



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

---

VOLUME 144 • NUMBER 108 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

---

OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, November 5, 2009**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

## **CONTENTS**

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 5, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

---

*Prayers*

---

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)  
[English]

### GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE REPORTS

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in order to inform parliamentarians and Canadians on the government's overall performance, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, on behalf of departments and agencies, 92 performance reports for 2008-09 and their companion piece, a report entitled, "Canada's Performance".

\* \* \*

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 13 petitions.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I would like to table, in both official languages, the Canada Revenue Agency Annual Report to Parliament 2008-09.

\* \* \*

[English]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

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

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to Bill C-280, An Act to amend the Employment

Insurance Act (qualification for and entitlement to benefits). The committee has decided to report the bill back to the House with an amendment.

[Translation]

### JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

[English]

In accordance with the order of reference of Wednesday, May 27, 2009, the committee has considered Bill C-232, An Act to amend the Supreme Court Act (understanding the official languages), and agreed on Wednesday, November 4, 2009 to report it without amendment.

\* \* \*

### CANADA PENSION PLAN

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-478, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan (arrearages of benefits).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce legislation today, seconded by my colleague, the member for Welland, that would allow for full retroactive payments plus interest when someone applies for benefits under the Canada Pension Plan.

The CPP is a pay-as-you-go contribution-based program that is funded solely by employers and employees. It is absurd that a person who is late in applying for his or her pension under the CPP is entitled to only 11 months of retroactive benefits. This is not the government's money. The bill would put an end to this insufficient and unfair period of retroactivity and would do the same for disability pensions or the survivor's pension and a disabled contributor's child benefit.

Ninety-three percent of Canadians are members of the CPP. Making sure that they can access the benefits that are rightfully theirs will help to reverse the tide that is currently sweeping more than a quarter of a million Canadian seniors into a life of poverty.

*Routine Proceedings*

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

\* \* \*

●(1010)

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD ACT**

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-479, An Act to amend the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Act (individuals or entities engaged in farming operations).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to introduce this private member's bill, entitled An Act to amend the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Act. My own nickname for it is the farm program eligibility act.

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that actual farmers are the primary targets and beneficiaries of federally funded farm programs. The bill would also ensure that farm program benefits cannot be paid out by the federal government to large publicly traded and international companies, slaughter plants or grain trading companies that might happen to also own some agricultural production units.

Another important part of this bill is that it will ensure that beginning farmers will be eligible for programs. It specifies a very low gross receipts threshold for those young farmers. With great pleasure, I table this.

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

\* \* \*

**EXCISE TAX ACT**

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-480, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (no GST on poppies or poppy wreathes).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Hamilton Mountain for seconding this bill.

As we are aware as we head to Remembrance Day, the selling of poppies, which all of us in this House are wearing and will be wearing up until that day, is the major fundraiser for the veterans and for the legion branches that use that money to help those veterans who are in need.

What we have found is that when the Dominion Command has to go and purchase those poppies, it pays the GST. We need every penny to go to veterans. One way to make sure every penny goes to veterans is to give back that GST to those veterans. That is what the legion branches do: give every penny to veterans.

The veterans deserve that, and we have a right to give it back to them. We should do that.

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

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move the following motion: "That this House directs the Minister of Finance to take all necessary steps to immediately bring forward an amendment to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act in an effort to provide those with a financial stake in a company pension plan with the appropriate protections in the event their employer becomes insolvent".

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. member for York West have the unanimous consent of the House for this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**PETITIONS**

## ROUGE WATERSHED

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition that calls for the creation of a new national park in the Toronto region.

[*English*]

I am tabling a petition signed by Canadians, calling on the Government of Canada to work with the Province of Ontario to establish a national park in the Rouge Watershed in the greater Toronto area so as to protect a nationally significant portion of Canada's landscape known as the Eastern Deciduous Forest, also known as the Carolinian forest zone, an area that contains numerous flora and fauna on the endangered species list.

I know that the House adopted a motion moved by the hon. Pauline Browes in January 1990 calling for the same thing, namely the establishment by the Canadian government of a park in the Rouge Watershed.

●(1015)

## HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my petition calls for the release of Ms. Birtukan Mideksa from arbitrary imprisonment. Ms. Mideksa is president of the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party of Ethiopia and has been held by the government since December 2008 without charge, on a politically motivated life sentence.

According to Amnesty International, she is a prisoner of conscience. She has been pardoned of all charges against her but has been arrested again for no reason. She has had no formal hearings and has been given no access to her lawyer.

Human rights organizations have been denied access and also her family contacts have been severely limited. She has been held in solitary confinement in life-threatening conditions.

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to pass private member's motion M-334, which requests that the government make use of every means at its disposal in addition to working with all allies in the international community and the United Nations to exert maximum pressure on the government of Ethiopia to immediately and unconditionally release Ms. Mideksa and allow her to participate fully in her position as leader of a political party.

## LIBRARY BOOK RATES

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present three petitions today from Alberta and Quebec.

As we know, Canadians love to read and they love to share. This petition supports my library book bill, which is an Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), which will protect and support the library book rate and extend it to include audiovisual materials.

## IRAN

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition signed by over 100 petitioners in solidarity with the people of Iran.

The petition reflects the results of the June 12 presidential election in Iran, and a concern that has been reflected in this House and elsewhere throughout Canada regarding the violations of human rights in Iran by its government.

This petition is consistent with an all-party motion that I had the honour to present to the House on June 17 in solidarity with the people of Iran as they aspire after democracy.

\* \* \*

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Question No. 426 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 426—**Mr. Jim Maloway:**

How much will the proposed Harmonized Sales Tax for the province of Manitoba cost the average taxpayer in Manitoba for each of the following expenditures: (a) funerals; (b) travel; and (c) purchase of new home?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has not adopted the federal harmonized sales tax. A decision to adopt the federal harmonized sales tax in the province of Manitoba rests with the provincial government of Manitoba. This would include decisions surrounding key design elements.

\* \* \*

[English]

## QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if a supplementary response to Question No. 320, originally tabled on September 14, 2009, could be made an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 320—**Mr. Nathan Cullen:**

With respect to sole-source contracting over the last five years undertaken by, or on behalf of, each department or Crown agency: (a) what was the total amount of such contracting, on an annual basis; (b) what was the amount and duration of each

## Points of Order

contract, (i) who so authorized the contracts, (ii) which contracts were amended, (iii) how were they amended, and what justification was given for amending each contract; (c) in each instance where the value of the contract exceeded \$25,000, what was the business case for doing so; and (d) what audits were undertaken in relation to any sole-sourced contracts, (i) what was the date, title, authorship and cost of each audit, (ii) which ones raised concerns over the value for money taxpayer received, (iii) what concerns were raised and what recommendations were made, (iv) did any result in criminal charges and, if so, (v) which ones?

(Return tabled)

[English]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

## SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2009-10

**The Deputy Speaker:** Before calling orders of the day I wish to return to the point of order raised yesterday by the hon. member for Wascana. The message transmitting the supplementary estimates (B) for 2009-10, presented yesterday by the President of the Treasury Board was indeed in the proper form and signed by Justice Thomas Cromwell in his capacity as deputy to Her Excellency the Governor General.

\* \* \*

## POINTS OF ORDER

## BILL C-280—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on June 3, 2009, the Deputy Speaker ruled on Bill C-280, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualification for and entitlement to benefits), as follows:

Bill C-280...proposed changes to the employment insurance program that include lowering the threshold for becoming a major attachment claimant to 360 hours, setting benefits payable to 55% of the average weekly insurable earnings during the highest paid 12 weeks...

It is abundantly clear to the Chair that such changes to the employment insurance program...would have the effect of authorizing increased expenditures from the Consolidated Revenue Fund in a manner and for purposes not currently authorized.

On June 10, 2009, Bill C-280 was adopted at second reading and referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

On November 3, 2009, during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill the member for Chambly—Borduas moved an amendment to clause 5 of Bill C-280 to increase the weekly benefits payable to a claimant from 55% of the average weekly insurable earnings to 60% of the average weekly insurable earnings.

A further increase to the benefits payable from 55% to 60% of the average weekly insurable earnings would require a royal recommendation and therefore is out of order.

That is why when the amendment was moved to the chair of the committee the committee chair stated:

[T]his...money...would normally require royal recommendation. This would be out of order but...we're going to vote on this anyway because it's come before us.

*Points of Order*

The amendment to clause 5 was adopted.

Page 655 of Marleau and Montpetit states that amendments requiring a royal recommendation are not admissible in committee.

In particular Marleau and Montpetit states:

An amendment must not offend the financial initiative of the Crown. An amendment is therefore inadmissible if it imposes a charge on the Public Treasury, or if it extends the objects or purposes or relaxes the conditions and qualifications as expressed in the Royal Recommendation.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I submit that the amendment should be struck from the report and the bill should be deemed to have been reported from committee without amendment.

● (1020)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, there are two points I would like to make in response to the hon. member's comments. The committee's amendment seems perfectly in order, for two reasons. First, the bill that was before the committee and that we are discussing today would already require spending for the 360-hour eligibility threshold, as we know. Adding an amendment to increase benefits from 55% to 60% respects a principle that has already been accepted, allowing the House to examine a bill through the committee, which reports back to the House. That is my first point.

My second point is that we must remember that, two years ago, this House voted in favour of keeping the employment insurance fund separate from the consolidated revenue fund. The EI fund itself must cover any additional costs generated by these new measures.

With all due respect for your previous rulings, Mr. Speaker, we sincerely believe that when it comes to improving employment insurance benefits, these measures should not require royal recommendation as such, but should be the result of a majority decision made here by all parliamentarians. That way, once the House has spoken, it will be considered law.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on this point of order.

The government says that this amendment requires a royal recommendation and that you must rule on that. I am sure you know this, but I would still like to remind you that the committee is master of its own proceedings. This was decided in committee. The House already passed the bill at second reading and referred it to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The House agreed to refer the bill to committee even though the government was already arguing that a royal recommendation was required.

However, we have an opportunity to study the bill and to work on it before bringing back here. If you have to rule on this, I think you should do it when the bill is at third reading stage. You will then be able to look at the bill as a whole. Otherwise, you will be interfering with the work of the committee, even though the practice has always been that committees are masters of their own proceedings.

● (1025)

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** On the same point. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleagues for their interventions, but I must disagree with their interpretation of what needs to be done here. Let me deal with the latter intervention first.

My hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst has stated that the committees are masters of their own fate. In effect, that is true. However, if chairs of committees are out of order in some of their rulings, of course, an appeal can be made to the Chair, and you are well aware of that.

I would suggest, in this particular case, the chair of the committee already confirmed that the amendment would require a royal recommendation. He stated that in the quotes that I provided in my point of order. As such, quite clearly, on page 655 of Marleau and Montpetit, which all members understand guide our committee work, guide our parliamentarians in the procedures and practices of our work here in Parliament, it states that any royal recommendation must be ruled out of order; in others, any amendment to a report in committee that requires a royal recommendation must be deemed inadmissible.

That is quite clear. That is part of the rules. That is part of the procedures and practices that we follow here in Parliament.

So, therefore, I think it would be advisable for the Chair to determine if this amendment did require a royal recommendation. Quite clearly, the chair of the committee believes it requires such a royal recommendation.

Should the Speaker of this place obviously agree with the chair of the committee, then, according to Marleau and Montpetit, it must be deemed to be inadmissible.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, my point of order is suggesting that you make a ruling on the amendment and if it does require a royal recommendation, I believe you are obliged to come back and ask that it be reported back to the House without amendment.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** I thank the members for their contributions. I will look at the amendment in question. The member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify the last comment made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. The inadmissibility of the amendment was never raised in committee. There were questions on the issue of the royal recommendation, this point of order being the best proof of that. I want to reiterate that the inadmissibility of the amendment was never raised in committee.

[*English*]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I must correct my hon. colleague and I quote as I did in my original point of order. The chair of the committee, when speaking about the amendment, stated:

*Government Orders*

This would be out of order but these would need royal recommendation.

My hon. colleague's point that it is not out of order and that it was never discussed at committee is quite incorrect.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** I think that I have heard enough comments to consider the matter. Does the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas wish to raise another point?

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will be brief because my colleague, who is a whip, is absolutely right on this. Our Conservative colleague drew a clear distinction between the fact that this might require royal recommendation and the fact that he does not accept the amendment itself. However, the committee deemed the amendment receivable. Because it was deemed receivable, I believe there is no impediment with respect to the recommendation made before the House.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** I thank hon. members for their interventions and I will take this matter under advisement, examine the points raised by members, and come back to the House in due course.

We will move on to debate Bill C-56, the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

---

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

### FAIRNESS FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED ACT

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC)** moved that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today I am very pleased to introduce Bill C-56, Fairness for the Self-Employed Act. Our government knows that self-employed Canadians should not have to choose between their family and their business responsibilities. Extending access to employment insurance special benefits to the self-employed is the fair and the right thing to do.

Our government knows that families are the foundation of this great country and this bill is yet another example of how our government is providing support and choice for Canadian families. It is good family policy and it represents one of the most significant enhancements to the EI program in the last decade.

[*Translation*]

Self-employed workers in Canada are often the innovators in our economy. These are people who contribute their creativity, their courage and their capital in pursuit of a better life. Their dynamism strengthens our communities, and that, in turn, makes Canada a stronger country.

Some 2.6 million Canadians are self-employed. They account for more than 15% of the working population.

● (1030)

[*English*]

It is very important to note that the self-employed have been asking for these benefits for quite some time and for 13 years, the former Liberal government completely ignored them and their families, but our Conservative government is responding by taking action.

Self-employed Canadians come from a broad range of situations and their incomes vary widely. There are professionals, scientists, technicians, tradespeople and retailers. Their work ranges from agriculture and construction to real estate and the performing arts.

It is important to note that about one-third of all self-employed women are of child-bearing age and many of them are choosing self-employment because it provides the flexibility of combining a career with raising a family. In tough economic times like these, self-employment also offers a way for many laid-off workers to stay active in the labour market.

Our government believes that the supports available to people who choose this path are insufficient today and that is why we are talking about supports that many salaried employees consider a given. Salaried employees who pay EI premiums have access, through the EI program, to a number of special benefits: maternity leave, parental leave, sickness and injury leave, and compassionate care leave. The self-employed, sadly, do not, and our government believes this is unfair.

A year ago, the Prime Minister said:

Self-employed Canadians, and those who one day hope to be, shouldn't have to choose between starting a family and starting a business because of government policy. It should allow them to pursue their dreams, both as entrepreneurs and as parents.

[*Translation*]

At the time, we planned to offer maternity and parental benefits to self-employed workers. Our Conservative government keeps its promises. This bill delivers even more than we promised. Our government plans to offer all special employment insurance benefits, including maternity benefits, parental benefits, sickness benefits and compassionate care benefits, to self-employed workers

This bill will have a major impact on the lives of Canadian self-employed workers. Self-employed mothers and fathers will now be able to take a break to take care of their newborns for a year. They will not miss their child's first steps or first words because now, they can collect maternity and parental benefits.

[*English*]

We know that increasing numbers of adults are becoming part of what is known as the sandwich generation and are taking care of an elderly parent. With access to compassionate care benefits, self-employed Canadians will be able to take time away from work to care for a terminally ill parent or other relative. Every Canadian knows how important it is to be able to spend time with and to care for family, and this bill will give self-employed Canadians the same opportunity.

*Government Orders*

Overall, special benefits for the self-employed would mirror those available to salaried employees under the EI program. Contributions and benefits for the self-employed would be comparable whether earnings came from self-employment, salaried employment, or a mix of the two.

While our overall goal is to make these special benefits for the self-employed the same as those for salaried employees, some adjustments are needed to reflect the unique nature of this type of employment. Specifically, participation in the program will be voluntary. Qualification will be based on earnings, not on hours worked. The self-employed will have to contribute to the program for at least one year prior to claiming benefits, and once they have made a claim, they will need to continue contributions on future self-employed income.

The self-employed would pay the same premium rate as salaried employees and they would not be required to pay the employer's portion of the premium rate. This is quite simply to recognize the fact that the self-employed will not have access to EI regular benefits, the ones that people collect when they have been laid off.

We expect that between 300,000 and 500,000 Canadians will apply for this coverage over the next three years.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

I would like to clarify that self-employed workers in Quebec will continue to receive maternity and parental benefits under the Quebec parental insurance plan. Now they can also receive the sickness and compassionate care benefits that the Government of Canada is offering through the employment insurance system.

[*English*]

The changes that we are making to create fairness for the self-employed go well beyond the commitments in the Speech from the Throne and budget 2009. This is one of the most significant enhancements to the EI program in the last decade, and it is just the latest in a whole series of timely enhancements that we have made to ensure that EI remains responsive to the needs of Canadians.

Our economic action plan is geared toward helping Canadian workers and their families get through the global economic downturn. By helping Canadian workers in all walks of life, we are helping families and communities in our overall economy. We believe that these individual Canadian entrepreneurs will play a leading role in our economic recovery. We need their skills, we need their experience and we need their energy to meet the challenges to come. That is why our government believes that these Canadians deserve to have access to EI special benefits, because it is the fair and right thing to do.

Our government knows that self-employed Canadians should not have to choose between their family and their business responsibilities. Members do not have to take my word for it; there has been a chorus of positive response across a broad range of employment sectors to the tabling earlier this week of Bill C-56.

We heard from the agricultural community. Richard Phillips, the director of Grain Growers of Canada said Tuesday on CTV *News* that for a lot of young farm families, this could be the difference

between whether they stay on the farm or leave the farm. He added in a news release that this legislation is very welcome. He said that this has huge potential for quality of life in rural Canada.

From the small business community, Catherine Swift, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said in yesterday's *Montreal Gazette* that the initiative fills a "glaring gap" for people running their own business, especially women. She said, "We have a lot of women members. They would like to have a child, and yet abandoning your business is not an option".

Next, from a town which forms part of my beautiful riding of Haldimand—Norfolk, Shane Curtis, president of the Tillsonburg Chamber of Commerce said Tuesday in the *Tillsonburg News*:

I think it's a fantastic thing from a couple different perspectives. It promotes women to be in business and to be self-employed. It will promote self-employed women to have children.

From one end of the country to the other, people have been getting behind this legislation. John Winter, the chair of the Coalition of B.C. Businesses, said in a release on Tuesday:

It is only fair... British Columbians who hang their own shingle should not have to choose between raising a family and raising a business.

I could not agree with him more.

The contractors have waded in as well. In a media release on Tuesday, Phil Hochstein, president of the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association said:

Many independent contractors work as owner operators, from truckers to drywallers to painters, and with these challenging economic times, the extra security offered with extending EI special benefits is welcome.

And it continues. Dale Ripplinger, president of the Canadian Real Estate Association is quoted in a news release on Tuesday, saying:

This is an important step to level the benefits playing field for self-employed Canadians.... We look forward to working with the government to ensure access to EI benefits for REALTORS(R), which can help balance career and family life.

I would suggest that the opposition listen not just to me but to Canadians, who are demanding that this legislation be passed, people like Stephen Waddell, national executive director of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists, better known to many as ACTRA, which represents creative people across the country. In a news release he said:

This legislation is a question of basic fairness and equal treatment for Canadian workers. We're calling on the Liberals, NDP and the Bloc to avoid an election and get this initiative passed into law.

*Government Orders*

•(1040)

The previous Liberal government ignored these Canadians for 13 long years. Self-employed Canadians want the bill to pass. They are trusting us to deliver for them, but they also know that the Liberals and the Bloc let down other Canadians. Hundreds of thousands of long-tenured workers were let down by the Liberals and the Bloc through their opposition to Bill C-50 earlier this week. Surely, when many of their own members have been calling for this bill, I would hope they would get behind the fairness to the self-employed bill.

On March 5 of this year, the Leader of the Opposition himself said in the *Toronto Star*, that the self-employed are the largest category of Canadians without EI protection and that he thinks if we are going to be a compassionate society and if we want to get stimulus in, that would be a good place to go.

Even the Bloc has expressed support. The member for Saint-Lambert said in this House on the same day, “I think offering self-employed workers the opportunity to contribute to employment insurance on a voluntary basis is long overdue”.

Finally, on Tuesday night on CTV's *Power Play*, the Liberal member for Markham—Unionville said that the Liberals support this bill in principle.

I encourage them all to support this bill in reality by voting for it.

The Liberals and the Bloc let down long-tenured workers. Will they let down the millions of self-employed Canadians as well? Self-employed Canadians want to know if they will be let down too. Canadians want this bill to pass.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, bringing the self-employed into the EI system is something which I think all parties agree with in principle. The question is whether this legislation does it. We think it is worth a serious look and we would be inclined to support it as long as some of the questions that come out of committee are answered in terms of cost, who is eligible, and who is defined as self-employed. These are questions that have not been answered yet, but could be answered on closer examination at committee. This bill appears to be a good first step.

I want to ask the minister a question that comes out of budget 2009. On page 100 it states:

The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development will be asked to establish an Expert Panel that will consult Canadians on how to best provide self-employed Canadians with access to EI maternity and parental benefits.

That was earlier this year. What happened to that expert panel?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member knows the answer to that question. I explained it to him several months ago.

We did engage to have an expert panel review the options for this particular initiative over the course of the summer. However, in June the Leader of the Opposition and the country's Prime Minister agreed to have a bipartisan panel work on issues related to EI over the summer. We were to develop initiatives that would help Canadians.

One of the initiatives that we were looking at, or at least attempting to look at, was this very one, because we believed that by

working together co-operatively we could address this issue in a timely manner. The work that the EI panel was to do was then to replace the expert panel.

The hon. member was actually part of the de facto expert panel.

•(1045)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I must say that we welcome with great interest this bill which, of course, should be improved. For years now, the Bloc Québécois has been asking that self-employed workers, who account for approximately 22% of the workforce in Quebec, be included. I think that the minister talked about 17% across Canada. Whatever the numbers, the fact is that they have become a very significant pool of workers with little or no coverage, particularly at the federal level. So far, these workers have been without any EI coverage.

We agree with the principle of this bill and, with the minister and her department, we would like to look at ways to improve it so that it is of the greatest possible benefit to the self-employed.

Where Quebec is concerned, with respect to special leave, we know that everything having to do with maternity and parental leave was transferred to the province, with a cost transfer of 37¢ per \$100, if I am not mistaken. We know that Quebec is now looking after maternity and parental leave. This means that only part of the benefits from Bill C-56 will apply to Quebec's self-employed workers.

The other benefits, namely compassionate leave and sick leave, account for only 25% of the total cost.

Could the minister tell this House how it came to be that 75% of the cost is being charged for something that is worth 25%?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that there are 500,000 self-employed workers in Quebec, and we want to help them. It is also important to remember that Quebec has a special program under which those workers receive maternity and paternity benefits. Quebec's program is mandatory, however.

Bill C-56 will introduce a voluntary program that will allow self-employed workers to opt into the employment insurance plan and receive sickness and even compassionate care benefits. The rate is comparable to the rate for employment insurance in Quebec: \$1.36 per \$100 of earnings. The same formula is used throughout Canada.

[*English*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this bill; I think it is a step in the right direction, but I want to go over what the minister has said. She said that she wants to treat people equally. I take that pretty seriously.

*Government Orders*

In talking about equal treatment, I will refer her to one of the reports that was put before the House. I visited every province across the country from Newfoundland to British Columbia, and I made a report on the lack of response to the new labour market. At that time, it was the self-employed. The employment insurance program as it now stands does not respond to the new reality of the labour market. More workers are classified as self-employed now. Why did she not put that in her bill? If people lose their jobs, they have no employment insurance. They cannot be part of the EI program and collect employment insurance because, as she said, they have to make a choice between family and employment and all of that.

Throughout that trip and the study that I did, I found that most of those who become self-employed are women. Businesses say that they do not need their services, but that they will take them on as self-employed workers to do the same work. Therefore, they lose all of the benefits and everything.

This bill does not treat everyone equally. The minister bragged that the Conservatives have done it and the Liberals did not, but in 1999, after the Liberals took all the cuts in EI, I made a tour across the country and that was one of the recommendations of the self-employed. They wanted to be part of the employment insurance program.

• (1050)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that the percentage of the population that is self-employed is growing. That is for a very large number of reasons, because it has been happening over a number of years. We want to encourage that entrepreneurial spirit among Canadians.

We also want to encourage them to have the opportunity to stay home while their children take their first steps or speak their first words, or to care for a family member who is gravely ill. We are offering these special benefits to the self-employed because that is what they asked us for.

We have been doing tracking surveys. They have asked for these specific special benefits. They recognize that to offer regular benefits to the self-employed would be more than a little problematic. How does one determine objectively if a self-employed person has laid himself or herself off, or if the person is taking a few weeks vacation?

Today, we are presenting an opportunity for Canadians to voluntarily participate in the special benefits part of EI. That is what they have asked for. That is what they need to support their lifestyle and choices.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources made a great speech outlining the benefits of Bill C-56. Recently, the House also passed Bill C-50, which is currently in the Senate. It makes a big difference for those long-tenured workers who are laid off.

I think we can all agree that the best way to help unemployed people is to help them find a new job. When I go door to door in my riding, once in a while I run into someone who has lost his or her job but has gone out and started his or her own business. It is clear that this initiative will really help these people.

How could any MP stand in this place and oppose the measures that are in this great bill?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Mr. Speaker, forgive me if I am a little bit biased in my answer to that question. I do believe that every MP should be supporting this bill for the sake of the 2.6 million Canadians who are self-employed and the many hundreds of thousands more who will become self-employed because it is their dream and goal.

They have an entrepreneurial spirit. Many of those people are young. They want to have families too and they should not have to choose between the two. We recognize that the self-employed often do not take much time off work because they cannot afford to for a number of reasons. We want to provide those income supports that they need for those key moments in their lives.

Perhaps they are welcoming a new child into their family through adoption or they have just had a new baby. Perhaps they have had a sudden injury or illness that prevents them from working, or they need to take care of their gravely ill family members. We want to be there to support them.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-56, the fairness for the self-employed act.

The Liberals will support the bill in principle. We want to get it to committee to have a look at it. It might take some considerable review because a lot of people have opinions on it, some favourable and some perhaps not. I think people, more than anything else, will have questions about it.

It strikes me that there is a bit of regret in that one of two things has occurred in the bill. The government and its departments, including human resources, have looked at this for some time, along with models and proposals. If that is the case, it was not shared with the EI working group in the summer, of which I was a part. That was part of the mandate of the group. However, there was no serious proposal made to the group.

In spite of consistent questions, particularly from my colleague, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, who asked whether the government had any information, the response was no. She said that there must be something as it was in the platform of the Conservative Party. If there was any information, it belonged to the Conservative Party and it would not share it. It was a dichotomous situation. Either the department was working on things that were not shared with us or the bill was rushed through and had some flaws in it. We will decide which one of those it is as it goes forward.

However, this is a good step forward for Canadians who are self-employed, a modest one albeit but a step forward. It looks at certain benefits for people who are self-employed and would like to be part of the employment insurance system.

Another question is one that I just asked the minister. I will quote from page 100 of the budget book of January 27. It states:

The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development will be asked to establish an Expert Panel that will consult Canadians on how to best provide self-employed Canadians with access to EI maternity and parental benefits.

The minister indicated that the expert the panel intended to consult was me and that the EI working group was supposed to do this work, which clearly was not the intent back when the budget came forward.

On Tuesday night, during a bill briefing, I asked officials this question. What about the commitment in the budget to have an expert group? They had no idea what I was even talking about. It was never seriously considered, unless they can prove the opposite. Even the parliamentary secretary was confused as to whether there had actually been a commitment.

Clearly, not many Canadians were consulted. We have not heard from the minister that she has consulted a lot of Canadians. She quoted some people after the fact, indicating that some may like the direction of the bill, and why not?

I am sure there is some merit to the bill and we hope this might be an opportunity for Parliament to work. We can look at the bill in a serious way in committee, me and my colleagues on the Liberal side, along with the member for Chambly—Borduas, who works and lives this file, and I suspect the member for Acadie—Bathurst, who steps in for the New Democrats on the human resources committee.

There are people who can seriously look at this and identify the flaws and opportunities to make the bill better. I hope that happens and that in the spirit of co-operation, perhaps even the spirit of Christmas, as the bill works its way through committee that might in fact occur.

We do have some concerns about premiums. There has not been any estimate as to what the cost to the government would be. We have heard there is a premium rate and that it will be differentiated for the province of Quebec. The province of Quebec already has certain benefits, maternal and parental, and people can opt in. Will the rate people in Quebec pay be suitable for the level of benefits they would have and will there be a cost to the government?

One could assume that in the first year there will be a spike in premiums as people enter the program. They will have to be in it for at least a year before they can draw benefits, so there will be any outlay in benefits. However, as the benefits start to catch up to the premium, what will be the cost and who will pay that cost? Will it be the consolidated revenue fund of the Government of Canada, as the government did with the extra five weeks in January, or will it be the EI fund where the money for Bill C-50 will come out of?

That is a big difference because, as we know, the government has set up a separate EI financing board, which only has \$2 billion to work with. We have already heard from the Chief Actuary of Canada that the \$2 billion is nowhere near enough to fund the programs that exist without adding new programs. That is one question we will ask.

• (1055)

However, I want to take a second and talk about a group of people in Parliament who have done some magnificent work. Over the last few years, the National Liberal Women's Caucus has established three pink books. These pink books came out in 2006, 2007 and

### *Government Orders*

2009. In each of those pink books, the National Liberal Women's Caucus has addressed this issue of self-employment and the importance that it has for Canadian women.

In the one that was released recently, I will quote from page 16. It states:

Another significant group in the labour force are self-employed women. The latest statistics reveal that more than 1 in 10 employed women in Canada are self-employed. In 2004, almost 840 000 women were self-employed. Women entrepreneurs face many challenges, including difficulty in accessing capital and benefits. The majority of women small-business owners earn \$30 000 per year or less and have no access to low-cost health care, no protection for disability, no employment insurance or maternity benefits, and cannot afford private sector insurance and pension plans.

Following that, it has a recommendation, which states:

Permit self-employed workers to participate in the special benefits programs under the EI program as recommended by the Standing Commons Committee on the Status of Women in its June 2007 report, "Improving the Economic Security of Women: Time to Act." This change would give self-employed workers access to maternity and parental benefits and the Compassionate Care Benefit.

I congratulate the government on adopting one of the recommendations from the pink book. I would encourage it to go further and adopt all of the recommendations in that book. If the pink book, which coincidentally is pink, were adopted in full by the Government of Canada, I would not have to be a member of Parliament. A lot of the work would be done. I want to commend members of our women's caucus for the outstanding work they do, particularly on the social side, but also on the economic and environmental sides.

The recommendations the caucus have made have been very important. People such as the member for Beaches—East York and the member for Winnipeg South Centre have been champions of this issue. We have new members of the national women's caucus, such as the member for Brossard—La Prairie, who has done some fabulous work on this issue as well. The Liberal caucus has been looking at this for a long while.

I also want to refer to a report that came out in June of 2009. This is a report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women entitled, "Towards Improving Access to EI Benefits for Women in Canada". Again, with the House's indulgence, I would like to quote from that. It states:

A measure which can be taken to limit the problem of moral hazard would be to extend exclusively EI special benefits to self-employed individuals. The Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) has extended its coverage to self-employed individuals for maternity and parental benefits. The Committee heard from several witnesses that QPIP can serve as a possible model for a federal program.

There are many good recommendations in the report. Recommendation 14 states:

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada make maternity and parental benefits as flexible and equal as the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan by expanding eligibility, benefit levels and duration of EI benefits.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada extend benefits to the self-employed using the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan as its model.

That also was a very good report and one of the things that our human resources committee would do.

*Government Orders*

I will ask for the indulgence of my colleagues from Chambly—Borduas, Acadie—Bathurst and my colleagues on the government side. We should have a joint committee study, at least one meeting where we bring in the status of women committee and look at this together, because of the specific implications it has for women's issues. There may be other committees that would be affected as well, such as finance or other committees.

This is a very broad bill, a long bill, a technical bill and a detailed bill. We have to do a bit of serious evaluation of it.

There are models and we have had significant groups, such as the National Liberal Women's Caucus and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, that have given us recommendations. We do not have to start from zero. We can take what the minister has given us. Again, I think there is a very real possibility that we can make this bill better for more Canadians.

However, we are discussing Bill C-56 and there are certain things that it would do.

● (1100)

The proposed legislation will provide the same number of weeks of benefit as paid employees have under their EI program. To recap, that is 15 weeks of maternity benefits, 35 weeks of parental and adoption benefits, 15 weeks of sickness and 6 weeks of compassionate care benefits.

I want to address the issue of Quebec. Quebec has a far more advanced social infrastructure than most provinces in Canada. It has made it a purpose to provide a solid social infrastructure system in the province of Quebec. It has a plan for parental and maternal benefits in Quebec. People in Quebec will still have the option to partake in the other plan as well, and they will pay a lower premium rate. Off the top of my head that the rate is 1.73%. It goes down to 1.37%. Is that a fair and accurate reduction for the amount of services to be provided?

We need to look at the entrance requirements. Normally for special benefits it would be an hours-based entrance requirement of 600 hours. Because we are talking about the self-employed, the determination is that it would be a threshold of \$6,000 in pre-tax income. We need to have a look at that. The weekly benefits will be calculated by taking the claimant's income from the previous tax year and dividing it by 52. When this gets to committee and people come forward saying they would like to participate in this or they represent a group that would like to participate in it but they have a certain question, we should hear them. This is where the committee can do some work.

The minister has indicated that when we look at EI for the self-employed and special benefits, the questions we have to ask are these. What is the pre-attachment and the post-attachment to the labour force? What is the pre-attachment and the post-attachment to premiums? It has been determined that people have to pay in advance for a year before they can claim benefits. However, once they have claimed a benefit, they have to pay premiums for the rest of their life as long as they are self-employed. We have to look at that. We have to look at the numbers both for the individual and for the EI fund, which will be financing this at the end of day, and determine if that makes sense.

Will people take part in the program if they know they have to pay premiums years after they finished drawing benefits? I do not think we know that yet and I am not sure we will know that until we have a chance to look at it in a very serious way.

We believe this is a plan that has merit. We think self-employed people are looking for this. I can recall talking with a gentleman by the name of Chris Hopkins from Montague, Prince Edward Island. He has long campaigned for EI for self-employed. An article in July quotes him as follows:

It's too late for me, it's not going to benefit me, but it could benefit a lot of people, especially in these recessionary times that we have...I'm no longer self-employed, I'm just plain out there, an unknown statistic, not classed as unemployed because I was never employed, I was self-employed. So I'm a non-entity in the eyes of the government.

People who have been on websites, making appearances and rallying troops to this issue are the kind of folks we should probably listen to at this point in time. We have an opportunity to make this a good bill to do what they have asked us, which is to extend benefits to self-employed. Folks like that deserve some credit on a day like this and they deserve to be listened to as we move through the committee process.

As I have indicated, we are generally in support of this and we hope the bill is as good as the minister says. If it is not as good as she says, which is very possible, we hope we can make it better with her and her government's co-operation, working together with the opposition. However, we are going to ask questions.

One of the first questions will be why the bill came forward without the input of the promised expert panel. In the budget the Conservatives specifically said that an expert panel would consult and then determine what would be an appropriate way to provide EI to the self-employed.

In June, when the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition determined that there would be an EI working group, the Prime Minister indicated that for the self-employed the government would consider looking beyond maternal parental sickness and compassionate care. He said that anything was on the table. He said that the EI working group would have a look at this.

● (1105)

We did not get the information that we needed. We never got a serious proposal. But to suggest that this group became the expert panel that the Prime Minister had indicated is just a smokescreen. The government did not appoint that expert panel. Why not? Why were the ministerial officials who briefed us the other day totally unaware that that commitment had even been made?

It is a highly technical bill. There may be flaws. There may be exclusions. What is the cost to government? That is a key point.

I want to go back to the fact that last year the government set up the CEIFB, the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board, which is supposed to be an arm's-length organization from government that will look at EI, that will determine premium rates, and that would invest moneys that are in the account. The problem is the government only put in \$2 billion.

*Government Orders*

Liberals, at the human resources committee, supported by opposition members, said we have to have a look at this and we studied this. One of the people that we brought in was Mr. Bruno Gagnon, from the Canadian Institute of Actuaries, and he spoke to the fact that a \$10 billion to \$15 billion reserve was sufficient. He stated:

Let's assume that a recession hits Canada and unemployment levels rise to 8%. The payment to out-of-work Canadians increases by approximately \$3 billion. So the \$2 billion reserve of the board is depleted and the EI account has to borrow \$1 billion from the government. In this situation we might have to raise the premiums above the legislated limit of 0.15%. Consideration of applying the 0.15% would fall to ministers. It would not be a very easy decision, because if you applied the 0.15% ceiling you would run a deficit and the deficit would accumulate. The impact on Canadian businesses, which pay nearly 60% of the cost of employment insurance, would be huge... Workers would have to pay 40% of the cost when they were already at risk of losing their jobs,—

He was talking, at this point in time, suggesting what would happen if employment went to 8%. Well, it has gone to 8%. The demands on the system are much higher than they were then. The demands on the system are much higher than the government would acknowledge. The demands on the system are possibly going to be made more robust by this bill. So, we just need to have a look at the financing side of it.

Who exactly is defined as self-employed? There is a whole range of people who would consider themselves self-employed. Who all is included in the definitions under this bill? We need to have a full understanding of that.

Another question is, why not full EI benefits? If we are extending EI benefits from maternal, parental, compassionate care, sickness, then would why we not look at EI benefits to all self-employed people on some kind of basis? What is the model for that?

So, this is a limited-scope bill in that it targets specific measures. Maybe that is the safest thing to do. Maybe that is what Canadians want. However, maybe Canadians would rather have the full meal deal when it comes to accessing employment insurance.

Is the \$6,000 pre-tax earnings threshold appropriate?

The issue of Quebec and how this plan will interact with QPIP in Quebec is important as well.

There is significant work that has to be done on this bill. I think, as I said before, that this is an opportunity for all members of this House, and particularly the members of the human resources committee, a committee that generally works very well together, a committee that is well chaired by the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook, a committee that has a lot on its plate already.

We are doing a study on poverty that will see us going out to western Canada the week after we get back from the break week to hear further testimony and hear witnesses about poverty and how do we actually do something about this in Canada. So, we have a lot on our plate. But this bill is important. I think we can give it the consideration that it deserves. I think we should see what people like Chris Hopkins and others around the country who have fought on this issue for a long time. I have not been in contact with Chris Hopkins recently, but if he is around, I encourage him to contact members of the committee and let us know what he thinks of this bill.

So, hopefully, as we head toward Christmas in this Parliament, we will have a sense of co-operation on this that will allow us to take a bill, perhaps improve it at committee, determine its strengths, understand its weaknesses, and work together to bring forward a bill that truly does provide an opportunity for the self-employed in Canada.

• (1110)

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his comments, and I do appreciate his tentative support for this excellent bill. However, I was intrigued by one of his comments early in his speech, where he referred to a new interest in what he called a spirit of co-operation; in fact, what he referred to as the spirit of Christmas.

I am sure he knows, having been involved in the votes in this House, that when our government proposed adding another five weeks of benefits for the unemployed, he and his Liberals voted against that. When we proposed to extend work-sharing arrangements, he opposed that. He opposed our efforts to provide enhanced benefits for long-tenured workers. And when we tried to improve retraining opportunities for the unemployed, he and his Liberals voted against it.

I wonder if this is a new-found zeal that he has for this spirit of co-operation, or will that interest only last until Christmas.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague might want to get a copy of Hansard and have a look at how Liberals actually voted on the five weeks in January. We supported that budget earlier this year. We were not opposed to that. We supported that bill and the measures that were in the first budget. We thought those made sense.

We thought that Bill C-50 was blatantly discriminatory, picking winners and losers, telling people like seasonal workers across Atlantic Canada that they were not entitled to anything more, they were not deserving, but others may be. I am entirely comfortable with our vote on Bill C-50.

The member and his government boasted in the spring about how they were extending this five weeks to all Canadians, not just pilot projects but to all Canadians, and how fair that was. A few months later the government brings in a bill that does exactly the opposite and which discriminates against the vast majority of workers, even long-tenured workers in this country. I am entirely comfortable with that.

When I talk about the spirit of Parliament being a working relationship, that does not mean we have to agree with everything or that we all have to vote the same way. It is how we interact in a respectful manner. I hope that is what we will see over the next weeks and months.

I will wish him a merry Christmas when the times come, and I hope he gets his shot before then.

*Government Orders*

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I first want to congratulate my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for the work he has done on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and also for convincing his Liberal colleagues to vote in favour of Bill C-308, a bill that reforms employment insurance, at second reading. We dare to hope that the Conservatives will vote in favour of this bill at third reading.

I have the following question for my colleague. He mentioned that he had a hard time understanding how the government determined the premiums for self-employed workers. They also seem illogical to us, compared to the benefits, especially in Quebec. He mentioned quite rightly that Quebec has had its own plan since March 1, 2005. This plan came out of an agreement with the federal government to transfer responsibility for maternity and parental leave to Quebec, along with a transfer of 35¢ per \$100 of earnings.

I would like to know how my colleague and his party understand this approach, which consists in having self-employed workers pay the full premium when they receive only a portion of the benefits and job loss benefits are not even included. Yet these workers will pay the same amount as if they were covered for job loss benefits.

[*English*]

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments and the work that he does on this.

I think this is exactly what we have to do at committee, identify this rate and the fact that it is \$1.73, the same as regular payers in the system. There is, of course, no employer premium, so the employers are paying the full cost but only the employee cost. For a long time people thought they might pay both ends. On the other hand, the benefits are less.

I think we have to look at that, and we have to look at what triggers what benefits and what the appropriate costs should be. Maybe it is higher and maybe it is lower. Maybe we can do that. Maybe we can find that out at committee.

I know that he is a very diligent member at committee and he will come fully prepared with ideas, costs and questions for people who may have the answers if we do not have them at committee. I think it is a very important process and I think the work can be very significant.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his speech.

He made several references to their pink book. I remember their pink book. I hope pink stands a better chance for success than red did, because as I recall, the red book talked about the GST and made all kinds of promises that were never kept.

My Liberal colleague is also trying to take credit for something, as though it had been his party's idea to grant benefits to self-employed workers. I would remind this House that when the Liberals were in power, they did absolutely nothing for self-employed workers. In

contrast, our party, the NDP, made recommendations in its 1999 report. They can be found on page 12. We mentioned this, proposed it in the House of Commons and made requests in committee. At that time, the workers were saying:

Self-employed workers are not eligible for employment insurance and benefit from almost no social protection. We must take a closer look at what is really happening on the new labour market and explore ways to help so-called self-employed workers contribute to and benefit from the system.

My question is for the Liberal member. If the Liberals were in power, would self-employed workers who lose their jobs and are not covered by Bill C-56—which the Conservatives just introduced—be covered if they are not working? That is what self-employed workers were talking about: parental leave, maternity leave, sick leave, compassionate leave and other benefits if they do not have a job. That is what they said across the country. I wonder if the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour can answer this.

• (1120)

[*English*]

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, I know how serious the hon. member is about that. I acknowledge the books and reports he referenced in the last century, but we are looking forward to things we are proposing, not just myself but the Liberal caucus, the Liberal women's caucus, and the human resources committee. We are trying to go forward.

The only advice I can give Canadians is that any book they see that has a shade of red in it beats any book they see with a shade blue that comes out of this place. It would be better for the social infrastructure of this country and better for Canadian workers.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my friend and colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has a constituent, who is probably one of the greatest hockey players now playing in the NHL, Sidney Crosby.

I have to ask my colleague this. Has he ever seen an exhibition of skating like what was just put on by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development when asked the question about the expert panel and trying to gather information before coming forward with this, and how she skated around that entire issue, abandoned the issue, and gave no answer?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, first of all I have to take issue with the member's comment that one of the best hockey players lives in my riding. The best hockey player in the world comes from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and that is Sidney Crosby.

However, I must defend the minister in terms of her skating around the question. It is not really her fault. Her material is very weak and she has to work with the material that she has. So far it has not been great. I hope though that we can take step forward.

As I close my comments, let us try to make this positive. I am certainly prepared to put aside what happened over the summer when I felt that the Conservatives did not take the EI working group seriously and we missed an opportunity there. However, let us see if we can get something done for self-employed Canadian workers and move forward.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a quick question again about the working group that he spoke so eloquently about and has much disdain for. Could he provide for the House once again information about how the situation of self-employed benefits was handled by the particular working group and how the whole process was held in contempt by the current government?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the EI working group could work.

One of my great political heroes is Teddy Kennedy. Teddy Kennedy passed away this year. One of his legacies was that he made things work. He reached across the aisle with Orrin Hatch and other conservative Republicans, he was a liberal Democrat, to get things done. That is the model we should all follow.

I know it is the model my colleague from Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor follows and I think that we should all follow.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth on a point of order.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons raised a question of privilege suggesting that I was involved in the disturbance in the gallery, which occurred on October 26 during question period. That accusation is false.

[*English*]

I was as surprised as anyone was when this incident took place. It interrupted my important question on pensions that day in the middle of question period.

As my House leader has already said, any conspiracy here is only in the mind of the government House leader.

I do take this accusation very seriously. It is a very grave charge for one member to make against another, not something to be done frivolously or as a partisan stunt.

I greatly value and honour this place, as my father valued and honoured this place before me when he served in the House. He introduced me to the world of Parliament as a young person when we were involved in what was then the Older Boys Parliament and ultimately the Youth Parliament. I served as the speaker of the Youth Parliament in Quebec in the National Assembly for several years and was responsible for some of the kinds of decisions albeit of the young people of Quebec at that time.

These kinds of false accusations are simply not in keeping with the high standards of decorum that we need to be showing to Canadians. We cannot forget that this is their House of Commons.

I find it particularly troubling that accusations like these ones from the government House leader and the member for Langley could have been levelled against me or others without any effort to call me or ask me what happened. I certainly would have responded to any

such call. It is almost like they were trying to intimidate me somehow. That is not right here.

We have both the right and the responsibility to debate the important issues of the people in this House. None of us should play any part in denying our fellow members the opportunity to freely and respectfully participate in these debates. Nor should anyone suggest that members should avoid meeting with groups who they might disagree with. These freedoms of speech and association are ancient rights that we were sent here to protect, not to erode.

I note that despite clear differences of opinion on some issues, the Minister of the Environment himself met with the very same group that I met with. I applaud him for doing so and certainly would never suggest that simply because he met with some of these young people that somehow he was responsible for their later actions in the House.

Lastly, I want to thank my friends, the member for Mississauga South and the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, for their correct and measured words on this matter. As always, I thank my friend from Vancouver East for her support.

In the spirit of encouraging free and open debate, and restoring a higher level of decorum and respect here in the House of Commons, I would invite the government House leader, should he so choose, and the member for Langley, should he so choose, to take this opportunity to apologize and withdraw their baseless accusations against me. I can assure the House that I would accept that apology and that would be the end of the matter as far as I am concerned.

• (1125)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for that statement. I understand the Speaker is considering the matter.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[*Translation*]

**FAIRNESS FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts be read a second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to Bill C-56, which will for the first time give a certain number of rights to self-employed workers, it is rather appalling that the major national parties are taking the credit for doing nothing to improve the living conditions of those who lose their jobs. It is quite surprising. They stated that they brought forward many proposals but at no time did they get together to finally take the next step of reforming the employment insurance program in order to restore its original purpose—to support and protect workers who have the misfortune of losing their jobs.

*Government Orders*

I am also surprised that two of my colleagues raised the fact that we could rejoice because of this bill and begin celebrating Christmas. I do not think there is anything to celebrate. There is no cause to celebrate, especially not for the unemployed because they will not be in a festive mood. In fact, I doubt that most of them have anything to be happy about, even at Christmas, because a large number—the majority of those who lost their jobs—will find themselves without income or with the small income provided by their provinces in the form of social assistance, the support of last resort.

Bill C-56 is not what is going to improve the situation. The only merit to be found in that bill is that for the first time it recognizes the rights of self-employed persons. Even though they do not have many rights, it is a first step, I would say, toward improving a social safety net that is perhaps, however, not identical to what other workers have. It needs to be improved, but it is a step in the right direction.

Members have been using the term “travailleurs autonomes” for self-employed persons. The term used in the bill is “travailleurs indépendants”. That is fine with me. We like it a lot, even though it also refers to workers who are federalists. But if we talk about workers who are “indépendants”, that is fine with me. The more there are, the better, not independent workers but people who are going to work for Quebec’s independence.

In recent years, the Bloc has never stopped calling for coverage for self-employed persons. In the last two economic recovery plans we presented, there were very specific measures for self-employed persons, particularly in the last one we presented in this House.

Bill C-56 refers to four kinds of special leave, but two of them will not apply in Quebec. Why? Because since March 1, 2005, there has been an agreement between Quebec and the federal government to transfer responsibility for maternity and parental leave to Quebec, along with part of the deduction for premiums that was to be allocated to support that program. Right now in Quebec, about 500,000 workers are considered to be self-employed.

Bill C-56 also provides for access to the program to be voluntary. We shall see whether making it voluntary, with the criteria being proposed at present, does not create problems in terms of genuine protection for those people.

We support the bill in principle for the reasons I stated at the outset. For the first time, it grants rights under the employment insurance scheme for self-employed persons, and in that respect we welcome this initiative.

● (1130)

We very much hope that the government, that is, the Conservative Party, will be open and work with us on making amendments to its own bill.

What also causes problems for us, and we will submit this for debate, is that we were hoping that when self-employed persons were given rights it would also mean granting employment insurance benefits from the point when they found themselves jobless.

An individual who owns a small business or is self-employed may sometimes in fact find themselves with no contract or no retainer so they can continue to work. As a result, they are left

without an income. I think this is an aspect that should be debated. Certainly we are going to work to have this bill passed on second reading to make sure it can be debated in committee.

There is also another problem, however. In my view, it is a major problem. That is the entire question of how premium rates are set, which seems to us to be somewhat random. As well, the projected premiums for the benefits that will be made available to these people seems to be much too high.

Remember that the bill is intended to provide self-employed persons with benefits during special leave. There are four kinds of special leave. There are maternity benefits for up to 15 weeks and parental or adoption benefits for up to 35 weeks. We agree on that. The maternity and parental leave benefits are the parts that cost the most, 75% of the total estimated cost. This is a responsibility that Quebec already assumes.

That means the bill does not apply to self-employed persons in Quebec. Only some of its provisions apply. The two provisions that apply are sickness benefits, for up to 15 weeks, and compassionate care benefits for up to six weeks. However, these two benefits account for only 25% of the total cost of Bill C-56.

The members can probably see where I am coming from. Self-employed persons in the rest of Canada will pay their full contribution to be entitled to these four benefits, while in Quebec, they will pay their full contribution to be entitled to only two benefits, representing 25% of the total cost.

Self-employed persons in Quebec are going to contribute as if they were receiving all four of the special kinds of leave I listed, in addition to the benefits they get if they lose their job. There is something very questionable about this.

The answer we are given is that as self-employed persons, they are assumed to be employers as well and the employer’s share will offset their contributions.

● (1135)

Even if we follow this reasoning and add the employer’s share, the final amount is still much less. This even implies that the transfers currently provided to Quebec for maternity leave and parental leave are far too low. That is another debate, though, that we will take up in another forum.

*Government Orders*

For the time being, let us just say that the cost of this for self-employed persons in Quebec is clearly too high. Some very specific work needs to be done to give us the information we requested. I hope we will get it. We had a briefing two evenings ago with some senior officials. We asked for the actual cost of each of the measures in the bill: the actual cost of the maternity leave and parental leave, the actual cost of the compassionate care leave, and the actual cost of the illness leave. They are nowhere to be found here. We have to refer to the amounts that Quebec pays for parental leave and maternity leave. We conclude from this that the cost is clearly too high.

The coverage that is provided applies to self-employed persons earning at least \$6,000 a year. I understand this is to facilitate the accounting rules in regard to taxation. The contributions that self-employed persons make will be determined when they fill out their income tax returns, that is to say, at the end of the financial year on the basis of their income during that year.

This brings me to another aspect of the bill that we need to take a closer look at. Self-employed workers who pay their premiums this year and then take six weeks of compassionate care leave, the purpose of which is to provide end-of-life care, would therefore be making a commitment to contribute for the rest of their working lives as self-employed persons. Yet, participation is said to be voluntary. I can understand that they cannot just make an opportunistic contribution and pull out after availing themselves of the plan. I understand that. We should, however, see if something could not be done differently, because this seems to be going too far.

Those who contribute for one year will be able to withdraw from the plan at any time, provided they have not availed themselves of it. If self-employed individuals join—and let us not forget that participation is voluntary—they will be able to withdraw, as long as they have not availed themselves of the plan. Otherwise, they will have to participate for the rest of their working lives. We should look for a way to come up with a more realistic measure with respect to the type of commitment self-employed workers have to make.

Before yielding the floor to a member from a different party, let me remind the House that, in Quebec, the self-employed will continue to benefit from maternity and parental leave administered by Quebec. Therefore, they will not benefit from this bill like the rest of Canada.

• (1140)

They will be charged the same amounts, which represent 75% of the costs, while Quebec will be assuming the largest part of the costs, given that maternity leave and parental leave make up 75% of special leave costs. The percentages for the self-employed will be reversed. While the federal government bears 25% of the costs, they will have to pay 100% in terms of premiums. The way the Conservatives look at it, this represents 75% of the total cost, and the federal government will be responsible for 25%. We estimate that the self-employed will be paying 50% too much.

This bill also provides that a person who is absent from work because of a work-related injury will be covered. In Quebec, we have a program supervised by the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, the CSST, which covers costs and which pays benefits to a person who is absent from work because of an

occupational injury or disease. Federal coverage will now be provided, but this will not benefit Quebec, because it has already provided such services since the late sixties. Quebec workers are paying good money for that protection. In fact, it is primarily employers who contribute to the fund, because of their responsibility as employers. Providing coverage in Quebec will not cost the federal government anything because coverage is already provided, but self-employed persons will have to pay premiums to the federal government. This is another point that we will have to examine very closely during our review in committee.

What we need is a comprehensive overhaul of the employment insurance system. As we mentioned, Bill C-308, which I sponsored for the Bloc Québécois, proposes some measures that should be part of this process, including working 360 hours to qualify for benefits, making the 50-week benefit period—instead of 45 weeks—permanent, and increasing the rate of weekly benefits to 60% of a claimant's earnings. Our bill also provides coverage for self-employed persons.

The government would have achieved two things by supporting Bill C-308, ensuring its passage through all the stages, and not seeking royal assent. This would have allowed us to do a really conscientious job and, more importantly, would have been socially responsible, because we would have taken into consideration a number of factors to avoid the aberrations that we mentioned earlier and that will have to be corrected along the way.

So we are going to support the principle of this legislation, as long as we can make the amendments that I suggested earlier. In the meantime, I urge the government and all parliamentarians to also support my Bill C-308, at third reading, in the near future.

• (1145)

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in this House to speak to the bill and to express the opinion of the New Democratic Party on it. First, there have been discussions among the parties, and I would like to share my time with the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to share his time?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill. I want to say right off that I agree with the Bloc member's remarks that the major parties here should work together to produce EI bills and EI and other reforms.

I could say—I do not know if the hon. member from the Bloc will agree with me—that when it comes to studying, we have been there and done that. Employment Insurance has been studied from top to bottom. Twenty-eight recommendations have been tabled in the House. Most of the political parties have introduced the 28 recommendations that should have led to the major reform of EI. I think we can agree that recommendations have been made and that a lot of work has been done.

*Government Orders*

When we invite witnesses to appear before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to speak about EI, we know what people need.

Earlier, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour tried to take some credit. It is not that I want to pick on this Liberal member. Let us consider their beloved pink book and the changes that should have occurred. Let us consider how much these people have been left out. I have to repeat what I have said on this. Although I produced a report in 1999, which the member more or less called an antique, the problem remains. If it is an antique, the Liberals were in office from 1999 to 2005 and did nothing for self-employed workers, sometimes called independent workers.

This bill is a good start. I asked the minister why the government did not make self-employed workers eligible for EI when they were unemployed. She said that the formula was too complex, for example, if they were taking a vacation. I think that if they took a vacation—she seems to have said that these people work without a break—if there is no money coming in, it means they are not working. That is the test of Bill C-56. That is how it is calculated.

There will, however, be 2.6 billion Canadians who could access the self-employed workers program if they wish. The benefits of the bill are 15 weeks of maternity benefits, 35 weeks of parental and adoption leave and six weeks of compassionate care leave.

As I said in 1999—it is not in the red or pink or other book, but it is still true—there is the human side of EI. At the time, people were saying:

A plan ill suited to the new labour market. The EI program, as it exists, does not take market realities into account. More workers are described as "self-employed", which is not quite the case. A growing number of businesses are laying off people and then hiring them as self-employed workers in order to avoid having to contribute to EI or to a pension plan. Self-employed workers are not entitled to EI and are practically without social protection. We must take a closer look at what is really happening on the new labour market and explore ways to help so-called self-employed workers contribute to and benefit from the system.

What were people saying in 1999 and what are they saying today, 10 years later? Many self-employed workers used to work for an employer. When their services were no longer needed, they went home. And then the same employer would call them back. These workers were mainly women doing office work.

● (1150)

The employer would ask them to do some work for him, to write a letter, for example. They had their own computer at home. They would write the letter and send it to the employer, who would use it. He would make these people work as self-employed workers and they were totally excluded from any program that could have helped them, like health insurance or employment insurance. They could not contribute.

How many people with complaints about that have I met in my riding? For example, a hairdresser who had her own salon told me that she would like to start a family and have children, but she could not afford to because if she stopped working, she would have no income.

Bill C-56 would give that hairdresser the chance to benefit from maternity leave, parental leave and sick leave. And she is not the

only one because, with this bill, even farmers will enjoy those benefits. Any person holding more than 40% of the shares in a company will be recognized as self-employed. That is why I am proud to see that this bill is going in the right direction. However, there are still improvements to be made.

The minister says that she wants equal treatment for workers. What is troublesome is that, according to the numbers, 2.6 million Canadian men and women are self-employed and have no protection whatsoever. How can the minister say that she wants equal treatment for workers when the self-employed cannot avail themselves of employment insurance, for example?

● (1155)

[English]

I have talked to other people who are self-employed, massage therapists, for example, and as I said, farmers. They get up in the morning and do their work. They wonder why they are not protected for when they do not have work, especially those who work in offices, most of whom are women.

When I made my trip across the country in 1999, the self-employed said it very, very clearly. I presented a document to the House of Commons, to the government. On page 12 of the document is the heading, "Lack of response to the new labour market". In the new labour market, many people have become self-employed. Many people who had worked for a company or a business but had been laid off started their own business.

This morning the minister herself said that this is a new lifestyle that we will see more and more. There are 2.6 million self-employed people in our country. If there are 2.6 million self-employed people in our country, we have to give them more than the sick leave, paternal leave, maternity leave and care leave. We have to go further than that. What if they lose their job or do not have any work? The minister this morning asked how we would know whether a person was working or not working. If people do not report any earnings, that means they are not working. If a hairdresser does not have earnings for two months, then that person is not working. I think there are ways to do it.

I will vote for the bill to go to committee. I would be very interested to work with other members to make it a better bill. That is what this is all about. The bill is presented in the House and when it goes to committee, we have the opportunity to make amendments to it. I hope that we will work together so that self-employed people will have been treated equally with respect to employment insurance.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Acadie—Bathurst made a very good presentation. I want to acknowledge the amount of work he has done over the years. He has been a driving force in the House in bringing forward the reforms that need to be made to the employment insurance system. I know the member is very familiar with the cuts to the program that were made back in the mid-1990s under the Liberal regime.

*Government Orders*

The member pointed out that in the cross-country tour he undertook a number of years ago, the very issue around women and self-employment was raised at that time. He mentioned the new economy. I wonder if he could talk about the kinds of cuts that he has seen over the last 10 or 12 years to the employment insurance program that have meant that women truly have been left behind when it comes to the employment insurance program.

I believe at this point in time only about a third of the women who pay into the system actually gain any benefits. I wonder if he could specifically talk about the impact this program has had on women and their families.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

When I went across the country I happened to go to Nanaimo, which is in the member's riding. I remember very well a story I was told about a woman who had worked for about four or five years and because of the cuts made by the Liberal Party at that time, people needed 700 hours in order to claim EI if they were sick. This woman fell into a coma and had to go to hospital. She recovered and applied for employment insurance. Believe me, I saw the tears in that woman's eyes when she told me she had 698 hours. She was missing two hours to qualify for employment insurance. She could not make the payment on her house. It was a real shame. The cuts that the Liberal Party made at that time were totally unacceptable.

Women are the ones who have suffered the most from all the cuts. Only 32% of women qualify for employment insurance. They are the ones who have been hit the most with all the cuts and changes that have been made over many years.

The government said that workers depend on employment insurance. It is not that. The government depends on the employment insurance fund. It has made a big profit from it. There was an overflow of \$57 billion that it put into the general revenue fund and said, "Never mind the working men and women of our country. We are going to steal that money, put it into the general revenue fund and say that we are good administrators with the money of our country". The deficit was paid on the backs of the working people of our country.

• (1200)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to follow my colleague, a colleague who understands and knows the EI system better than most people in this House. He is a true expert in the area. He has done a lot for unemployed people over the last number of years.

At the outset, I want to compliment the government for bringing in a bill that appears to have all-party support in the House. That is a welcome change from the government we were seeing six months to a year ago. The Conservatives perhaps are learning their lesson rather slowly, but nevertheless they are learning that if they bring in legislation that benefits workers in this case, or benefits Canadians, they can continue to achieve at least a majority support of the House, or perhaps even both houses in this case. They may find themselves successful in a minority government situation for a lot longer than most people think. That is certainly a good sign and we expect to see more positive initiatives from the government over the next few months and maybe even years.

Having said that, if the government proceeds to bring in omnibus bills with poison pills and wedge issues in them, then it will end up seeing itself defeated and we will be into an election which, once again, nobody wants. If that were to happen, I think members of the public are aware enough that they would know that it was a set-up on the part of the government.

I would also like to compliment the Liberals for climbing down from their ledge. It has taken them a month to do it. They did oppose Bill C-50, which would provide \$1 billion to 190,000 long-tenured workers in this country. They did vote against that. I thought that was something they probably should not have done, but I see that on this particular provision, extending benefits to self-employed people, the Liberals themselves are on board. Therefore, I anticipate that perhaps by the end of today, this bill will receive all-party support to get it to committee where I am sure through the committee process, there may be some adjustments and changes.

As I had indicated, we are providing under this bill employment insurance special benefits to the self-employed. In the 2008 Speech from the Throne, the government committed to take measures to increase access to maternity and parental benefits under employment insurance. The commitment is being met by providing the self-employed access to all EI special benefits on a voluntary basis. These include maternity, parental, adoption, sickness and compassionate care benefits.

Not only were these promises made in the Conservative Party's election program, but this promise was also made as part of the NDP election promises last year.

We also note that in 2008, 2.6 million Canadians reported some income from self-employment, and for a large majority, it is their sole source of income. The share of self-employed in the labour force has been relatively stable over the past decade at 15%. I have to take that figure at face value because I personally do not believe that that is true.

• (1205)

I see an explosion, in fact, of self-employed people in the labour force, probably starting back in the early 1980s. It may even be earlier than that, but companies have changed their methods of doing business. For example, computer companies that repair computers would turn around and lay off their repair staff, and then hire them back as self-employed individuals. In some cases that was a win-win situation because the employees were perhaps happy to be working for themselves. They could take on customers other than simply working for their previous employer. They would get to deduct their expenses and perhaps even deduct office expenses because many would be working out of their houses. We have certainly seen a lot of activity in that area.

As long as 25 years ago, pretty much all of the real estate business was made up of employer-employee relationships and deductions were taken. During the old Block Brothers days, deductions were taken from the agents who were considered employees in terms of benefits.

*Government Orders*

In the early to mid-1980s companies like RE/MAX and others that members would be familiar with simply went to an option of self-employment. I say that as an option because a lot of those companies retained a hybrid system. Some companies did go totally to a self-employed model and thereby moved away from worrying about deductions and so on, and in turn transferred the responsibility over to the agents themselves so they became self-employed and could deduct their expenses. This probably worked out for some employees, but in a lot of cases the employees were actually worse off than they were before.

I have had other experiences over the years. I have heard of people giving up good paying jobs to open a Pizza Hut or a restaurant thinking of themselves overnight as entrepreneurs. They worked many more hours than they were before and getting less benefits. They were taking a different look on life. The reality is that they would have been better off staying as salaried employees.

Many self-employed people may have gone there by choice. They may in fact have been doing better than they were before, but there are a number out there who went in that direction not on a voluntary basis but were forced into self-employment. They are doing worse than they were before.

This measure has been a long time coming. People who are self-employed will benefit under this system. Perhaps a measure like this might actually encourage more self-employed individuals in the marketplace when they find that they can be covered for benefits under the employment insurance system.

Self-employed people face a very difficult time trying to find insurance coverage for themselves and their families because they do not belong to a group so they do not qualify for group benefits. No insurance company wants to insure one or two people, so it is very difficult for them. They are basically out there on their own and they do not have a lot of support or protection. Anything that we could do to help them through the EI system is a positive thing.

• (1210)

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Madam Speaker, when we are looking at the self-employed, and I would agree with the member's analysis, I think that 2.6 million workers who are self-employed is probably an underestimation.

We know of many communities that are going through transition, my own community is going through a transition due to the changes in the forestry sector, and many workers are ending up being self-employed.

In fact, in my office in Nanaimo—Cowichan we had a worker come in a couple of weeks back. He had been employed for a number of years and decided to set up his own business. He wanted to do it on his own hook. He did all the work in setting up the business and then found out, as many self-employed discover, that it would be a while before he actually saw a positive cashflow. He went to the local office to find out whether he could collect employment insurance benefits while he was setting up his business. Because he already was into setting up his business, he was not eligible. He was already deemed to be self-employed.

This bill is a positive first step, but could the member talk about what other changes he would like to see in terms of supporting workers who are self-employed?

**Mr. Jim Maloway:** Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that in many cases they do not have the ability to plan their move to self-employment. It is basically thrust on them.

There are people who are able to set up and plan their affairs in such a way as to get into a self-employed situation through working for a company, learning how that company operates, and basically looking ahead six months to a year and then saying that their goal is to become self-employed by that time.

However, many others just simply find that they have no jobs and are forced into self-employment overnight. They are forced with the decision of trying to stay afloat and basically become a business person. We know that statistically businesses just do not last in a major fashion beyond five years.

I do not know what the figure is exactly but a very high number of businesses fail within the first five years and very few businesses survive past the five year mark.

By the way, that is why franchises have become such a popular item and a popular approach for people to take because the franchising concept, while it has a lot of negatives in some ways, has proven to be successful. If one signs in on a franchise, one can probably enhance one's chances by perhaps 100% in being successful for a much longer period.

In terms of the employment insurance route, my colleague talked about having full EI benefits available and that we should look to that in the future. This bill is a very good first step, but perhaps in the future, next year, the government might look at developing the system a little further, perhaps to allow self-employed people access to the full system under certain circumstances.

I think that would be the way to look at it long-term.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Madam Chair, I rise today in the House to speak in support of the measure we are putting forward to assist self-employed persons and to make it possible for them to balance work and family life.

As we know, self-employed persons are their own employers, and this means that the money does not always come in when they want it and that they have no guarantee of an income. As well, these people are to some extent vulnerable to special situations in their lives: they may have the bad luck to fall ill or a member of their family may be ill and they may want to help them during that difficult period in their life, or at the end of their life.

How does it work at present for all regularly employed workers in Canada who get a paycheque every week? They have access to employment insurance and special benefits such as parental leave, sick leave and compassionate leave. That is available to all employed workers in Canada.

*Government Orders*

In Quebec, certain aspects are different. In Quebec, all employed workers also receive the same kinds of benefits, except that they may get a little more than what is available to other Canadians. Because the service is a little different in Quebec, the costs associated with it are also different.

Today, our government is keeping its promise. We said that we would also offer certain special benefits to self-employed workers.

What are the special benefits we are going to make available to self-employed workers? First, let me explain the difference between Quebec and all the other provinces of Canada. In all provinces and territories, self-employed Canadians will be able to receive special benefits: maternity leave, parental leave, sick leave or sick benefits, and compassionate benefits. To receive those services, self-employed persons will have to pay \$1.73 for every \$100 in income earned.

In Quebec, there is a difference. Self-employed persons were already required to pay for maternity and parental benefits. Because Quebec managed the program, instead of paying \$1.73 per \$100 in earned income, employed people paid \$1.36 per \$100. But the Government of Quebec also required that self-employed persons pay an additional amount: 86¢ more than the \$1.36 we already require, in order to get these benefits.

That may be a little complicated, but I want to make it clear that there is a difference between Quebec and the other provinces and territories, because Quebec offers more things. Now, what is being offered to self-employed workers?

Those who also want to avail themselves of sick leave and compassionate benefits will now be able to have access to them on a voluntary basis. No one will be compelled to contribute. Those who contribute will be billed \$1.36 per \$100 of income earned, while in the other provinces it will be \$1.73.

I think it is important for people who want this protection to be able to have it, because they could have the bad luck to fall ill or to need compassionate leave to help a family member.

Sick leave would cover a period of 25 weeks. Someone could therefore fall ill and receive payment for 25 weeks, based on their average earnings in the last year. Compassionate leave covers a six-week period.

Now, how do we go about making all this available, and how will it work? For someone to actually be able to sign up for this insurance, to cover the possibility of illness or so they can take compassionate leave, they will have to have earned \$6,000 in the last year.

Why \$6,000 and not 600 hours, like employment insurance for other workers? That is because we do not know how many hours a self-employed person works per week, because it is not recorded and also because there is no obvious way to do it.

• (1220)

Our calculation is based on a person working 600 hours, as in regular EI. If we calculate that at \$10 an hour, it comes to \$6,000. At that income level, an individual can contribute in order to be eligible for the special benefits for sick leave, compassionate care leave,

maternity leave and parental leave, which will be made available to all Canadians.

This is not the first measure we have put forward to help Canadians and workers who are losing their jobs right now. I will say a few brief words about these workers who are losing their jobs. We know we are in a recession. Even though things seem to be going better at the moment, it is still a global recession and during this difficult time it is important for us to support workers who lose their jobs. Among the new benefits we are offering, we decided, first, to extend EI by five weeks for people who will lose their jobs or for those who have already lost them. We thought it important to give them an extra five weeks. By way of example, if someone received \$400 weekly in EI and got an additional five weeks that would mean \$2,000. That is a lot more than the two weeks the Bloc was after with the elimination of the waiting period.

We also wanted to protect businesses and employees, if they were prepared to share work in order not to lose their jobs, so that everyone could stay on with the company. This is often called a four day week. We put measures in place to support these businesses and the workers who want to go that route. We are giving them an additional 14 weeks. In the past, it was 38 weeks, now it will be 52 weeks. Over 5,000 businesses have benefited from this for 5,000 workers, which is to their advantage as well.

Among the other measures, we wanted those who lose their jobs to get training in order to acquire new skills. We can pay for up to two years while they train. Of course, during that time, they receive benefits as they acquire new skills so they can go into another sector of activities if they are unable to return to their former workplace.

Another measure that we proposed recently—and once again the Bloc wanted to vote against this measure—is to arrange for an additional 5 to 20 weeks of EI for long-tenured employees, people who have worked in a company for 7, 8, 10, 15 or 20 years and never drawn EI benefits. They come up against hard times, and of course it might well take longer for them to return to the same job. Some will not even be able to go back because the business closes for good. There will be an additional 5 to 20 weeks available to them. For someone contributing at the maximum, that 20 weeks amounts to \$8,940 more. This is what EI claimants could get if they lose their jobs. I do not know whether anyone can explain to me why the Bloc voted against the unemployed in order to deprive them—if we speak of the maximum—of \$8,940. That is money when you lose your job and have no idea when you will find another one. Well, the Bloc members voted against this measure.

*Government Orders*

I want to come back to the importance of what we are doing today. First, we are delivering the goods. Second, we are doing even more than what we originally talked about. We are now allowing self-employed workers to be eligible for special benefits. That means that now, self-employed workers will be able to receive maternity leave, parental leave, sickness and compassionate care benefits. Those are the measures we will offer.

Of course, Quebec already had parental and maternity benefits that were mandatory. In Quebec, workers paid less than what we were asking. For them it was \$1.36, while for the other provinces and territories, it was \$1.73. Quebec charged an additional 86¢ for self-employed workers. So, for the two new measures, everyone would be on an equal footing. They would pay \$1.36 for every \$100 of earnings in order to be able to receive benefits.

•(1225)

We know that life is unpredictable. We determined that 86% of people wanted this for self-employed workers for sickness benefits, among other things. That means 86% of people wanted these benefits to be available. They now are. At least they will be once the bill is passed. Some 84% wanted compassionate care benefits, and a little over 60% wanted parental and maternity leave benefits. We see that this is what people wanted, and now self-employed workers will have access to that protection.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I heard the member for Jonquière—Alma talk about various measures on which the Bloc has taken a stand.

Let us take, for example, the two week waiting period. The Bloc believes that the two week waiting period is unfair to a worker who loses his job. If we abolished the waiting period, that worker would receive money a lot sooner to buy food and other necessities. People who lose their jobs and go on EI are subjected to the two week waiting period, and it takes another four weeks to process the claim. That means that it takes six weeks for the cheque to arrive. This is very unfair, but the member for Jonquière—Alma and his party do not understand that.

I would like to raise another point. He also talked about the program to add an extra 5 to 25 weeks of benefits provided that the worker has not received benefits in the last five years. This is another measure that does nothing for Quebec, for seasonal workers and for forestry workers. Every union and every workers' representative in Quebec is against this measure because it is tailored to the needs of auto workers. Those are the two points I wanted to make regarding the comments by the member for Jonquière—Alma.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Madam Speaker, once again, I would like to add to what the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord just said.

Suppose a worker loses his job and is entitled to 30 weeks of employment insurance benefits under the EI rules. If I eliminate the waiting period, that worker will get his benefits earlier, but he will still collect just 30 weeks of benefits.

We are in a recession, so the measure we are proposing is doubly important. Often, when a recession happens, the economy does not recover as quickly as employers might have expected. Economic activity often slows down. Employers get fewer orders and are not in

a position to call staff back. In such circumstances, it is important for those who worked for these companies to have the opportunity to collect five extra weeks of employment insurance benefits. As we all know, the maximum weekly benefit is \$447 per week. Multiply that by five, and it adds up to over \$2,000. That is not peanuts.

Then, consider the 5 to 20 weeks that we want to give long-tenured workers. How can any member of the House say no to that if they want to help people going through hard times because they have lost their jobs and might never be hired back by their former employer? Our government is taking action. We want to help unemployed workers. We are standing up for unemployed workers by bringing in a measure to offer 20 extra weeks, times \$447 per week, which means that we are giving \$8,940 to people who are going through tough times. They, on the other hand, are standing up to vote not for this bill, but against it. What is going on?

Why are they here? Are they here to help people who are having a hard time or are they just here to ask partisan questions that are not in the best interest of those people? Rich people will not benefit from this measure. Workers who lose their jobs, who are going through hard times and who want to support their families, are the ones who will benefit. We are offering 20 extra weeks and they are voting against it.

•(1230)

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Madam Speaker, my colleague from Jonquière—Alma will probably admit that he made an error in his presentation earlier. The number of weeks of sickness benefits is 15, not 25. I do not believe that the bill says that it will increase. He said 25, but I think that that is a mistake, because the bill provides for 15 weeks of sickness benefits. That said, I do not believe he deliberately misstated the number.

I would like to talk about my colleague's presentation, in which he defended Bill C-50 instead of Bill C-56. I understand that he is embarrassed at having supported that bill and that he felt obliged to defend it because it is indefensible.

My colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord pointed out that in Quebec, both the major unions and the groups that represent the unemployed are unanimously opposed to the bill. I would add that even in the auto sector, the Canadian Auto Workers have acknowledged that it would help them so little for the price that they would prefer not to have it.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the correction the hon. member made. It was an error. There are 15 weeks of sickness benefits and 6 weeks of compassionate care benefits. Parental benefits vary by province or territory.

*Government Orders*

In Quebec, for example, maternity leave runs for 15 to 18 weeks under the plan there. In the other provinces, it runs for 15 weeks. We can see that there are differences, just as there are for parental leave.

That said, I would like to tell the hon. member once again that the Conservative government is standing up in the House to introduce measures to help workers who lose their jobs, especially long-tenured workers who have paid into the employment insurance plan for maybe 20 years and have never received a cent. We are offering to give them from 5 to 20 additional weeks of benefits if something disastrous should happen and they should lose their jobs. If they are entitled to a year, for example, we will give them 5 to 20 weeks more. You are voting against this.

How can you explain why you are voting against a measure like this that helps—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I would ask the hon. minister to address his comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Madam Speaker, through you, I have a question for the Minister of National Revenue, who, like me, is a citizen of Quebec.

I have been watching the Bloc in this House for the past 20 years. First of all, it has never brought forward any measures to protect the interests of Quebec's unemployed workers. Second, it has never wanted power, and accordingly, never wanted to resolve any issues.

I would like to ask my colleague who will pay for this new system. In Quebec, I already pay, in part, for unionized employees who have certain rights, but those employees do not necessarily pay for me.

Since I am a self-employed worker who decided to run for election, I would like to know who is going to pay for this new bill, which benefits self-employed workers in Quebec.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. It is an excellent question.

Since we are talking about self-employed workers, those who wish to take advantage of this insurance in order to have benefits, including sick leave and compassionate leave—so the self-employed workers themselves—will pay a premium of \$1.36 for every \$100 of earnings.

To be entitled to employment insurance, the employee and employer both pay. For instance, the employee pays \$1.73 in all other provinces and territories, and the employer pays the same amount multiplied by 1.4. In the case of self-employed workers, the employer does not pay. Only the individual who wishes to receive special benefits will have to pay premiums. The money accumulated should allow this to remain revenue neutral.

Furthermore, beginning in 2011, the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board will ensure that premium rates correspond to the actual costs associated with the benefits provided by the employment insurance system.

• (1235)

[*English*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

[*Translation*]

These amendments will mainly affect self-employed Canadians who have been lobbying for changes to employment insurance legislation for a number of years.

[*English*]

In principle, Liberals will support this legislation because the intent is good. We would like to see the bill sent to committee for an in-depth study.

[*Translation*]

What my colleagues and I on this side of the House find surprising is the fact that the government has drafted such an important bill without even defining the expression “self-employed worker”.

As a legislative body, it is our responsibility as parliamentarians, when laws are written and codified, to provide advice to those who will apply the law in the legislative framework.

[*English*]

At the outset of any piece of legislation, it is important to say what we mean by the terms. Who are these independent workers? When we talk about the self-employed, who are we speaking about? Are we speaking about people who work as individual consultants, or those who work within a consulting firm where there are several independent consultants but only share office space, phone lines, a receptionist and other administrative services? Are we speaking about contractors, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs who work in teams yet have no financial responsibility towards each other?

Surely the definitions of the people affected by any legislation, and particularly such a major piece as we are discussing today, should be included and clarified in the actual legislation and not left to regulations. These regulations, which come after the legislation has passed this House and the other House, can be amended by order in council, at the government's will, without any debate in Parliament. It is therefore imperative that there be substantial amendments to the bill as it stands today, and the very first one that I would suggest to this House would be a definition of who are the people who will be affected by this bill.

[*Translation*]

Who are these self-employed workers? What we do know, based on socio-demographic characteristics, is that the number of self-employed workers has increased.

[*English*]

Throughout Canada, one worker in six is now self-employed.

[*Translation*]

According to the surveys, self-employment has grown more quickly than employment in general in the past 25 years.

*Government Orders**[English]*

According to Statistics Canada, between August 2008 and August 2009, self-employment rose by 3.5% on average. That is in one year. That is over 92,000 more people.

*[Translation]*

Concurrently, the paid work force has decreased by 2.7%.

*[English]*

There are now more than 2.7 million self-employed people in Canada, as compared to 2.5 million in 2005. This is despite the downturn in the economy. It is obvious that this bill comes at a very important time for these 2.7 million self-employed people in Canada, but we have to know, within this 2.7 million, who is going to be affected by the bill.

● (1240)

*[Translation]*

In the case of women who are self-employed, 35.9% have their spouses as business partners compared to 28% for men. That means that both workers in the family are self-employed.

*[English]*

We also know that around 88% of the self-employed work full time.

We know that people have chosen self-employment either after retirement, or in many cases, when they have grown frustrated with their inability to find full-time work that suits their qualifications and skills.

We also know that stress in the workplace, especially within the public service sector, has forced people to choose the uncertainties of self-employment, and I could talk about the uncertainties of self-employment, because for 10 years I was self-employed. It was really an up-and-down ladder. There were months when nothing would come in and I would do no work, and there were months when I would be trying to do two or three things at the same time. One could never tell a few months ahead whether there was going to be any money coming into the house.

We know that among the self-employed, 17% are newcomers to Canada. We know one of the reasons is that they have degrees they have earned outside Canada and they are not able to have a comparable degree here in Canada. These people have no choice but to become self-employed, because barriers to employment are more prevalent.

*[Translation]*

The opposition has been waiting a long time to discuss changes to employment insurance. We spent the summer trying to work with the Conservative government.

In the end, we have a bill that has no flexibility within the employment insurance program, does not take into consideration the variety of legislation in the provinces and territories, and does not provide a clear definition of self-employment. If there is one, it is not good enough.

*[English]*

This is as a result of a summer of discontent, of a lack of goodwill on the part of the government to be open and willing to discuss public policies that matter to Canadians.

While we are pleased that many of those self-employed women, and I am only speaking of women here, will now be able to access maternity benefits and parental, sick and even compassionate benefits, what calculations did the government use to assure Canadians that the EI fund will be able to withstand the added cost? If it has done calculations, these calculations are still unknown to Canadians and are definitely unknown to parliamentarians.

What models did the government look at before coming up with this framework? Obviously not very many.

*[Translation]*

For instance, had the government made an effort to look at what the provinces and territories had in terms of programs, it would have realized that the Quebec model is a very good one, and it would be important that it be used as a basis for developing a fairer and more equitable system for the self-employed. I would like to take a moment to outline this Quebec model.

The Government of Quebec currently provides parental and maternity benefits to the self-employed, but it uses a different model. All Quebecers who are in business for themselves have to pay, out of their income, premiums to Quebec's parental insurance plan, QPIP. Self-employed workers with at least \$2,000 in insurable income may qualify for benefits under this plan and receive up to 70% of their income in QPIP benefits. That is a more generous plan than the one proposed in the bill before us today.

As long as the QPIP is in place, the new federal maternity and parental benefits plan will not apply to Quebec, but the self-employed in Quebec will be able to contribute to the plan for the caregiver and sick leave benefits that are not currently provided under QPIP. Consequently, in Quebec, the self-employed will pay premiums corresponding to 37% less of their income. It goes without saying that this sounds like a more equitable arrangement than the one proposed in this federal bill, which corresponds to 55% of an individual's average income.

*[English]*

Another questionable aspect of what is being presented in this legislation is the threshold of \$6,000 in pre-tax earnings before the self-employed can qualify.

Again, what calculations did the government use to come up with this figure?

● (1245)

*[Translation]*

This is one aspect that we, on this side, would like to see discussed in detail at committee in the interest of those who will be affected by the proposed regulations.

At committee, we would also like to hear the Government of Quebec on the best practices and lessons learned in providing services to the self-employed in that province.

*Government Orders*

[English]

While we are pleased that many of those self-employed women will now be able to access maternity benefits, we still ask, again, what calculations has the Conservative government made? How has it come to these calculations? Will it make them public to members of Parliament, as well as to the Canadian public?

[Translation]

The labour force must become flexible. Working full time for a single employer is no longer the norm. We must therefore have a system that meets and responds to the needs of this new labour force, one that is flexible, mobile and even seasonal.

[English]

This is what fairness and equity is all about in the 21st century.

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak to this very important piece of legislation, which is being brought forth as part of our Conservative government's campaign commitment last year, not only fulfilling but exceeding expectations of our constituents with regard to this platform initiative. I would like to thank the hon. member for her dissertation. We work together on the human resources standing committee and will be discussing this piece of legislation.

From a British Columbia perspective, and you yourself, Madam Speaker, being from B.C., I know that John Winter, the chair of the Coalition of B.C. Businesses has said that the legislation would ease some of the risk associated with self-employment and provide greater financial security to Canadian entrepreneurs. He said:

This is welcome news to B.C.'s 216,300 owner/operators. No longer will an economic downturn or the decision to care for children leave them in the lurch without employment insurance or parental leave. It's only fair that...British Columbians who hang their own shingle should not have to choose between raising a family and raising a business.

One of the fastest-growing sectors of the self-employed is women entrepreneurs. The women's enterprise centre is located in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country and I see how the women's resource centre is expanding. A *Globe and Mail* editorial made reference to the fact that:

Broader supports for this group of 2.7 million Canadians, men and women who work long hours with little certainty, would make the country more equitable and make the path to entrepreneurship more viable.

This is substantiated by Stats Canada, which says that, from 1976 to 2008, the number of self-employed men in Canada roughly doubled, from 873,400 to 1,719,700, and the number of self-employed women nearly tripled over the same period, going from 311,600 to 909,900.

Understanding the importance of this type of insurance for men and women, specifically the entrepreneurial women sector, does the member support expediting the bill through the House so we can ensure the legislation is effective in January 2010?

[Translation]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Madam Speaker, I am very happy to hear the member for Kelowna—Lake Country. I totally agree with him that there is a great need. I said so myself in the brief remarks I just made in the House.

However, it is clear that some basic elements are missing from the bill before us. The bill must go to committee. The member for Kelowna—Lake Country sits on that committee, as I do. It depends on us, as members of the committee, and on how fast we want to work.

I suggest that we work as fast as possible to correct the flaws in this bill so that it can come back to the House as quickly as possible and so that all these people, these women and men, can benefit from it as soon as possible.

• (1250)

[English]

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her work on the human resources committee. She works very hard on behalf of her constituents on issues like this.

There was a briefing on the bill itself. I understand the member attended the briefing and it was quite clear how the calculation came to be about the \$6,000 threshold, related to the number of dollars per hour earnings, as well as the threshold for special benefits. I wonder if the member had missed that in the briefing.

Perhaps the member would like to make a rebuttal to this comment. In 2003, the parental benefits for the self-employed was the principal recommendation of the Liberal women on the Prime Minister's task force on women entrepreneurs. Just recently, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine was asked about the success or failure of that on behalf of the previous Liberal government and she admitted on *Power Play* that the previous Liberal government completely ignored it.

I wonder if the member would be prepared to comment on either of those issues.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Madam Speaker, I was a member of the committee of women entrepreneurs which came to my riding at the time and we met a large number of women entrepreneurs in Laval—Les Îles. Along with the other groups, we made those recommendations. I was for that recommendation then. I discussed it with my party. We discussed it in the Liberal women's caucus. This was important for us because, as everyone agrees, women in the workforce form a large part of the independent, autonomous workers.

I am sorry to say that when we in the Liberal Party were in government, we did not push this sufficiently. What is past is past. What is now before us is a bill which I think means well but is definitely incomplete and must be ameliorated.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to recognize the contribution that my colleague has made in working on that whole issue of the self-employed and women in particular. She mentioned the needs of women in her comments and that self-employment is attractive to women. They can arrange their own schedules and so on, so it is a real benefit.

Some of the things that go against women are: not being able to contribute to their pensions and insufficient support. I would like to ask the hon. member, what other suggestions does she have for the committee in order to make this bill that much stronger and really help the women of Canada that we are talking about with this motion.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the compliments.

My colleague is our party's critic for seniors' issues. The issue of pensions is a very important topic these days in Canada. It is something that we must definitely examine carefully in connection with how much a person earns.

For self-employed workers, the amount of money they earn one year will not necessarily be the same as the amount they may earn another year. Even within the year, there are ups and downs. They work hard some months, and other months, they do absolutely nothing and have no income.

I would say that it is like a roller coaster, and we must have a close look to determine the minimum threshold that would allow self-employed workers to receive pension benefits.

I thank my colleague for bringing up this issue, because this will enable us to study it in committee.

• (1255)

[English]

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for her comments and her study of this bill, which of course is a huge step forward and is fulfilling some of our campaign promises.

We all know there is a great number of people who are self-employed. There are certainly thousands of self-employed tradespeople who are currently unable to participate in the EI program. I would ask the member opposite to give us her thoughts on how this would greatly help the tradespeople.

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. member for Laval—Les Îles has only one minute to respond.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Madam Speaker, I should put the question back to my colleague opposite. That is the major flaw in this bill. Who will benefit from it? Will it be businesspeople, people who work from home? Who are they? The member's party has not identified the groups who will benefit from this bill. That still needs to be done.

[English]

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Simcoe—Grey.

[Translation]

It is a pleasure for me to rise today in defence of Bill C-56, Fairness for the Self-Employed Act, which provides self-employed persons in Canada with special employment insurance benefits.

Entrepreneurship is vital to a vibrant economy and creates jobs in Canadian communities. Last year, there were 2.6 million self-employed in Canada, accounting for 15.4% of the active population. Nearly one-third of self-employed women are in their reproductive years.

Self-employed persons have little or no income protection during major events in their lives, such as the birth or adoption of a child, sickness, or the provision of care to gravely ill relatives. Our government wants the self-employed to have special employment insurance benefits comparable to those available to salaried employees.

Expanding access to these benefits is both fair and responsible. Let me explain these special benefits, which provide Canadians with income support during major events in their lives, such as the birth or adoption of a child or the need to care for a terminally ill relative.

Anyone would find that major events like these affect a person's ability to work. Our Conservative government is very sensitive to the difficulties facing all working Canadians, who have to deal with the pressures of both their occupational and family responsibilities. All indications are that these benefits are very important to the self-employed.

A recent survey showed that self-employed persons are very interested in getting some help in dealing with these sorts of events in their lives. Our government is responding to their long-standing desire to be able to draw on this kind of support. We are proposing that the special employment insurance benefits for the self-employed should be similar to those available to employees under the current employment insurance program. The following would therefore be similar: benefit periods, income-replacement rates, maximum insurable earnings, the treatment of earnings, and the waiting period.

Adjustments will be made, of course, on the basis of the individual situations of the self-employed. For example, participation in the program will be voluntary and self-employed persons must contribute on an ongoing basis for at least a year in order to qualify for benefits. They can withdraw from the program at the end of any financial year, provided they have never received benefits. The contribution rate is the same as for employees, but they will not be required to pay the employer's share of the employment insurance contribution because they will not be eligible for regular employment insurance benefits. The self-employed will qualify for benefits if their income is interrupted as a result of the birth or adoption of a child, a sickness, or the need to care for a gravely ill relative.

To be eligible for those benefits, they must earn at least \$6,000 in the calendar year as a self-employed worker. As many hon. members know, the Government of Quebec already pays maternity and parental benefits to self-employed workers through Quebec's parental insurance program.

*Government Orders*

•(1300)

I would point out that with this bill, self-employed workers who live in Quebec will continue receiving maternity and parental benefits from Quebec's parental insurance program established by the Government of Quebec for everyone who lives in Quebec. However, they could also be eligible for the sickness and compassionate care benefits offered by the federal government through the employment insurance system. Since the province is already paying for parental and maternity benefits, the premiums paid by self-employed workers in Quebec will be lowered. Those are the main points of this bill.

Increasing access to these benefits is a fair, equitable, family-based policy that will greatly benefit families across Canada. Our Conservative government knows that family is the foundation of our beautiful country.

We believe that self-employed workers in Canada should not have to chose between their families and their professional responsibilities. I would like to look at Bill C-56 in a broader context.

When the Prime Minister came to power in 2006, he made child care one of this government's top priorities. In fact, this summer marked the third anniversary of the universal child care benefit. Since July 2006, we have been giving parents \$100 a month for each child under the age of six. This means a total of \$1,200 a year for each child under the age of six, which helps parents choose the solution that best meets their family's needs.

Since last February's budget, we have made major new investments in families. We have increased the income thresholds at which the national child benefit and the Canada child tax benefit are phased out. We have created \$580 billion in refundable tax credits through the working income tax benefit. We have created \$1 billion in decent, affordable housing. Over five years, we will deliver \$20 billion in personal income tax relief. In short, support for Canadian families is one of this government's top priorities. That is the backdrop against which we are introducing Bill C-56, the Fairness for the Self-Employed Act.

These special benefits will not only help many people take responsibility for their family and loved ones, they will also give them peace of mind and greater financial security. As hon. members are well aware, the government acted quickly to help Canadians get through these tough economic times. That is another one of our priorities.

Thanks to Canada's economic action plan, we quickly made improvements to the employment insurance system by increasing the benefit period, making service more efficient, providing support for training and extending the work sharing program. The measures in Canada's economic action plan reflect this government's commitment to help all Canadians through this economic crisis.

This government has also expanded eligibility for compassionate care benefits and created the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board to improve the governance and management of the EI account. More recently, the government has passed legislation to pay regular EI benefits to long-tenured workers who lose their jobs. These are people who have paid into EI for years but seldom received benefits and who now need a hand.

Our Conservative government is sensitive to Canadians' needs. This bill reflects our commitment to pay parental and maternity benefits to self-employed workers.

I encourage all members to join me in voting for this bill.

•(1305)

[English]

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his presentation.

Does the government have any projections as to the uptake of this program? How many people will be affected by it? How many people will be applying for it, projected? In terms of its cost, who makes up for it if there are cost overruns in the program and where does the money to make up those costs come from?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Madam Speaker, on the funding for this program, one reason why we ask self-employed Canadians to make contributions one year before they collect is so they help finance the program.

The intention is this is a self-financing initiative. Over time, the money that independent business people put into the employment insurance program will be used to pay their benefits. If there were cost overruns, our estimation is that over time, this may raise premiums for the average Canadian by perhaps 1¢ or 2¢. That is about it.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have two questions for the member.

Huron—Bruce is a rural riding with many farmers, farm producers and farm families. It is a pleasure to hear the member speak today. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, could he comment on the impact this will have for farmers and farm families across Canada?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Madam Speaker, I come from the riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, which is also a rural riding. In fact, I will read a quotation. This is from Richard Phillips, the executive director of the Grain Growers of Canada. He said, "The legislation is very welcome. This has huge potential for quality of life in rural Canada". He also said:

[This] could be the difference as whether one member of the family has to seek off farm employment because now families will have a choice. With over 200,000 farms in Canada, if even 10 per cent of them choose to take advantage of these programs, this could help ensure another 20,000 more young families staying on the land.

This is a great initiative for all Canadians, but particularly for rural Canadians, as indicated by the quotes from the executive director of the Grain Growers of Canada.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, based on what I hear about the bill, it certainly sounds good. I hope that at the end of the day, it really serves the self-employed. However, it sounds like it will be very expensive.

*Government Orders*

I think about the many people in my riding of York West who are self-employed. They are self-employed because they are at home with children or caring for elderly family.

Is this program not really looking at those who are doing extremely well, or is there going to be a way to help those low-income earners who are still self-employed?

• (1310)

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Madam Speaker, the initiative being put forward will apply to all self-employed Canadians, whether they are on the low-income end or not. It is a program that will support all of them.

I take the opportunity to invite my colleagues on the other side of the House, particularly in the Liberal Party, to support this initiative. Independent business owners have been asking for this for an extremely long time. We have a government taking action and moving forward, but we need the co-operation of our fellow MPs in the opposition parties to make this a reality.

This is a very important initiative. It is being watched very closely by independent business owners and we should act in their best interests. That is why I invite my fellow colleagues to support this initiative.

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC):** Madam Speaker, a year ago the Prime Minister said this:

Self-employed Canadians—and those who one day hope to be—shouldn't have to choose between starting a family and starting a business because of government policy....They should be able to pursue their dreams—both as entrepreneurs and as parents.

At the time, Conservatives promised to extend EI maternity and parental benefits to the self-employed. That was our pledge to all Canadians.

Canadians who pay into the EI system now get not only maternity and parental benefits but also compassionate care benefits and sickness benefits. Right now the field is not fair. Those Canadians get more.

We want to do more, we can and we will do more. We are doing more for self-employed Canadians through Bill C-56. Not only will we make maternity and parental benefits available to them, but also those same compassionate care and sickness benefits that most working Canadians already receive. This is both the fair thing and the right thing to do and it is really that simple.

The same relative assurance and stability that most working Canadians have due to these special benefits should be and now will be accorded to the work and lives of the literally millions of self-employed Canadians across the country.

Our Conservative government knows that families are the foundation of our great country and until the introduction of the bill, there was no choice for them at all. Self-employed Canadians have been on their own since the very beginning.

While we certainly have faith in the abilities and the willingness of these Canadians to create jobs, to create wealth and to save and plan for the contingencies of life, successive Canadian governments have done nothing to make things even just a little bit easier; that is, until now.

Bill C-56 amends the Employment Insurance Act to extend to self-employed Canadians similar EI special benefits that employees enjoy on a voluntary basis. These are the benefits that can help them cope with life-changing events and transitions, such as the birth of a child, the adoption of a child, a serious illness or having to care for a family member who is gravely ill.

These benefits have been available in various forms to most working Canadians for a very long time but never to our self-employed. Building this structure to facilitate our self-employed being able to draw on these benefits, if they want to and if they need to, is our government's way of making things a little easier.

There are somewhere around 2.6 million self-employed Canadians in our country. We are talking about over 15% of the workforce. We know that 47% of small business owners are women owned or operated by women. We know that the OECD has cited Canada as having one of the most entrepreneurial women's groups within the OECD developed countries. That is impressive. It is a very large and very important segment of our workforce and an even bigger segment of our entrepreneurial, creative and wealth-producing talent.

They have long asked for this sort of support. Previous governments completely ignored these Canadians and they have for decades. That is stopping right now.

Our government has listened and we have worked hard to create this bill and the structure and now we are delivering results for the self-employed.

In many cases self-employment has meant a new start for people or even a challenge right at the outset of a person's working life. Many of these people are entrepreneurial by nature. They are willing to take risks. They are very creative and they are driven.

I have been a small business owner myself, having been raised in a small business family and coming from a long line of small businesses, namely from a jewellery business, to a local garage owner, to a motel, to a grocery store and to a furniture business. That is the family business I was raised in for 40 years. I often jokingly say that I started in the dusting department and quickly rose and graduated to marketing, sales, finance and so on. A small business person is all of the above.

Many members here, past and present, and I am sure many in the future, too, have run small businesses and perhaps will run a business of their own when they leave this place.

Self-employed people set out to market their skills and their knowledge and the economy is much better for their resourcefulness and determination. In this place we often speak of creating the best trained, most skilled, most flexible workforce in the world. Often it is those very attributes that define the successful self-employed Canadian. They market themselves on their strengths, on their training and their skills and they are certainly among the most flexible people in the labour market.

*Government Orders*

• (1315)

Self-employed individuals must be ready to take on a very wide range of challenges. Many self-employed individuals find great satisfaction in being their own boss. They enjoy being called in to fix a particular problem for which their background and training make them qualified.

However, as many self-employed people know, and would remind us, this kind of career path can be something like walking a tightrope at times and there is no safety net of benefits to tide them over should difficult times come upon them.

Life transition events can be extremely challenging for those who are self-employed. What do they do when they are sick? Who do they turn to? What do they do when a close family member has been diagnosed with a terminal illness? How do they balance their work and their family responsibilities?

An employee who pays EI premiums has access to EI maternal and paternal benefits when needed. Up to now, self-employed Canadians had no such option. Our Conservative government cares a great deal about the family. We are helping Canadians balance their work and their family responsibilities.

When the Prime Minister first assumed office in 2006, he made child care a priority for our government. Choice and opportunity would be the driving forces behind our government's policies when it came to Canadian families.

When our Conservative government sees such a large number of Canadian workers who might want to raise a family but do not have the kind of supports that they need, especially when those supports are available to other Canadians, we want to ensure we can help them. This situation is particularly acute when we consider how many self-employed Canadians are women.

As Minister of State for the Status of Women, I am proud of what the bill would accomplish for women. This, however, is nothing new because in every action that we have taken as a government, we have advanced the economic, social, cultural and democratic participation of women in this country.

The guiding principle for actions we have taken with respect to women has always been ensuring that the benefits go directly to women and their families. That was why our government chose to provide child care benefits directly to parents. That is why we created two new funding programs at Status of Women Canada: the community grants fund and the partnership fund. We increased the budget for both of these programs so women's organizations across the country could get the assistance they needed in order to help within their own specific communities.

Funding for Status of Women Canada right now is at the highest level in Canada's history. We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of women's organizations across the country that are receiving funding, in fact, a 69% increase. Forty-two per cent of them are receiving money for the first time.

To date, 100,000 women have benefited from these projects, which focus on economic security, ending violence against women and leadership and democratic participation. However, the larger portion is focused on economic security. This includes talking about

financial literacy or helping a new businesswoman understand what is required in terms of accounting measures for small business, or, for new immigrants, even knowing where to go to begin that new business.

Over the summer, I had an opportunity to meet with women across the country from all walks of life. I was proud and impressed to hear from so many Canadian women on how they had accomplished so much as small business women and what they were looking for from this government.

I heard time and again that they wanted us to fulfill the promise and the pledge that we made to provide maternal and paternal benefits to the self-employed, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are doing one better. We are also going to provide compassionate benefits, which are important.

Working with businesswomen across the country, being a former owner of a small business and having a Masters in business, I can tell the House that small businesswomen across the country are pleased with this government. They are looking to all members in the House to support the bill.

• (1320)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to follow-up with a question that has to do more with the previous government speaker. I asked him to provide us with the projections for the uptake on the program. In other words, how many people does the government think will take advantage of the program in the first or second year, and the cost of the program. I also asked what would happen with overruns. His answer was simply that the program would be self-financing, but if it did not self-finance, the premiums might go up 1¢ or 2¢.

The point is with Bill C-50, the bill dealing with long tenured workers, the government projected 190,000 participants would be involved and it projected a cost of \$1 billion.

In this bill, the government must have done a similar analysis. I would like to know where the analysis is. How many people does the government project would be helped by this program in the first year, two years and three years?

**Hon. Helena Guergis:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his important question.

I will highlight for him what Catherine Swift, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, had to say. She said the bill would fill a “glaring gap” for those who run their own business, especially women. She said:

We have a lot of women members. They'd like to have a child and yet abandoning [their] business is not [an option].

This is a strong businesswoman, the president of the CFIB. She has her ear to the public, to the small business people. She clearly knows what they are looking for. Her strong statement highlights that there are a lot of small business people who are members of her organization who have been looking for this.

*Government Orders*

In addition to that, public opinion research has indicated that 86% of the self-employed support access to sickness benefits, that 84% support access to compassionate care benefits, and that 64% support access to maternity and parental benefits.

This is something that goes back years. Those in small businesses have been calling for it for about 10 years. There have been a number of reports, even specifically on women and women in business, indicating that they have been asking for this initiative. It is clearly something that they want.

It depends on the uptake. The member knows that. Clearly we can see that there is a strong interest and desire to have this.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of State for the Status of Women for the hard work that she has done. The work she is doing for financial literacy and for young women at risk is phenomenal, and I know it will yield great results in the future.

I would like the member to give us a contrast between the previous Liberal government and our current government. As far back as 1993, the previous Liberal government promised child care. In 2003, it promised parental benefits for the self-employed. That was the principal recommendation of the Liberal women on the Prime Minister's task force for women entrepreneurs. The member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine admitted the previous Liberal government completely ignored it.

Could she briefly tell the House about the great work this government has done in delivering for families and for businesses?

**Hon. Helena Guergis:** Madam Speaker, I do not have enough time to highlight everything that we have done.

I would like to point out, however, that recently the third edition of the pink book was distributed. To be perfectly honest, I can understand how many of the Liberal women were probably upset, because once again they were relegated to the back pink room, handed a pink pad of paper and asked to write down, for the third time, the list of Liberal broken promises made to women over the past decade-plus. It is shameful. It is unfortunate.

It is this Conservative government that not only has delivered on every promise that it has made to women but it is working to ensure that women have the opportunity to fully participate in the economic, social, democratic and cultural life of Canada. We have the largest percentage of women in cabinet in Canada's history, the largest increase in funding to Status of Women Canada to support women and the status of women, and the largest amount to hand out to grassroots organizations across the country that the country has ever seen.

We are hearing from these organizations, which are helping women with concrete actions and plans in the individual communities across the country, how pleased they are with this Conservative government and the positive changes that it has made and the work it is doing for all Canadians.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to

speak to Bill C-56 on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. I am glad to participate in the debate on an issue as important as employment insurance.

Earlier, I listened to the Conservative member list all of the things her government could have done for women. Opinion polls—one came out just today—show that the Conservative Party has far more male supporters than female, and for good reason. The Conservatives simply do not have the will to systematically address women's problems.

On the contrary, the Bloc Québécois does. That is why, day after day in the House, the Bloc Québécois speaks out vigorously on employment insurance issues, particularly since the economic crisis began. The crisis is affecting society's weakest and most vulnerable, those in unstable employment situations. Employees themselves are not unstable, but the jobs being offered by employers are.

The Conservatives' proposed reforms are nothing more than partisan tactics. Consider the previous bill on employment insurance reform—not Bill C-56, which is before us now, but the previous one introduced by the Conservatives—the one they say will help long-tenured workers. So much can be learned from a closer look at this bill that was passed by the House but opposed by the Bloc Québécois. The help for long-tenured workers bill creates two classes of workers. Their definition of a long-tenured worker is a person who has worked for the same company for at least five years and who has not collected more than 35 weeks of employment insurance in the past five years.

We all know that those employed in the tourism, agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors, primarily in Quebec, who have worked for a long time—for 15, 20, 25, and 30 years—will not have access to these benefits. They are offered seasonal employment that is often unstable, meaning that it is not permanent. It is in some ways permanent because people return to the same job year after year. However, there are always times when people have to be laid off for all kinds of reasons—in tourism because there are no tourists in a given period of the year, in fisheries because of quotas, in agriculture because the weather makes it impossible to work all 12 months of the year, in forestry because of the weather also. This sector has been in crisis for the past five years and it all started with tariffs. The softwood lumber agreement was signed long before this recession began.

The Conservative Party believes that some permanent employees who are long-tenured workers in an industry do not deserve to have their benefits extended by 5 to 20 weeks.

It is difficult to listen to and follow the Conservatives. They are again boasting about helping women and the most disadvantaged with Bill C-56. We see that this is not the case.

*Government Orders*

The Bloc Québécois will vote for the bill at this stage to send it to committee and to explore these issues. We know how committees work. Witnesses are invited, target groups consisting of those who should benefit and those who believe they could benefit are heard.

• (1330)

Then we amend and improve the legislation. We will see what happens. However, the bill that is now before us, and which will be passed by the House, may be quite different when it comes back from the committee. We have to care about the most vulnerable in our society, but also about self-employed persons. In fact, ensuring that self-employed persons can benefit from the employment insurance program has always been a clearly stated objective of the Bloc Québécois.

As I said, the Conservatives are manipulating public opinion. It is quite something to hear the media convey the messages of Conservative ministers and members. The Conservatives give the impression that they are helping all self-employed persons, as if these people could contribute to the EI fund and be entitled—if they find themselves out of work for a period of time—to EI benefits. That is not the case. This bill is about a voluntary employment insurance program that will cover special benefits. It is important to make this distinction.

When we talk about special benefits, it is important to understand that self-employed persons will receive maternity benefits for 15 weeks, parental or adoption benefits for a maximum of 35 weeks, sickness benefits for a maximum of 15 weeks, and compassionate care benefits for a maximum of six weeks. Since participation will be on a voluntary basis, the program is not the same across Canada. Of course, in Quebec, some of these benefits—in fact the majority of them—are already included in the program administered by the Quebec government. However, this is not an employment insurance program for self-employed persons.

The Conservatives should stop manipulating and brainwashing the public by saying that they will allow self-employed persons to receive EI benefits. A self-employed person who loses a contract will not be entitled to employment insurance. That is not what the bill now before us provides.

I am repeating it again, because this is important. The Conservatives have become experts in manipulating public opinion. They influence public opinion with a statement from the minister or from members, saying that they are implementing an employment insurance program for self-employed persons. That is not the case. This is an employment insurance program that includes special benefits for those self-employed persons who decide to participate in it. Again, the special benefits to which self-employed persons would be entitled are as follows: maternity benefits for a maximum of 15 weeks, parental or adoption benefits for a maximum of 35 weeks, sickness benefits for a maximum of 15 weeks, and compassionate care benefits for a maximum of six weeks.

Again, there is nothing here for a self-employed person who loses a contract and who, after contributing to the plan, wants to collect EI benefits like any other worker who pays premiums. This person would only be entitled to special benefits, under specific circumstances, but definitely not when losing a contract or a portion of his income.

Now that I have cleared that up, it should be evident that this has always been a goal of the Bloc Québécois. What the Bloc would like is to improve this measure in committee, to ensure that we have a real employment insurance program to help self-employed workers who have been hit by the economic crisis like all other entrepreneurs, businesses and employees.

Contract work has become quite popular. To avoid paying different types of benefits or packages, business people are deciding to hire contract workers to cover a portion of their operations. A good number of self-employed workers are on contract. This is very common in the IT world. My son works in multimedia.

• (1335)

In this field, I would say that nearly 100% of employees are on contract. That does not mean that they are short of work, but during an economic crisis, there is less work. So a number of contract workers are currently out of work, and do not have access to EI because they have not paid premiums.

So we must be cautious about what the Conservatives are proposing, as they often manipulate public opinion for purely partisan reasons—I have no problem saying that—and use the media to serve their party's purposes. Sometimes the media are very sympathetic. They know that the Conservatives are using them and they want to do their work well. I will not say the dirty work that the Conservatives want done, although that could be the case. However it should not be surprising that the objective of the Bloc Québécois, the only party that defends the interests of Quebecers in this House every single day, is to get the bills improved in committee and to provide a real employment insurance program for self-employed workers.

We also have to put what will be paid in perspective because participation to the program will be voluntary. The bill allows self-employed persons to have access on a voluntary basis to special employment insurance benefits, as I explained earlier. They will pay their premiums to the scheme via their tax returns. They will have to make a voluntary declaration in their tax returns or another return stating their income, and they will have to pay a premium per thousand dollars of income.

Obviously some conditions will apply. They will have to earn a minimum of \$6,000 in the calendar year preceding their claim in order to be entitled to 50% of their income, as is the case for special and regular benefits. They will have to enrol in their 2009 tax return. So that will be in their next tax return, that they will have to file in February, March or April 2010 for the 2009 taxation year. They will have to enrol in their 2009 tax return to be able to claim benefits in 2010, a year of paying premiums before being entitled to benefits.

*Government Orders*

In the present situation, that measure could be in place by 2010, based on tax returns for the preceding year. So we are allowing workers to enrol as of now. They enrol and when they prepare their tax return, they pay their full premium for 2009, and this enables them to claim special employment insurance benefits starting in 2010.

We have to question this procedure because the employment insurance fund has forecast a \$7 billion deficit in 2010. Will the purpose of the special premium to be paid by self-employed persons for 2009, which will be payable as soon as January, February, March or April 2010, be to top up the employment insurance fund? Obviously we will have to ask ourselves that question.

Workers who want to claim special benefits will have to pay mandatory, permanent premiums to the plan once they declare themselves as self-employed persons. This will be done on a voluntary basis, but those who begin paying premiums can decide to opt out as long as they have never claimed benefits. That is a choice they could make. However, once someone has claimed benefits under the program, they will have to continue to contribute to the scheme forever, or as long as they are self-employed.

The Conservatives tell us that self-employed persons will pay only the employee premium since they do not have access to regular benefits. That will mean that the premium required will be lower than what is required of regular employees who work for companies.

• (1340)

On the question of special benefits, there is the bill that self-employed persons are to have to pay and what is paid out of the employment insurance scheme in special benefits at present. There is already a plan in effect in Quebec, in fact. Special benefits represent about a quarter of total benefits paid by the plan, while the Conservative Party is seeking \$1.73 per \$100 from self-employed persons. In Quebec, those workers will pay \$1.36 per \$100 to be entitled to the two least costly components of the bill. They are already entitled to the other measures through the premiums they pay in Quebec.

Obviously there will be a whole debate in committee about the portion paid by self-employed persons in Quebec. According to the documents provided to the press by the government, self-employed persons who live in Quebec will continue to receive maternity and parental benefits under the government of Quebec's parental insurance plan.

In addition, these workers will now be eligible for sickness and compassionate care benefits through the federal government's employment insurance scheme. If they decide to take part in the scheme, they will have to pay the same employment insurance premiums as other workers in Quebec, where the rates have already been adjusted to take into account the provincial maternity and parental benefits program.

Bill C-56 will only partially apply to self-employed workers in Quebec, since they are already covered by the Quebec parental insurance plan when it comes to maternity, parental and adoption benefits. Therefore, only the sickness and compassionate care benefits would apply to workers in Quebec.

The EI premium rate for workers in Quebec is \$1.36. In Canada, it will be \$1.73. The difference between the two rates can be explained by the fact that Quebecers pay premiums for provincial parental insurance. However, Quebecers already pay more than the difference between \$1.73 and \$1.36, which is 37¢, although at this time, they pay just over 80¢ to the Quebec system.

There will be a great deal of discussion and debate over whether this scheme will see Quebecers paying more than the rest of Canada. People will soon realize that that is the case. The Bloc Québécois' goal will be to ensure that Quebecers never pay more, that the premiums they currently pay to the Government of Quebec are taken into account, and that the amount of those premiums is in fact deducted from whatever premiums they pay as part of the scheme for the rest of Canada.

In all of the Americas, Quebec is where wealth is the most evenly distributed, and this is what we want as a society. Quebec has created programs that we often pay for ourselves. It serves as an example for the rest of Canada, but we are never compensated as much as the others are compensated. That is one reason why Quebec hopes to one day become sovereign. It is not because we do not like our neighbours; it is simply because we have a different perspective of society. This is confirmed every day.

When it comes to the environment, it is now clear that Canada is an embarrassment to the rest of the world. If Quebec were a country, it would have one of the best track records in terms of fighting climate change. Society makes these choices. Quebec developed hydroelectricity and I am proud to say that our hydro network was developed with no federal contributions whatsoever. Quebecers chose to develop their hydro network without any help from the federal government. If Quebec were a country, it could take part in the carbon exchange, and Quebec companies that have made an effort to reduce their emissions beyond the Kyoto targets would now be entitled to huge sums of money.

Rivière-du-Loup closed a landfill and built a methane capture system, so it would collect \$1 million. However, because Canada decided to go it alone, it has deprived Rivière-du-Loup of that \$1 million.

• (1345)

[English]

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his comments, although I do not think his comments really reflect the Bloc's voting record when it comes to supporting people who are unemployed. Two examples would be the economic action plan which was tabled in the winter and which provided billions of dollars through a variety of different programs to support the unemployed and just recently, Bill C-50, which provided another \$1 billion to help another 190,000 long-tenured workers.

The Bloc talk very much, but do very little when it comes to voting in support of the unemployed. How can the hon. member reconcile his words versus his and his party's actions in actually not supporting the unemployed on any issue so far in 2009? I am sure he must be disappointed with that.

*Government Orders*

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Madam Speaker, I am not surprised to hear that from a Conservative member. The Conservatives have never understood how Quebec works. If there is one party in the House that does not constantly change its mind, that party is clearly the Bloc Québécois, and we saw several examples of that yesterday evening during the vote to eliminate the gun registry.

We have never wavered in our commitment to updating and improving the employment insurance system. Since coming to the House, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for an independent system. We will not forget that \$54 billion was taken from the fund by both the Liberals and the Conservatives to do all kinds of things other than invest in employment insurance reform.

As I said before, Bill C-50, which we voted against, will protect long-tenured workers, but it does not apply to forestry, agriculture, tourism or fisheries. The program was created for Ontario's auto workers. That is a choice. They can go ahead and leave Quebec out. But those of us over here stand up for Quebec at every—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Questions and comments. The hon. member for York South—Weston.

[*English*]

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I think that all members in the House would agree that providing EI benefits to those who are self-employed is a very worthy, admirable objective that should have been faced up to many years ago. While the legislation is welcome, it has struck me that, as the member has pointed out, the special benefit that actually accrues as a result of the formula that is being applied will be one-quarter less than that for those where there is an employer and an employee contribution. Compounding that, our colleague has also pointed out that the employment insurance fund actuarially will be in deficit in 2010.

I am impressed with the manner in which the Quebec fund is administered, as the member has pointed out, but from a Quebec perspective, what approach will have to be taken with respect to that deficit where an actuarial charge now is going to be on top of that which will exist without having self-employed workers receiving benefits?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I said earlier that in Quebec, the premium for special benefits is now just over 80¢ per \$100 in earnings, which is of course adjusted depending on plan expenses.

The problem is that the Liberals and the Conservatives had a surplus of \$54 billion until last year, something we obviously always condemned. If the premium money had always been spent, we would have a better plan today.

I have a problem with my colleague's question, because he referred to employment insurance measures for self-employed workers. He then referred to special benefits, but he fell into the Conservatives' media trap, which was to announce a huge operation to create an employment insurance program for self-employed workers. But this is not an EI program for self-employed workers.

Self-employed workers who lose their contract, earn less money or no longer have any income will not be able to receive employment insurance benefits. This program will only provide them with special benefits: maternity, parental or adoption benefits, sickness benefits and compassionate care benefits. That is what we are going to want to improve in committee.

● (1350)

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, there are over 2.6 million self-employed in Canada. Of them, 21,000 are members of ACTRA. These are the people who work in television, film, in the arts. ACTRA has been pushing for years to extend benefits to the self-employed and to ensure that there is parental leave for workers in the film industry.

Steve Waddell, who is very active in ACTRA, said that this issue is one of basic fairness. I was speaking with Ferne Downey who said, "Our union has been fighting for years to get governments to recognize self-employed workers deserve these rights". She said, "We are urging all parties to support the extension of benefits to the self-employed and for parental leave".

In light of the hard work of what ACTRA does for the cultural sector of this country, will the Bloc work with the NDP, because we have supported these motions for some time, to ensure that our arts sector workers are given the parental benefits that they deserve?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Madam Speaker, we are cooperating to create a real employment insurance program for self-employed workers.

But we will not do what the NDP did in the case of long-tenured workers, which was to exclude workers in tourism, farming, fishing and forestry. That was the choice the NDP made. It is not the choice the Bloc Québécois will make.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate my Bloc Québécois colleague for his excellent speech. I would like to ask him if he could again explain which unfair, additional premiums a Quebecker will have to pay if the bill is adopted.

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Madam Speaker, my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord has done an excellent job of defending the workers in his riding, particularly those in the forestry sector. He is fighting hard with two Conservative ministers who refuse to get it.

I understand how he wants once again today to enlighten some Conservative ministers and members from Quebec, who do not seem to understand that Quebeckers already pay for certain special benefits.

We pay just over 80¢ on every \$100. The Conservatives are asking Canadians to pay \$1.73 and Quebeckers to pay \$1.36, because they already cover a portion. That is a difference of 37¢, although Quebeckers already pay 80¢.

*Statements by Members*

There must be real justice for Quebeckers in the House and it must not be just the Bloc that defends the interests of Quebeckers. The Conservative and Liberal members for Quebec should also rise and defend Quebeckers.

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park can begin his comments and will have to be interrupted by statements by members at 2 p.m.

**Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today on a bill that provides improvements to the employment insurance program which would, if passed into law, set up a system to allow self-employed Canadians to collect EI special benefits for the very first time. This will mean that our self-employed Canadians and their families would have access to the same treatment as most working Canadians for major events, such as the arrival of a new baby, a serious illness, or the need to care for a gravely ill relative.

I am particularly pleased to be able to contribute to this discussion since it provides me with an opportunity to speak on behalf of this group of hard-working Canadians who, through their ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit, have done so much to spur economic growth, inject new ideas, and foster greater innovation. There are some 2.6 million self-employed people in our country. They represent just over 15% of our workforce. This means we are talking about a large number of people who make a significant contribution to our economic well-being.

Self-employed Canadians are very often the people driving innovation in our economy. These are the people who harness creativity, courage and capital to build better lives. They themselves are creatively-driven, resourceful and entrepreneurial. They create businesses. They create new products. They innovate. They create jobs. They create wealth. They build our homes and they help us buy and sell our homes. They help us, when we need it, through the legal system. They fix our pipes and our wires. And they employ people who do all these things, too. They provide services that we need. We need them. They are farmers and realtors, carpenters and electricians, doctors and business owners, and so much more.

They build stronger communities and, in turn, a stronger country. Our self-employed entrepreneurs are the forefront of our economic vitality. We want to ensure our entrepreneurs can have strong, healthy businesses because stronger entrepreneurship means a stronger Canada.

We need their skills, we need their experience, and we need their energy and creativity to meet the challenges to come. They deserve fair treatment. I think this is most important. Self-employed Canadians deserve fair treatment. If the federal government is going to offer a framework and a structure for providing certain benefits to working Canadians, then all working Canadians should have the opportunity take part in that structure and to have access to those benefits.

That is why our Conservative government believes that these entrepreneurs deserve to have access to a system that would provide them with the same EI special benefits that other working Canadians can have access to. That is simply the fair and right thing to do.

Bill C-56 seeks to address the gap by giving such entrepreneurs access to EI special benefits for the very first time and, on a voluntary basis; a move that would improve their financial security and acknowledge the important role that they play in our economy.

When it comes to this action by our government, we listened to Canadians. We made a promise to them, and now we are delivering on that promise over and above what we said we would do.

Let me tell members about it. A year ago, our Prime Minister promised Canadians action. He said:

Self-employed Canadians, and those who one day hope to be, shouldn't have to choose between starting a family and starting a business because of government policy. It should allow them to pursue their dreams, both as entrepreneurs and as parents...a re-elected Conservative Government will permit self-employed Canadians to join the EI system to access maternity and parental Employment Insurance benefits.

With this bill, not only are we keeping that promise and delivering access to that leave but we are also giving the self-employed access to sickness and to compassionate care that those other Canadians also have access to with EI special benefits. We are exceeding our promise made to Canadians. We are giving self-employed Canadians the same access as other Canadians. We are making this access voluntary because, of course, these benefits would require premium contributions, and we are ensuring that our federal government treats all working Canadians fairly in this manner.

• (1355)

We listened to Canadians. It is not surprising that many self-employed Canadians have been calling on the federal government to open up EI special benefits to them. They want fair treatment from their government and we agree. We do not want them to have to scale back or stop work when faced with joyous events like the birth or adoption of a child, or a difficult personal family challenge such as a serious illness or family crisis.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I will have to interrupt the member. When debate resumes, the hon. member will have 14 minutes remaining for his comments.

---

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### VETERANS' WEEK

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Madam Speaker, this year the world has mourned the passing of many veterans of the first world war, and Canada has only one member remaining, Mr. John Babcock, an amazing man. Mr. Babcock celebrated his 109th birthday this year and we are reminded that it is up to us as a nation to keep the memory of this great generation alive.

During Veterans' Week, which leads into Remembrance Day, let us remember significant milestones of the first world war, which are synonymous with our proud military heritage, for example, Passchendaele, the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Throughout these battles, regiments from coast to coast served and triumphed together, helping to create a new and stronger sense of Canadian identity.

Ninety-one years ago at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, the guns of the first world war went silent. This November 11 we will pause to remember the generations of Canadians who bravely served our country and honour those still serving today.

Lest we forget.

\* \* \*

• (1400)

### TEACHING EXCELLENCE

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour Ava Gomes, an early childhood educator in the Blue Wave Child Care Centre in Don Valley West. Ms. Gomes is a recipient of the Prime Minister's award for teaching excellence and excellence in early childhood education.

Ava goes beyond her regular duties to provide one-on-one attention to children. She participates with them in their extra activities, sends home creative projects and motivates her students through skits, props and music.

A parent of one of her students said it best:

Every day Ava builds [my daughter's] confidence, fosters her independence, makes her feel special. Like Ava, her classroom is warm and inviting.... Every morning [my daughter] wakes up excited and inspired to learn.

This award recognizes not only Ms. Gomes but also the importance of early childhood education. Liberals recognize this point very well. That is why any future Liberal government will be committed to a national child care program.

I congratulate Ava on this tremendous achievement and for inspiring students at the most critical moment of their lives.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### RENIL BELISLE

**Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an act of bravery by Renil Belisle, a blue collar worker from Delson, who rescued a neighbour, Yann Lamy, and saved his life.

Yann Lamy was repairing his car on October 6, when the vehicle, whose tires had accidentally not been secured, started to back up. Mr. Lamy was trapped under the vehicle.

Mr. Belisle heard his neighbour's cries for help. While his spouse called emergency services, Mr. Belisle remained calm and rescued Mr. Lamy by lifting the vehicle with a jack.

It is often said that it is the circumstances that create heroes. But I would say that these circumstances allow the hero inside to come out.

### Statements by Members

Mr. Belisle, your actions saved another man's life. You have every reason to be proud of this act of bravery, and on behalf of all my constituents, I commend you.

\* \* \*

[English]

### CANADIAN OLYMPIC TEAMS

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today the Olympic torch is in the Northwest Territories, in Inuvik and Yellowknife. As one can imagine, northerners have a special love of winter sports. Today allows them to show that love and to show their attachment to Canada.

Despite its small population, the NWT has been well represented on the Canadian Olympic teams, most notably by Sharon and Shirley Firth of Inuvik. The Firths were members of Canada's national cross-country team for 17 years. Between them, they won 79 medals at national championships and competed in four Olympics.

The NWT also has aspiring Olympians like Brendan Green of Hay River, who just made the national biathlon team. Others are still trying for places on those teams.

As part of the Olympic celebrations, Dene and Inuvialuit athletes will be showcasing traditional games. As well, NWT Day is being celebrated on February 19.

I support and encourage all northerners who aspire to Olympic greatness, and I know the entire NWT does as well.

\* \* \*

### SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, service organizations in Prince Edward—Hastings like the Rotary, Legion, Knights of Columbus, Lions Club, Kiwanis, Shriners, Elks and Kinsmen, among many others, have been responsible for bettering our communities and helping thousands of people.

One particular organization in my riding currently involved in a very worthy initiative is the Prince Edward District Masons, who are volunteers in the Masonic child identification program. This program is one of the most comprehensive child recovery, identification and abduction-awareness programs in use today. With individually tailored child ID kits, it provides all parents with a tool for helping to keep their children safe. Thanks to the masons of Prince Edward district. We appreciate their efforts to protect the ones we love.

I would also like to take a moment to congratulate a very special constituent who truly is an inspiration to one and all. While standing only 4 feet 9 inches, at 114 pounds and 65 years young, Kenzo Dozono, an eighth-degree black belt, recently took home three gold medals from the world karate open championships in Athens, Greece.

I extend my congratulations to Kenzo.

*Statements by Members*

● (1405)

*[Translation]***ROBERT “BOB” BEAUCHAMP**

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise here today to thank Robert “Bob” Beauchamp for his loyal service to the members of the House of Commons.

*[English]*

Bob Beauchamp has worked on the Hill for the past 31 years. During this time he has seen eight Prime Ministers and many members of Parliament come and go.

*[Translation]*

A devoted family man, Bob Beauchamp is also a loyal volunteer at the Aylmer branch of the Canadian Legion and with the Knights of Columbus.

I would also like to take this opportunity to underscore the quality of the work of all employees of the House of Commons. Their dedication and skilful performance of their duties supports the work of parliamentarians, and Bob Beauchamp was part of that great team. His was a career marked by enthusiasm and commitment.

We all noted, however, that his enthusiasm was inversely proportional to how fast he drove his car—we are sure he has never received a speeding ticket while driving on the Hill.

My colleagues and I would like to wish Bob Beauchamp a happy retirement, and we hope he will enjoy every minute of it.

\* \* \*

*[English]***REMEMBRANCE DAY**

**Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on November 11 we remember the generations of Canada's most courageous who have answered the call of duty and served our country.

From World War I to our work in Kandahar and around the globe today, the constant has always been the valour, the courage and the sacrifice of our brave men and women in uniform.

It is our duty to remember. That is why on Remembrance Day in communities like Barrie, throughout Canada, hundreds of families will stand before their cenotaph, like the one in Memorial Square in Simcoe County, to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

At this time I would like to pay respect to Pastor Jay Davis at Mapleview Church for his annual Remembrance Day service, Reverend Michael Cassidy, who conducts a moving service at Whispering Pines seniors residence, and of course our veterans organizations that lead Remembrance Day events on November 11.

I thank Jim Strang, president of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 147; Neil McKinnon, president of the Army Navy Air Force Club; Bill Wuerch, sergeant-at-arms; the Auxiliary Corps ladies led by the lovely Rosemary Ashton; and our honorary colonel of Base Borden, Jamie Massie, who all play a big role in honouring our veterans in Barrie.

*[Translation]***USE OF WOOD**

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is proud to be a forest region. Inspired by an idea proposed by the mayor of Saint-Félicien, Quebec's Department of Transport is building the first bridge ever made with glue-laminated wood beams in the municipality of Albanel. This initiative could be the start of a new generation of bridges built exclusively out of wood.

This is an example of daring and vision. However, we cannot say the same about the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and his party, who have problems and concerns with implementing such a measure in constructing or renovating federal buildings.

By supporting Bill C-429 introduced by the Bloc Québécois, the government would set an example by promoting the use of wood. This would show that it wants to help the forestry industry, which is in crisis. But it prefers to help the automotive industry in Ontario.

\* \* \*

*[English]***RAY LEITCH**

**Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the passing of Ray Leitch, a long-time Conservative activist and volunteer. Sadly, Ray passed away in Vancouver on Monday night.

Ray was a great example of what it means to be Canadian. He took pride in Canada's democratic process and devoted the majority of his life to volunteering for the Conservative cause.

Ray served in many capacities, from volunteering on campaigns to serving as a national councillor, and most recently to sitting as an EDA president in Vancouver.

He was more than a volunteer. Ray was also a friend, a confidant and a trusted adviser who helped many who have served in this House achieve their dreams of participating in Canada's political life.

Today I rise on behalf of the Conservative caucus to honour the memory of Ray Leitch and to offer my condolences to his family. He was a true gentleman and will be greatly missed.

\* \* \*

**INTERNATIONAL INUIT DAY**

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in 2006, the Inuit peoples of the entire circumpolar world, assembled in Utqiagvik, Alaska. They proclaimed November 7 each year to be International Inuit Day.

This year, Inuit Day will be commemorated this coming Saturday. On this day, the Inuit peoples of Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Arctic Russia celebrate their culture and heritage, and proclaim to their fellow citizens and to the world that the Arctic is the Inuit homeland.

*Statements by Members*

At a time when climate change and resource development are altering the Arctic landscape, the Inuit peoples are acting together across international boundaries to defend the Inuit cultures, languages and way of life.

All nations would do well to follow the Inuit model of cooperation, consensus and concern for the environment.

On behalf of my constituents in Nunatsiavut and throughout Labrador and the residents of the other territories which make up Inuit Nunaat, Nunavik, Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region, I extend best wishes on International Inuit Day. *Nakkumek*.

\* \* \*

• (1410)

**VETERANS' WEEK**

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week Canadians across the country are marking Veterans' Week.

As we remember our Canadian veterans, we also pay tribute to the members of the Canadian Forces who serve our country today.

Let us join Canadians from coast to coast to proudly support our men and women of the Canadian Forces. We honour those who courageously put their lives on the line to bring peace and security to troubled areas around the world. These valiant men and women selflessly face danger and uncertainty to protect the rights and freedoms of others in need.

On November 11 we remember the culmination of two world wars. We celebrate the armistice that silenced the guns and ended the conflict. We remember the millions who mobilized and the 100,000 who made the ultimate sacrifice. We remember those who fought in the Korean war and in many regional conflicts.

This year, as we honour our fallen and wounded warriors, may we also remember those who are serving on the front lines in Afghanistan today along with all those who sacrificed to secure our freedoms and way of life.

Lest we forget.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**DANIEL PAILLÉ**

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, who am I?

I want to be elected at all costs in a riding that I know nothing about.

I was the director general of the program for privatizing public corporations and recommended the privatization of the SAQ.

I locked out 365 *Journal de Montréal* employees.

My "Paillé plan" resulted in a \$116 million loss to Quebec.

I vehemently opposed a day care on my street because it threatened my quality of life.

I was involved in the Société générale de financement du Québec debacle.

I was an advisor to the Conservatives and pocketed a great deal of money.

I have always lived outside Hochelaga.

Who am I?

I am Daniel Paillé, the parachute candidate.

Check it out at [blocageintermittent.ca](http://blocageintermittent.ca).

\* \* \*

**BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS**

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am dismayed. Dismayed by the actions of the members from the Bloc Québécois. Dismayed also by their choice of motto: "Debout!", or "Stand up!"

When Quebeckers find themselves jobless and seek support from their members of Parliament to find solutions, the Bloc members remain seated.

It is our Conservative government that takes action, suggests solutions and stands up for the real interests of Quebeckers and Canadians.

We have added five weeks of employment insurance benefits. The Bloc voted against that. We have increased the number of weeks under the work sharing program. The Bloc voted against that too.

This week, the Bloc members remained seated, so to speak, by voting against extending EI benefits by 5 to 20 weeks for the self-employed.

Our Conservative government is taking action to help workers and does not remain—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

\* \* \*

**GLAXOSMITHKLINE**

**Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is to blame for the chaos surrounding the H1N1 vaccination campaign, but it is desperately trying to pass the buck. It has accused GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) of being slow in delivering the vaccines, even though this company is working at full capacity to produce the 50.4 million doses ordered.

The reality is that the federal government waited until the last minute to order the adjuvanted and unadjuvanted vaccines, and these last-minute decisions have delayed the regular production of vaccines. In other words, the government is using GSK as a scapegoat to shirk its own responsibilities.

In light of recent events, my thoughts are with the employees of GSK in my riding, in Sainte-Foy, who are working very hard to meet the demand for quality vaccines, but who must unfortunately contend with the difficult situation created by this government.

*Oral Questions***JACQUES SAADA**

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the hon. Jacques Saada for being made a Commandeur de l'Ordre de la Pléiade, which promotes the Francophonie and cultural dialogue. None could be more deserving of this honour awarded by the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

I had the privilege of working with Jacques Saada when he was the member for Brossard—La Prairie and minister for, among other things, the Francophonie. I know that all the work he did while heading up that department demonstrated to a lot of people just how important promoting and strengthening the entire francophone community was to him.

During his mandate as the federal minister responsible for the Francophonie, the hon. Jacques Saada actively promoted cooperation and a sense of community among the francophone peoples of the world. He did a lot to foster true multilateral diplomacy in the context of the Francophonie.

I would especially like to highlight his efforts to make Israel and the Palestinian authority full members.

Bravo, Jacques.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

[English]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has taken action to make sure Canadians hardest hit by the global recession have the support they need while finding a new job.

I am proud to inform the House that this morning Bill C-50 passed Senate committee without amendments. I hope it receives royal assent very soon.

This bill will provide unemployed long-tenured workers who have worked hard and paid premiums for years with five to 20 weeks of additional EI while they transition into a new job.

The Liberal leader fought against this bill and these Canadians the whole way through, but fortunately he did not succeed and long-tenured workers will receive the much needed help they deserve.

This bill is just one example of the actions taken by our Conservative government. Whether it is extending benefits, protecting jobs through work sharing or unprecedented investments in skills training, Canadians and their families know that it is our Conservative government that is helping weather the global economic storm.

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**HEALTH**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we now know that more than half of the vaccines that have been produced are in fact in storage and not in the arms of people. Experts have also told us that the peak of the epidemic is expected to be at the end of November and not at Christmas.

Therefore, I would like to ask the Prime Minister, what exactly will change to ensure that Canadians in fact are inoculated before the end of November?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, as I said yesterday, the provision of the vaccine has been, at this point, quicker than the ability of the provinces to actually distribute it. I know they are focused on those challenges.

There is a list of recommended high priority groups. Those are the people who should be getting the vaccine first. Governments at all levels are working together to ensure that this happens.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it simply is not possible to say that the same old is working or that the plan in fact is beautiful and nothing needs to change. The evidence is very clear that it will require the inoculation of a million Canadians a day in order to get Canadians inoculated before the peak really hits at the end of November.

I ask the Prime Minister again, what exactly will change in order to produce a plan that will in fact work for Canadians?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, this is by far the largest and quickest vaccination program the provinces have ever attempted in the country. They are rolling it out. They are adjusting as they experience various difficulties and challenges.

We obviously urge people to be patient and to listen to the health authorities. Canada's plan and the availability of vaccine is far higher in Canada than anywhere else. We continue to urge people to follow the instructions of their health authorities.

[Translation]

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is saying things that are not quite accurate. The reality is that half of the vaccines have been put in storage instead of being administered. The reality is that the pandemic will peak in November, not at Christmas, as the government first thought. We must face the challenge now.

What will the government do to change its attitude and its plan in order to respond to a situation that is very serious right now?

• (1420)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, provision of the vaccine is now much quicker than the ability of the provinces to administer it, but the provinces are making the necessary changes.

Canada's plan is very advanced compared to other countries. We encourage all Canadians to listen to the advice of public health authorities across the country. There are priority groups. There are many doses of the vaccine, enough for these priority groups.

[English]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Wrong, Mr. Speaker, Australia has the highest per capita in the world, not Canada.

[Translation]

Canadians are counting on the federal government for a national response to H1N1. Instead of helping the provinces manage this crisis, the government prefers to blame the provinces and wash its hands of the problem.

The Prime Minister must explain why he is turning his back on our provincial partners during this national crisis, when he and his government are the ones with the financial and other resources. This House gave him a clear mandate yesterday to help the provinces.

[English]

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is well positioned to respond to this pandemic. We have been working with the provinces and territories for the last eight months, and we rolled out our vaccine sooner than expected. The provinces and territories started to roll out their vaccines last week. In fact, some jurisdictions will be done vaccinating their population next week. Most of the vaccine is being rolled out. There are some items in storage because that is where they are kept before they are actually delivered.

This is an ongoing process. We will continue to deliver it and we will work with the provinces and territories.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Wrong, Mr. Speaker, China is rolling it out faster than Canada.

The Prime Minister is failing to provide leadership or to allocate the dollars and resources needed to manage this crisis. The provinces need help to pick up the pace in vaccinating Canadians, more personnel, more vaccination sites, longer hours.

Why does the Prime Minister not step up to the plate, show some leadership and compassion for Canadians and help our provincial partners? He has the money, the resources and he got a clear mandate from the House yesterday to do it.

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again, six million vaccines have been distributed to the provinces and territories. Approximately two million more will be distributed next week. Unadjuvanted vaccine was also distributed in Canada. Currently Canada has more H1N1 vaccine per capita. That is a fact.

Vaccine is being distributed as quickly as possible to the provinces and territories. Every Canadian who wants to receive the vaccine will be able to do so.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, TVA is reporting that Senator Claude Carignan received political

#### Oral Questions

donations totalling nearly \$90,000 in seven days when he was the Conservative candidate in Rivière-des-Mille-Îles in 2008. Among the contributors were members of the Mathers family, who own several businesses in Saint-Eustache.

Is the Prime Minister not concerned that this could be a strategy to circumvent the political party financing legislation?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, all these donations are legal. They were publicly reported. They fall within the strict limits set by law.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, 17 members of the Mathers family each gave Claude Carignan \$1,000, 14 of them on the same day, September 19, 2008.

Did the Prime Minister check this disturbing information before appointing Claude Carignan to the Senate?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, these donations were made in accordance with the Canada Elections Act.

I hope that we can expect the same thing. The Zambito family has also donated money: \$4,470 to the PQ since 2001, \$2,000 to the Bloc in 2008 and \$8,500 to the Liberal Party since 2004. Since 2001, the Mathers family has donated \$29,600 to the PQ, the Bloc's head office, and \$5,092 to the Liberal Party of Canada. We hope we can expect that these people complied with the law in donating to the other parties as well.

● (1425)

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister cannot afford to ignore the troubling facts emerging about Senator Carignan's election funding. A number of donors are mixed up in notorious political scandals. For example, Lino Zambito tried to derail the municipal elections in Boisbriand, and Conservative Senator Léo Housakos' clan seems to be involved in partisan appointments and the awarding of federal government contracts.

How can the Prime Minister turn a blind eye?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since taking office, we have passed the toughest legislation on election financing. The law is extremely strict and tough.

We can confront the Bloc with the facts: it accepted \$2,000 in 2008 from the Zambito family. What is good for the Bloc is good for the government if everyone obeys the law.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, another fact should be of interest to the Prime Minister: Giulio Maturi, a Conservative Party bagman and member of Vision Montréal, made a donation to Claude Carignan. We should note that Mr. Maturi and Mr. Housakos took control of funding for Vision Montréal after the well-known businessman Tony Accurso intervened with Benoît Labonté.

In light of these troubling facts, will the Prime Minister call for an inquiry into Conservative Senator Carignan's intriguing financing?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we had a mess to clean up when we arrived in 2006 and clean it up we did. We passed the most stringent law on election financing and all these people obeyed the law.

If that is not the case, as the Bloc alleges, it should make its accusations outside the House rather than saying all manner of things inside the House. We shall see what the appropriate authorities make of it.

I would remind them that I hope we can expect the same treatment: the Zambito family gave the Bloc \$2,000 in 2008. Did TVA not mention this?

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has won three “Fossil of the Day” awards in as many days. That is a perfect score for the government. Canada was awarded the latest booby prize because the Minister of the Environment rejects the science.

He is now saying that Canada will not be tabling its regulatory framework for large emitters ahead of the climate change summit in Copenhagen.

Another delay. Why keep putting things off?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's position is very clear. We are promoting the development of a new international agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, an agreement that will include all major emitters of the planet. That is essential for an agreement to be efficient. Our position is almost identical to that of the United States.

[*English*]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, winning three fossil of the day awards at the International Climate Change negotiations is no small feat. They give these awards to countries that are blocking the progress of the UN negotiations on the treaty on climate change. Negotiations are taking place there now and the International Climate Action Network has given Canada, once again, the fossil of the day award.

The environment minister said in June, “the full suite of policies that relate to all major sources of emissions” would be released before Copenhagen. Was that just another hot air emission from the minister, or will the Prime Minister finally tell us whether he even has a plan?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Once again, Mr. Speaker, the government, as the Minister of the Environment said yesterday, will not sign on to an agreement that imposes obligations on Canada and on hardly anyone else and is ineffective.

The government will ensure that we stand up for Canadian interests, that we get an international agreement to which we contribute, along with all the major emitters on the planet. Our position is identical to that of the American administration of President Obama, which the leader of the NDP so heartily supports.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is the one condemned in international negotiations. That is what is happening.

This government is being awarded more booby prize than any other.

The European Union's chief negotiator said it was difficult to comment on a position one knows nothing about.

Mali's chief negotiator said he did not feel that Canada was taking an active part in moving things forward.

Canada is isolated. Does the Prime Minister not realize that?

[*English*]

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this may be a shock to the NDP, but the negotiators Canada assigns to international negotiations like this are there to represent the interests of Canada, not the interests of Mali.

These are very difficult negotiations on a very important subject. This government is determined that we will get an effective international agreement that includes everyone, that includes all the big emitters, including the Europeans, the Chinese, the Indians, the Brazilians and the Americans. We will be part of that. We will do our part, but we will ensure that our interests, the economic interests and the energy interests of our country are protected.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, health experts predict the second wave of H1N1 may peak well before Christmas. Because of the government's delay in getting the vaccine out, many Canadians will not be vaccinated before that peak period hits.

In British Columbia a disease control official has called the increase in doctors' visits startling.

Will the minister inform the House how many Canadians have been actually vaccinated, especially children who are most vulnerable?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear the individual has taken the advice of the experts on planning for the second wave. We have been planning for the second wave since April and planning the second wave for the rollout.

*Oral Questions*

The six million vaccines that have been distributed to provinces have been rolled out. An additional two million will be distributed next week. Some jurisdictions will have completed their entire population immunization campaign next week. We will continue to roll out the vaccine by jurisdiction.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what really matters is the number of Canadians who have actually been vaccinated. Rather than the six million doses of vaccine that the Conservatives claim have been distributed, a Quebec doctor notes a few days makes the difference between falling gravely ill or being completely safe from H1N1.

What additional action will the government take to protect Canadians from falling gravely ill between now and the end of November?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since April we have been advising Canadians what measures they can take to protect themselves from H1N1 as we were in the process of developing the vaccine.

We were early in producing the vaccine for all Canadians and we were able to distribute the vaccines to the provinces in October, two weeks ahead of schedule.

The one way to protect oneself from H1N1 is to get the vaccine. The provinces and territories are working very hard to roll out the vaccines, so every Canadian can receive the vaccine by the end of this year.

**Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to H1N1, there is confusion and chaos. Canadians across the country who are not proficient in English or French are having difficulty accessing H1N1 information. They are confused about what to do. They have been left to piece together information from family and friends, many of whom are also uncertain.

The government has left Canadians with language barriers to fend for themselves in the face of this pandemic. Why?

• (1435)

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated leadership in communicating with Canadians with regard to H1N1.

As well, in partnership with the provinces and territories, we have been communicating what Canadians can do to protect themselves from H1N1. We will continue to do that across the country, to educate Canadians on ways to prevent the spread of H1N1 and the importance of getting the vaccine in their jurisdictions when it becomes available.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, how can spending \$100 million on Conservative propaganda be justified, when less than 10% of that amount is being spent on the H1N1 pandemic?

Will they use what is left of the \$100 million to better inform the public? Will they reach those who have difficulty with French or English?

[*English*]

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a number of jurisdictions have gone out of their way to communicate to their population the importance of preventing the spread of H1N1.

Nunavut has produced a booklet in Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, English and French. Various other jurisdictions have done the same to communicate with their population.

If the member wants that information, I will gladly share it with him.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Revenue says that the contributions the government wants to collect from self-employed workers in Quebec reflect the cost of the new benefits to which they would be entitled under Bill C-56. That is just not true. Sickness and compassionate care benefits constitute less than 8% of employment insurance payouts. The government should therefore collect just \$0.32 per \$100, not \$1.36.

Does the minister acknowledge that the contribution rate is too high compared to the real cost of the new benefits for self-employed Quebec workers?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we agreed that we would offer special measures to help self-employed workers who do not have access to special benefits. In Quebec, that means sickness and compassionate care benefits. The government announced that it would bring in these measures. It delivered the goods this week and now, for the first time, it is offering self-employed workers an opportunity to benefit from services that will be offered to all self-employed workers in Quebec as well as all of the other provinces and territories.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister needs to bear in mind that Bill C-56 does not take into account the fact that self-employed workers in Quebec already have access to maternity and parental benefits, for which they pay \$0.86 per \$100.

Does the minister realize that, by charging an extra \$1.36, he is making self-employed workers in Quebec pay for those in Canada?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government decided to help self-employed workers by offering them special benefits. That is what we are doing now by introducing this bill.

The \$0.86 that the member is talking about is the amount that the Government of Quebec collects to cover the cost of maternity and parental benefits. Now we are giving self-employed workers the opportunity to opt in, but what he is talking about is mandatory. Our program is voluntary, and it finally gives people access to sickness and compassionate care benefits.

*Oral Questions***FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the National Assembly adopted a third unanimous motion asking that the federal members maintain the firearms registry in its entirety. The Conservative bill, sponsored by the member for Portage—Lisgar, and supported by the Liberals and New Democrats, would dismantle the firearms registry system.

So that Quebec does not lose this important crime-fighting tool, will the government comply with the request of the Parti Québécois, which is calling for the transfer of the firearms registry to the Government of Quebec, with full compensation?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote a press release I received today.

The Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs welcomes the fact that members of Parliament have supported private member's bill C-391, introduced for second reading in the House of Commons yesterday. The Fédération believes that the so-called unrestricted long arms registry is not useful, does not protect the public, and costs Canadian taxpayers a great deal of money.

The Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs represents 125,000 members.

• (1440)

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I met with officials from the federation, and a number of them told me that their wives did not agree.

The Government of Quebec is urging the federal government to transfer this responsibility, and the funds that go with it. Quebec believes in gun control.

Will the Prime Minister comply with this request from the Quebec nation?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the firearms registry is a huge waste of money and does not help prevent crime. That is clear.

I encourage the Bloc Québécois leader to do as the other leaders are doing and let the members vote freely, and we will have more support for the abolition of the firearms registry.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources is already under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner and the Privacy Commissioner, and is implicated in violations of the Lobbying Act.

Today we learned of many new allegations of ethical breaches while she was president and CEO of the federal Toronto Port Authority. Instead of investigating, the government has done everything in its power to cover this up.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Will he finally demonstrate accountability and call on the Auditor General to investigate, without delay?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in the morning papers we learned nothing new, contrary to what the member opposite said.

What we do know is the Toronto Port Authority has said many times that “all expense and hospitality policies were followed”. The board has since stated that “the management and staff clearly followed all of these policies”. The chairman of the board's audit committee stated that “there was nothing unusual in expenses for a business of this size”.

Those are the facts.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Deloitte & Touche disagrees with the minister. The minister ran up almost \$130,000 in hospitality and other personal expenses as head of the authority. Now we learn that she unethically signed her own expense reports rather than the chairman of the board of directors. Contrary to the evidence, the transport minister assures us that all policies were followed. That is not the case.

When did the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Transport, and his predecessor learn of these allegations? Why is the government continuing this shameful cover-up?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is using some very colourful language. I wonder if he would have the courage of his convictions to be that colourful outside of this place.

Let us be very clear. The Toronto Port Authority has said many times that expense and hospitality policies were followed. The chairman of the audit committee stated there was nothing unusual with these expenses. That is what the arm's-length board of the Toronto Port Authority has said to us.

\* \* \*

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are shameless when it comes to promoting themselves at taxpayer expense. We have learned that the city of Mississauga has been forced to spend \$90,000 putting up economic action plan signs. Another \$5,000 has been spent on signs for the RInC program.

Why is the government forcing municipalities to waste their infrastructure money on partisan propaganda?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. What really embarrasses the Liberal members of Parliament opposite is that they see these signs popping up all over their own ridings. Also, they are being put in the embarrassing position where they actually have to defend why they voted against all this spending in the first place.

Last week, we were hearing that none of this money was going to Liberal ridings. Now we hear that all over Mississauga signs are popping up. It shows just how fair and equitable, and open and transparent this government has been.

**Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government's signs—

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

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Mississauga—Brampton South has the floor.

• (1445)

**Hon. Navdeep Bains:** Mr. Speaker, the government's signs are a sheer waste. It requires separate signs, separate designs and separate sizes, all of which add thousands of dollars to the cost of the signs.

In Mississauga alone, the city had to put up 396 signs to promote only 130 projects—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Mississauga—Brampton South has the floor. We will have a little order, please.

**Hon. Navdeep Bains:** Mr. Speaker, 130 projects and 396 signs. Do the math.

Would the minister not agree that this money would be better spent on flu clinics, as opposed to partisan propaganda?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as to spending money and making investments in the city of Mississauga on infrastructure, home to seven Liberal MPs, I plead guilty.

\* \* \*

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister is aware, reports indicate that nine million sockeye salmon went missing during last summer's migration to the Fraser River.

Would the Prime Minister tell this—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country has the floor. We will have a little order, please.

**Mr. John Weston:** Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister is aware, reports indicate that nine million sockeye salmon went missing during last summer's migration to the Fraser River.

Would the Prime Minister tell this House what action this government will be taking to respond to the problem?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country for his question and for his interest in this serious matter.

As the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has said on numerous occasions, we are very concerned about the low and falling returns of sockeye salmon in British Columbia.

Tomorrow, the Minister of International Trade, as the regional minister for British Columbia, will be making an announcement outlining the terms of reference for a judicial inquiry, as well as the judge who will lead that inquiry.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are worried about their children and their families in the face of the H1N1 pandemic. They wonder why it is taking so long to get the vaccine and why their government is not doing its job.

Either the government is hoarding 1.8 million doses or they are a figment of the government's imagination because they are not getting to the provinces. Manitoba, for example, has just been told that its supply for next week will be 10 times less than was promised or than can be delivered.

So, without blaming anyone, what is the government doing to fix the problem?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again, six million vaccines have been distributed to all the provinces and territories. Close to two million will be sent out to the provinces and territories next week. As well, this week we have sent an additional 225,000 unadjuvanted vaccines to the provinces and territories. Each province that receives the vaccine further distributes it to their authorities and are rolling out the vaccine.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Canadians everywhere, I say to the minister, stop the broken record, stop the blame game and start acting on behalf of parents who are worried about their children.

In fact, the government has offered no leadership while the provinces have had to work with less vaccine than promised and cut back drastically on a day's notice. Next week they will again be shortchanged on supply.

When will the government become a reliable ally in the fight against H1N1?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have taken the steps to ensure that the provinces and territories have the vaccine. Again, we have provided the vaccine as quickly as it has been produced by GSK. We prepositioned it in the provinces and territories so that, when the authorization came through, the provinces were able to start the vaccination campaign immediately.

We will continue to distribute vaccines as they are being produced to the provinces and territories.

\* \* \*

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is now three for three, having been named “fossil of the day” three times in as many days in Barcelona. This time, the award was given to Canada because of the environment minister's statement that Canada would postpone the adoption of the regulatory framework for major polluters until after the Copenhagen summit. Another delay.

*Oral Questions*

After three "fossil of the day" awards, does the minister not feel it is time to change tack by negotiating in good faith and setting strict GHG reduction targets? If not, the next award the minister will receive will be the "dinosaur" award.

[English]

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have been at the negotiating table. I think that the country can have a great sigh of relief that no members of the Bloc are actually at the negotiating table.

These are tough negotiations with tough parties at the table. We need people there who are going to defend Canada's interests. We want to see an international treaty, but not at any cost. It has to be one that applies to everyone that emits carbon.

One thing that will never happen on our watch is that this country will negotiate from a position of weakness and get drawn into the kinds of targets we have seen in Kyoto and in the legislation which the Bloc has put forward in this House.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, even though the minister's position is diametrically opposed to the position of the National Assembly of Quebec, the minister does not want to let Quebec speak for itself in Copenhagen.

How can the minister claim to speak for Quebec when his position runs counter to Quebec's goals and interests? Is this not more proof that the government's recognition of the Quebec nation means absolutely nothing?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has consulted all the provinces in preparation for the Copenhagen summit, and we are offering them a place in the official Canadian delegation. They will have access to the documents and will be able to express their views within the delegation. However, it is clear that Canada will speak with one voice in Copenhagen.

\* \* \*

[English]

**OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES**

**Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, an Olympics is supposed to be a national celebration. The Olympic torch is like the Stanley Cup. It is a symbol of something that matters so much that we want to get close to it and touch it.

When I first heard the government's plans, I was sure the report could not be true, but it is. The torch will go through many ridings. It will make stops for big rallies for Canadians to share and celebrate in 16 Bloc, 17 NDP, 20 Liberal and 90 Conservative ridings.

I ask the Prime Minister, how could any government be so inappropriate, so grossly unfair?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, how could any former cabinet minister stand in the House and ask a question about something he clearly knows so little about? The torch relay route was designed 100% by VANOC, not the government. Today, John Furlong said, "At no time did anybody in any government or any

political party offer one iota of counsel or influence about" the torch relay.

Shame on the member for playing games with the Olympics.

**Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is even worse in terms of the total number of stops: Bloc, 20; Liberals, 26; NDP, 27; Conservatives, 127. During the worst economic times in 70 years, far more money has gone into Conservative ridings. With people struggling, there was \$45 million for signs, and now this, something no government anywhere would ever do.

I ask the Prime Minister, how is it possible that such a big-spirited country could have such a small-minded government?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, clearly, the hon. member opposite is not at all interested in the facts. VANOC designed the torch relay entirely. It is over 45,000 kilometres and over 90% of Canadians will be within a one-hour drive of the torch relay. It will be a pan-Canadian incredible celebration of our athletes. The hon. member clearly has no idea what he is talking about. This is going to be a great torch relay. Again, like the athletes' uniforms, like the torch relay, across the board the Liberals cannot help themselves from embarrassing themselves by politicizing the games.

\* \* \*

● (1455)

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, two months ago, I asked the Minister of Transport to release all expenses incurred by the Minister of Natural Resources when she was the CEO of the Toronto Port Authority. Some \$81,000 of her expenses were released, but there was no mention of \$50,000 fancy lunches on the taxpayers' dime.

Why is the minister hiding these illegal expenses from the public and this Parliament? Did the guests at these fancy lunches help with her election? What other scandalous cover-ups are there?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what is scandalous are the remarks made by the member for Trinity—Spadina.

Through access to information all this information has been made available to the public. The Toronto Port Authority has said many times that its expense and hospitality policies were followed. The board has since stated that management and staff clearly followed all these policies. The president of the audit committee has spoken to that. I do find the comments of the member opposite rather regrettable.

### GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as part of their blitzkrieg of self-promotion, the government is hanging home renovation flyers on the doorknobs of 3.5 million Canadian homes.

Will the Minister of Transport and gilding the lily please tell us how much these doorknob thingies are costing the taxpayer? Who is being paid to deliver them to 3.5 million homes? Who is deciding which neighbourhoods and which targeted ridings are getting these gratuitous reminders of the glory that is Rome from the font from which surely all goods things and sunshine must flow?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have not seen these flyers that the member opposite speaks of, but I am excited to hear that the government is taking action to make more people than ever aware of the home renovation tax credit. This by far is one of the most exciting and successful parts of our economic action plan. Thousands of people have been put to work from every corner of the country.

Whether it is helping families make their homes more energy efficient, whether it is families being able to expand their principal residences, whether it is the jobs that are created, or whether it is the hope that is being generated, we are excited about it. I want to thank the member opposite for telling Canadians about this great program.

\* \* \*

### EMPLOYMENT

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has taken concrete actions to help Canadians and their families weather the global economic storm. The measures taken as part of our economic action plan are having a positive impact on the lives of Canadians who have been the hardest hit. We have taken additional action since to help long-tenured workers and self-employed Canadians.

Could the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development please inform the House about the status of these important initiatives?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report to the House that thanks to the economic action plan, over 165,000 jobs of Canadians are being protected through the expansion of work sharing. Unprecedented investments in training of people who have been laid off are being distributed by the provinces and territories. Over 300,000 Canadians are benefiting from an additional five weeks of EI benefits. Despite the Liberal opposition to it, Bill C-50, which will help long-tenured workers, will soon receive royal assent. Today we launched debate on a new bill to help the self-employed across Canada. We are getting results for Canadians.

\* \* \*

### PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

**Mr. David McQuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is not enough that the Prime Minister spends 100 million borrowed taxpayer dollars on partisan propaganda, or that he makes 3,000 appointments in three years without his promised appointments commissioner, but now Canadians applying for senior public service

### Oral Questions

jobs are being tested on the basis of their loyalty to the Prime Minister's Reform Conservative ideologies.

In 1,000 words or less, could the Prime Minister please explain how stacking our non-partisan and impartial public service with his ideological soulmates is good for Canada?

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong.

Our government is committed to a strong and effective public service for Canadians. The annual report of the Public Service Commission that was tabled last month confirmed that.

Why does the member not take it up with the Public Service Commission, which confirmed the independence and the strength of our public service?

\* \* \*

● (1500)

[Translation]

### MUSEUMS

**Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, for seven weeks now, the employees of the Museum of Civilization and the War Museum have been on strike. They are simply asking for employment conditions similar to those offered in other museums. For the past 46 days, not only has the minister been ignoring them, but he has been turning a blind eye to the attitude of the employer, who is using strong arm tactics with its workers.

Instead of allowing the employer to make matters worse, what is the minister waiting for to step in and tell it to go back to the bargaining table in good faith?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we know this is a very difficult time and our thoughts are certainly with those affected by this situation, but this is a legal work stoppage, and it is important to note that the museums are open for visitors at this time.

A federal mediator has been working with the parties since before the strike even began. The mediator will continue working with those parties to find a solution.

\* \* \*

[English]

### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today the B.C. Supreme Court declined Sharon McIvor's appeal on whether or not women could pass on Indian status to their children. That means if the Indian Act is not amended by April 6, thousands of first nations people will lose their status.

First nations are frustrated by the ruling, but are even more frustrated that the government refuses to consult with them on how to change the legislation. Will the minister commit to full consultation with first nations to bring an end to the discriminatory practice of letting all men but only some women pass on their status?

*Business of the House*

**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, of course we respect the B.C. Supreme Court ruling. The court decided not to hear Ms. McIvor's leave to appeal. We are adhering, of course, to the B.C. Supreme Court ruling.

We will make sure that women are treated the same as men, and the descendants of women are treated the same, which is what that court case is about. There are 17 or 20 consultative hearings that are taking place; most have taken place. People are welcome to contribute over the next couple of months as we prepare a response to make sure we are in adherence to that court ruling.

If the member would like, she could support our matrimonial real property rights bill so we could really help women across this country.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government looks after all those who are working—whether they are the teachers at Juvénat Notre-Dame or the parents of the students of this venerable institution in Lévis—as well as those who are unemployed. In the meantime, the Bloc members just sit on their hands and even vote against measures to help the unemployed.

Why has the Bloc abandoned workers while our government works for the people of Quebec and Canada? Can the Minister of National Revenue tell me what concrete measures our government has implemented to help workers—

**The Speaker:** The Minister of National Revenue.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member is right to raise this matter. It is rather perplexing that while our government introduced measures to help the unemployed on four occasions, the Bloc remained seated every time there was a vote. First, we added five weeks to unemployment insurance. Then we extended the work sharing program by 14 weeks. We subsequently provided funding for up to two years for retraining. More recently, we added 5 to 20 weeks for long-tenured workers.

It is this government that is working on helping the unemployed.

\* \* \*

●(1505)

[English]

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** Order, please. On the upcoming occasion of Veterans' Week, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Canadian war veterans, peacekeepers and a current serving member of the military, namely Mr. Gerry Bowen and Ms. Helen Rapp, World War II veterans; Mr. Lloyd Swick, a World War II and Korean War veteran; Mr. Ray

Paquette, a peacekeeping veteran; and Captain Leo Phillips, a current service member of the military.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are important proceedings to take place in this House with respect to Veterans Week almost immediately, so I will simply ask the government House leader if he could briefly describe his work program ahead so we can quickly get on to the tributes to veterans.

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the brief question from my hon. colleague this week in honour of the tributes that we are about to hear.

Today we began and hopefully will conclude the second reading stage of C-56, the Fairness for the Self-Employed Act. That bill is receiving rave reviews all across the land and it is my hope that it will move very expeditiously through the House.

On Tuesday, we sent another employment insurance act to the Senate, Bill C-50. My understanding is that it has completed third reading over in the other place and we hope that will receive royal assent today.

Following Bill C-56, it is my intention to continue the debate at third reading of C-27, the anti-spam bill, which will be followed by Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act, which is at second reading.

Bill C-56 will continue tomorrow if not completed today. Backup bills for Friday are Bill C-51, the Economic Recovery Act, which was reported back from committee this week, followed by any bills not completed from today.

When the House returns from our constituency Remembrance Day week, the schedule of bills will include Bill C-23, Canada-Colombia, and bills not concluded from this week. We will give consideration to any bills reported back from committee or new bills yet to be introduced.

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to order made on Wednesday, November 4, 2009, the House will now proceed to statements by ministers.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***VETERANS' WEEK**

**Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today is one of those special days in this place when members from all sides of the House will speak with one voice, and that is to honour those who have allowed us to live in the best country in the world.

There will be no disagreement and no debate. There will be only one message: a sincere thank you to the generations of men and women who have worn our uniform, who have defended our way of life and who have made Canada strong and free and proud.

As we launch Veterans' Week, we think of the extraordinary contributions that ordinary Canadians have made in two great wars, in Korea, on peacekeeping missions, on military operations and in Afghanistan today, missions that have distinguished our soldiers, Canada's soldiers, as the best in the world. They are the best trained, the most disciplined and the most professional.

We live in a country blessed with peace, a country built on the values of generosity, democracy, human rights and the rule of law and we owe much of it, if not all of it, to our men and women in uniform, past and present.

In this place, words are all we have to express our gratitude, just words to describe their sacrifice, but words fail to capture the brutal inhumanity of war and the tragic loss of so many young lives on a scale that none of us can imagine.

Words cannot describe the sacrifice on Vimy Ridge or at Beaumont-Hamel. They cannot describe the horrors on the shores of Normandy, in the mountains of Italy or in the hills of Korea. They cannot capture the atrocities in Rwanda or Bosnia, and words alone cannot begin to tell the untold stories of Canadian bravery and determination.

In December 1941, a valiant group of Canadians arrived in Hong Kong with few supplies and no backup. Yet they stood in the face of relentless Japanese attacks for 17 long days. Again, words cannot describe the cruelty that eventually led enemy soldiers to overrun a makeshift hospital and assault and murder nurses and bayonet our wounded soldiers in their hospital beds. This all happened on Christmas Eve. These are actions that defy any level of human behaviour, even in war.

Our Canadian men and women still stood their ground with uncommon courage until the next day, Christmas Day. On Christmas Day, those still alive or still standing were taken prisoner of war. "Prisoner of war" does not begin to describe what happened to these young Canadians. It fails to describe the sheer torture and brutality that they endured. The term "prisoner of war" only proves that even in war we sanitize the language.

These Canadians were forced to perform slave labour on a starvation diet. It was truly a prescription for death. What continues to amaze me is that some of our soldiers walked away; they walked away from those camps on September 9, 1945, after 1,355 days. Almost 2,000 men and women had sailed to Hong Kong and more

than a quarter of them never returned home, and some who did survive had to be carried out, only to die on the voyage home. Their story is worth retelling because after all of these years, some 65 years later, many of the horror stories from those camps remain untold.

• (1510)

The survivors of the Battle of Hong Kong still cannot and will not talk about everything that happened. Those still with us today will occasionally share a story with each other, but they have never told their families, their loved ones or their friends the whole story.

I keep asking myself this: How did these men and women, how could any human being, survive such suffering; what kept them going?

When we ask George Peterson, one of the men who did survive and one of those who did walk away, he will use only one word and he will tell us that they lived on hope. More precisely, they existed on hope. They did not live, they existed. They came from a country they loved and wanted to return to. They believed in a free world and in the mission. Most importantly, they had made a solemn promise to their loved ones that they would come home no matter what.

These stories remind us that the full cost of war is not limited to those Canadians who lie buried overseas. The full cost of war lives on from generation to generation and it continues to be paid today.

Mr. Speaker, you and I and many members of the House grew up with children of that generation of soldiers, children who grew up in families with fathers who struggled with the invisible cost of war, brought up by parents who suffered in silence.

What is truly astonishing is that even those who endured such hardships, even those who still bear the emotional scars of war, came home to build this country. Their contributions did not end on the battlefields. They came home and started businesses, they pursued careers, they went to work, they paid their taxes, they made the Canada we know today. They made our country. They made Canada great.

That is the remarkable story of our veterans. When we are in their presence, when we are sitting at a table and sharing a meal with one of these once young soldiers who are now in their twilight years, we realize that they are not just ordinary people. As we watch a frail and arthritic hand break bread, and just the way they look at their food before they eat it, the way they never take a meal for granted, we realize that these men and women are different. They are special. They are our nation's truest heroes. They did not seek the headlines, but they wrote the true story of our country, Canada.

Men and women like them are still writing that story, the Canadian story, and they are still risking everything to defend our way of life.

Each of us in this chamber knows it. Every one of us in this place has met families of our fallen soldiers from Afghanistan. When we are in their presence our eyes are instinctively drawn to that tiny silver cross that tells the whole story. These families have paid the ultimate sacrifice. When our eyes meet their eyes, we cannot help but wonder how pain and pride can coexist simultaneously in one set of eyes, but they do.

*Routine Proceedings*

As we reach out to them, just a simple handshake is not going to cut it. These are truly powerful moments, because we know that for anyone who has lost a loved one the pain they bear is real and never goes away.

•(1515)

As we have heard in this place so often, for someone who has lost a loved one, every day is Remembrance Day. Yet amid such sacrifice, it is also true that, almost without exception, each one of these family members will tell us that if they were to do it over again, nothing would change, nothing. They still believe in Canada. They still believe in the mission and, most important, they loved and believed in their fallen sons and daughters, husbands and wives.

In the next few days all of us in the House will return to the towns and villages that we represent. We will go back to the men and women who sent us here and with them we will gather at our cenotaphs and at our memorials. The bugle will sound and pipes will blow and we will lay the wreaths and we will observe the silence. During that time of quiet reflection, we will thank them, we will remember them and we will say a silent prayer for those who continue to serve.

Lest we forget.

**M. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley-Ouest, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and deeply humbled to rise on behalf of the entire Liberal caucus in joining with colleagues in all parties this afternoon to honour the service and the sacrifice of Canadian veterans and, particularly, to remember more than 100,000 members of the Canadian armed forces who have given their very lives in the pursuit of peace, freedom and democracy at home and abroad.

I am even more deeply humbled to be surrounded by them this afternoon in the very presence of those representatives of the armed services and the veterans above me in the gallery. Even though I cannot see them right now, I appreciate their presence and ask for their grace and patience as I try to pay tribute.

Over the next week, in villages and cities, in places of worship, places of honour, in public squares and at the bedsides in veterans' care facilities, Canadians will pause to reflect and remember. And on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, we will still ourselves for two minutes to bring to mind and to heart the passion, the courage and the hopes of those who died in service to our nation.

This week we will bear boldly the flame of gratitude and remembrance.

[*Translation*]

We are a nation proud of being forward-thinking, a forward-looking nation, an optimistic people committed to building a better country and a better world. This week, however, as we do each year around this time, we shall take a moment to stop and contemplate our past to recall the throes of war, and to remember with sad hearts the loved ones who are departed and the families torn apart. We will also reaffirm our commitment to their efforts in shaping a world of peace and equity.

•(1520)

[*English*]

As we do that, we will feel humility. We will feel gratitude. We will feel pride.

It is my hope that this week we will recall in our souls the tireless pursuit of a world free from tyranny and terror that has been the call to action and the call to arms of members of the Canadian Forces for generations.

It is my hope this week that we will reclaim in our hearts the spirit of this nation, its care for the most vulnerable, its commitment to civil and human rights, its protection of minorities and its commitment to democracy and freedom, those things that have shaped every one of our wartime efforts.

Most of all, it is my hope this week that we will remember, at the core of our being, the spirit of those soldiers, peacemakers and peacekeepers who lost or risked their lives in the trenches and fields of the first world war, on the bloodstained beaches and in the fields of the second world war, over the mountains, through the swamps and across the rice paddies of the Korean War, and now in the city streets and the vast deserts of Afghanistan, even as we speak today.

To remember the wars of the 20th century is not an easy task for two reasons.

Quite simply, the experiences of war are painful to convey and difficult to share. It grates against the grain of our culture to call to mind the tragedies of war and the magnitude of death. The numbers stagger. Canada sent 620,000 soldiers to fight in World War I, 66,000 were killed. Over one million Canadians fought in World War II, 45,000 did not return. It is hard to come to terms with over 100,000 lives cut short, over 100,000 stories left unfinished, over 100,000 families truncated, over 100,000 dreams trampled upon.

There is a natural human response to want to shield ourselves from the reality of this sacrifice. But even if we are willing, our capacity is dangerously threatened.

[*Translation*]

With each Remembrance Day, the veterans who gather around memorials to lay wreaths and share their stories with family and friends grow a little older and fewer. Those who saw combat are now having a hard time feeding the flame of remembrance alone.

For Canada's younger generations, the World War II and Korean War veterans' memories are ancient history. With each year that goes by, our nation is remembering less vividly the conflicts that have marked the previous century.

[*English*]

But remember we must. To bear the flame of remembrance is simply not enough. We must continue to feed the flame of remembrance as well.

*Routine Proceedings*

We feed the flame of remembrance by our yearly naming of those who have given their lives, keeping our promise to those who have died in our service. We take time and make space to ensure that they are remembered as men and women, as flesh and blood, not mere statistics in corporate memory. From Harry B. Little, who died at the age of 26 on August 14, 1914, to Sapper Steven Marshall from Calgary, Alberta, who, at 24, was killed in Afghanistan on October 30 of this year. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

We feed the flame of remembrance also by telling and retelling stories of the human side of war, keeping our promise to those who have served faithfully. We support the Memory Project of the Historica-Dominion Institute, connecting veterans and students online and in classrooms across the country by the sharing of personal stories with youth.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

So far, these veterans have managed to touch more than 300,000 young people with their stories of courage and passion.

[*English*]

We feed the flame of remembrance by caring for our veterans and their spouses with dignity, compassion and economic security.

[*Translation*]

We honour the new Veterans Charter, an alliance between this country and those who served in the armed forces.

[*English*]

We thank the Royal Canadian Legion and ANAVETS units across the country that not only keep this memory alive, but provide social, cultural and individual support for Canadian veterans.

Finally, we feed the flame of remembrance by honouring those who wear the uniform today, ensuring that we equip them appropriately, keep them safe and preserve their health.

[*Translation*]

These brave women and men put their lives on the line every day for a better world.

[*English*]

Our solemn responsibility is to protect them and when they come home, to ensure their physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health. Sometime next week, we will remove the poppies from their place of honour over our hearts, but let us never remove our commitment to feeding the flame of remembrance. Let us keep the faith. Let us keep hope.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we are taking time today to mark Remembrance Day. It is very important to remember the men and women who fought and those who never came home to their families.

The first world war ended on November 11, 1918. Canadian soldiers had participated in one of the most devastating conflicts Europe had ever seen. Many took part, and too many died. After the

armistice was signed in 1918, Canada decided to designate a day for remembering the soldiers who fell at the front.

Ever since, we have paused on this date to remember our armed forces. Everyone in this chamber knows the difficulties they must overcome and the efforts they make. They accept the most perilous of missions without flinching. Their reward is the appreciation and gratitude of their fellow citizens. When we gather each year to honour the memory of those who fell, it is our way of saying a collective thank you. Thank you for your sacrifices. Thank you for your devotion to duty.

The people themselves make this very clear. They remember well. One need only look, year after year, at the younger generations that take the time to remember all that the veterans did. Every year, November 11 is highlighted. Some people journey to attend ceremonies and parades. Others wear the poppy. But all remember.

How can we forget the courage and valour of the women and men who donned the uniform and risked their lives for their missions? They are the ones who went up to the front to defend the values on which our societies are based. When we talk about democracy, liberty and equality, these soldiers endured everything to ensure that those fundamental values are respected.

Human solidarity is on display whenever the time comes to help other people in their struggle to gain and preserve liberty and respect for basic human rights. Canadian soldiers are on the front lines defending these values, and we should never forget it.

They accept all their missions with humility, determination and courage. We have a collective duty to remember that.

We remember, too, the men and women who took part in these conflicts out of uniform.

We also remember the fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and friends of these soldiers. We remember the families afflicted by the loss of one of their loved ones. This day is especially important to them, and we should underscore their sacrifice.

We remember the cities, towns and countryside devastated by conflicts and wars.

We remember our soldiers' determination to accomplish their mission, restore the peace, and secure areas in order to help the civilians living there.

When talking about our veterans, we should save a special thought for the men and women currently serving in Afghanistan. Regardless of what we might think about this mission, the soldiers from Canada and Quebec who are serving there do their jobs with the greatest professionalism and devotion to duty. We should value their work and their sacrifice. Never forget that the soldiers of today are the veterans of tomorrow.

Present and future generations are all indebted to our veterans. They are the ones who sacrificed so that we and our families can live in a world of peace and freedom.

*Routine Proceedings*

●(1530)

[English]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot begin to describe what it is like to stand in the Chamber where the decision to send Canada's young men and women overseas into battle took place.

From the Boer War to World War I to World War II to Korea to peacekeeping conflicts, and to our current mission in Afghanistan, we, the members of Parliament and those in the Senate, get the opportunity because of their sacrifices to debate the future of those conflicts. That is an honour that only soldiers can give us in a democratic society.

This year's campaign poster from veterans affairs is extremely poignant. It asks every Canadian "How will you remember?"

One way that I plan to remember is something that Canada's current Minister of Veterans Affairs said in a speech not too long ago. He said he was looking at some gravesites and the names on those gravesites, and instead of just reading them in his own mind, he said them out loud. In many cases the names that he spoke out loud were probably spoken for the first time in many years.

When my father passed away, a person who was liberated in a war camp by the Canadian military and its Allies in the liberation of the Netherlands in 1944-45, my mother said, "He's up in heaven keeping an eye on me until it is my time to go and join him".

We have almost 118,000 young men and women who are up there right now looking at all of us and keeping an eye on our current military personnel and their families. I would like to mention out loud some of the names of those who are still with us.

The great John Babcock, 109 years old, Canada's last surviving World War I veteran, and one of the very few left on this planet. May God give him many more years of a healthy lifestyle because he is the last vintage hold onto that World War I battle.

Jack Ford of Newfoundland and Labrador, the world's last surviving prisoner of war during the bombing of Nagasaki. He was in slave labour at the Nagasaki shipyards when the Nagasaki bomb went off. He, by the grace of God, is still with us in the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador. A poignant, humanistic story that the minister and I and others got to share.

On June 6, 1944, five miles off the coast of Juno Beach, a young naval officer by the name of Murray Knowles from Halifax stood there, ready to aim the guns to protect our soldiers as they went into battle on Juno Beach. What was happening at the same time he was on that ship protecting the world, his son was born in the Maritimes on June 6, 1944. And 65 years later, all of us in Canada witnessed Murray Knowles at age 92 and his son at age 65 standing shoulder to shoulder on Juno Beach.

That is the human element of what our men and women went through, and the glory of God to allow them to have shared that moment 65 years later.

I would also like to mention the great Helen Rapp. Those who know Helen know she is a staunch defender of the women who

served in our military. She deserves our undying gratitude for the tremendous work that she does.

I just had the distinct pleasure of going to the Amherst Legion Branch 10 recently, and I met three fantastic unbelievable World War II veterans, Harold Ettinger, Lyon Kaufman and Allison Chapman. These three men are working in their legion in their very late stages of their lives to do one thing, to preserve the memory of those who never got a chance to come back, to preserve the memory of the stories, to tell them to future generations, and to show support to those current men and women serving overseas and their families. They deserve our undying gratitude for never allowing the flame of hope to be extinguished.

One of the ways of how we will remember is by asking exactly why did these men and women go overseas in the first place? Well, there was a sign in Ypres that I saw a few years ago, written by a Canadian, I believe a family member of a Canadian who came over. On that sign it said, "We left our country so you could live in yours".

I think that says it all right there. Why would a 14-year-old kid from the Prairies or from a fish plant or from the woods lie about his age, join the military, and head over to the battlefields of Europe?

●(1535)

It was not just for excitement. It was because of an undying Canadian attitude that when the bell gets rung, we answer the call. To those 133 brave men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, they did not die in vain. Their families and children, some of whom we have all met, are the heroes of our generation today because they keep their memories alive. They left this country, so that the people of Afghanistan and other conflicts in the world can live peacefully in theirs.

If we keep that memory alive for all future generations, our children and grandchildren will always remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. There are those who are part of an aging society right now, where memories come back to haunt them because they are infirm. We need to do all we can to ensure that their memory is never extinguished.

As the Legion says, "At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them". However, we also ask God to care for them, whether they pay the ultimate sacrifice or whether they come back broken, wounded or psychologically damaged in any way. We know that all 33.5 million Canadians, in their heart of hearts, love our military, love our veterans, and respect and love the family members and friends of those veterans.

Without them, I and the rest of us could not stand in this Chamber and be able to debate the important issues of the day. I stand here proudly to salute the men and women of our armed forces who have served.

May God bless all their memories and may God take care of their families.

●(1540)

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among all parties and I think that if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

*Speaker's Ruling*

That this House recognize the extraordinary contributions made by millions of Canadians serving in the Boer War, two World Wars, Korean War, and many missions since, and urges all Canadians to heed the call of The Historical-Dominion Institute to return to the initial practice of taking two minutes of silence (“two minutes to remember”) at 11 a.m., on Remembrance Day, November 11, to remember the sacrifices courageously made by our servicemen and women at home and abroad to guarantee the peace, rights and freedoms that we Canadians enjoy today.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Speaker:** I now invite the House to rise and observe one moment of silence to commemorate our war veterans.

*[A moment of silence observed]*

\* \* \*

*[Translation]*

#### MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed the following bill: Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits.

\* \* \*

*[English]*

#### PRIVILEGE

##### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now prepared to make a couple of rulings that I know members are dying to hear.

*[Translation]*

I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on October 27, 2009, by the hon. member for Joliette alleging the premature disclosure of the content of a government bill to the media prior to the bill's introduction in the House.

*[English]*

I would like to thank the hon. member for Joliette for having raised this matter, as well as the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the hon. Minister of Public Safety, the hon. member for Wascana, the hon. member for Vancouver East, the hon. member for Beauséjour, and the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River for their comments.

*[Translation]*

In raising his question of privilege, the hon. member for Joliette claimed that a breach of the privileges of the House had occurred as a result of the public disclosure of the content of Bill C-53, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

The member argued that the Minister of Public Safety in a press conference and through a press release and backgrounder on the bill had disclosed its essence and content to the public and media before it was introduced in the House on October 26, 2009, and that this amounted to a contempt of the House. It was his contention that, “The issue is not the quantity of details but the quality of details—”. He pointed to the importance of the confidentiality of bills prior to their introduction, saying that he always advises colleagues to hold press conferences on their bills only after their introduction.

Likening this situation to the question of privilege he raised on October 22, 2009, concerning the disclosure of details of Bill C-52, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sentencing for fraud), prior to its introduction, the hon. member for Joliette wondered if there was no longer any reason for him to apply the rule of confidentiality of bills on notice so strictly.

● (1545)

*[English]*

During the interventions of the hon. member for Wascana, the hon. member for Vancouver East and the hon. member for Beauséjour, the seriousness of this issue was raised. The chair was urged to consider whether this was becoming a pattern and to give clear direction to the House on the rules that apply in this respect.

Following question period on October 27, the Minister of Public Safety rose to address the issue of whether the contents of Bill C-53 had been improperly disclosed prior to its introduction in the House. The minister noted that the rule prohibiting disclosure of the content of bills prior to their introduction arises out of a 2001 Speaker's ruling. The minister noted that the ruling limited the time period in question to the time between the bill being put on notice and its actual introduction in the House. He argued that the underlying principle is that the text of the bill should be made available first to members of Parliament.

*[Translation]*

Citing the 2001 case, in which the justice minister had actually circulated to the media a copy of the text of the bill and provided comment on it, the Minister of Public Safety acknowledged that the text of a bill cannot be disclosed to a select group ahead of parliamentarians seeing it. He then went on to accuse the opposition of looking to expand this rule significantly, effectively prohibiting the government from ever discussing any policy that might, in the future, be the subject matter of a bill before the House.

*[English]*

In his comments, the minister argued that the purpose of the rule is not to stifle discussion or debate or an exploration of policy issues but to restrict the actual disclosure of the text of a bill. That is only partly correct. The purpose of the convention is also to ensure that members are not impeded in their work by being denied information that others have been given.

*Speaker's Ruling*

The minister also noted that the time period in question is limited only to the time between a bill being put on notice and its actual introduction, and in this he is correct. Prior to giving notice of a bill, a minister or a private member developing a legislative initiative is of course free to discuss the proposal with anyone, but the House has the right to have first access to the text of the bill once it has been placed on notice. The specifics of a bill, once it has been placed on notice, should remain confidential until the bill is introduced.

In the case before us, the Minister of Public Safety differentiated between his own conduct and prohibited actions, stating that he did not disclose the contents of Bill C-53 but rather discussed an existing policy problem and the intention of the government to solve it. He provided neither a specific explanation of the government's solution nor an indication of what the text of government legislation in this regard would be.

As members have indicated, it has been a long-standing practice that the content of all bills on notice is confidential until they are introduced in the House. As I mentioned in my ruling of March 19, 2001, referred to by the Minister of Public Safety, at page 1,840 of the *Debates*:

[*Translation*]

The convention of the confidentiality of bills on notice is necessary, not only so that members themselves may be well informed, but also because of the pre-eminent role which the House plays and must play in the legislative affairs of the nation.

I went on to say that:

To deny to members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

[*English*]

In the 2001 case, the Chair ruled the matter to be, *prima facie*, a case of privilege, and it was ultimately referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

In the committee's report on the matter, presented to the House on May 9, 2001, this important principle was reiterated. Following a commitment by the then Minister of Justice to establish protocol governing the processes for bills prior to their introduction, the report stated, in part:

[*Translation*]

The Committee believes that the protocol of the Department of Justice whereby no briefings or briefing materials should be provided with respect to a bill on notice until its introduction in the House of Commons should be adopted as a standard policy by all government departments. We believe that such a policy is respectful of the House of Commons and its members. It recognizes the legislative role of Parliament, and is consistent with parliamentary privilege and the conventions of Parliament.

[*English*]

While an attempt has been made to liken the situation surrounding Bill C-53, the case before us today, to the disclosure of the details of Bill C-52, clearly the circumstances of these two situations are not identical.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

In the case of Bill C-52, specific details of the bill were released to the media and the public. On October 26 and 27, respectively, the

Minister of Justice and then the Minister of Public Works and Government Services apologized to the House and made commitments to ensure that their actions concerning Bill C-52 would not be repeated. Their apologies put an end to the matter, as I indicated at the time. However, the House—and in particular ministers—should note that had it not been for the apologies of the ministers, the case might well have had a different outcome.

[*English*]

However, in the case of Bill C-53, the Minister of Public Safety categorically assured the House that, “none of the provisions, none of the potential mechanisms, none of the solutions, let alone the specific text” were divulged prior to the bill's introduction in the House.

[*Translation*]

While, by his own admission, he discussed in broad terms the policy initiative contained in the bill, the Chair is satisfied that the Minister of Public Safety did not disclose the details of the measures being proposed in the bill. The Chair is also satisfied that there has been no contempt of the House as a collectivity nor of any member individually as members were not denied information they need to perform their duties as parliamentarians.

Accordingly, the Chair finds no grounds for declaring a *prima facie* question of privilege in this case.

[*English*]

I wish to thank the House for its attention to this ruling on a matter of considerable importance to us all.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

## DISTURBANCE IN THE GALLERY—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on October 27, 2009, by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons regarding the disturbance in the public gallery that occurred during Oral Questions on October 26, 2009.

[*English*]

I wish to thank the government House leader, the hon. member for Mississauga South, the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, the hon. member for Vancouver East, and the hon. member for Langley for their interventions.

[*Translation*]

As members will recall, during Question Period on October 26, a disturbance occurred while the leader of the New Democratic Party was asking a question. Several persons were shouting in the public gallery and the House had to interrupt its proceedings for several minutes while the gallery was being cleared by our security officers.

*Government Orders*

[English]

In raising his question of privilege, the government House leader charged the member for Toronto—Danforth with contempt, alleging his involvement in this incident. The substance of the government House leader's allegation, a version of events supported by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, is summarized in the following paragraph of his intervention, found on page 6240 of the *Debates* of October 27, 2009:

[Translation]

The leader of the protesters is the political events organizer of the NDP. His group gained access to the parliamentary precinct because of the leader of the NDP. The leader of the NDP provided a practice room for this group. The group was allowed to go from its practice to the galleries where it obstructed the proceedings of the House and intimidated some members.

[English]

The government House leader explained that it had been reported to him that members had felt uncomfortable and had feared for their safety.

In reply to this very serious allegation, the House leader of the New Democratic Party emphatically denied that the member for Toronto—Danforth was involved in the protest that occurred in the public gallery. She indicated that he was simply doing his job by meeting with the group as did other members of Parliament, but that he had no knowledge of the planned protest.

This morning the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth assured the House that he was not aware that a disturbance had been planned by the visitors with whom he met on October 26. He denied being involved in any way and expressed dismay that such allegations were made.

At the outset, the Chair wishes to state that it views the disruption of the proceedings of the House as a very serious matter, and as has been noted by the government House leader, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 84 states:

Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its members free from intimidation, obstruction and interference.

[Translation]

Some members may recall that the House experienced two gallery disturbances in 1990; both instances are most instructive in dealing with the case at hand. The first occurred on April 10, 1990, when two visitors disrupted the proceedings of the House by throwing papers from the galleries onto members in the chamber. The next day, a member raised a question of privilege charging another member with contempt of the House, alleging that he had provided passes for the protesters and had prior knowledge of the protest. On April 27, as reported on page 10760 of the *Debates* of the House of Commons, the member thus charged denied such prior knowledge, thereby settling the matter.

The second case happened on October 17, 1990, when again, objects—in this case macaroni and protest cards—were thrown onto the floor of the House by protesters in the galleries. A question of privilege was raised the next day, as reported on pages 14359 to 14368 of the *Debates* of the House of Commons, in which a member charged another member with knowing in advance about the demonstration and doing nothing to prevent it. He contended that the

member was thereby an accessory to a contempt of the House. The member who was the subject of the charge denied his involvement in the matter. In his ruling delivered on November 6, 1990, Mr. Speaker Fraser stated that as the member had denied his involvement, that matter was at an end.

[English]

In the case presently before the House, the allegations made about the involvement of the member for Toronto—Danforth in the gallery disturbance of October 26 have been categorically denied. In keeping with the precedents outlined above and with the long-standing tradition in this place that we accept an hon. member's word, the Chair accepts the statement of the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth that he was in no way involved. Accordingly, I will therefore consider the matter closed.

Having set aside the question of privilege raised by the government House leader, the Chair wishes to stress that it continues to have serious concerns about the gallery disturbance itself. The actions of the sizable group of individuals in using subterfuge to gain admittance to the galleries and then to disrupt our proceedings are totally unacceptable, and do them and their cause little credit.

They were less than frank about their intentions, and the aggressive behaviour of a few individuals as they were escorted out was particularly provocative. If anything, this incident graphically illustrates the extent to which members can be vulnerable and must be vigilant to avoid being dragged into situations when their guests abuse their trust.

Before I conclude, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the House's security personnel for their work during the incident on October 26. Their swift action in clearing the public gallery under difficult circumstances allowed the House to resume its work with a minimum of delay.

[Translation]

I would like to thank all of my colleagues for their attention.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 32 minutes.

---

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### FAIRNESS FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** Before the debate was interrupted, the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park had the floor. There are 14 minutes in the time allotted for his remarks.

I therefore call upon the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, before question period and before the great tributes to our veterans by all parties, I talked about a promise our Conservative government made to self-employed Canadians to set up a system to allow self-employed Canadians to collect EI special benefits for the very first time.

It is not surprising that many self-employed Canadians have been calling on the federal government to open up EI special benefits to them. They want fair treatment from their government, and we agree. We do not want them to have to scale back or stop work when faced with a joyous event, like the birth or adoption of a child, or difficult personal or family challenge, like a serious illness or family crisis.

This was underlined by recent public opinion research which found that 86% of self-employed persons polled supported access to sickness benefits, 84% to compassionate care benefits and 64% to maternity and parental benefits. Those are overwhelming numbers. While I realize it can be easy to get overwhelming numbers of people who say yes to money, and let us be clear, these numbers are yes to money numbers, the overwhelming number of people responding to these questions are self-employed.

They are entrepreneurs, they are business owners, they are service providers who only get paid when they work, when they show up or when their shop is open. This is a demanding life. They know the value of a dollar and they also know the value of each dollar they earn. They know the value of work because they do not get paid unless they work.

They also sometimes just think that life could be made just a little easier. They do not want a handout. They are not looking for free money or special treatment. They want to be treated fairly just like other Canadians, and we can do that.

They know that this opening of access to those benefits is not free. It is not without cost. This system will be largely, if not entirely self-financing. This means that the money for these benefits will come from the self-employed. They will pay in and it will pay out to them.

An overwhelming number of these self-employed Canadians want access to a structure that facilitates the provisions of these benefits to them and they know perfectly well where the money will come from. It will come from them. These numbers tell us that they are willing to pay out that money. The opt-in rates for this system, once it is set up and running, will tell us how much they are willing to pay.

The choice is up to them. The opportunity is theirs. We as a government simply know that it is fair and right to give them that opportunity.

Self-employed Canadians want access to these special benefits so they do not have to make a difficult choice between work and family or their own health and so years of work spent building up a business or professional practice are not lost by life events that, in many cases, are foreseeable, if not close to certain.

As I said, we can make things just a little easier without giving anyone special treatment.

Our Conservative government has listened and is prepared to act by recognizing that such a move is not only the compassionate thing

to do, but also the smart thing to do since it will strengthen and support families, which are, after all, the foundation of our society, and allow the self-employed who might otherwise have to leave the workforce to stay fully engaged, keep their skills up-to-date and continue making their own special contribution to the prosperity and competitiveness of our nation and its economy.

Now that we have introduced this bill, here is what Canadians are saying about it. On Tuesday, Richard Phillips, the executive director of the Grain Growers of Canada said that this legislation was very welcomed. He said, "This has huge potential for quality of life in rural Canada".

He also said this:

—could be the difference as whether one member of the family has to seek off farm employment because now families will have a choice. With over 200,000 farms in Canada, if even 10 per cent of them choose to take advantage of these programs, this could help ensure another 20,000 more young families staying on the land.

Therefore, it is good for farmers. We know our farmers feed our cities. In fact, they feed the entire world. This is something we can do to help them even just a little more.

• (1600)

It is good for small businesses. Do not take it from me, take it from the president of the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. It is one of the main voices for the self-employed and small business owners.

On Wednesday, Catherine Swift said:

—the initiative fills a "glaring gap" for people running their own business, especially women. We have a lot of women members. They'd like to have a child and yet abandoning your business is not (an option)

That point is very important. More than full one-third of self-employed Canadians are women. Many self-employed women want to have families, and that number is growing. Women are starting more businesses, owning more businesses and continually increasing their strength of their numbers within the self-employed. The bill would help them.

On Tuesday, Philip Hochstein, the president of the Independent Contractors and Business Association, said:

Many independent contractors work as owner operators, from truckers to drywallers to painters, and with these challenging economic times, the extra security offered with extending EI special benefits is welcome.

On Tuesday, Dale Ripplinger, the president of the Canadian Real Estate Association, applauded the government for taking action to address many of the inequities in the Employment Insurance program faced by self-employed Realtors. He said:

This is an important step to level the benefits playing field for self-employed Canadians....We look forward to working with the government to ensure access to EI benefits for REALTORS(R), which can help balance career and family life.

*Government Orders*

In a welcome call, Stephen Waddell, the national director of ACTRA, the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists, called on the opposition to support our government's efforts to pass the bill. He said:

This legislation is a question of basic fairness and equal treatment for Canadian workers. We're calling on the Liberals, NDP and the Bloc to avoid an election and get this initiative passed into law.

David Quist, the executive director of the Institute of Marriage and Family, welcomed the plan, saying that it would allow more parents to be involved in their children's lives.

This is a big part of why we are doing this. Self-employed Canadians want this bill. They want fairness and we are going to deliver it for them.

What are the proposals contained in the bill and why are they so important to entrepreneurs who find themselves in this situation? Basically, it comes down to this.

Under this bill, our government is proposing to do the right thing by giving the self-employed the ability to voluntarily opt into the EI program to be able to receive EI special benefits, which include maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits.

Self-employed residents in Quebec are already covered by the Quebec parental insurance plan for maternity and parental benefits provided by the government of Quebec and they would continue to be. They could opt in to take advantage of the sickness and compassionate care benefits to be offered by the Government of Canada through the EI program.

Under the legislation, special benefits for self-employed individuals would mirror the current EI program with similar benefit duration periods, income replacement rates, maximum insurable earnings, treatment of earnings and waiting periods.

It is clear that some aspects of the program will have to be adjusted, given the unique circumstances of the self-employed. A good example is eligibility will be determined by a minimum income threshold of \$6,000 per year rather than the current 600-hour requirement for those working for an employer.

Should they opt into the program, their EI premiums would be collected by the Canada Revenue Agency, along with their income tax. They would have to pay EI premiums on an ongoing basis for at least one year prior to receiving EI special benefits and these would mirror the relatively low rate currently paid by salaried employees across the country.

Equally important is the fact that, unlike the current practice with the Canada pension plan, self-employed contributors would not be required to pay the employer's portion of the premium, 1.4 times the employee rate, in part to reflect the fact that they would not have access to EI regular benefits.

Self-employed Canadians who begin paying premiums may choose to opt out of the program at the end of any tax year as long as they have never claimed benefits. Once they have made a claim, they must continue to make contributions on their self-employed income.

• (1605)

The changes contained in the bill represent just one element in a much larger, overall effort by our government to ensure the EI program continues to serve Canadians in an effective manner.

A number of EI measures have been implemented through Canada's economic action plan, which seeks to help Canadian workers and their families cope with the impact of the current world economic downturn. This has resulted in a number of improvements to EI involving longer benefits, more efficient service and more support for training.

These measures include providing five extra weeks of EI regular benefits, increasing the maximum duration of benefits as well as protecting jobs through extended and more flexible work-sharing agreements. In addition, the career transition assistance initiative is providing assistance for long-tenured workers who need training to transition to a new industry.

We introduced Bill C-50, extended weeks of benefits for those long-tenured workers, which passed through the House earlier this week.

This is proof positive of the government's commitment to ensure that EI programs will continue to provide Canadians with the temporary income support needed to make ends meet, while they look for another job, and help workers adjust to labour market changes and balance work and family responsibility.

These are some of the measures being taken up by this government to help Canadians cope with the unprecedented world economic downturn.

Recognizing the importance of this issue, fairness for the self-employed, I will vote for the bill so self-employed Canadians can get the assistance and support they need. I urge other members of the House to do likewise.

• (1610)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to note that when we discussed Bill C-50, dealing with long-tenured workers, the government had actual statistics or figures that it could give us. It projected that Bill C-50 would affect 190,000 people and that it would cost roughly \$1 billion.

I ask the member to provide us similar statistics for this bill. Surely before the government would introduce a bill of this type, it would have some projections as to how many people might be affected by this initiative and how many people are expected to apply in year one, two, three and year five.

I understand it will be a self-financing program, but if it is not, how will the shortfalls be made up?

Could the member tell us why the government has not released details similar to the same type of details it released in Bill C-50 just two weeks ago?

**Mr. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, the fact is it is optional for the self-employed to buy into this program.

*Government Orders*

We have about 2.6 million self-employed Canadians. Overwhelmingly, when polled, they wanted this program. They have interest in it: 86% are interested in sickness, 85% in compassionate care, 64% in parental benefits and 62% of women are interested in the maternity benefits that this can offer.

Frankly, right now we do not know the numbers. We anticipate many of those 2.6 million will opt into this program. However, until the program gets going, we will not know how many, but we definitely anticipate many of them will. Many are interested in this program. It can help so many of them with their businesses and will allow them to balance business and family.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I like the many aspects of the bill. I hope it will be sent to committee, debated and refined in committee.

I have one concern, however. On matters of EI, we have seen time and again from the government misinformation on the actual numbers. It was in response to a question for the parliamentary secretary just last week. He stated in the House that the rates per \$100 on EI, the premiums charged businesses actually went up during the tenure of past Liberal governments. That is absolutely and positively wrong. When we took over in 1993, it was at \$3.18 and it was on its way up. Now it is down to \$1.72, so that is a false statement.

What we hope for, and I hope the member can assure us of this, is the numbers coming forward before we vote on this are true numbers. Does he not understand fully that the numbers the parliamentary secretary cited were absolutely wrong?

**Mr. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, what is clear is the number of self-employed Canadians who actually need the bill and it is the reason we brought the bill forward. It was a commitment by the government, a commitment by the Prime Minister and a promise made to self-employed Canadians, because we believe that self-employed Canadians should not have to choose between family and their businesses.

Self-employed Canadians include small business owners, farmers, construction workers, professionals, realtors and those who have small businesses at home. More important, according to Statistics Canada, from 1976 to 2008, the number of self-employed men in Canada roughly doubled from 873,000 to over 1.7 million, but the number of self-employed women nearly tripled over the same period, going from some 300,000 to over 900,000.

The bill would help Canadians across all of Canada, and especially help women to balance work and family.

• (1615)

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton for his excellent remarks about the bill, which would continue to serve the needs of workers, especially those who are self-employed in Canada.

I would like to have him comment about the Liberals new-found zeal for the unemployed. As he knows, Bill C-50, a government bill that is presently in the Senate, is providing additional support for long-tenured workers, in other words, those who have worked for many years without drawing on the employment insurance system and have suddenly found themselves out of work. We are making

that system even more robust in providing additional benefits to those long-tenured workers. Unfortunately the Liberals, when their feet were held to the fire and they were asked to vote for the unemployed, voted against that legislation.

Perhaps my colleague could comment on how he perceives this inconsistency between how the Liberals speak in the House and then act when they are asked to vote on support for the unemployed.

**Mr. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said that the Liberals say one thing and then vote in a totally different direction and really let Canadians down. Canadians are lucky to have a government that is supporting them, especially the long-tenured workers. So many Canadians have asked for this. They need it. We have added extra weeks onto EI, and now this bill would allow self-employed Canadians to benefit from EI special benefits.

Even in the arts and culture community, Ferne Downey, the national president of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists, said:

This is a positive first step by the federal government and so we are urging all parties to support the extension of parental leave benefits to all workers.

These are Canadians across the country urging the opposition to support the bill so we can help them.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is often said that when a member speaks in this place or outside of this place, they are taking a risk because their integrity is being judged at every moment.

Previously a member asked the member directly about the information he gave about EI premiums increasing during the last Liberal government. The fact is, as the member knows, from 1993 there was a constant decrease, year after year, in EI premiums.

So I will ask the member very directly, would he please check his facts and affirm to the House what the truth is?

**Mr. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians want to know the truth about where all those EI premiums went to during the Liberal tenure, when they were in government for so many years.

For 13 years when the Liberals were in government, self-employed Canadians had asked for this bill, asked for provisions to help them, asked for an extension to EI. They did not get anything under the Liberal government. This government made a promise and we kept the promise.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Bill C-56 is great news for self-employed workers. It was utterly unfair that, in the past, only those who worked for other people's organizations have been able to collect employment insurance and parental benefits, while putting in an equal amount of work and paying taxes.

*Government Orders*

It is vitally important that all Canadians are able to find a balance between work and family. Extending maternity, parental, and compassionate care benefits to self-employed Canadians will mean that they will be better able to care for their families.

Perhaps the member could comment on how self-employed workers across this country would be allowed access to these benefits just like other Canadians.

• (1620)

**Mr. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question, her comments, and hopefully for her and her party's support for this bill.

I was speaking in my riding to members of the Sherwood Park and District Chamber of Commerce and they were saying how much they appreciate this, especially women and also new Canadians. Many new Canadians have built up businesses, have come into this country and invested, and they really would appreciate getting these EI benefits as well, just like other workers.

This bill is good news for all Canadians.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I waited patiently to participate in this debate on Bill C-56 at second reading. I had, in my mind, planned to talk about certain things, but following the debate, I am going to start off by going in a different direction and then I hopefully will have enough time to make the points I wanted to make about the merits or the demerits of the bill.

We are elected to come to this House with the intent of trying to bring forth legislation. Ideas and suggestions are tabled here and in committee to improve the lives of our people in good times and in difficult times. Our country today is going through some difficult times. There is high unemployment, and the economy is hitting rock bottom.

We eliminated the \$42 billion deficit. We provided \$100 billion in tax relief, the highest in Canadian history. Unemployment went from 11.3% or 11.4% in 1993 to 6.1% or 6.2% when we left government in 2006. People were working. There was confidence in the nation.

I want to go back to a couple of questions that were asked of the previous speaker, who is from the Conservative Party, the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park. He was asked one question by two members of the Liberal team: first by our whip, the member for Cape Breton—Canso; and the same question again by the member for Mississauga South.

One might ask why two Liberal members would ask the same question.

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Where is the \$45 million?

**Mr. John Cannis:** I will tell him where the \$45 million is. If he is patient enough, I will tell him where the \$45 million went and I will tell him where his party blew \$70 billion.

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Where did the adscam money go?

**Mr. John Cannis:** I will tell him that too, absolutely.

Mr. Speaker, I do not mind being harassed. The problem is, when they hear the facts, they cannot take it. The fact is that the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park, who was asked a similar question,

was intellectually dishonest with his response. I know I can use that word. Why? The member for Cape Breton—Canso and the member for Mississauga South asked him a very simple question. Were the EI premiums, under Liberal administration, ever increased? In those 13 years that we served in government, did they go, as the member for Cape Breton—Canso clearly stated, from \$3.18 per \$100 to the \$1.72 per \$100 that it is today, saving employers and employees just over \$14 billion?

Why could he not be honest enough and say, yes, they did go down? The Liberal member, and I have to stress, the good Liberal member for Cape Breton—Canso, simply asked a question. Where did the money go? Why did the parliamentary secretary mislead this House? If this Reform, now called Conservative, Party wants us to co-operate, the least thing they could do is be honest with us.

For example, the other day, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development was on television being asked questions about Bill C-52 and she really could not give answers. All she said was, "We will see" or "We do not know".

It reminds me of what Kim Campbell said before the 1993 election. She said to reporters that she was not going to answer the questions then, she would answer them after the election.

No, Canadians are not stupid. Canadians want to know now, before they make decisions. That is why we are asking these questions.

The member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park talked about entrepreneurs and independent business people, the self-employed. An independent entrepreneur, an independent business person does not become a self-employed independent because he wants to become unemployed. He is an independent entrepreneur because he wants to continue earning a good living to support his family and his surroundings.

An independent business person, a self-employed person, does not become self-employed because he wants to become unemployed to collect EI.

• (1625)

My father, God rest his soul, told me a story as I was growing up. He said that when he went out looking for work he did not ask how much the job paid. He simply wanted to work. He was not concerned about how much EI would pay, he was concerned about whether there was work.

A self-employed person does not become self-employed because he plans to be unemployed. He plans to be gainfully employed for as long as he can.

Catherine Swift of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said that the bill makes it voluntary for self-employed Canadians who want to opt in and it fixes a "glaring gap" in the program.

The government cannot give us statistics such as who, how many, what the uptake is going to be, what the cost is going to be, et cetera.

*Government Orders*

I do not know what the gap is all about that Ms. Swift is talking about, because what is going to happen is that the people who are working are going to be taxed. We know that because hidden in the government's budget—

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Be truthful.

**Mr. John Cannis:** I am being truthful, Mr. Speaker. The member can read it if he would like to. I will get him the page number.

The truth is that the government has inserted in its economic stimulus package close to \$15.5 billion in EI premium increases. When the current Prime Minister was in opposition, when he was actually just a member of Parliament before he became the leader of the Reform, the Alliance, and then the Conservative Party, he said that a tax, EI, is a job killer, that it destroys jobs. That is on record. It can be seen on video and can be researched today with the technology that we have.

What did the Liberals do? We listened to employers in 1993 who said that if we lowered EI premiums they would invest in hiring. That was one of the first things we did. It is in our red book and people can look that up.

Year after year the Liberals lowered EI premiums, as the member for Mississauga South and the member for Cape Breton—Canso pointed out earlier. For the record, that reduction totalled over \$14 billion.

Prior to being elected in 1993, I ran my own company as an independent entrepreneur for almost 20 years. I went to work to build my company, employ people, pay their EI premiums, their OHIP premiums, and their Canada pension premiums. I felt it was my obligation as an employer to provide a platform whereby they had something to fall back on in case there were some difficult times such as layoffs, job losses, et cetera. Having been an employer, I do know first-hand.

Let me clarify this. As an officer of the company, I was not eligible to pay into EI. Quite frankly, I did not want to pay into EI, because that was a demotivating factor for me. It was as though I would have been paying into EI because I planned to be unemployed. It was a different story for my employees.

We are trying to change that today. What is strange here is that there has been no analysis done. Nobody knows. We do know that once the legislation would receive royal assent, people could apply. They would have to pay for one year prior to being eligible to receive benefits.

Unless this bill is really fine-tuned and all the bugs are clearly addressed, I am concerned that this legislation will be abused.

I am not picking on the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park, but he said that the Conservative government made a promise, and now it is doomed; it is keeping it.

• (1630)

I do not want to say it is too little too late, although it is too little too late.

Three and half to four years ago, when the Conservatives took over with their first minority government, we and all the economists

said that we were headed for trouble and difficult times. The economists said to that administration and to this administration the second time around that it has to do certain things. But no, the Conservatives said, "Don't worry, be happy. Everything is fine. There is no recession. We are not going to go into deficit. Everything is hunky-dory. Everything is okay".

Sure it was okay because when the Conservatives assumed government after the first election, the Liberals had left a surplus of \$13.2 billion.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Now what do we have?

**Mr. John Cannis:** That is a good question. Mr. Speaker, I will tell the House what we have now. The government is now projecting a \$56 billion deficit.

The Conservatives had a \$13.2 billion surplus, money left over after we had paid our bills, after we had paid our expenses, after Canada had met its obligations. Now we are into a \$56 billion deficit. If we add those two figures, we have a \$70 billion turnaround in three years. No wonder Canadians are asking where the \$70 billion went.

A friend of mine said to me a couple of weeks ago that Brian Mulroney in nine years added about \$20 billion to \$21 billion to the deficit. That is over nine years. If the Conservatives have left us with a \$70 billion deficit in three years, times three, nine years down the road, God forbid if they are in government, we are going to have a \$210 billion deficit.

**An hon. member:** Unbelievable.

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable indeed. It is not our generation that is going to pay. It is our kids, our grandkids and our great-grandkids who will pay.

We laboured and sacrificed in 1993, not on the backs of Canadians, but we put our house in order. Then what did we do? We returned it back to the system by providing EI premium relief, over \$14 billion year after year after year. Those are the facts.

We have shown co-operation on other pieces of legislation. If the Conservatives want us to co-operate, we must deal with facts, not innuendoes. When they are asked a question, let them respond with the facts.

When the parliamentary secretary was asked a question, as the member for Cape Breton—Canso said, why did he not respond with the facts? He misled the House by saying that the employment insurance premiums supposedly went up. That was not accurate. That was not correct. That was false information. I think I can use that word. We are always trying to be very polite and professional in this environment.

I wanted to speak to the bill for various reasons. One was to set the record straight. I also wanted to speak as a former independent entrepreneur. My company was not a big company. I employed 23 or 24 people. We were there for 20-some years. We provided an environment where people could earn a living and provide for their families. We were more than happy to contribute to the system that provided the foundation for a strong safety net.

*Government Orders*

I am trying in my own way to understand this safety net. If there was going to be an undertaking to help the unemployed, and we were beginning to see what was happening in the United States of America several years ago, and the government literally did nothing, today we are bringing forth a system, for what? These people who are unemployed have already taken the hit.

• (1635)

It is shameful because once this individual who is unemployed, this woman, man or young person, gets a job as an independent entrepreneur, what is the individual going to do? First, the individual has to find a job as whatever, an accountant, a computer programmer, a painter, a plumber or whatever, and then the individual will pay EI premiums. Why? With the intent that he or she might be unemployed a year and a half down the road? I do not think that is the individual's intent.

Right now, I am of the opinion that it is too little too late. If this legislation is to work, and judgment is still out there for this piece of legislation, it should have been done three and a half years ago when the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park said the Conservatives promised it. I do not dispute that they promised it. I do not remember, but I will take his word for it that they did promise it. But if they did promise it, why did they wait for three years to bring forth this legislation?

Preventive maintenance are words used in the computer industry, or let us take care of ourselves so that we do not get sick and need medication or surgery. We knew the tide was coming. We could see it. All the economists were telling us. The big question I have is, why did the government not undertake to bring in this legislation three years ago so that the people who are unemployed today, the people in small business, the entrepreneurs they are trying to protect would have some protection today? Today they have zero protection, nothing. Even on regular EI, we had to fight like crazy to get them to help these people now.

Had that \$13.5 billion been there and had it been invested properly, as opposed to spending \$100 million in advertising that we are seeing every day on billboards, et cetera, money that is being literally wasted—

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Trains.

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, you name it, buses, trains, the whole gamut.

In conclusion, all I can say is that I will support anything that will help improve the life of any Canadian. I just do not have a good feeling that this legislation, as it is written, will solve this problem. I have not been convinced. Maybe when it goes to committee, amendments could be brought forward and it could be worthwhile for the future. The concern we have is what we can do for the unemployed today.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I do not say this often, but I would like to congratulate the government for bringing in a bill that is timely and important for Canadians.

On March 10 in the House, we adopted a motion on employment insurance that was proposed by the New Democrat member for Hamilton Mountain. Among other things, that motion called on the

government to allow self-employed workers to participate in the EI plan. It does no violence to our cause here to say that we have long championed the extension of benefits to the self-employed, and I congratulate the government on recognizing that.

In this country there are 2.6 million Canadians who report some income from self-employment. For a large majority, it is the sole source of their income. The share of self-employed in the labour force has been stable over the past decade at 15%, and over 75% earn less than the maximum insurable income. This bill will help our country's artists, taxi drivers and truck drivers, tradespeople, small retailers and farmers, and it will disproportionately help women in this country. That is very important in these economic times and the New Democrats are very strongly in support of helping these people.

My question for the hon. member is, after being in power for 13 years with three successive majority governments, why did his government not extend benefits to self-employed workers?

• (1640)

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, unlike the new NDP government, after 60 years we refuse to tell people what they want to hear. We tell people what they should hear.

The NDP could promise pie in the sky knowing they could never deliver. They had their chance in the 2005 budget when there was money for the environment, money for housing, money for students, et cetera, and the NDP blew that chance by betraying Canadians and joining forces with the current Prime Minister. All that money went down the drain.

Let me give the hon. member the answer, because he talked about supporting truck drivers and taxi drivers. A truck driver and a taxi driver do not go to work with the intent of being unemployed. Those people go to work every day diligently to earn a living and support their families. He asked why we did not do it. During our tenure we created over 3.5 million jobs. Canadians were not in need of these programs because Canadians were working. The nation was confident. Money was being generated. The books were balanced. That is why Canada was the number one country in the world then, unlike today, where I think it has dropped to second or third.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the things the Conservatives keep talking about is the idea that we did not support Bill C-50 for the extension of weeks. I would like to point out to them that in 2004 with respect to a similar matter, a five-week extension, they voted against that, so therein lies yet another backflip. It is unbelievable in this situation because now all of a sudden there seems to be this self-effacing realization that EI is the way that they are going to endear the people of Canada when in fact they have denied all these benefits for so many years. We have bills such as Bill C-50 which could have been done a long time ago. This particular bill, as my hon. colleague from Scarborough Centre pointed out, they could have done a while ago. Now all of a sudden they keep forcing these people into doing what they promised they would do.

*Government Orders*

My colleague is an independent businessman and I respect him for it. He is a great man. He is a great speaker, hours of entertainment if nothing less than that. I mean, the man is just so diligent it is unbelievable. I am not even being paid to say these things. If I lived in his riding, I would campaign beyond belief.

I want the member to tell the House about his experience as an independent businessman and just how the Conservative government is trying to pull the wool over our eyes by pretending to be a compassionate voice of EI.

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. If the government were a compassionate government, it would have kept the promise that we were told about by the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park three years ago. If the government really felt for Canadians, it would not be increasing the EI premiums, which is in its books, to the tune of \$15.5 billion. It is on record. If the government were compassionate, it would work with the rest of us, but every time we go into committee, for example, there is always an obstacle here and an obstacle there, some kind of stumbling block.

When it comes to the well-being of Canadians and the nation, earlier today we spoke about our veterans, past and present. There was one united voice and all parties spoke from the heart. That is how we have to approach this type of legislation, for the good of the country. Bill C-52 and the Conservatives' initiative on these areas is pure politicking right now.

• (1645)

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my question relates to a specific situation. An independent business person, a small renovation contractor who employs six people finds out that one of his four children has a severe illness and has to be hospitalized for two years for treatment, and of course, the impact that would have on the business person's ability to be with the son, to be compassionate. The husband and wife work in the business and did not have the opportunity to contribute into a plan that could cover off some of the lost income for one of the spouses.

How would the member respond to that situation for an individual in those circumstances, where a business person is not able to have the type of insurance needed in those kinds of situations?

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question and I will respond first by asking what took the Conservatives so long to bring forth this legislation.

As a former independent business person I will tell the member and everyone else that there are policies and programs that we do purchase through insurance. For example, as a former officer and director of the company, I was not allowed by law to pay for any of these benefits, but I purchased additional benefits should unforeseeable and difficult circumstances arise. The renovation contractor also has that option. Independent business people have various options for various writeoffs, whether it be a car, lunches, et cetera, which the average person does not. There is a trade-off right there.

I close by asking, if members on the Conservative side are so compassionate, what took them so long?

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like a quick follow-up on the previous question because I am not aware, nor have I been aware as a business person my whole life, that we

can purchase private insurance in order to protect our income or be replaced by a program. There are programs, disability programs, for an individual being insured, but there are no programs that I have ever been aware where an individual's loss of income is covered in the circumstance of a child diagnosed with cancer and having to spend two years in cancer treatment at a hospital. Please tell me where we could buy that insurance because this is a real-life example I am talking about today.

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, I would answer the hon. gentleman in two ways.

First, as an individual entrepreneur that we are talking about, what took the government so long?

Second, with respect to the specific example that he is referring to where, unfortunately, a child within the family is sick and one of the parents, who are both working if I understand his example, is in the business. There are programs, in terms of insurance for the individuals, et cetera, but for the child, again, that is something that we should look at because it would fall under unforeseeable circumstances. I do not have the answer. I am answering him on the individual case. We could extend it and extend it, and there would be a never-ending story.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Gatineau, Infrastructure.

[*English*]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Welland.

I want to begin by indicating that New Democrats will be supporting this bill in principle. We have been advocating the need for changes to the Employment Insurance Act, including self-employment, for a very long time, and we look forward to sending this bill to committee in order to consider it fully and recommend some potential changes to the legislation.

For Canadians who may be tuning in, I want to cover some of the key points in this piece of legislation. Many people are self-employed and this will only deal with a very small group of them.

Specifically, this legislation would allow self-employed Canadians to opt into employment insurance programs dealing specifically with maternity benefits, up to a maximum of 15 weeks; parental and adoptive benefits, up to a maximum of 35 weeks; sick leave benefits up to a maximum of 15 weeks; and compassionate care benefits up to a maximum of six weeks. We see this as being a positive step.

*Government Orders*

As other members in the House have pointed out, the member for Hamilton Mountain introduced legislation in the House to deal with some of the issues regarding employment insurance and maternity benefits.

We have heard members in the House speak about the fact that it is about time this bill was introduced. I want to bring to the attention of the House a report from 1999 called “The human face: unemployment insurance”. In those days it was called unemployment insurance. This was a report put together by the member for Acadie—Bathurst. It is probably no surprise to members of the House that the member for Acadie—Bathurst has done very good work for a number of years with respect to employment insurance.

People say it is about time, but in 1999, as a result of a cross-country tour that the member undertook, one of the recommendations was that insurance must be made available to more self-employed workers. In the report he outlined a much broader perspective than just the kinds of special benefits that we are talking about: maternity, paternity, adoptive, compassionate care and sickness benefits. He outlined a proposal that talked about covering self-employed workers in all categories of employment.

When people say it is about time, it is a sad commentary. It has been 10 years since this report was put together that we are finally seeing some movement on employment insurance benefits for self-employed workers.

We have also heard in the House that there are approximately 2.6 million self-employed workers in this country. That is a significant portion of the workforce. We are talking about workers who have no social safety net.

We are talking about workers who, if they fall sick, are “Tough, out of luck”. If they become pregnant or adopt a child, they have to somehow figure out how to make ends meet if they put their business on hold. If they have a child who becomes ill, as the member opposite pointed out, they have to find some other way to cover their expenses when they need that very important family time to look after that sick child.

We are also talking about many self-employed workers who are not self-employed by choice. In an economic downturn, many workers lose their employment. They lose the good paying jobs that they have come to rely on for their families.

In my own riding forestry has taken hit after hit after hit, and many of the workers do not want to collect employment insurance, despite the fact that they have paid into it for many years. They want to work hard, bring home a paycheque, and support their families. What many of these workers do when they lose their employment through no fault of their own is look at how they can make a living in their community through self-employment.

Someone recently came into my constituency office in Nanaimo—Cowichan to talk about that very thing. Sadly, in his case, he was going to be completely out of pocket. He had come up with an idea to put together a company and was doing all of the groundwork around it.

He told the employment insurance office that it was going to take him a little longer to make money and asked if he could apply for

one of the programs that helps self-employed workers. There are some programs that help self-employed workers start up businesses. Sadly, in his case, because he had already gotten involved in starting up this company, because he had already done a significant amount of work, he was not eligible.

Here was a worker attempting to support himself, asking for some assistance from the government, so he could get his business off the ground and because of the very rigid rules in place around employment insurance, he simply was not eligible.

• (1650)

That is just one example of what happens to workers who are self-employed when they are looking for some financial assistance through a bit of a cash crunch. But I want to come back for one moment to some of the other workers who are being forced into self-employment.

Women are particularly disadvantaged. We find that women are often in contract, seasonal, part-time, self-employed work. In fact, women are some of the most significant business-starters in this country. There are significant numbers there. Under our current employment insurance system, women are disadvantaged. Only about a third of women who pay into it actually collect. On the other hand, we have women who are in non-standard employment, as it is called. This non-standard employment often leaves them ineligible to even pay into employment insurance.

Although we welcome these changes that are put before the House in terms of special benefits and the ability of workers to opt in, we would really encourage the government to actually expand how it is looking at self-employed workers to ensure that there is that social safety net there for them.

I want to touch briefly on the fact that New Democrats have consistently called for a significant number of changes to the Employment Insurance Act. We have seen the erosion of employment insurance since the mid-1990s. What we have seen is far fewer workers being able to qualify. We have seen the benefit rates reduced. We have seen the number of weeks that people can collect reduced.

We have seen some other anomalies in the system and I have raised this in this House before. There are problems with how the unemployment rate is calculated in regions, which then directly impacts on the number of weeks of benefits that people can claim.

In my own region, our unemployment rate is tied to the city of Vancouver. Of course, anybody who knows this country knows that Vancouver Island has a very different labour market than the city of Vancouver. It means that workers in my area collect far fewer weeks than the unemployment rate in our area actually would warrant if it were a more reasonable determination.

We know that there are some significant problems with the current employment insurance legislation. We also have heard members in this House speak about EI premiums. We know that over the years, workers and their employers have paid into the employment insurance fund, which used to be the unemployment insurance fund.

*Government Orders*

What we have also known is that this money has been siphoned off to pay down the debt. Some \$54 billion to \$57 billion of workers' and their employers' money has gone not into providing that social safety net, not into providing training and education for workers, not into providing some other benefits that would help an employer become more productive but into the government coffers. I would argue that in any other place, we would probably call that theft.

When people are talking about problems with the employment insurance fund and arguing that somehow or other a small measure for the self-employed is somehow not good enough, I would argue that we should support this measure and actually encourage the government to go further, to ensure that the funds that workers are paying are actually going toward programs that are going to support them and their companies, to look at how we can increase the self-employed benefits, and also at how we look at the overall fund.

I know that there is a lot of good work that has been done both by members of the New Democratic Party and also by the labour movement. I want to touch upon a couple of things that they have proposed in terms of changes that would be helpful with regard to creating a job strategy that ensures people have well-paying jobs and then looking at the social safety net that supports them when they do not have those jobs. One of the aspects I want to focus on very briefly is the fact that we need to ensure that we have well-paying jobs in manufacturing and forestry in this country. There are a couple of ways we can do that.

First of all, we can ensure that we develop sector strategies that look at investments in forestry and manufacturing. We can ensure that the raw resources are processed here in Canada, that they are value added and ensure that we add as much value in order to keep those jobs in our communities. We can also work to prevent plant closures by investing in those plants, helping those companies upgrade equipment, so that they are productive and efficient.

In closing, I urge all members of this House to support this bill at second reading and get it to committee, so that we can have a further discussion around the kinds of changes that we need to see to the employment insurance legislation.

• (1655)

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to have had the opportunity to listen to my colleague's intervention in this debate on Bill C-56 around special EI benefits for the self-employed. One of the things that I found most interesting about her speech was her comments about how this legislation particularly affects women.

We know that women are heavily represented among Canada's 2.6 million self-employed citizens, and that the benefits that are offered by this legislation are often of particular interest to women, certainly the ones regarding maternity benefits and compassionate care benefits. Although we would hope that everybody would share those kinds of responsibilities, we know that women often bear the burden of those kinds of familial responsibilities.

This legislation will directly address the concerns of many self-employed women in Canada and I wonder if she might just expand on that point a little in response to this question. How will this legislation particularly affect Canadian women?

• (1700)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, the member is well aware that generally in the labour market, women are often in what is called non-standard employment. That means that women are often involved in contract employment or in starting up their own businesses. They may have seasonal or part-time employment, which can be insurable employment, but often women are not eligible to collect regular employment insurance benefits even if they have paid the premiums, because they often do not have enough hours since they have not worked enough weeks.

This piece of legislation is particularly attractive because it would allow self-employed women to opt into a system that would at least allow them to claim maternity or adoptive parental leave benefits if they chose to have children or adopt children. This would significantly contribute to women being able to spend some quality time with their children in their very early years. It would be of benefit in terms of encouraging them to continue to be self-employed.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 2.7 million Canadians who are self-employed cannot currently access employment insurance or maternity or parental benefits. Hard-working Canadians deserve access to these services regardless of who they are working for, and it is the government's responsibility to make sure every worker has access.

This bill would make sure that self-employed hairdressers, real estate agents and others would be able to make commitments to their families and to their careers at the same time and sleep easier at night knowing employment insurance was available to them in case of difficult times.

Could the member describe some of the other professions and other Canadians who have been denied employment insurance? What would it mean to them if this bill were passed and they could access maternity and parental benefits?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, people who are self-employed come from almost every walk of life.

One of the things the member for Acadie—Bathurst identified in his 1999 report was the fact that some employers were actually laying off their employees and then contracting them back as self-employed workers. We find that happening in every imaginable occupation.

There are some rules around that. The Canada Revenue Agency determines what is insurable employment and what is not. By the same token, however, there are self-employed workers in every sector.

I would like to emphasize the fact that this bill is a good first step. It would provide workers with access to the special benefits that are currently available under the Employment Insurance Act.

However, I would urge us to take a much broader perspective and look at ways to cover all self-employed workers so that they will not have to worry if the market crashes or if there is an economic downturn, or if they lose their companies through no fault of their own. That way they will know there is an avenue available to them to have some income.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan for splitting her time, and thank all of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party for the work they have done over a great many years on this file regarding unemployment insurance.

I prefer to call it unemployment insurance rather than using the term for the premium collections of the employment insurance system, which finds itself in a dark hole under the current government as it was under the previous one which let \$57 billion slip through its fingers. If a business lost \$57 billion, it would be bankrupt, but it seems that we can spend it in other places and forget about it.

I would also like to be on the record as congratulating my good friend and colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. As my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan said, he has really led the charge in the House to try to make sure that we look at this whole system in its totality. Over the last number of sessions, we have been nibbling away at the edges of the unemployment system.

Basically, we are making this little change and that little change, not that this is a small change for those self-employed workers out there who are looking for compassionate care and maternity, parental and sick benefits. These are important things for those workers out there now, who at one time more than likely had that protection.

As my colleague said, all too many of them, in my riding as well, who once had well-paid manufacturing jobs are now forced into being entrepreneurs. I know that the pulp and paper makers in Newfoundland are faced with the same thing today. It is not because they necessarily want to be entrepreneurs. Eventually, what they have found is that there are no longer employers there to actually employ them, so they find themselves having to go out there.

What happens to them? The government's own document says that over 75% of the self-employed earned less than the maximum insurable earnings. Yet, if we were to look at those honourable workers in the pulp and paper industry up in the north of Newfoundland, the auto workers in southern Ontario and workers across this country, we would find that the bulk of those workers in the manufacturing sector made more than the maximum insurable earnings. They have now been forced into this so-called self-employment scheme. It seems to me it was driven at them when they least expected it and did not want it.

Here we have workers who indeed would have paid into the system for a long period of time, perhaps 20 or 25 years in some cases. We are seeing that type of worker who has worked that length of time forced out of work and forced into self-employment. One of the major training programs through the EI fund used to get a person to open up their own business. One of the major pushes seen inside of it is to go and do that.

For those who truly want to do that, it is a good thing. However, for those who feel forced and compelled to do it because they have no other options, that is a sad thing. It is a sad day in the sense that the government did not bring forward regular benefits for the self-employed, period, including all of these special benefits, as the EI system calls them, and put them together as a whole and made those workers whole like any other workers.

At the end of the day, they are workers. They work at home for the most part, but they are workers. People say that they own their own businesses, set their own standards and set their own times. Perhaps they do, but nonetheless, they work for a living. That is exactly what they do. Ultimately, we should have looked at that in its totality and protected it.

If we are going to review the system, let us review it in its totality and let us make it work as it once did. We have seen that it has been eroded. Unfortunately, it was beginning to be eroded under the Liberal government. I know that my colleagues down there will say, "Not I, not I. I was not here at the time", but certainly, the Liberal Party eroded the system when it was in government. There was a \$57 billion surplus. They could have covered every self-employed worker in this country for regular benefits and special benefits and it would not have made a dent in the \$57 billion surplus. They chose not to.

Now, here we are at a moment in our history where the economy is in desperate straits and workers find themselves on the streets. Self-employed workers who thought that they were going to be able to build a business find themselves unemployed because their businesses have basically failed. We are now saying that maybe we need to build the model now.

I suppose some would say better late than never. The unfortunate part is all those souls who were lost between the time when we could have done it and had the money to do it and today when we are now thinking about doing it for special benefits.

• (1705)

How do we look at all those folks and say to them, "Sorry, we did not do it"?

I think that is a question all of us should ask ourselves. Truly we owed that debt to them and we should have paid it.

Now we need to get on with the work of making this happen. Yes, there are some flaws in the system when it comes to special benefits, and it happens in the regular scheme as well for those we call "employed persons" who work for an employer and have their deductions made at the moment. If they happen to be in an adoption situation they do not get the same time a natural birth mother gets. We do not have that at the moment. They get parental benefits but they do not get the additional 15 weeks.

The government should have included that. It could have used it as the springboard to actually give back to the other workers who worked through the regular employment system and paid regular employment insurance, to make sure that adoptive parents got the whole year off and collected unemployment insurance.

The government should have waived the two weeks. If one is sick, the two-week waiting period should be waived. The person is sick, for heaven's sake.

I can just imagine folks who contract H1N1 and have to be off work because the employer tells them to stay away. They will not get paid for two weeks. They are going to have to wait for those two weeks and they will get nothing for those two weeks.

*Government Orders*

It is all well and good to say one will get 15 weeks' sick time but the reality is they are going to lose the first two. If they are better, they will come back to work. So they are out the two weeks' pay.

I think we should have looked at that as being an opportunity if the government wished to do that. Hopefully we can look at that at committee, because, as some of my colleagues said earlier today, there are some things they would like to see done and some things they would like to see worked on.

When we look at the package, it is incomplete. It is a good first start. As others have said in the House, the government at least brought something forward. The Conservatives said that they promised it in the throne speech and they will take credit for it.

I am glad they heard the member for Acadie—Bathurst and perhaps they read his report before the throne speech and made sure they added it in.

In 1999 when the member did this report we made a pledge to workers to fix the system.

I worked in that system for a long time as an advocate for the unemployed, going back to 1990. I know the type of system that has been developed over the years and the hardships that they face trying to work through the system as it has changed over the years with the amendments to it, through the computerization of it and all of the other intricacies that we have seen over time. It did not work for workers and it should work for workers.

We need to get our heads around the fact that it is the unemployed that we are supposed to be protecting, not the system, not the collection of the money. Those are important to make it self-financing. However, it is about the system of protecting those who work and who, for whatever reasons, find themselves out of work whether because of sickness or because they are at that joyous moment in their life when have decided to have children and indeed they have them, and they want to be with their youngster, as someone said earlier, to hear the first voice, to hear that first word, to see that first step. All of us who have had the great joy of having children know what great occasions those are.

I appreciate the fact that we have changed the system from the days when my wife and I were graced with twins 27 years ago and she got only 15 weeks of maternity benefits. There were no parental benefits in those days. We have moved forward. That is a good thing.

However we have far to go. We could be doing it now. That is the sadness I see here today. Yes, there is a good piece here to work with, but the sadness is how much further we have to go. The fact is the alarm bell was rung 10 years ago by New Democrats when that report was written by the member for Acadie—Bathurst, and we needed to do it then.

Here we are 10 years later and we are still moving along ever so slowly. That is the great sadness I find with the changes in the bill.

I hope my colleagues are absolutely sincere and genuine in what I am hearing them say today, which is that they believe the system needs to be changed in a comprehensive way. I believe that is ultimately what they said.

If they did say that, I hope we will all be working in unison so eventually we will be making a system that truly works for the unemployed, because it is theirs. It belongs to them. They paid for it. It does not belong to the House. It belongs to the workers of this country and they ought to have what they have demanded of us which is a system that works for all of them under which they are all treated equally.

● (1710)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague mentioning the situation in Newfoundland and Labrador, certainly when it comes to Abitibi.

Would he illustrate why, with this fundamental legislation, and other legislation, such Bill C-50, it is important to do something else in addition? A lot of that has to focus on upfront benefits, such as less hours and the two-week waiting period about which he spoke so passionately. I agree this should be considered. However, in this situation, the government has done all of it on the back end and it has done it piecemeal over the past year and a half. Now all of a sudden it is in a situation where it is forced into providing benefits all in the back end, nothing upfront.

Could the member illustrate, and perhaps he can allude to the study that was done by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, and talk about what needs to be done with regard to EI legislation on the front end of enabling people to find additional income?

● (1715)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. We have a gaping hole in the system. We can point fingers at folks and say that they created this hole and we have to fix it, but I will not comment on that now. However, the hole is there, and we recognize it. Congratulations to all who have recognized that. Now, let us stop trying to paper it over. Let us stop taking those little sticky notes one by one and slapping them up against that hole. Let us fix the hole.

We all understand there is a hole in the system, so let us come together, as a minority Parliament, and let's fix it. That is what it is about, working together in unison, understanding what is wrong with the system, understanding the hardship that Canadians are facing when they are unemployed and when they are sick. We know what it will take to fix it, so let us do that in the spirit of co-operation. Let us stand shoulder to shoulder and tell them that we understand their hardship, that we understand what we need to do, and let us simply do it.

A comprehensive review would fix the hole. Papering it over will only mean the hole will come back because each bit of paper will finally fall off that hole.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Welland. I know he has spent a lifetime in the service of helping working people of all types, and I view the bill before us today to be a further step in that regard.

*Private Members' Business***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

● (1720)

*[English]***FAIRNESS FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Person with Disabilities.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 33(2), government orders shall conclude today at 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, I further ask that you see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

*[Translation]*

**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.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***CRIMINAL CODE**

The House resumed from September 30 consideration of the motion.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this motion. I will, for the record, read the motion since I am the first to speak this afternoon. It states:

The most positive thing about the bill is revealed when we focus on what it would actually do. The bill would allow self-employed people to take time off for maternity, to take time off for parental duties, to take time from the business when they are sick and to take time off for compassionate leave, which would allow them to look after a critically ill family member. These are important social issues in our country that I think all of us should join together and support. Just because people are self-employed does not mean they do not have a right or a need to engage in these kinds of activities.

Would my hon. colleague focus on the specific benefits that the bill would provide for people, and is that important to the people in his riding and to Canadians across the country?

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that in Welland these are absolutely important benefits. When this is passed, and hopefully it will, the fact that one can get compassionate benefits, can access sick benefits and can get parental and maternity benefits is hugely important to those folks who never before were able to get them.

My colleague from Scarborough Centre at one point talked about the fact that they could buy insurance, and I appreciate that. However, quite often individual entrepreneurs working in the home are unable to afford insurance premiums to insure themselves in case they get sick, and a lot of women who become self-employed work from their own houses. Therefore, what do they do when they get sick?

As we know, if they happen to have young children, mothers get sick more often than anyone else because young kids bring everything under the sun home. That is the nature of being a youngster. They go to school and everybody else shares. They share the hat, they share a cold, they share a cough. I see my hon. member has a cold and hopefully he will not share that with the rest us.

At the end of the day, that is what happens. We need to ensure they get the benefits. They deserve to have those benefits. They have a right. We ought to ensure it happens.

**ROYAL ASSENT***[English]*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall  
Ottawa

November 5, 2009

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bill listed in the schedule to this letter on the 5th day of November 2009, at 4:19 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila-Marie Cook  
Secretary to the Governor General

The schedule indicates the bill assented to was Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and to increase benefits—Chapter 30.

*Private Members' Business*

That, in the opinion of the House, for greater certainty, the government should take steps to ensure that counselling a person to commit suicide or aiding or abetting a person to commit suicide is an offence under section 241 of the Criminal Code, regardless of the means used to counsel or aid or abet including via telecommunications, the Internet or a computer system.

This area is complex and there would be issues in prosecuting such an offence and obtaining a conviction. However, from a public policy point of view, I am prepared to support the motion and vote in favour of it. As is contained within the motion, it is now part of the Criminal Code, pursuant to section 241, but the motion asks for that particular section to be further clarified.

Suicide is a difficult issue to deal with and I do not think anyone who does not come from a family that has experienced it really cannot imagine the difficulty that would ensue. The causes and contributing factors are numerous and I suggest is ill understood by society as a whole. Each person is unique. There is no single reason and the circumstances are extremely complex.

In any situation where individual residents of Canada are contemplating such an act, I suggest they need assistance but not with engaging in the act itself. That is the underlying purpose of section 241 of the Criminal Code.

I would also suggest that mental health issues are predominant factors. We are talking about an area of health care that is probably the least understood of known illnesses. Though I believe that as a society we know more now than we did 10 or 15 years ago, we have an obligation to become more aware, knowledgeable, responsive and perceptive.

I support zero tolerance on this issue. We should not in any way get on the slippery slope. As a society, we should send a very clear message that any action contemplated or envisaged in this motion by section 241 of the Criminal Code should clearly not in any way be sanctioned by society. In fact, any action that aids, abets or counsels any person in the act of suicide should be subject to criminal sanctions.

I understand the mover has been prompted by the Nadia Kajouji case. I have read the media reports on that case. It is extremely disturbing. A lot of people ask why charges were not laid. I do not know all the facts or why charges were not laid. Obviously there were some interjurisdictional issues that had to be dealt with and it appeared to me maybe some mental health issues with the person who committed the alleged offence.

Most states have similar legislation in the United States, although my research found that prosecutions are extremely rare. It is not an easy area to prosecute, but that does not allow us as parliamentarians or makers of the law to shy away from this issue. In fact, the opposite I suggest is true.

The present section 241 reads:

Every one who

- (a) counsels a person to commit suicide, or
- (b) aids or abets a person to commit suicide,

whether suicide ensues or not, is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years.

● (1725)

It is there, but this motion would broaden it. It would go into electronic communications, the Internet, and so on.

We as members of this House should support the motion and let it proceed for further study. If there is any way that section 241 can be enhanced or strengthened to give police and prosecutors more tools to go after anyone who would commit such an act, then I stand here today in support of it.

My remarks are going to be fairly limited. I just went over what I think of this particular motion. It is something that the House should support. From a public policy point of view, it makes sense. It is complex. It is a little complicated. When we get into anything with the Internet and criminal prosecutions, it can become complicated. We are not into a simple matter but, on the other hand, it is not an issue we should shy away from.

For those reasons, I will be supporting the motion when it comes to a vote.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I will begin my comments by thanking the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for raising this important issue.

As the previous speaker has mentioned, we have a case here where there are provisions within the Criminal Code, but as we have seen, technologies change. We have also seen the need to adapt our laws to conform to the changes we have seen in technologies.

I think that what we see here is an attempt to address clearly what is an area in the law where we need to buttress the law to acknowledge that there are changes within our society that have to do with technological advances that have affected our social outcomes.

I am going to spend some time commenting on someone who has already been mentioned by the previous speaker and who is the motivating factor for this law. The person who I will be referring to is Nadia Kajouji. Sadly, Nadia took her life at the young age of 18. She was a person who was attending Carleton University, which is in my riding. Her case seized this community.

When she went missing, many of us were seized with the fact that she had not been found. There was a search for her. People searched for her for about 40 days. This involved, of course, her parents and family. What we found was her body. It washed up on the shores of the Rideau River, in fact, just a block from where I live.

If we go to the end of Clegg Street in old Ottawa East, not far from here, and go to where the street and river meet, today we can see a memorial to Nadia. It is a memorial that people have gone to, friends and family, to write personal notes and reflections about Nadia, about their love for Nadia, and their concerns about her life being taken too early.

Nadia's case and her situation was one which I think we should all pay attention to. Nadia was 18 years old. She was a young university student. She was deeply isolated, not to mention the fact that she had issues of depression. She was deeply isolated in a context where she was surrounded by people, but she was not able to have people around her that she felt comfortable with and trusted to reach out to at the time.

What this motion is trying to address is how people who are vulnerable can be protected from people who are manipulative. What we found, after her body was found, was that Nadia had committed suicide. However, she had been counselled to do so by someone who was pretending to be a nurse, a woman, online, who had counselled Nadia to take her life.

After the investigation ensued, it was learned that the person who was supposedly a woman nurse online turned out to be an impostor, and he was a male. He had taken advantage of Nadia's vulnerability, and it was not the first time.

From the testimonies we have been able to read, and there have been media reports, Nadia had gone through a lot. She was depressed, as I mentioned. She had some really difficult issues. She had not been able to find the resources and support that someone at her age with her needs was in need of, but she did reach out, as many young people do, online to find some help, some support.

● (1730)

Sadly, she found it in someone who was manipulative and had something else in mind, and ultimately it cost her her life.

The approach of the motion is to acknowledge the fact that these are real issues that are affecting people. We know that many young people are deeply isolated, and that the only way they seem able to relate or to find support is through that virtual world that has been constructed. We also note that many people use that forum, that medium, to manipulate.

Throughout Nadia's struggle with her depression, it should also be noted that it was difficult for her family to know. There are other issues around her case that need to be dealt with as well, and having talked to Nadia's brother Mark, there is more to be done particularly for young people on university campuses who find themselves away from home, young, isolated and troubled by many different issues.

It was clear that when Nadia was trying to reach out, the use of the Internet and reaching out to people who are not connected to her directly is something that we need to understand a little better.

The person who is alleged to have instructed her to take her life, it was noted, was known to have done this before. The gentleman is 47 years old. He was presenting himself as Cami D online. He was posing as a young woman. He formed a suicide pact with Nadia. Allegedly this happened before with this particular person.

There was a disciplinary record of this person as a nurse. Notwithstanding that, this person was allowed to continue practising nursing in Minnesota for more than a decade and a half after being disciplined. It was also alleged that this person was abusing patients. There was clearly a pattern here and there was much concern around those with whom he had contact about his stability. This person

### *Private Members' Business*

clearly had a record. Unfortunately, he ended up being the person with whom Nadia ended up connecting.

This is a complex issue. We need to understand better how technologies are being used, who is using them, and to what end. We will see here an attempt to try to update the Criminal Code.

In the case of Nadia, this particular person has not been charged. I do not know how Nadia's family is coping with that. I know that they are strong. I know that they are working together and supporting each other, but if a parent had evidence that someone counselled his or her daughter to take her life and that there were no consequences for that person, having had a pattern of doing this before, that parent would want to see something done.

As I have mentioned, I have talked with the family and I have talked to Mark. He is not interested in vengeance. He is not interested in revenge. However, he is interested in justice and he is interested in making sure that Nadia's life was not in vain. I think the House and this Parliament can deal with part of that equation. We should look at what happened, vis-à-vis Nadia's life, the taking of her life, and how it ended up that way. We should take a look at the Criminal Code, how it relates to technology, and how it relates to people who are counselling others to take their lives.

● (1735)

I will finish by saying that it is in those of us who are left to carry on life that we must remember those who have passed, and it is in seeking justice that those who have been laid to rest will be able to rest in peace. I hope that we see fit to make amendments to the Criminal Code to make sure that happens for Nadia and her family.

● (1740)

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to add my support to the motion presented by my friend and colleague, the member for Kitchener—Conestoga. It deals with a very serious issue that is every parent's worry, and should anything happen, their worst nightmare: the loss of a child, particularly if it is as a victim to a predator, and in the case of this motion, an Internet predator.

As the father of five children from six to 20 years of age, I can say that this is a very real concern. As responsible parents, we do everything in our power to protect our children from the dangers of the world in which we live. In the early years when our children are young, while we must remain vigilant, the task of ensuring the safety of our children is relatively straightforward.

We are able to set limits on the time of day our children are outside, where they play, who their friends are and with whom they spend time. We are able to limit their access to technology such as the Internet and we are able to filter out much of what might harm our children.

However, as our children grow older into youth and young adulthood, they become more independent. They travel further from home and they have access to all types of technology. It is important to note, however, that even though our children are older, they are still vulnerable, which is why as parents we still worry.

*Private Members' Business*

[Translation]

One major concern has to do with Internet usage. This technology has become an essential tool in today's society. Although the Internet offers us new opportunities in the areas of information, education, entertainment and communication, it also provides some degree of anonymity to people who want to harm our children.

Thanks to the Internet, our children can have conversations with people far, far away, including strangers who might have very dubious intentions, despite the fact that our children are physically at home or somewhere thought to be safe.

As responsible parents, my wife and I always try to carefully supervise our children's use of the Internet, but we also recognize that it is not always easy. In many families, both parents work, so they cannot possibly always be at home when their children go on the Internet.

In many cases, children even have computers in their bedrooms, and as we have seen recently, when Internet predators come along, the consequences can be devastating.

I am sure all members here will recall the tragic death of Nadia Kajouji, a young student of 18, who took her own life here in Ottawa after a man from Minnesota encouraged her over the Internet to commit suicide. It was a terrible act that sounded the alarm and worried parents across Canada.

[English]

As parents, we had already seen the risks posed by online sexual predators, and Parliament moved ahead by adopting tougher laws to outlaw the luring of children over the Internet. It is also important to note that, in order to better protect our children against sexual predators, our Conservative government moved ahead by raising the age of sexual consent from 14 years of age to 16 years of age.

I am glad that fellow members of Parliament realized the importance of protecting our children and that we worked together to move forward with better legislation to protect them, but there is still a lot more to do. It is becoming much more apparent to Canadians that dangerous people often use the Internet to prey on our innocent and vulnerable youth.

Our youth, who during a difficult time in their lives might typically turn to people they love and trust for support, sometimes seek the anonymity of the Internet and confide in people who do not really know them. The grave concern is that this same anonymity that hides their own identity also hides the identity of dangerous manipulators who seek to take advantage of them and the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves.

In this one case I mentioned, the person who allegedly encouraged Ms. Kajouji to commit suicide was actually a man in his 40s, even though he claimed to be a woman of the same age. This individual is said to have had the morbid fantasy of seeing this poor young woman kill herself online for his pleasure and for the entire world to see.

● (1745)

[Translation]

Nadia Kajouji was only 18. She had just started her studies at Carleton University and had her whole life ahead of her. However, despite her good marks and large circle of friends in her hometown of Brampton, Nadia suffered from a serious illness, as do many people, with symptoms that were not apparent to her family and friends. She suffered from depression, a dangerous condition that can lead to suicide, the second leading cause of death in young adults in Canada.

I had the opportunity to meet with her mother, Deborah, here in Parliament and believe me, it was not easy for her to hear the facts because most parents do not expect it. Children do not always admit to their parents that they are depressed.

[English]

Like many victims of depression, Nadia turned to the Internet for support, for advice, for interaction with people who were in the same situation in which she found herself. In other words, she turned to the Internet looking for help. Unfortunately, those looking for help are often those who are the most vulnerable to being taken advantage of. The sad reality is that there are a number of predators with sinister motives who seek out those who are vulnerable. In this case, a man named William Melchert-Dinkel, living almost 2,000 kilometres away, is said to have manipulated her emotions over the Internet, encouraged her to commit suicide, and most unfortunately, her body was found in the Rideau River shortly afterwards.

Our law is very clear with respect to aiding, counselling or encouraging someone to commit suicide. It is illegal and can be punishable with jail time. However, the laws have been on the books long before use of the Internet became so widespread and predators need to know that there are laws that apply very much to them.

[Translation]

Our problem is that the current law, as it is written, makes no reference to acts committed over the Internet. For this reason, I am proud to support the motion of the member for Kitchener—Conestoga, which would amend section 241 of the Criminal Code to better reflect today's reality.

We must do more to protect our children against the dangers lurking on the Internet. Many believe that the law of the land does not apply to the Internet because it is a global network that has no borders. For that reason it is important that we provide clarification by including, in section 241 of the Criminal Code, the Internet and other electronic means as prohibited means of encouraging suicide.

[English]

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for their support of Motion No. 388.

I appreciate the opportunity to address this crucial issue of Internet predators. These individuals presume to be able to hide behind the anonymity of the Internet, all the while carrying out their criminal activities, intent upon coaxing vulnerable youth to throw away the incredible potential that life holds for them.

The current Criminal Code of Canada, in section 241, does make it illegal to counsel someone to commit suicide and provides penalties of up to 14 years of imprisonment for someone convicted of the same. However, the current Criminal Code does not explicitly state that a person who commits an offence under section 241 by means of telecommunications, the Internet or a computer system is also guilty of an offence under that section.

Youth suicide is a troubling matter. Here in Canada it is the second highest cause of death for youth aged 10 to 24. Each year, on average, 294 Canadian youth die from suicide. Motion No. 388 will not stop all youth suicide, nor is it the only initiative that government should consider.

In my research surrounding Motion No. 388, thankfully I have become aware of many great initiatives that seek to give positive help, hope and encouragement to those who struggle. Suicide prevention councils and websites such as YLC, Your Life Counts, are doing great work to help our youth, but they need more resources to address this pressing need.

We have received over 11,000 signatures from Canadians who are asking for changes to our law and for resources to help vulnerable youth. I received a letter from a secondary school in Brampton, which said:

Over 400 members of our student body signed the petition. The number of signatures shows that your fight for those who are unable to speak for themselves is highly supported by the school community.

Our youth are asking us to act.

The challenges of moving into adulthood are immense. During these times, our youth need positive messages of hope and encouragement, not destructive messages by someone lurking with evil intent.

Over a year and a half ago, Nadia Kajouji, a young woman studying at Carleton University right here in Ottawa, sadly ended her life at the encouragement of an Internet predator. The man, who impersonated a young woman in order to deceive Nadia, has admitted to U.S. police that he had used the Internet to coax at least five different people to commit suicide.

A premeditated act with criminal intent is responsible for cutting short the life of a young woman who had begun her studies to pursue a career in law and politics. She never achieved her goals. I have met her mother, her father and her brother, and they are devastated.

Stories like this make it necessary to clarify our laws in order to remove any doubt surrounding the issue of counselling to commit suicide. In our Internet age, we have an obligation to protect vulnerable youth.

Some members of this House and some legal professionals believe that our existing laws already make this behaviour a crime. I would like to believe they are correct, but the predator who drove Nadia to her death remains free without charges. If this crime is already covered under section 241 of Canada's Criminal Code, why have no charges been laid?

There are far too many unanswered questions. There are conflicting reports as to why no charges have been laid. It is my belief that if section 241 explicitly stated that suicide counselling

includes the use of the Internet, there would not have been such a long period of inaction and uncertainty on the part of our law enforcement agencies.

Some members of this House are concerned that by adding the words "including via telecommunications, the Internet or a computer system", we may be inadvertently excluding other methods of suicide counselling. If for greater clarity we add certain current technologies, such as the Internet, will that automatically exclude others? That is a fair question.

These additions that I am suggesting are not meant to be an exhaustive list. Other jurisdictions, such as Australia and a number of the United States, have found ways to avoid that pitfall. By including words such as "including but not limited to", we could make it clear that this motion does not intend to provide an exhaustive list that may inadvertently exclude other methods.

The uncertainty in the current Criminal Code may be the cause for any hesitation on the part of our law enforcement agencies. Therefore, this clarification is needed.

As Nadia's grieving mother noted:

as long as there are predators who believe the Internet is some kind of exclusive sanctuary and as long as there are police officers who believe, for some unwritten reason, that the Internet is not governed by our existing laws, this clarification is very much needed.

I call upon all members to join me in support of Motion No. 388 in order to provide the protection that our youth deserve.

• (1750)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The time provided for debate on this matter has expired.

Accordingly, the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 18, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

[English]

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Madam Speaker, I ask that you seek unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

---

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1755)

[English]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am rising on a question that I raised in the House on June 3 of this year with respect to employment insurance. It was about the fact that the Catalyst Crofton pulp mill was laying off workers and it was in the context of a lot of other forestry sector workers that were being impacted. Specifically, I indicated that there would be no severance package for Catalyst workers and, instead, the employer was negotiating a plan to top up EI benefits, as had been done in Sudbury. I asked the minister to explain whether these sub-plans would trigger clawbacks. It is ironic that I am now raising this question again in the House.

The answer I got from the minister did not indicate what the government would be doing about the clawbacks for these laid-off workers. Since that time things have not been a lot better in the forestry sector, at least in my riding and other parts of British Columbia.

I recently received a letter from the Catalyst - Timberwest Retired Salaried Employees Association indicating that not only did some of them lose their jobs through layoffs, but some of them ended up taking retirement and now their pensions are under threat. As well, they are not getting full entitlement to employment insurance. In its letter of October 26, the association indicated:

Currently both the underfunding of the pension plan and the non-pension benefits are considered unsecured debt, and has one of the lowest claims on funds.

In a letter of October 28, one of the workers said:

I am a retiree of a forestry company in British Columbia. The quarterly financial and economic reports of our Company indicate that it is in a survival mode in an industry that no one is predicting will turn around soon. I am very concerned that the company will seek CCAA or Bankruptcy protection while my pension fund is between 25% and 30% underfunded.

If this occurs, I anticipate losing 25 to 30% of my pension and all of my medical benefits earned while I was working.

I specifically raised the point around employment insurance, but what is becoming increasingly clear is not only do workers not get adequate employment insurance when they are in a temporary layoff, but when they are in receipt of company pensions that they expected would support them for their retirement years, they are also under threat in terms of the pension.

Given the circumstances that many workers in forestry and manufacturing in this country are facing with continuing lack of productivity in the workplace and the uncertainty surrounding economic recovery, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary if the government is entertaining some additional changes to the employment insurance legislation.

We welcome some of the changes that we have seen come forward, certainly, the additional weeks in Bill C-50, and we welcome what is happening with Bill C-56 with respect to employment insurance for self-employed workers in particular categories, but that is simply not enough.

I want to point to some of the things that New Democrats have requested: a reduction in the number of hours that are required to qualify for employment insurance; an increase in the number of weeks; some standardization across this country in the number of weeks to qualify; and an increase in the benefit rate. We know that for many workers the current benefit rate simply does not reflect the cost of living and the reality in many people's communities.

When it comes to the unemployment rate, I have mentioned a number of times in this House that we have had no movement from the government to change it, but the differential rates in calculating benefit rates simply disadvantage communities like mine.

Is the government entertaining future changes to the Employment Insurance Act that would reflect the needs in our communities?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, there is no question this member raised a very technical point during her original question; however, today she speaks more generally.

As she may well know, we have Bill C-50 that would extend benefits by 5 to 20 weeks, which I understand has passed through the Senate and is receiving royal assent, or has. There is Bill C-56 for the self-employed, five extra weeks of benefits across the board, and work-sharing programs. Those are all significant improvements and there is the freezing of the EI rate.

Specifically to the question she raised and in dealing with the situation described especially in her original comments, HRSDC and Service Canada take many steps to help employers and Canadian workers. Whenever there is a threat of a company facing mass layoffs, Service Canada immediately moves in to work with the company, with the employees and with the union, if there is one, to try to reach an agreement that will help all of them get through difficult times.

It may be through work-sharing, a program we have enhanced for Canadians. It may be advising them of potential benefits, including the option for them to continue with long-term work studies so they can upgrade their skills. During this difficult time, the supplemental unemployment benefit program, or SUB as it is known, allows employers to provide top-up payments to claimants who are receiving EI benefits during a period of temporary unemployment, training or illness.

I should explain that one of the main objectives of the SUB program is to stabilize an employer's workforce. The reasoning is that workers will be more inclined to return to work when they are recalled. Moreover, if the claimants do return to their old workplace, they will be avoiding the need to go through the retraining process. So it is a win-win situation for everyone. The program is also designed to mitigate the adverse financial impacts that communities would suffer when massive temporary layoffs occur.

Please be assured that in the event of a temporary layoff, the payments under such plans are not deducted from the claimant's EI benefits nor are the payments during the waiting period. If the layoff is permanent, any employer payments to the claimant to top-up EI benefits would not be considered SUB payments.

The difference is that the workers will not be returning to work for that employer. In such a situation, the employers top-up payments to the EI benefits would be classified as earnings. As such, these earnings would be deducted from the EI benefits that were paid.

I should stress, however, that as a result of the working while on claim pilot project, claimants can earn up to 40% of their EI benefit rate before any deductions are made. This went into force December 2008. I would like to clarify that there is a short time during the mandatory two-week waiting period when there is no allowable amount of earnings. Any earnings during this period are deducted dollar for dollar.

This is the situation in the matter referred to by my colleague in her original question, and is somewhat technical in nature. As members can see, we are doing whatever possible whenever we can to ensure that the claimants do not endure unnecessary hardship. Where possible we try to work with them to make the situation better.

• (1800)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for the clarification on the SUB program because he is absolutely correct, it is very technical in nature.

We were having some concerns from the employees from Catalyst because we simply were not able to get clarification at the local level. The employees at the local level are very good to work for, but this was an usual situation.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary, once again, are there future plans that he is aware of to make some modifications to the employment insurance system? Again, we have many workers who continue to be laid off, many workers who are now running out of employment insurance and are not eligible for some of the other programs.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

Again, in my area, workers are disadvantaged because our unemployment rate is actually tied to the Vancouver labour market. The Vancouver labour market simply does not reflect the realities on Vancouver Island. We would welcome some other changes that looked at some balancing out of the unemployment rates, so that people actually can collect benefits that are reflective of the labour market in their region.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Madam Speaker, obviously we are doing whatever we can to ensure that we can help those who are affected in their workplace. We have done that with skills training and upgrading with \$1.5 billion, on top of \$2.5 billion. We froze EI premiums that will in itself insert about \$10 billion into the economy. Wherever the unemployment rate goes higher, it takes less weeks to qualify for longer benefits.

As I mentioned, Bill C-50 has passed. It adds 5 to 20 weeks of benefits as a bridge to the career assistance plan program. The self-employed will be able to enter the program. There is the five extra weeks we have added across the board, and we have extended the work-sharing program. We have made it more flexible.

We are always monitoring what is happening in the economy. We have been reacting to it as we felt appropriate and reasonable. We will continue to monitor the situation. We will see where it goes from there.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ):** Madam Speaker, in the June 5 issue of *Le Droit*, Jacques Lyrette, vice-president of Développement économique-CLD Gatineau and a former assistant deputy minister in the federal public service who is now a management consultant, said something that is very true: "While the federal government is pouring millions of dollars into the city of Ottawa, its neighbour, Gatineau, is getting nothing but crumbs."

Mr. Lyrette gave specific examples of structural investments the federal government had made in Ottawa in June 2009. It gave \$50 million to the Ottawa Congress Centre, \$17 million to La Cité collégiale, \$30 million to the University of Ottawa, \$26 million to Carleton University and \$150 million for a new green building in downtown Ottawa, but Gatineau got nothing.

The last federal structural investment in Gatineau dates back to 1989. It was the Museum of Civilization, Mr. Lyrette points out. The \$50 billion deficit announced by the federal finance minister could become an \$80 billion to \$85 billion hole. Mr. Lyrette goes on to say, "And then there won't be any more money, because that ship will have sailed. That is what happened in the 1990s with the Conservative government. So what are the current members for Pontiac and Hull—Aylmer doing?"

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The Bloc Québécois agrees with Mr. Lyrette's comments. When I asked the Conservative government a question, the minister responsible for the Outaouais refused to acknowledge this situation.

On June 5, I asked the government the following question:

The Conservatives promised Gatineau the earth. When will they have the courage to keep their promise and rebalance the amounts of money invested on both sides of the Ottawa River?

[F]or 23 years, we have been waiting for the Science and Technology Museum in Gatineau. For 13 years, we have been waiting for phase II of the [Archives] in Gatineau. There are no research centres in Gatineau, but there are 27 in Ottawa. In short, they always make big promises, but they do not keep them.

Conservatives and Liberals: same inaction.

When will the government take real action for Gatineau?

The minister responsible for the Outaouais has not provided any real answers. He claimed to be "somewhat surprised" by Mr. Lyrette's comments.

Mr. Lyrette said that "We need more tourism and leisure infrastructure to create an environment that attracts new businesses. That is the basic requirement, but it is not enough. What we need are museums and research laboratories. Museums attract tourists, keep our shops and restaurants in business, and encourage people to experience our region. Laboratories attract researchers and academics, particularly if they are associated with a university."

Mr. Lyrette also said, as the Bloc Québécois pointed out, that the Gatineau Language Technologies Research Centre, the LTRC, is not part of the National Research Council's network. The LTRC does not receive ongoing funding from the NRC.

Mr. Lyrette did not put much stock in the Conservatives' commitment to move 6,200 federal employees to Gatineau in 2011 as part of the 25:75 agreement. That deadline has already been pushed back to 2012.

[English]

**Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to address the question raised by the member for Gatineau regarding the infrastructure generally in Quebec.

It gives me the opportunity to remind the House that Canada's economic action plan is working in every part of the country, not just where the member stated, but in every member's riding across the country, and Quebec as well. We are doing that by establishing strong partnerships with provinces and municipalities across the country, including the Government of Quebec. Together we have been able to achieve real results.

I would like to refer to some of those results and some of the major projects we have supported in Quebec in the short period of time we have been in government. For instance, there will be \$40 million for le Quartier des spectacles de Montréal, \$33.7 million for the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec and \$13 million for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and it continues.

In member's own constituency, our government, together with the Government of Quebec, is supporting road construction, which is so vital and important to all citizens, especially in a congested area such as in the Outaouais region. This we are doing through the Outaouais

road agreement. This agreement is funding projects like the boulevard des Allumettières in Gatineau and the extension of Highway 5.

Together with the province of Quebec, we will see a total investment of over \$630 million in the municipalities under 100,000 residents and over \$600 million in Quebec's nine largest cities to support the people there.

In recent months, under this program, funding has been committed to 125 projects across the province. Our government has also launched a \$700 million fund to repair and replace drinking water and waste water pipes in municipalities across the province of Quebec as well. That is because waste water and water itself is very important to the people of Canada and is a right they deserve to have. I am happy to also tell the House that 101 Quebec municipalities have benefited from funding under this particular program.

We are also moving quickly to commit funding under the infrastructure stimulus fund. To date, more than \$815 million in joint funding has been announced, representing an important investment to over 230 projects in Quebec communities, which will certainly help the people of Quebec. They include, specifically: in the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, Autoroute 15, \$11,350,000; in the riding of Jeanne-Le Ber, projet d'agrandissement de la Maison Saint-Gabriel, \$2.1 million; and in the riding of Louis-Hébert, another \$7 million. It goes on and on.

The people of Quebec are benefiting from this Conservative government giving them real and honest results where they need it: drinking water, waste water treatment and roads.

● (1810)

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** Madam Speaker, with all due respect, I would point out to my colleague that the Boulevard des Allumettières and Highway 50 are not in the riding of Gatineau. He should review his geography and his Quebec geopolitics.

I would also add that the federal government is still not awarding contracts in Gatineau and Ottawa fairly. In 2008, the federal government awarded goods and services contracts worth \$3 billion to suppliers in the national capital region: 1.4% in Gatineau and 98.6% in Ottawa, or \$38 million in Gatineau and \$2.962 billion in Ottawa. In 2005, Gatineau got just 0.9% of the contracts. In 2006, it got 1.8% of the contracts, and in 2007, just 2.1%.

People in Gatineau pay just as much federal income tax as people in Ottawa. The government needs to be fair and give Gatineau its due. This is an Ottawa versus Gatineau issue.

[English]

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Madam Speaker, I cannot accept the proposition put forward by my friend. His leader has received funding in his riding of Laurier—Sainte-Marie of \$685,000 for le Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui.

Further, our government has for every community in Quebec and every community across Canada accelerated the existing building Canada fund. In fact, the riding of Laval has received \$15.8 million for a multipurpose sports and cultural complex. We have accelerated the existing building Canada fund and helped more projects move forward. The riding of Trois-Rivières amphitheatre received \$13.2 million and the riding of Québec, Augustinian Monastery Museum, another \$15 million.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

How they have really benefited is through the gas tax fund. We have doubled the funding and we have accelerated it.

● (1815)

**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 6:15 p.m.)

---



# CONTENTS

Thursday, November 5, 2009

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

<b>Government Performance Reports</b>	
Mr. Toews .....	6641
<b>Government Response to Petitions</b>	
Mr. Lukiwski .....	6641
<b>Canada Revenue Agency</b>	
Mr. Blackburn .....	6641
<b>Committees of the House</b>	
<b>Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities</b>	
Mr. Allison .....	6641
<b>Justice and Human Rights</b>	
Mr. Fast .....	6641
<b>Canada Pension Plan</b>	
Ms. Charlton .....	6641
Bill C-478. Introduction and first reading .....	6641
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) .....	6642
<b>Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Act</b>	
Mr. Miller .....	6642
Bill C-479. Introduction and first reading .....	6642
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) .....	6642
<b>Excise Tax Act</b>	
Mr. Allen (Welland) .....	6642
Bill C-480. Introduction and first reading .....	6642
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) .....	6642
<b>Petitions</b>	
<b>Rouge Watershed</b>	
Mr. Chong .....	6642
<b>Human Rights</b>	
Mr. Maloway .....	6642
<b>Library Book Rates</b>	
Mr. Tweed .....	6643
<b>Iran</b>	
Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country) .....	6643
<b>Questions on the Order Paper</b>	
Mr. Lukiwski .....	6643
<b>Questions Passed as Orders for Returns</b>	
Mr. Lukiwski .....	6643
<b>Supplementary Estimates (B), 2009-10</b>	
The Deputy Speaker .....	6643
<b>Points of Order</b>	
<b>Bill C-280—Employment Insurance Act</b>	
Mr. Lukiwski .....	6643
Mr. Lessard .....	6644
Mr. Godin .....	6644

Mr. Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord) .....	6644
Mr. Lessard .....	6645

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

<b>Fairness for the Self-Employed Act</b>	
Ms. Finley .....	6645
Bill C-56. Second reading .....	6645
Mr. Savage .....	6647
Mr. Lessard .....	6647
Mr. Godin .....	6647
Mr. Albrecht .....	6648
Mr. Savage .....	6648
Mr. Fast .....	6651
Mr. Lessard .....	6652
Mr. Godin .....	6652
Mr. Cuzner .....	6652
Mr. Simms .....	6653
<b>Points of Order</b>	
<b>Oral Questions</b>	
Mr. Layton .....	6653

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

<b>Fairness for the Self-Employed Act</b>	
Bill C-56. Second reading .....	6653
Mr. Lessard .....	6653
Mr. Godin .....	6655
Ms. Crowder .....	6656
Mr. Maloway .....	6657
Ms. Crowder .....	6658
Mr. Blackburn .....	6658
Mr. Bouchard .....	6660
Mr. Lessard .....	6660
Mr. Petit .....	6661
Ms. Folco .....	6661
Mr. Cannan .....	6663
Mr. Lobb .....	6663
Ms. Sgro .....	6663
Mrs. Davidson .....	6664
Mr. Lemieux .....	6664
Mr. Maloway .....	6665
Mr. Lobb .....	6665
Ms. Sgro .....	6665
Mrs. Guergis .....	6666
Mr. Maloway .....	6667
Mr. Lobb .....	6668
Mr. Laframboise .....	6668
Mr. Lobb .....	6670
Mr. Tonks .....	6671
Mr. Angus .....	6671
Mr. Bouchard .....	6671
Mr. Uppal .....	6672

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

<b>Veterans' Week</b>	
Mr. Benoit .....	6672
<b>Teaching Excellence</b>	
Mr. Oliphant .....	6673
<b>Renil Belisle</b>	
Mrs. Freeman .....	6673
<b>Canadian Olympic Teams</b>	
Mr. Bevington .....	6673
<b>Service Organizations</b>	
Mr. Kramp .....	6673
<b>Robert "Bob" Beauchamp</b>	
Mr. Proulx .....	6674
<b>Remembrance Day</b>	
Mr. Brown (Barrie) .....	6674
<b>Use of Wood</b>	
Mr. Bouchard .....	6674
<b>Ray Leitch</b>	
Mrs. Wong .....	6674
<b>International Inuit Day</b>	
Mr. Russell .....	6674
<b>Veterans' Week</b>	
Mr. Lunney .....	6675
<b>Daniel Paillé</b>	
Mr. Julian .....	6675
<b>Bloc Québécois</b>	
Mrs. Boucher .....	6675
<b>GlaxoSmithKline</b>	
Mr. Paillé .....	6675
<b>Jacques Saada</b>	
Mrs. Mendes .....	6676
<b>Employment Insurance</b>	
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora) .....	6676

## ORAL QUESTIONS

<b>Health</b>	
Mr. Rae .....	6676
Mr. Harper .....	6676
Mr. Rae .....	6676
Mr. Harper .....	6676
Mr. Rae .....	6676
Mr. Harper .....	6676
Mrs. Jennings .....	6677
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6677
Mrs. Jennings .....	6677
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6677
<b>Political Party Financing</b>	
Mr. Duceppe .....	6677
Mr. Harper .....	6677
Mr. Duceppe .....	6677
Mr. Paradis .....	6677

Mr. Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord) .....	6677
Mr. Paradis .....	6677
Mr. Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord) .....	6678
Mr. Paradis .....	6678
<b>The Environment</b>	
Mr. Layton .....	6678
Mr. Harper .....	6678
Mr. Layton .....	6678
Mr. Harper .....	6678
Mr. Layton .....	6678
Mr. Harper .....	6678
<b>Health</b>	
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North) .....	6678
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6678
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North) .....	6679
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6679
Mr. Bevilacqua (Vaughan) .....	6679
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6679
Mr. Bevilacqua (Vaughan) .....	6679
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6679
<b>Employment Insurance</b>	
Mr. Lessard .....	6679
Mr. Blackburn .....	6679
Mr. Lessard .....	6679
Mr. Blackburn .....	6679
<b>Firearms Registry</b>	
Mr. Ménard .....	6680
Mr. Van Loan .....	6680
Mr. Ménard .....	6680
Mr. Van Loan .....	6680
<b>Natural Resources</b>	
Mr. Szabo .....	6680
Mr. Baird .....	6680
Mr. Szabo .....	6680
Mr. Baird .....	6680
<b>Infrastructure</b>	
Mr. Bains .....	6680
Mr. Baird .....	6680
Mr. Bains .....	6680
Mr. Baird .....	6681
<b>Fisheries and Oceans</b>	
Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country) .....	6681
Mr. Harper .....	6681
<b>Health</b>	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis .....	6681
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6681
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis .....	6681
Mrs. Aglukkaq .....	6681
<b>The Environment</b>	
Mr. Bigras .....	6681
Mr. Prentice .....	6682
Mr. Bigras .....	6682

Mr. Prentice .....	6682
<b>Olympic Winter Games</b>	
Mr. Dryden .....	6682
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam) .....	6682
Mr. Dryden .....	6682
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam) .....	6682
<b>Natural Resources</b>	
Ms. Chow .....	6682
Mr. Baird .....	6682
<b>Government Advertising</b>	
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre) .....	6683
Mr. Baird .....	6683
<b>Employment</b>	
Mr. Young .....	6683
Ms. Finley .....	6683
<b>Public Service of Canada</b>	
Mr. McGuinty .....	6683
Mr. Toews .....	6683
<b>Museums</b>	
Mr. Nadeau .....	6683
Ms. Ambrose .....	6683
<b>Aboriginal Affairs</b>	
Ms. Crowder .....	6683
Mr. Strahl .....	6684
<b>Employment insurance</b>	
Mr. Blaney .....	6684
Mr. Blackburn .....	6684
<b>Presence in Gallery</b>	
The Speaker .....	6684
<b>Business of the House</b>	
Mr. Goodale .....	6684
Mr. Hill .....	6684

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

<b>Veterans' Week</b>	
Mr. Thompson .....	6685
M. Oliphant .....	6686
Mr. André .....	6687
Mr. Stoffer .....	6688
Mr. Sweet .....	6688
Motion .....	6689
(Motion agreed to) .....	6689
The Speaker .....	6689
<b>Message from the Senate</b>	
The Speaker .....	6689
<b>Privilege</b>	
<b>Introduction of Bills—Speaker's Ruling</b>	
The Speaker .....	6689

<b>Disturbance in the Gallery—Speaker's Ruling</b>	
The Speaker .....	6690

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

<b>Fairness for the Self-Employed Act</b>	
Bill C-56. Second reading .....	6691
Mr. Uppal .....	6692
Mr. Maloway .....	6693
Mr. Cuzner .....	6694
Mr. Fast .....	6694
Mr. Szabo .....	6694
Ms. Chow .....	6694
Mr. Cannis .....	6695
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) .....	6697
Mr. Simms .....	6697
Mr. McColeman .....	6698
Mr. McColeman .....	6698
Ms. Crowder .....	6698
Mr. Siksay .....	6700
Ms. Chow .....	6700
Mr. Allen (Welland) .....	6701
Mr. Simms .....	6702
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) .....	6702

## ROYAL ASSENT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin) .....	6703
--	------

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

<b>Fairness for the Self-Employed Act</b>	
Bill C-56. Second reading .....	6703
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee) .....	6703
Mr. O'Connor .....	6703
Motion .....	6703
(Motion agreed to) .....	6703

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

<b>Criminal Code</b>	
Motion .....	6703
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown) .....	6703
Mr. Dewar .....	6704
Mr. Lemieux .....	6705
Mr. Albrecht .....	6706
Division on motion deferred .....	6708

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

<b>Employment Insurance</b>	
Ms. Crowder .....	6708
Mr. Komarnicki .....	6708
<b>Infrastructure</b>	
Mr. Nadeau .....	6709
Mr. Jean .....	6710

**MAIL  POSTE**

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

**Lettermail**

**Poste-lettre**

**1782711  
Ottawa**

*If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:*

Publishing and Depository Services  
Public Works and Government Services Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,*

*retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*  
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt  
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

### **SPEAKER'S PERMISSION**

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and  
Depository Services  
Public Works and Government Services Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5  
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943  
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757  
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca  
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the  
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

### **PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT**

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les  
Éditions et Services de dépôt  
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5  
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943  
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757  
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca  
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à  
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>