, he acknowledged that the term "responsible environmental stewardship" is not defined in this act. He went on to say that "ecological integrity" is defined in the Canada National Parks Act, and he read its definition.

Number one, why did the government change the terminology from what is commonly understood to be sustainable development to responsible environmental stewardship, as the government did, for example, in the defining and enabling legislation for Natural Resources Canada, which was considered to be a serious watering down of environmental standards across the country?

Second, how does he propose, as a legislator, to instruct the management of the NCC in its ecological integrity responsibilities? What exactly is it going to be using as a baseline if responsible environmental stewardship is not defined and ecological integrity is outside the ambit of his act?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, we spoke about ecological integrity, and I gave its definition as contained in the Canada

National Parks Act. As I mentioned, I feel that definition provides ample information to the NCC on how to carry out that responsibility.

I hear from the opposition that it wants such detail inserted into this act that we would not actually need a National Capital Commission; it would all just be regulated by the act.

We have to invest our confidence in the decision-making abilities of the National Capital Commission and we have to ensure that the right people, with the proper qualifications, sit on the board of the commission so they can make the right decisions.

● (1655)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about the action plan for the National Capital Commission this afternoon.

I am very proud of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for taking action on this issue. He helped us all recognize the strategic importance of the National Capital Commission. Our capital, which belongs to all Canadians, is world-class.

I think that this bill is a good one because it will modernize the institution. Its many strong elements include recognition of the boundaries of Gatineau Park and a strong stance on the need for responsible environmental management. It also contains a comprehensive governance regime for the board of directors and provides for governor in council approval of the master plan. These measures are all the result of consultations. We consulted stakeholders and now we are moving forward. For 13 years, the previous government failed to act on this issue. Now, those members have a chance to work with our government to modernize the National Capital Commission, to make it fully operational and to ensure that it meets present-day needs.

This afternoon, I listened to opposition party members. I suppose it is easy to criticize for the sake of criticizing, to nitpick and stall. We all understand the spirit of this bill. There can be no doubt that this bill will modernize the National Capital Commission. We believe that it should be passed and referred to committee. If it needs improvement, we will improve it. This is our chance to get things done. That is what we were elected for: to make things happen. That is why we are taking action.

By introducing amendments to the National Capital Act, our government is presenting its vision for the future of the National Capital Commission, a vision that will enable Canadians to benefit from the commission's lands and properties now and for years to come. We are acting to support the commission's viability and transparency, to protect Gatineau Park and to prepare this important institution for the challenges and opportunities to come.

### *Government Orders*

The National Capital Commission is an important institution in overseeing our nation's capital. However, it is not unique. Other countries also have similar institutions. For instance, in the United States, the National Capital Planning Commission is designated as the central planning agency. Quebec also has its own *Commission de la capitale nationale* and Australia has the National Capital Authority, which is responsible for planning and development in the nation's capital, Canberra. It is also responsible for the upkeep of public spaces that Australians can visit. Thus, these are all institutions that enhance the national character of the capital and ensure that people from all over the country are proud when they come here to visit Ottawa.

Certain individuals have played a key role in making Ottawa a truly modern capital, in every sense of the word. My hon. colleague from Ottawa—Orléans mentioned the architect Jacques Gréber, who developed the plan for Canada's national capital region in 1950. His report proposed a series of measures to improve Canada's capital. Mr. Gréber proposed the creation of a scenic parkway and a greenbelt, the restoration of shorelines and the expansion of Gatineau Park. The interesting thing about this is that it affected two provinces, the two founding nations of our country.

A large portion of the lands in Gatineau Park belonged to the Government of Quebec, but in 1973, the province agreed to transfer the administration of those lands to the federal government to create Gatineau Park. Our actions will protect the park's boundaries and encourage environmental stewardship. The National Capital Commission is also responsible for other important areas in the region. Every year the National Capital Commission fulfills its duties. As chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I can assure this House that the NCC is doing an excellent job in that area. Its contribution to the linguistic duality of the capital serves as a model for others.

Let us turn our attention to the greenbelt. What is the greenbelt? The greenbelt brings together several pieces of land along the Ottawa River on the Ontario side. It covers nearly 20,000 hectares of green space, including farms, forests and wetlands.

• (1700)

These lands allow people to discover their rural roots and natural heritage and are a place where sustainable agriculture and forestry can be practised.

What is interesting about the bill being debated this afternoon is that we will be strengthening the regulatory powers and the enforcement regime of the National Capital Act. The bill contains the basis for improved protection of the greenbelt through an environmental regulatory framework.

Think of the properties managed by the commission. We have the Rideau Canal, which stretches over 200 kilometres and was built in the 19th century to link Ottawa to Kingston. In June 2007, the Rideau Canal was designated a world heritage site by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Members will recall that Quebec has a representative at UNESCO. This is another fine achievement by our government and a prime example of our open federalism.

UNESCO highlighted the historical importance of the Rideau Canal in the fight for control of the northern section of the North American continent.

In winter, a second section of the Rideau Canal measuring almost eight kilometres and equivalent to 90 Olympic-sized skating rinks is transformed into a skateway—the great Rideau Canal skateway. The Guinness Book of World Records has recognized it as the world's longest skateway. It is a place to celebrate the joys of winter in Canada.

The Mer Bleue Conservation Area is located east of Ottawa. A boardwalk protects the acidic water and the bog that shelters unusual species of trees and other plants. In 1995, the area was designated a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, a treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Other properties found in the greenbelt are Commissioner's Park, where there is a display of over 100,000 tulips each spring, and Bate Island on the Ottawa River.

The National Capital Commission is responsible for a very large area—over 58,000 hectares, in fact—spanning a number of different sectors. These green spaces are home to a variety of ecosystems, habitats, plants and wildlife.

Canadians recognize the importance of protecting green spaces and other properties managed by the National Capital Commission. Environmental groups and parliamentarians have certainly shown interest in preserving National Capital Commission properties, in particular Gatineau Park. However, the current National Capital Act does not address the importance of maintaining the integrity of these ecologically sensitive areas.

This bill makes it clear that ecological integrity, in particular when it comes to Gatineau Park, is a major concern. This is what came out of consultations with stakeholders. Our government is proposing changes to the National Capital Act in order to better protect the commission's properties. A new provision would be added to require the commission to manage all of its properties in accordance with the principles of responsible environmental stewardship. That would apply to Gatineau Park as well as the greenbelt.

The commission will have a great deal of responsibility with respect to governance, and that will allow for better monitoring of management of its powers for possible approval by the Governor in Council.

I must stress that this bill would make it possible to preserve the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park. These changes would go a long way toward ensuring the sustainability of National Capital Commission properties, and environmental sustainability in particular.

*Government Orders*

This is our opportunity to modernize the National Capital Act. We are reaching out to the opposition parties because we want to work with them on this. Obviously, it is easy to criticize and complain. But this time, they have a chance to do something tangible to modernize the National Capital Commission. I urge them to support the bill and to send it to committee. Then, parliamentarians will be able to examine the details of the bill. We could make it better, to ensure that we have a National Capital Commission backed by contemporary legislation that meets the needs addressed in our consultations.

• (1705)

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure what I heard from my colleague on the other side of the House, but I think that I understood him to want the bill to be sent to committee quickly to have amendments proposed, which he might or might not support. There are a few points that should be amended in my opinion, and I would like to know what he thinks.

Clause 3.1 of Bill C-37 reduces the number of commission members from 15 to 14. I would like to know whether he would agree with us when we likely submit an amendment to have an uneven number of members, perhaps 15, or to give the chairperson the deciding vote. With 14 votes split evenly, a decision would not easily be made.

Clauses 3.1 and 8 confirm the abolition of the commission's executive committee. This government's accountability act, Bill C-2—as we remember—provided in clause 288 for the formation of an executive committee of the National Capital Commission. There is a contradiction. So, we will have to see with my colleague whether he would be prepared to accept amendments to correct these errors.

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Hull—Aylmer for his question. Indeed, the bill provides for a reduction in the number of members of the board of directors from 15 to 14. And 14 is an even number. So, when there is a vote, what will happen in the event of a tie vote?

I want to reassure my colleague opposite. Indeed, the board of directors in its new form, as we propose it, will include 14 members, and the chief executive officer will no longer be a member of the board. This change consolidates the oversight and the accountability of the National Capital Commission.

However, according to the regulations governing the commission, the chairperson casts the deciding vote in the case of a tie. This will make a decision possible in a tie vote. It is the chief executive officer who decides in the end in the case of a tie.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a very brief question for my colleague.

The proposed legislation will create a specific position for a CEO at the NCC. Does the member agree with having the position designated officially bilingual?

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his question.

As I mentioned in my speech, the National Capital Commission stands out from other federal institutions because of its respect for the application and the spirit of the Official Languages Act. For this, as a parliamentarian, I think we can give the commission a tip of the hat. I find my colleague's proposal interesting given that we are in an

area where English and French are used. It would seem to me totally appropriate for this person to be able to speak in both of our country's fine official languages.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague made a small mistake when he talked about the deciding vote. Personally, I have not seen the clause in the bill that gives the chairperson a deciding vote. However, it could be in the regulations, except that my colleague was talking about the chief executive officer having a deciding vote. The bill certainly makes a difference between the chairperson and the CEO, and I do not think that the CEO can have—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I meant the chairperson of the board of directors, not the chief executive officer. I stand corrected.

• (1710)

[*English*]

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the bill which would seriously amend the enabling authority for the existence of the National Capital Commission and its mandate, and would deal with a number of pressing questions that have arisen more recently and have arisen over time.

However, before addressing the merits of some of the changes, I want to quickly review the history and the accomplishments of this crown corporation. It did celebrate 100 years, a century of achievement in 1999, from 1899 to 1999. It was established in 1959 and it had predecessors: the Federal District Commission of 1927 and the Ottawa Improvement Commission of 1899, so its roots go substantially back.

I think Canadians and parliamentarians know that the capital region was founded in the early 19th century as, effectively, lumbering and industrial centres. My own grandfather was a night watchman on LeBreton Flats, just a stone's throw from here, working the midnight shift, carrying his lunch-pail to work, carrying on his back a burlap bag of kindling back to the rooming house which my grandmother operated in downtown Ottawa at a time when Ottawa was very much divided between founding peoples at the time. Of course, it moved on and improved.

In 1899, Parliament created the Ottawa Improvement Commission. Its focus was to beautify Ottawa as the national capital. It created driveways along the Rideau Canal and Rockcliffe Park, and Minto bridges and several new urban parks.

From 1927 to 1959, governments established the First Federal District and transformed the organization into a more powerful Federal District Commission. It focused on working to the general advantage of Canada. It built the Champlain Bridge, the National War Memorial in Confederation Square, Gatineau Park, and the famous Gréber plan which sets out and maintains the existence of the green space in this region.

*Government Orders*

From 1959 to the present, the more recent generation, more recent time, the National Capital Act of 1958 doubled the size of the national capital region, bringing more of Quebec and Ontario together in the capital, as well as new expanses of natural land, rural land, and finally established the National Capital Commission in 1959, as I mentioned. Its focus was to create pride and unity through Canada's capital region.

What did it do during that time, 1959 to today? It removed the railway lines from downtown, something that, from time to time, we lament today given the importance of public transit, particularly light rail systems in our urban centres. It has built much infrastructure, expanded the Gatineau Park, created a protected greenbelt in the Ontario part of the capital region, decentralized government offices to campuses throughout the capital region and developed urban parks, things like the tulip displays and beyond.

The NCC has had a profound impact on our national capital region on behalf of all Canadians. It is all Canadians' whose tithes contributes to the NCC's budget. It is they who are shareholders in this national capital region. Some of us have the privilege and the benefit of serving as elected officials in this area. My own riding of Ottawa South is touched by NCC properties, the greenbelt, an international airport and more.

The NCC is here and it is here to stay. It has an undeniably important role in strengthening Canada's national capital, a G8 economy and a G20 economy. We want set up our capital here and we want to improve our capital that is becoming of our city, our region and our country.

• (1715)

The mandate and the activities of the NCC have not been without controversy in the more recent history in this region. There have been debates swirling about funding levels. Is the NCC sufficiently funded or has it been acquiring and developing properties on behalf of Canadians in order to provide the necessary funding levels to achieve its other responsibilities in its mandate?

What about its governance structures? How many people sit on the board? Do they meet publicly? What is their decision-making process? Is it open? Is it transparent? Is it closed door?

What about transparency itself? What kind of information is being accessed, links to consultation? To what extent is the NCC intervening appropriately, not only with other federal government line departments and central agencies, but other levels of government, the Corporation of the City of Ottawa, the Corporation of the City of Gatineau, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec and municipalities across the region as well?

Its property disposition has been quite successful over the years. The changes proposed in the bill make significant changes to the powers and the quantum, the amount of money involved in these property deals. The bill speaks also to the question of expropriation of properties, for example, in the Gatineau Park.

There are, of course, other outstanding questions. What role should the National Capital Commission play in its 10 year plans? What role should it play with respect to transportation master plans and transportation infrastructure?

There is a new context that is important to situate as we debate this legislation. The new context is this: Ottawa-Gatineau is now the fourth largest census metropolitan area in the country and it is at least the second fastest growing, following, I think, just behind the great city of Calgary. It is growing quickly. In many respects our larger census metropolitan areas are re-emerging as city states. They are re-emerging as city states, not only competing one against the other, but they are competing against American city states, Chinese city states, European city states and beyond.

Why is this important? It is important because we know from the work of important academics, like Richard Florida, that the question of how we do metropolitan areas is critical to our economic success. We know that the higher the quality of life in a census metropolitan area, like the Vancouver district, the greater Toronto area, Halifax, Dartmouth and beyond, has a direct bearing on the ability of these regions to attract and retain capital.

This region used to host some 2,500 high tech firms. Last year, under the watch of the Conservative government, only one new start-up high tech corporation was created using venture capital.

We are in a venture capital crisis. Our ability to attract that venture capital to give rise to those start-ups, to innovate, to compete and win, is directly affected by the quality of life that an organization like the National Capital Commission impacts upon.

Our ability to retain and attract skilled and educated workers is fundamental, which is what the experts tell us we need if we are going to compete and win in the race for a clean economy and the clean jobs of today and tomorrow. Therefore, quality of life in cities is paramount if we are going to win that race to the top.

The bill would make some changes to the NCC that, ultimately, in the context I have just set, has a bearing on that quality of life. Let us examine, for example, what the bill says about the environment. It speaks about environmental stewardship in clause 10.

• (1720)

The environmental implications we are learning now as we go forward are extraordinarily important because we are now recognizing that the environment is more than simply a limitless carrying capacity system that can provide without any end for our needs to be able to assimilate our wastes, provide our natural resources, give us our crops and our foodstuffs, maintain ecological integrity and so on and so forth. We now know that fiction is over.



*Government Orders*

We know, particularly through the phenomenon of climate change, that we are now butting up against carrying capacity challenges. We are asking the atmosphere, for example, to carry 450 parts per million of greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, at a time when the scientific community is quite certain that we are playing Russian roulette with our atmospheric carrying capacity, temperature and other climatic patterns on the planet. This is linked, believe it or not, to the NCC.

The NCC has a mandate, not only in an urban context but, as we have heard in debate here earlier, with respect to a major park called the Gatineau Park, which hundreds of thousands of Canadians enjoy each and every year, tour, visit and ski through. It is filled with lakes and it is developed to a certain extent.

What happens within that park, as the NCC is given new marching orders with respect to ecological integrity and environmental stewardship, in terms of decision making made by the NCC, is fundamental. In one of the earlier questions I posed, I made it perfectly clear that what we now know about the national park system, despite our best efforts in setting up isolated zones across the country to represent different ecozones and ecosystems, we now really know, as the biological evidence tell us, that our park system is failing. It is failing because our parks are not connected. They are not connected because the predatory species cannot move easily. That is why I am so proud of my colleagues from Alberta who have launched the Yellowstone to Yukon initiative, finally overcoming the fiction and stopping the denial that this question of integrating our land masses to be able to allow for connectivity is so important to maintaining our flora and fauna.

We also know that our parks not only need to be connected but they need to be buffered. If one mines up to the edge of a park, despite the short-term attractiveness of turning that natural capital into financial capital through profit, we also know that without being buffered our parks are being compromised which draws down, once again, on our natural capital.

I know these terms, this concept, this idea and this thinking are foreign to many in the Conservative government. In fairness, the Prime Minister only admitted that the science of climate change was in fact correct after the chief scientific advisor for former President Bush told him so. Up to that point, the Prime Minister was in wilful or non-wilful denial about the risks inherent with climate change, temperature increases, species disappearance and so on and so forth.

Canadians would be forgiven, I think, if at face value they see these changes with respect to the environment in this bill and be skeptical about the government's serious intentions and whether or not they can trust the government to do the right thing.

The bill, for example, does not speak at all to the question of watershed management. We have in the Ottawa River one of the mightiest rivers in the world. The daily flow of the Ottawa River is larger than every western European tributary combined. It is a massive and mighty river which much of this region was built on. Much of the lumber used to create this beautiful chamber was derived from the Ottawa valley and floated down the Ottawa River.

●(1725)

How is this question of watershed management, if we are going to move for example to a watershed management approach, as they have in British Columbia, how will this impact on the NCC's mandate?

As I mentioned earlier, if we do what happened in Boston, where the city of Boston grew up and around a park area, we see that within some 150 years every indigenous species of flora and fauna in that park has disappeared and something new has replaced it. That is hardly ecological integrity.

Ecological integrity and the movement toward it began under our previous government, when former environment minister Sheila Copps struck a national panel. Prime Minister Mulroney understood the importance of this. He mentioned it in speeches in 1992 at the Earth Summit. By the way, the Prime Minister is the first prime minister not to participate in international negotiations for climate change, biodiversity or otherwise in recent Canadian history, in over 35 years.

Therefore, the bill does not answer fundamental questions about responsible environmental stewardship and what it means. It does not answer questions about what ecological integrity looks like. It does not seriously, in my view sufficiently, guide the executive of the NCC in its difficult decision making on how it is going to move forward.

How will the NCC expropriate properties even if we lift the ceiling and allow it to expropriate property for millions of dollars? Will it do so using fair market value? If I owned a property in the Gatineau Park that was being expropriated, would I not go out and get the most expensive possible listings, bids that I could possibly muster, turn around and pass it on the federal taxpayer and say, "Please indemnify me"?

Another issue which I have not raised yet and I would like to close with is this. How will the NCC deal with the important question of public transit, light rail and moving our citizenry in this area? Just today, the city of Ottawa settled a \$37.5 million lawsuit for breach of contract for a light rail project which had been approved by this city, and by the way had been approved by the former minister of transport and President of the Treasury Board. After all this was done, after \$45 million of acquisitions were pursued by the city, now a \$37.5 million settlement and \$2.5 million worth of legal fees, all of which came from the unprecedented and reckless behaviour of the present Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities while he was Treasury Board president.

This is why I am calling, for example, on the city of Ottawa to release its legal opinions to the Canadian people, to the citizens of Ottawa, and to Canadian taxpayers who pay for the NCC, whether there are legal opinions as to whether or not the federal government should be indemnifying the city of Ottawa for the reckless behaviour of the member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

*Private Members' Business*

Will the NCC's participation in this kind of transportation planning prevent this kind of reckless behaviour in the future? We do not know, but that would be very important to address, given the NCC's important responsibilities and its mandate to the shareholders of Canada. The taxpayers of Canada provide the tax dollars every year to allow the NCC to pursue its mandate on behalf of all Canadians to have a beautiful, healthy, high quality of life in our national capital, so it can continue to thrive for all Canadians and that all Canadians can be proud of.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

### INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR OLDER WORKERS

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should as quickly as possible implement a genuine income support program for older workers who lost their job in order to ease their transition from active employment to pension benefits.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Motion M-285 calls on the government to, "as quickly as possible implement a genuine income support program for older workers who lost their job in order to ease their transition from active employment to pension benefits".

That is quite different from a program that targets training. We are talking about workers who, quite often, cannot be retrained. This program would give them the financial assistance needed to bridge the gap, after age 55, until they receive their pension and old age security. Such a program has existed in the past and was very successful.

In introducing this motion, I am thinking of those who have already benefited from the program and who could see it be reinstated. For example, in my riding, nearly 2,000 workers from Marine Industries were forced to retire because of the closure of the shipbuilding and railway car sections. These people were able to bridge the gap I mentioned earlier. The people of Sidbec-Dosco (Ispat) Inc., in a neighbouring riding, including many of my constituents, the people of the sewing plants in Saint-Ours and Pierreville, and the people from the manufacturing sector in Nicolet and Bécancour benefited from this program.

Today, it is just as sorely needed in Sorel, for example, where QIT-Fer et Titane, a plant that is actually doing well, shut down for eight weeks. These temporary closures worry the older workers. The Poudres Métalliques plant has had some difficult adjustments in recent years. At the Mittal plant in Contrecoeur, there are many workers from my riding. There was also the closure of Norsk Hydro in Bécancour, where there were workers aged 55 and up who could have taken advantage of such a program.

In fact, all working people throughout Quebec would be well served by the creation of this new program, which would really not cost very much money. The cost of restoring this program, known as

POWA or the Program for Older Worker Adjustment, is estimated to be between \$70 and \$75 million.

In general, the Bloc Québécois thinks it is unacceptable for the government to delay creating an income support program for older workers who find themselves in an especially difficult situation.

In the 2006 Speech from the Throne, the Conservative government promised to establish a committee to study the creation of such a program, but the Bloc Québécois has seen the government do all it can to avoid real discussions of setting up this income support program.

An expert panel on older workers was established in January 2007 and submitted its report in 2008. However, this group clearly had a mandate to repeat the Conservative rhetoric and orient its work toward active measures. That is the difference I was talking about a little while ago in regard to active measures to reintegrate these workers who are 55 years of age or more and cannot go back to school, for example, because all they have is grade 2 or 3. They have not even finished secondary school. That is why the workers I am talking about are poorly served by active measures.

This program was aimed at all workers who suffered mass layoffs and could not be re-trained. POWA was established in 1988 and provided eligible workers between 55 and 64 years of age who had lost their jobs as a result of major, permanent layoffs with benefits in order to bridge the gap between their employment insurance and old age pension. Unfortunately the program was ended in March 1997. It was a shared-cost program, 70% funded by the federal government and 30% by the participating provinces. In 1996, 111,700 people were registered in the program after 900 layoffs.

• (1735)

Since the disappearance of POWA, the Program for Older Worker Adjustment, in March 1997, there have not been any more income support programs targeted specifically at older workers affected by mass layoffs or company closures.

It is a well-known fact, though, that age is a particular problem after job losses because employers are more reluctant to hire older people. This means that even though workers 55 years of age or more are generally less likely to be unemployed than young people, when they do find themselves unemployed, it is usually for a much longer time than the average.

In its 2004 Monitoring and Assessment Report, submitted in March 2005, the Employment Insurance Commission said that older workers are overrepresented among the long-term unemployed, making up 21.3% of this group but only 12.5% of the active population.

The pilot projects created in response to the mass layoffs are aimed mainly at providing training for people who have been laid off. However, older workers do not participate very much in this kind of training and measures like this are clearly inappropriate for them.

*Private Members' Business*

In addition, according to the four big central labour bodies, and I quote:

—studies have also shown that the older they are, the harder it is for workers to get training. Losing a job is much harder on older workers than on younger workers because the skills of older workers, who have not had access to training, are increasingly out of sync with the skills required by the current labour market.

The numbers speak volumes: workers over 55 years of age account for only 3.5% of participants in the regular skills development component, that is, training programs.

The Employment Insurance Commission notes that, “as a general rule, older workers remain unemployed longer than do workers between the ages of 25 and 54”. Older workers remain unemployed for an average of 33.6 weeks versus 23.3 weeks for workers aged 25 to 54. They are also relatively unskilled, which is why the program is so important. In fact, 39.1% of older workers have not completed high school, compared to 18.9% of workers between 25 and 54 years of age.

Workers have been calling for the reinstatement of POWA since the Minister of Finance at the time, Paul Martin, abolished it in 1997.

In 1995, the federal government contributed \$297 million and the provinces contributed \$127 million. It was clear that the program was useful. The final evaluation report released in 1997 had this to say about it:

POWA appears to have contributed to a greater quality of life for the participants. Participants, particularly under Regime 1, express greater satisfaction with aspects of their life such as ability to spend time with family, and participation in social and recreational activities.

POWA was renegotiated in 1993. At that time, Quebec and Ottawa renewed the program for older worker adjustment for those over 55 who were victims of massive layoffs in 1993. They reduced the minimum number of years of employment required to benefit from 15 to 13, which was an improvement.

Once their EI benefits had run out, workers aged 55 to 60 could also draw a monthly benefit of between \$760 and \$1,000, depending on their income, as long as they remained available for work.

For those aged 60 to 64, the benefits were set at \$700 because RRQ benefits could be tacked on to their income. Previously, these benefits varied between \$754 and \$1,200.

This did not prevent recipients from working, as only 40% of employment income in excess of \$300 could be deducted from benefits collected under the program.

• (1740)

During the 38th Parliament, the Bloc Québécois worked hard on many occasions to get an income support program for older workers implemented.

In the report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources tabled on February 15, 2005, recommendation 13 reflects the Bloc Québécois' position. It reads:

The Committee recommends that the proposed employment insurance commission consult program contributors and report to the government on the feasibility of providing a supplementary benefit beyond the proposed 50-week maximum period so as to help unemployed workers 50 years of age and over cope with extended periods of unemployment. The amount of the supplementary benefit and its duration should depend on lifetime contributions to employment insurance.

On June 9, 2005, the Bloc Québécois had a motion unanimously passed that referred to the increasing number of factory closures associated with globalization and called on the government to establish a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.

Despite that motion, the Liberals, in power at the time, took no action. We believe, however, that funds allocated to POWA should not come from employment insurance, but rather from the consolidated revenue fund, and that POWA should be a social program managed by Quebec and the provinces.

On April 6, 2006, the House unanimously passed an amendment to the amendment to the Speech from the Throne proposed by the Bloc Québécois, and I quote:

That the amendment be amended by adding after the words “tax increases” the following: “, for the lack of a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs, a strategy that should include income support measures.”.

That idea was therefore added, and was unanimously adopted. This should have prompted the government to act, but it did not.

Although the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development talked about a feasibility study in spring 2006, the Conservative government still has done nothing. We still do not know the results of that study.

The Bloc devoted another opposition day to the issue in October 2006, and the Conservative Party was the only party to vote against the Bloc's proposal. The vote was 155 members in favour, and 124 against. The Bloc included this program in phase one and phase two of its economic recovery, which was announced in fall 2008 and 2009.

It would cost the federal government approximately \$75 million a year to improve POWA. This calculation has been confirmed by a number of economists.

The expert panel consulted the provincial and territorial governments, employers, unions and academics. The public was also able to participate in these consultations.

As indicated in budget 2006, the expert panel was mandated to conduct a feasibility study, in partnership with the provinces and territories, to evaluate current and potential measures to address the challenges faced by displaced older workers, in order to help them overcome these difficulties, including improved training and enhanced income support, such as early retirement benefits. The group produced a report along the lines I mentioned today.

I wish to conclude by saying that the Canadian and provincial governments already have experience in implementing the type of programs I am talking about today. The program that we advocate is not only feasible, it is essential to take into account the actual situation of older workers who are collectively laid off or who lose their jobs because of plant closures. In spite of all efforts and good intentions, some of these workers are unable to find a new job. It is high time to act in order to correct the situation created by the elimination of the POWA in 1997. It only takes political will.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1745)

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I found it very interesting to listen to the hon. member's comments and concerns about older workers.

I would be interested to know approximately how many people in his area have been victims as a result of this recession and are currently struggling to find employment today.

[Translation]

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** Madame Speaker, we are talking of course of hundreds of people. Historically, there were thousands.

Let us consider, for example, the 2,000 workers at Marine Industries. Today, this company operates under another name and has 250 to 300 employees. There are not many plant workers. It is more of an executive firm that needs highly qualified people. And the workforce was left with nothing at all.

This program allowed more than 500 employees who could not be retrained to take advantage of a link. They were 55, 57 or 58 years old and were able to get to 60 and then to 65.

Presently, in the plants in my region, which includes areas beyond my riding, there are cases that could obviously have benefited from this program, including in areas such as Saint-Hyacinthe, Drummondville, Contrecoeur, Bécancour, Nicolet and Sorel. The recession has been deeply felt in all regions of Quebec and Canada. However, it has had devastating effects in the manufacturing, pulp and paper and forestry sectors.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Madam Speaker, first of all, allow me to congratulate my colleague for introducing this motion. The hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour has been extremely thorough in his defence of people over 55 years of age who have lost their jobs and who are unable to find other employment. He described the situation very accurately.

Alongside the hon. member, I took part in meetings with workers—at Marine Industries and the Jeffrey mine in Asbestos, among others—and we heard from people whose financial situation was severely affected. For example, they were forced to exhaust all their earnings before turning to welfare.

I would like to hear the hon. member expand on this. Like me, he knows that people over 55 who work for businesses like the Asbestos mine and Marine Industries account for 20% to 25% of all job losses. I would like to hear what the hon. member has to say about that.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** Madam Speaker, there was indeed a high percentage of workers who were completely abandoned. It is nearly impossible for an electrician with 30 years of experience in the same plant to become an electronics engineer. These people learned their skills on the job. They were trained by other electricians when they started working in the plant. What they learned was quite specific to the company they worked for. Thus, at 57 or 58 years of age, they were unable to retrain.

My colleague mentioned the case of Marine Industries, where some employees had only a grade two or grade three education. Therefore, to be able to follow a training program, they would have

had to go back to school for five, six or seven years. It did not make sense. These people had worked honestly, earned a living and raised their family. They found themselves forced to sell their house and to move into an apartment. The family was in a state of complete instability. When this program was implemented, it gave people between the ages of 57 and 60 sufficient money to last until they were eligible for the Quebec Pension Plan. Then, the pension would be added. Of course, the POWA benefits would be reduced accordingly. This would be sufficient for the worker to live on until he became eligible for the old age security pension. This was extremely beneficial. This is what I would like to be available for workers now.

• (1750)

[English]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to Motion No. 285. The sponsor of the motion would like to see this government implement an income support motion and a support program specifically for older workers who have lost their jobs to bridge them from active employment to receiving pension benefits.

I cannot encourage support for the motion. It would be against both the letter and the spirit of our policy with regard to older workers. Our government's approach to older workers has always been to create initiatives that encourage and support their retraining and participation in the labour market. If the initiative proposed in the motion were implemented, it would weaken the attachment of older people to the workforce and it would cost Canadian taxpayers billions of dollars.

Allow me to go over a bit of the history and give an historical perspective to the motion.

Motion No. 285 essentially calls for the establishment of a passive income support program, very much like the defunct program for older worker adjustment, or POWA.

POWA was a federal-provincial cost-shared program that existed from 1987 to 1996. It served 12,000 people and cost nearly half a billion dollars over the program's existence, and 70% of that was paid for by the Government of Canada. There were many problems with the program.

Let me cite the most important one. It discouraged people from returning to work. The figures tell the story. Only 19% of the participants in the program found work again after being laid off, as compared to 39% of the people who were not in the program. In addition, although both groups experienced a substantial loss of earnings after job loss, this loss was more pronounced for those in the program, with average earnings decreasing each year following layoff.

That program was abolished because of its negative impact on older workers and on the job market and because of its prohibitive cost.

In part because of these reasons, the government has decided to move away from passive income support toward a more effective intervention to help vulnerable workers.

*Private Members' Business*

We are currently dealing with an economic downturn and one of its effects is a rise in unemployment. It is distressing to see older people lose jobs that they may have held for many years. However, government-funded early retirement is not the answer. Why? Because as the economy picks up, we will need every worker we can get, and that is a fact. Every older worker has something to contribute and we want to be sure they are part of the labour market.

In a few years we could again face significant labour shortages. That is why we need to keep older workers in the labour market. Older workers are key to Canada's long-term prosperity, especially in the context of a rapidly aging population. They represent a large pool of experienced and skilled labour. Retaining them and retraining them is essential for ensuring a strong labour force in Canada.

The government's concern for older workers predates the current recession. In 2006 we introduced the targeted initiative for older workers. It provided active employment services to unemployed older workers in vulnerable communities affected by high unemployment or significant downsizing.

In 2007 we also appointed an expert panel on older workers, with a mandate to examine the longer-term issues facing this group. The panel confirmed that our government was on the right track with the employability approach that would remove systemic barriers and disincentives to work. The panel did not endorse a passive program like POWA.

Our aim is to give older workers more flexibility and choice so they can continue to participate in the workforce if they want to. The advent of the recession has only intensified our efforts to help older workers.

Canada's economic action plan is providing significant support to Canadian workers, including older workers affected by the global economic downturn. Through Canada's economic action plan, the government is creating more and better opportunities for Canadian workers through skills development. When older workers lose their jobs, they can get temporary income support through employment insurance income support. Many older workers are also receiving employment insurance-funded programming and training. We have invested significant sums of dollars toward training and retraining for the jobs that exist now and into the future.

• (1755)

Through Canada's economic action plan, our government is investing an additional \$60 million nationally over three years in the targeted initiative for older workers, which we extended for additional years and have made available to workers in cities with populations of less than 250,000. This increased funding will enable even more older workers to make the transition to new jobs.

There is even more. Our economic action plan also provides about \$500 million over two years for the career transition assistance program. This program offers extended income benefits to long-tenured workers who are paying for their own long-term training. We estimate that the career transition assistance program will benefit about 40,000 people.

All of these programs are aimed at helping people acquire new skills, training them and retraining them for a job market. These new initiatives are in addition to the increased support that we are

providing to the provinces and territories for skills training through the labour market and labour market development agreements. Over two years, we are putting a total of \$1.5 billion into these agreements, and that is on top of the programming support we already have in place. These agreements provide training support for the unemployed people.

In budget 2008, we increased the guaranteed income supplement earnings exemption from \$500 to \$3,500 and we made it easier to apply for and get the guaranteed income supplement. This is another significant improvement. Just recently, the Minister of Finance announced changes to the Canada pension plan rules, something that has been very well accepted, to better reward older workers who participate in the labour force and to improve the options for older workers who choose to combine pension and salary.

As one can see, these programs, although popular, may not be popular with the members of the opposition, but they are popular with the group that are benefited by them. As one can see, our government is committed to helping older workers remain in the labour market. This commitment is shown in our concrete actions to help older workers.

I should note that we are not the only ones who think that this is the best way to go. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, has strongly advised against publicly funded early retirement schemes. At the March 2009 meeting of the G8 employment and labour ministers, the OECD presented a paper that called early retirement schemes a policy mistake because they reduce the long-term labour supply and increase dependency on benefits. That is just not good for anyone and it is not good for our country.

Canada's prosperity now and into the future depends on a strong labour force. Older workers have accumulated the kind of wisdom and experience that we cannot afford to throw away. A passive income support scheme for unemployed older workers would be a waste of our human and financial resources and would cause great long-term damage to our economy.

This government is not going to make that kind of mistake. That is why I oppose Motion No. 285. I encourage my hon. colleagues to join me in voting against this sort of policy mistake and support our government's active measure for older workers.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to join the debate and pleased to see that you are in the chair and probably looking at the time and looking forward to having your evening off as well.

*Private Members' Business*

I am quite happy to speak today to support Motion No. 285, brought forward of course by the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour. More to the point, as the Liberal critic for veterans affairs, seniors and pensions, I am particularly pleased to support Motion No. 285 as it parallels many of the things that we as a party have been urging the current government to accept and act upon for some time given the reality of the recession that is affecting thousands of people across this country. I think all of us want to work, but when we cannot find a job at 58 years old, then we should be able to rely on our government for assistance when all else fails.

Regretfully, the Liberal Party and the current Conservative government seem to place radically different levels of focus on these issues. We just heard from my colleague that it is a very different ideology and a very different thought process.

As Liberals, we believe it is incumbent upon governments to be proactive and to help whenever they can. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister and his Conservative caucus have their own thoughts on the issue which were clearly spelled out by my hon. colleague across the hall. I say this not to be unkind, even though that is usually what we are in the House, but rather to simply point out that the Conservative Party, now the government, has time and time again demonstrated its political tendency for playing to the masses while practising a strict adherence to the notion that only the strong shall survive.

That is not the Liberal way. I do not believe that is the Canadian way either. After all, it was the current Prime Minister who once ran for the office with a promise to replace the CPP with personal, high-interest pension accounts in which citizens could deposit all of their extra money, money that could then be used for their retirement. To me it sounds like a plan that might be slanted toward those with a great deal of extra money.

Another case in point is income trusts. In the election campaign, the Prime Minister said that taxing income trusts was like robbing our seniors of their nest eggs. We all heard him many, many times say that. But once in office, what did he do? He said he needed to tax income trusts to prevent the rich from getting richer. Given that the measure primarily impacted seniors and near retirees I am forced to wonder what event could possibly have perpetuated this radical policy flip-flop. The answer is simple. There was nothing. Nothing changed and nothing happened. If nothing happened, one must wonder if the idea to tax income trusts was always part of the Conservative plan. More important, it was a part of "I will say anything to get elected and I will do what I want after".

I could go on with several examples, but I think most understand and accept that the Conservative government's record on quality pension reform and retirement income security is lacklustre at best.

As many members of the House will know, tens of thousands of skilled workers, particularly those who were employed in the manufacturing sector which my colleague referred to earlier, have lost their jobs due to circumstances far beyond their control. But what many do not fully understand is that the actual job loss is only the tip of the iceberg.

On September 20, 2007, our dollar hit parity with the U.S. dollar for the first time in more than 30 years. While Canadian tourists and cross-border shoppers began to rejoice, Canada's manufacturing

sector winced as it was hit squarely in the bottom line. This reality, coupled with certain global market pressures, was part of a chain reaction that saw huge multinationals fail and governments worldwide dole out billions of dollars in economic stimulus.

In 2007, more than 130,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in Canada. This year our economy has shed nearly half a million jobs in total. Where are these people? They are still unemployed. These numbers might sound staggering but it is not until one factors in the actual collapse of those companies and the subsequent loss of those companies' pension plans that the real toll in real terms can begin to be measured.

● (1800)

People can work to get another job, if they are lucky, but it is impossible to financially recover when 10, 20 or 30 years of pension contributions and interest are lost.

Canadian workers have been and are still losing their jobs today and their future financial security at an astounding rate. As recently as today, the OECD, which my colleague referred to earlier, released a report suggesting that western nations could set a new post-war unemployment record with the jobless numbers topping 10% next year.

While most nations are working tirelessly to stop the bleed, the Conservatives in this country continue to stand by with absolutely no plan of action to stop the hemorrhaging or to repair the damage. Just like they denied the recession was happening in the fall, the Conservatives' head-in-the-sand approach to problem-solving is now being extended to pension and retirement income security.

On the other side of the debate, the motion today deals with the need for a genuine program for older workers to help them financially transition from working life to retirement, but I would suggest that this concept must also be part of a far larger and more comprehensive debate on pensions and national income security.

The CPP, employment insurance, old age security and a host of other programs currently offered by the federal government have become the primary, if not exclusive, components in the retirement or emergency income strategies of many Canadians. Worse yet, in most cases, these important systems have been without a substantial review or wholesale revamp for several years.

There are few in this House who would suggest that Canada and the Canadian economy are the same today as when the CPP was passed by Lester Pearson in 1966. Today retirement income and pension security are also premised upon sound investments and robust global market growth, but, as members know, the current economic crisis has yielded anything but robust global markets. In some cases, portfolios have contracted to such a degree that investors have been wiped out entirely, undoing 20 years of shrewd financial planning.

While the current Prime Minister calls this negative market reality a great buying opportunity, to many watching, as a lifetime of retirement savings leak away, the situation qualifies as an outright crisis.

This brings me to Motion No. 285. I want to be clear. While the sponsoring member and I have differing opinions on many things, we share a real concern for those impacted by the global recession. Unlike the current Conservative government, we are determined to yield results for the tens of thousands of hard-working Canadian families who find themselves without work and without savings during this nearly unprecedented global and Canadian recession.

Motion No. 285 is a measure that fits hand in glove with the notion of income security. It is for that reason that I intend to stand in support of it. I say this carefully because I view Motion No. 285 positively, but I also see it as just one piece of a much larger puzzle. To have a real debate on retirement income, pension and investment security, we need to look beyond today's seniors. While we need to help protect our seniors and older workers today, we must also consider those who have seen their retirement savings eroded or eliminated as a result of the global economic downturn.

I cite the former Nortel pensioners as an example. In many cases, these employees worked for many years, contributing to a company pension plan that promised to be the central pillar in their personal retirement strategies. Today, with the volatility in the marketplace, that pillar has been toppled and the Conservative government seems content to deny the very existence of the problem.

I am pleased to be able to support this motion. I would think there are a variety of things that we need to talk about in the future, such as maximizing income coverage, where we can ensure it is adequate, and how we can protect the level of benefits that have been promised.

• (1805)

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Madam Speaker, as I was sitting here preparing to speak, it occurred to me that we have a situation where the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP are in agreement on support for our seniors, which is great, but I am curious as to whether we are now going to be called the coalition of senior supporters or whatever else the government will come up with.

This motion is urgently needed. Let us consider what it says. It states "That, in the opinion of the House", which happens when the House votes and the majority makes a statement, not when just the Conservative government makes a statement. It goes on to read:

—the government should as quickly as possible implement a genuine income support program for older workers who lost their job in order to ease their transition from active employment to pension benefits.

### *Private Members' Business*

Ensuring that older Canadians are able to live out their work life and their retirement years with the dignity they are due has long been a concern of mine, and even longer, a concern of the NDP.

I want to thank the Bloc member for bringing the motion forward because it is an important motion to put before the House, particularly at this time.

In fact, the first pension legislation in Canada came about as a result of the work of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, or the CCF, which was the forerunner to my NDP Party today. It was the CCF's leader, J.S. Woodsworth, who successfully pressured the Liberal government of Mackenzie King to implement an old age pension plan back in 1926. A previous speaker talked about Mr. Pearson in 1966 and the CPP. Pressure from the NDP-CCF was behind that move.

To this day, the NDP continues to push for an expansion of programs designed to ensure that seniors are able to live out their lives comfortably and in dignity.

Over this summer, I visited 19 communities across our country. I listened to seniors, doing the best I could to reassure them. I listened to their concerns and I will put them before the House as we discuss pensions in the coming weeks. Pensions must be a priority for the House in this particular session.

On June 11, I presented an opposition day motion on pension reform, which was unanimously supported in the House. Its first provision calls for immediate expansion of CPP, OAS and GIS.

We need to give consideration to doubling OAS. That measure will have to be discussed in depth because of the fiscal ramifications.

There are over 200,000 seniors in our country who live below the poverty line and 70% of them are women, and that is not acceptable.

Just as the NDP supports enhancing existing federal programs so seniors are able to live with the dignity that is their due, so we will also support proposals that aim to assist those older workers who find themselves out of a job and unable to acquire new work. Therefore, it is in keeping with the NDP's long established traditions and principles that we support the Bloc motion here today.

From talking to folks in my riding, I know that many older workers find themselves let go from their positions for two reasons. The first is prejudice among employers regarding the performance of older workers. These prejudices have absolutely no empirical evidence of support from any study or any body of research anywhere and are just that, prejudices. The second reason is the unconscionable practice among employers of exchanging their older, more highly paid employees with younger, less expensive ones.

Here are some more interesting things to note on this issue taken from a recent study that links discrimination of older workers to increased incidents of ill health.

*Private Members' Business*

While older workers tend to be more committed to the quality of their work performance and have more experience, many employers believe them to be limited as to the possession of the skills that are highly valued today, skills such as flexibility, which I do not think is really a skill but that is the way it is viewed in the corporate world, competency with respect to new technologies and a desire to learn new skills. This places them at a disadvantage in the hiring process.

• (1810)

Moreover, when older workers find themselves out of work, they tend to remain unemployed for a longer period of time than younger workers, in fact over twice as long, with older workers on average being out of work for up to a year. That is in normal times. They also experience a decline in earnings of 20% to 50% if they manage to find new work at all. Worse still, rates of job loss within the older worker population are higher among non-white and less educated persons. Recent research suggests that job loss among older workers leads to a decline in health, in mental health as well.

The upshot of this, it seems to me, is that we must provide some modest level of income support to these workers now or we will pay for far more expensive treatment, in medical terms, later on.

Last, 84% of managers and counsellors in HR centres agreed that employers discriminate against older workers in hiring practices.

I believe the Bloc's motion is calling for the kind of supportive bridge between the time an older worker is let go from his or her job until such time as he or she is old enough to be eligible for pension benefits of one kind or another.

In addition to income supports, there should be other programs. These programs should be put in place, designed to provide older workers with the kind of up-to-date training in technology and systems that will enable them to be more competitive with their younger peers.

Given that older workers are often unemployed for up to a year, as I said earlier, and having been let go from a job, it is very difficult for them. Supports must be in place to assist them until such time as they find that new job.

That older workers should be subjected to discrimination is all that more difficult to understand because of the commitment they have given to their companies over the years. According to Statistics Canada, there is expected to be a severe labour shortage coming our way as the baby boomers retire, and that was commented on earlier in the government's remarks. Perhaps having older workers stay in the workforce longer is a chance that this shortage may be sidestepped to some degree. That is if we, the people and employers, are able to overcome the prejudices toward older members of our workforce.

An estimated 2.1 million individuals between the ages of 55 to 64 were either unemployed or looking for work in 2006. This is more than double that in 1976. They represented 12% of the total workforce in 2006 compared with 10% three decades ago.

The previous speaker spoke about problems with programs in the 1980s and 1990s. We are dealing with a completely new generation of workers in terms of how a program should sustain these workers.

There are two main forces behind increases to our aging population and the rising labour force participation of older workers. Studies suggest that the labour force participation among this age group will continue to increase for three reasons: many baby boomers seem to want to remain in the workforce longer; rising levels of education particularly among women; and an apparent desire among people over 55 to continue working, either out of interest or financial necessity. One other point is this generation of older workers is far healthier than previous ones that we are aware of. In terms of employment, just over two million people age 55 to 64 had a job in 2006.

The projected labour shortages will occur, but then we will have no choice but to deal with them. We must be prepared for these shortages. Until such time as these issues are resolved, our older workers will need to know that supports are in place to assist them should they find themselves out of work through no fault of their own.

Obviously, this Bloc motion addresses an urgent need. In fact, I believe the original program for older worker adjustment should never have been eliminated in the first place. Therefore, I will close tonight by stating that it is an honour to support this particular Bloc motion, and I look forward to the day when it becomes a reality.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the motion tabled by my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour. It is an even greater pleasure because I worked very hard on this file on behalf of my party. First, of course, the human resources and social development file includes employment insurance. However, by way of historical coincidence, over the last few years, massive numbers of workers have lost their jobs in many different places. Workers over 55 years of age find themselves in a virtual dead end when there are no jobs in their area for which they are qualified or no jobs at all.

The program for older worker adjustment—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I do not know if this issue interests the member who is speaking out loud, but it concerns him too.

The program for older worker adjustment was launched in 1988. My colleagues referred to it. It was cancelled in 1997 for cost-cutting reasons to eliminate the deficit. It was, however, relatively inexpensive to run with an EI account that had some \$16 billion in it at the time. The program costs were a mere \$17 million. This goes to show that the decision made was a targeted one, and it has hurt a specific group, namely older workers. We have been trying to bring the program back because it was very popular and it delivered.



Before getting to the point I want to make here, let me set something straight. Much to my surprise, the government's parliamentary secretary claimed that what we are calling for is an early retirement plan. Either he does not understand the first thing about this debate or he is engaging in demagoguery. My sense is that he understands what the debate is all about. Early retirement plans are for workers with jobs to whom support is provided to help them transition to positions that remain active. This is completely different from what he said.

We are talking about those situations where workers lose their jobs. The positions have been abolished. These are massive job cuts, and the workers are laid off. When their EI benefits run out—if they are so lucky as to qualify for  $x$  number of weeks—and they go looking for work, there are no jobs for them. Employers may not want to hire them because of their age—it happens—or they do not have the qualifications required for the jobs that are available or, as is often the case, there are no jobs in the region where they live.

I will give some examples. Whirlpool, for instance, is the former manufacturer of Bélanger stoves in Montmagny. It used to employ 300 workers until it closed five years ago. Twenty-three percent of the workers were over 55. That was the main plant. Most of those workers were unable to find another job. They wanted to work; they were not lazy. The Liberal government was in power at the time and it suggested that they go work in Alberta. Can you imagine? A mother or father who have raised their children, who live in Montmagny with their entire family and they are going to move to Alberta to find work? That was the thinking in those days because there was no work nearby. But how would they survive in the meantime?

I remember a 57-year-old man. He sent out 91 job applications. He had one interview. People were discouraged.

In Huntingdon, it was textiles.

• (1820)

The job losses are staggering. And how many suicides have there been? These people are not lazy. They worked and paid employment insurance premiums their entire lives. There are no jobs. There is no early retirement program. It is callous and insulting to say that. It is tantamount to telling people that they were lazy, that they did not want to work, that there were jobs but that they did not want them.

I will give another example with which our colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles is familiar. The Régence shoe factory in Charlesbourg closed four years ago. When he was elected, he promised that he would do better than the Liberals. When elected in 2006, he met with representatives of the Régence factory workers. He was taken aback that they did not have a POWA program. He promised that they would get a POWA program and told them that they were not lazy. He told them that MPs make a lot of money and so on and so forth. He told them that he would look after them. Three months later the same people went to see him. He told them that progress was being made. You will remember that he was elected in January.

A motion was introduced in the House of Commons in October 2006, but he and his colleagues voted against the motion to implement POWA. I speak to these people regularly. I spoke to them

again today. They call me because I listen to them. Even his office staff were rude to these people. They are saying that they feel betrayed.

That is rather rude behaviour, if I may say so. It is completely unacceptable to make a commitment to these workers—especially the female workers, because the majority are women—and to treat them the way that the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles has treated them. These people worked 30, 35 or even 40 years for a company. It is unacceptable that they are being treated the way the parliamentary secretary treated them today.

He spoke about an early retirement scheme. I do not think I have ever heard anything so offensive towards these people. When we talk about the people of Montmagny, Huntingdon, Charlesbourg, Asbestos—earlier, we spoke with the people of Jeffrey mine and Marine Industries—we can see that these people are often worn out. They have spent many years of their lives working and still want to continue to do so. They have dignity. It is unacceptable to treat them like this. We are here to ensure that the people who built this country and who support our economy are respected and that they are treated with dignity.

But the government refuses to implement this relatively inexpensive program. It is about \$100 million. Each province can cover 30% of the cost. In February 2007, the National Assembly voted in favour of a motion asking the Canadian government to reinstate the program. Quebec was prepared to pay its share of 30%, which would leave a cost of \$75 million to reinstate this program.

My Liberal colleague rightly said earlier that things have changed since the turn of this century. We saw an increase in mass layoffs. Over the last year, 500,000 jobs have been lost, including 70,000 in Quebec.

• (1825)

Are we going to keep compensating these workers by offering to train them? We are not against training programs for workers who can be retrained and go back to work. Workers are getting involved, but in most cases, only 6% or 7% of retrained workers manage to find a job, for reasons covered earlier.

I invite my colleagues to vote in favour of this motion. It is so important. It is not a binding motion like a bill, but once it is passed, maybe the Conservatives will find enough dignity to introduce a bill and act on it.

• (1830)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

*Adjournment Proceedings*

[Translation]

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this adjournment debate and raise a question I asked on April 1, 2009, several months ago.

My question followed the disclosure of information about positions at Service Canada being posted in March 2008 but not filled yet in March 2009. Service Canada is now in charge of employment insurance, among other things.

Let us remember that, even if the Conservative government was denying the existence of the economic crisis at that time, people in our ridings were suffering. They did not have access to the employment insurance benefits they were entitled to because of unacceptable delays.

The Conservatives denied the existence of the crisis, and fathers and mothers had to pay the price. Let us be realistic. They are not the only ones paying the price. Their whole family is paying the price, including their children, along with their brothers and sisters. One year went by without positions being filled as they should have been.

Now it is September 16, 2009, and several months have passed since I asked that question on April 1, but I am still wondering what the Conservative government has done about it. It boasted that it was going to inject funds to hire people and speed up request processing so that unemployed workers could collect their first employment insurance cheque. Back then, and even now, workers had to wait more than 55 days to receive their first benefit cheque, which is totally unacceptable.

Now it is September 16 and we are still wondering where these people who were supposed to be hired are. Just to clarify, I am talking about employees in regional Service Canada centres. I am not talking about Service Canada employees in offices, call centres or other places where employees never meet clients face to face.

The fact is that we have to provide a service to our workers, a service to Canadian citizens. Today, I am still looking for these new workers in local centres that are supposed to be open to our citizens every day. We have been waiting for over a year, and we have often raised the issue of this crisis, but we are still waiting for these new employees while countless working families have had to wait two months or more to receive their first employment insurance cheque.

Last year, the Conservative government said that there was no crisis. It said that it was going to hire people, but in the end, it figured that the crisis would pass, that there would be no need for extra employees and that people would continue to receive their employment insurance benefits.

Why have we not yet seen concrete results and more workers in Service Canada centres?

I cannot wait to hear the parliamentary secretary's reply. He better not make up stories about additional positions being created in local offices because that is not true. When someone retires, the position is not filled. And if by chance it is filled, it goes to a central office. That is not what Canadians and the citizens in our ridings need. They need concrete results.

I will ask my question once again. Where are the new jobs that the Conservatives have been promising since 2008?

• (1835)

[English]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I heard the remarks of the member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

Certainly the government has taken action, and it has done a number of things in a substantive way and also in a process way. Our government knows that the global economic recession is affecting workers across Canada. We have taken significant, responsible and concrete action to help Canadians through employment insurance. We have made timely improvements to help Canadians by providing five extra weeks of benefits, making the EI application process easier, faster and better for businesses and workers and increasing opportunities for unemployed Canadians to upgrade their skills and get back to work.

Canadians are benefiting from these improvements. More than 240,000 Canadians have received additional weeks of benefits thanks to the five extra weeks of benefits included in Canada's economic action plan. This is a significant number of Canadians.

Canadians are benefiting from improvements to service delivery. Between April and July, 756 additional claims processing staff were hired and an additional 280 agents were hired and trained to answer calls to help even more Canadians receive their EI benefits as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Canada's economic action plan also announced the freezing of the employment insurance premium rate for 2010 at the same level as 2009 and 2008, the lowest level since 1982. These measures keep premium rates lower than they would otherwise be.

We are assisting businesses and their workers experiencing temporary slowdowns through improved and more accessible work-sharing agreements. More than 165,000 Canadians are benefiting from work-sharing agreements that are in place with almost 5,800 employers across Canada. It is a very popular program. The uptake is incredible. We believe it is very important to ensure Canada's workforce is in a position to get good jobs and to bounce back from the recession.

The career transition assistance program is a new initiative that will help an estimated 40,000 long-term workers who need additional support for retraining to find a new job.

The hon. member needs to get behind these programs. Instead of carping he should get behind these programs and support and encourage them to continue going forward.

Through this initiative, we have extended the duration of EI regular benefits for eligible workers who choose to participate in longer term training, for up to two years, and we are allowing earlier access to EI for eligible workers investing in their training by using all or part of their severance package. Two years, that is significant.

By working with the provinces and the territories through this and other programs, we are providing Canadians with easier access to training that is tailored to the needs of the workers in our country's different regions.

The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development today introduced measures to help long-term workers who have lost their jobs. These measures will help ensure that these long-tenured workers who have paid into the EI system for years are provided the help they need while they search for new employment. This is fair. It is an important step for Canadian workers who have worked hard, paid their taxes their whole lives and have found themselves in economic hardship. Surely the member can get behind and support this.

Our government is focused on what matters most to Canadians, finding solutions to help long-term workers who have worked hard and paid into the system for years but are having trouble finding employment through no fault of their own. We are going through the process of extending benefits to self-employed Canadians and getting Canadians back to work through historic investments in infrastructure and skills training.

It is clear from these and other measures introduced in Canada's economic action plan that our government is stepping up to the plate to provide real results for Canadians. The member needs to get behind that to see all these workers through this difficult time until the economy turns and they can bounce back into the mainstream of employment.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Madam Speaker, given that my colleague opposite has broached two aspects of this matter, I would like to deal with them quickly.

First, although the Conservative government says that it wants to give workers an additional 20 weeks, why will it not cover seasonal and construction workers and those working in tourism? All these workers will not qualify for benefits. And yet, all these industries are in trouble.

Second, the Parliamentary Secretary mentioned the increase in employment insurance premiums. He is talking about the current

situation but he dares not mention their hidden agenda: increasing employment insurance premiums by \$13 billion. The reason for the increase is simple: it is a tax on workers, a tax on unemployment. That is the reality. While our workers lose their jobs, this government is announcing that it will impose another tax on workers, another tax on unemployment. That is unacceptable. They obviously are heartless and do not care about workers and their families and all those who lose their jobs.

• (1840)

[*English*]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Madam Speaker, we have come up with a number of programs with significant benefits. Each and every time a new program comes up, the hon. member and his party would like yet a different program or find some fault with it. We are focused on fighting the recession. The opposition Liberals simply seem to want to fight the economic recovery.

Recently, they walked away from the table and turned their backs on unemployed Canadians rather than contributing to the solution. They have refused to give up their two-month work year. The Liberal scheme was costed at over \$4 billion. That is simply irresponsible and unaffordable in our current circumstances. What is more, it is offensive to hard-working Canadians.

The Liberals have said that they will vote against all government measures, including the extra support for workers who paid into the system for years, and maternity and parental benefits for the self-employed. They are voting against the popular home renovation tax credit. Why? They just want an unnecessary election that will hurt the economy and unemployed Canadians.

They do not care about helping unemployed Canadians. They care only about themselves and are totally opportunistic. They ought to apologize for their leader's actions. No Canadian wants an election. The Liberals are fixated with it and that is wrong.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:41 p.m.)

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