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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 18, 2010

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 18, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

KEEPING CANADIANS SAFE (INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER OF OFFENDERS) ACT

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-5, An Act to amend the International Transfer of Offenders Act.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two reports to present this morning. They will require some explanation, so I hope the House will indulge me.

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

At its meeting on Thursday, March 11 the committee unanimously adopted a motion that the 10th report entitled “The Privacy Act: First Steps Towards Renewal” adopted and presented to the House in the second session of the 40th Parliament be adopted as a report of the committee in the present session, and that the chair present the report to the House.

The report tabled in the last session requested that the government table a comprehensive response to the report pursuant to Standing Order 109. As the government did in fact table its response to the report on October 9, the report being tabled today is identical in all respects to the report tabled last session with the exception that it does not include pages 29 and 30, which only requested a government response.

The minutes and evidence of the meeting of March 11 will reflect that the chair is to specifically advise the House that we are not requesting a government response.

By way of explanation, the committee was not satisfied with the government response, and on November 26, 2009, the committee unanimously passed a motion that the Minister of Justice be requested to address each of the recommendations in the report and provide background for his caution and concerns by January 15.

On December 10, 2009, the minister wrote to the committee and agreed to comply, subject to an extension to February 15. The committee concurred with the extension but no response has yet been received. Although the House was prorogued on December 30, the committee anticipated that a response would still be forthcoming. Discussions have been held with the Minister of Justice to resolve this matter and we await his consideration for his undertakings and his response to our invitation to him to appear before committee.

Finally, ostensibly the reason for re-tabling this report in the House is so that there is a report which the committee can refer to in the current session. I expect that there may be other committees that have similar situations as a consequence of the last prorogation of Parliament.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

At its meeting on Thursday, March 11 the committee unanimously adopted a motion that the 11th report entitled “The Access to Information Act: First Steps Towards Renewal” adopted and presented to the House in the second session of the 40th Parliament be adopted as a report of the committee in the present session, and that the chair present the report to the House.

The report tabled in the last session requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report pursuant to Standing Order 109. As the government tabled its response to the report on October 9, 2009, the report being tabled today is identical in all respects to the report tabled last session with the exception that it does not include pages 31 and 32, which only requested a government response.

The minutes and evidence of the committee meeting of March 11 will reflect that the chair will specifically advise the House that we are not requesting a government response.

Routine Proceedings

By way of explanation again, similarly, the committee was not satisfied with the government response of October 9, 2009, and on November 26 the committee unanimously passed a motion that the justice minister be requested to address each of the recommendations in the report and provide background for his caution and concerns.

For the record, identical to the previous statement, we are still in discussions and we look forward to receiving the justice minister's concurrence with our request for him to respond and to appear before committee.

• (1005)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of tabling two reports today, in both official languages, from the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The first report is in relation to supplementary estimates (C) of 2009-10.

The second report is in relation to the main estimates of 2010-11.

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to supplementary estimates (C) 2009-10.

* * *

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion.

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, for the purpose of the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne of the third session of the 40th Parliament, Standing Order 50(4) be amended as follows:

“(4) On the third of the said days, if a subamendment be under consideration at fifteen minutes before the end of the time provided for the Address debate, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and forthwith put the question on the said subamendment.”; and

When the debate conclude on the said subamendment, it be deemed put, a recorded division be deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, March 23, 2010, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

• (1010)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With regard to the motion just dealt with by the House, as I understood it, was it requesting an amendment to the Standing Orders? I understand that it is only temporary.

The Speaker: I believe the motion says:

[Translation]

The amendment applies only to this session of this Parliament.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I too rise on a point of order. There is a serious situation facing Canada's pensioners. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move the following motion which states that notwithstanding any order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-476, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (unfunded pension plan liabilities), be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

* * *

PETITIONS

CANADA POST

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present three petitions on behalf of constituents.

First, approximately 200 residents are concerned that Canada Post has deleted Unionville from the postal code reference library. They want the necessary steps to be taken to recognize the existence of Unionville by restoring its name to the postal code reference library.

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by approximately 400 individuals who wish to create effective laws regarding corporate social responsibility, particularly in the area of mining. They ask that we consent to the expeditious passage of Bill C-300.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is from approximately 150 people who petition the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition today. I will be requesting that the committee on justice and human rights look at it. It is a petition from approximately 40 of my constituents who are opposed to Bill C-384.

This bill would legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide. My constituents are saying they oppose euthanasia and assisted suicide as it directly threatens the lives of people with disabilities and other vulnerable people in our society. They believe also that we should be promoting measures that increase the quality of life for people who experience difficult life conditions and not introduce measures that threaten their very existence.

The petitioners are respectfully requesting that I oppose this bill. I can assure them that I will be vigorously opposing this bill on their behalf.

ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table two petitions in the House today.

The first contains the names of hundreds of Canadians, calling on the government to extend the funding for healing programs under the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is set to expire on March 31, 2010. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation supports aboriginal people in building healing processes that address the issues of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools. The residential school system caused physical and mental trauma to the children who were forced to attend. This foundation is important to the survivors, through counselling and the cultural programs. The foundation has existed for 10 years and the healing is still not complete.

The petitioners are asking the government to extend the funding for this important foundation.

●(1015)

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition concerns the earthquake in Chile and is signed by dozens of Canadians, calling on the government to match funds personally donated by Canadians to the victims of the earthquake in Chile.

Hundreds of people attended a social event in Winnipeg on Saturday, March 6, raising \$10,000 for earthquake relief. This Saturday, over 1,000 tickets have been sold for a second big event.

The petitioners request the same rules that are being applied to the Haitian disaster. The petitioners request the government to match all funds donated to help the victims of the earthquake in Chile.

[*Translation*]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions.

The first petition is from citizens who support a universal declaration on animal welfare. The petitioners say that animals can

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feel pain and suffering and that we should avoid cruelty to animals and reduce their suffering.

The petition also states that animals are not taken into consideration in the event of a natural disaster. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to support the universal declaration on animal welfare.

FINANCE

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the second petition, the petitioners are worried about the state of public finances and, among other things, the federal government's significant debt.

They are asking that a panel of experts be convened to help Canadians better understand the reality surrounding the debt and the solutions being discussed.

BURUNDI

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition signed by Canadians and members of the Burundian community, citizens of Canada.

The petitioners are condemning the continuing violence in Burundi. They are asking the government to restore the suspension of removals on Burundi for a minimum of three years and to grant permanent residency to those who sought asylum before the July 23, 2009, measure.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The Chair has received three notices of questions of privilege, all respecting basically the same subject. I will hear the presentations on those questions of privilege now. We will start with the first one I received, and that will be the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be able to take up this matter with the House this morning. It is probably going to take a few minutes. I hope members will bear with me. I gather there are other colleagues who wish to do the same.

Privilege

Mr. Speaker, I brought notice of this question of privilege to you on February 18, prior to the resumption of the House. The issue stretches back to approximately December 1, when I rose in the House to bring to the attention of the House the words of the Minister of National Defence in response to a question in question period. They were words that I believed would potentially obstruct witnesses before our committees.

I brought three matters to your attention. Today, I am going to refer to one as a prelude, the one dealing with the words of the Minister of National Defence. Second, there is one organic matter that I believe is a breach of our privileges, involving correspondence from the Department of Justice to our law clerk and parliamentary counsel here in the House of Commons.

In all three instances, but technically in just two here today, these actions taken or not taken here, in my view, impugn, obstruct or derogate from the inquiry powers of the House as an integral and core function. It is part of our constitutional legislative function here as grand inquest of the nation.

No citation should be needed here, but for the record, and I am not going to quote them, I will simply list the three citations: the words of Edward Coke in the year 1671, from the *Institutes of the Laws of England*, volume 4; Bourinot's *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, 1916, page 70; and the Supreme Court of Canada in *Canada v. Vaid*, S.C.R. 2005, page 20, not that any court validation is constitutionally necessary for us here.

These benchmarks reflect 340 years of bedrock constitutional history. I have selected these dates to show the length of time this constitutional provision has remained the same. It has not varied for 350 years. If anyone thinks it has, I invite them to find a precedent anywhere in the developed world where there is a parliament.

Initially, these laws were developed in Westminster. I have gone back 350 years to show one of the routes taking us right into modern Canadian law, with that citation from the Supreme Court of Canada. I am not making this up as I go along, and we in Parliament are not making this up as we go along. This is a three-century bedrock constitutional power.

One of the powers and privileges we have here in this inquiry function is the power to send for persons, papers and records. The powers among those described in the Erskine May classic definition of privilege are in edition 21 on page 69. I will not read them, as members have heard them hundreds of times.

The power is also codified in our House Standing Orders, specifically in Standing Order 108(1)(a). The key words are that we are "empowered to examine and inquire" and that we are empowered to send for "persons, papers and records". These are also bedrock and elementary House of Commons 101 constitutional law principles. If anyone disagrees, again, let them find a precedent or let them make an amendment to our Canadian Constitution.

I also need to make two quick reference points just to shape my remarks. The power to send for persons, papers and records exercised by the House and its committees is whole, complete and unabridged.

● (1020)

The delegation of this complete power from the House to its committees in Standing Order 108 is full and unconditional. There are no words, phrases, precedents, events or statutes that distinguish this power in the hands of committees from that of the House itself, and I cite the words of Speaker Fraser on March 17, 1987, when he said:

I think it is important to emphasize, in case there should be any misconception in any quarter concerning the powers and functions of parliamentary committees, that committees appointed by this House are entitled to exercise all or any of the powers that this House delegates to them. These powers include the right not only to invite witnesses to appear but to summon them to appear, if necessary.

If there is non-compliance, a separate enforcement procedure or punishment procedure or coercion, usually a contempt matter, can be initiated in the House, sometimes relying on the Sergeant-at-Arms. Our committees would not usually have this enforcement power on their own, unless the House were to pass a statute specifically for that purpose.

This separation of the subpoena power from the enforcement, coercion and punishment power and procedure has confused some, even some of us in the House. By analogy, the House of Commons and Parliament pass and adopt criminal laws, but we do not enforce them. The police and the courts do. However, this does not mean that Parliament does not have the full power to pass the criminal laws in the first place. An order issued pursuant to a power to send for persons, papers and records is full and complete and binding, and failing compliance, enforcement and punishment can be pursued and has been.

I note that many of our administrative tribunals and our cousins in the American congressional houses and committees also have a similar separation of the enforcement procedure, which they have assigned to civil or federal courts. This assignment in no way derogates from the fullness of their subpoena powers.

My second point of reference is that many Canadian statutes refer to bodies or agencies that have a power to compel attendance or the production of documents. This House of Parliament under our Constitution, of course, is not included among those references. As far as I can determine, this House and its powers are distinct from every other organ of government, and no statute is needed to provide for those powers and no statute or constitutional provision abridges those powers and the associated privileges, other than has been done explicitly in the Parliament of Canada Act. Such statutory references as compelling the production of documents or attendance do not describe Parliament and are not helpful for analysis or comparison.

What are the breaches? First, the words of the Minister of National Defence, I would say, describe a prelude to the breach. The Minister of National Defence declared in an answer in question period on December 1, 2009, that:

There is a mandatory obligation on public officials to ensure that when information is released, it is in compliance with the Canada Evidence Act.

....With respect to information, I think most people, even the hon. member, can understand that we want to protect operational matters, information received from other countries, other sources, confidential sources, national security. Those are the reasons these documents are being examined by the Department of Justice.

I thought those words constituted an attempt to mislead, or that they actually do mislead, the public and the House on the obligations of witnesses, including government witnesses and all persons, to respond to orders to appear and to answer questions or provide documents to our House committees.

The minister says those documents can only be released to the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan under the provisions of the Canada Evidence Act. That is what he said to the House. More importantly, the words are simply not just wrong and misleading but also, coming from a government minister and Minister of National Defence, they have, in my view, the direct effect of obstructing House and committee witnesses by intimidating the witnesses, especially armed forces personnel and public servants, from complying with House requests and orders.

• (1025)

He says that statutes of general application prevent persons from complying with orders of this House for documents. However, under our law and our constitution, persons under a House of Commons order are not prevented by statutory provisions from complying, and all of our witnesses, I repeat, all of our witnesses, have the full protection of our Houses and constitution-based privileges and no such procedure may be taken up or questioned in any Canadian court.

I submit that these words constitute, whether through misunderstanding, ignorance or malice, I am not sure, a slander of our parliamentary core powers, and they serve directly or indirectly to undermine our country's constitutional order, which gives this House the obligation to hold the government to account.

I am going to move to the second item now.

In a letter dated December 9, 2009, the assistant deputy minister, Public Law Sector, Department of Justice, wrote to our law clerk and parliamentary counsel. That letter and the reply by Mr. Walsh, our law clerk, were made available to me at my request following their circulation to a member or members of the special committee I referred to earlier.

The letter outlines the position of the Department of Justice on the application of acts of Parliament to officials of the Government of Canada.

I would table both these letters with consent or simply make copies available to the Chair.

Do I have consent to table the letters?

• (1030)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table these letters?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Derek Lee: I choose my words very carefully. This letter from the assistant deputy minister, Department of Justice, breaches the privileges of the House by, in effect, laying for witnesses a false basis for refusing to provide disclosure to the House or its committees after being ordered to do so.

Privilege

These contemptuous suggestions are found in paragraph 4 on page 2 of the letter. They read:

Of course, there may be instances where an Act of Parliament will not be interpreted to apply to the Houses of Parliament (or their committees). However, that does not mean automatically that government officials—who are agents of the executive, not the legislative branch—are absolved from respecting duties imposed by a statute enacted by Parliament, or by requirements of the common law, such as solicitor-client privilege or Crown privilege. This is so even if a parliamentary committee, through the exercise of parliamentary privilege, may extend immunity to witnesses appearing before it. A parliamentary committee cannot waive a legal duty imposed on government officials.

I feel like reading it again, but the record will stand. This is a clear indication that public servants, government officials and probably even the public cannot be protected by Parliament if they respond to questions at a parliamentary committee.

To me, these words are sad and shocking coming from the Department of Justice and the legal advisers to the Crown. In my view, they undermine the entire structure of parliamentary accountability and the constitutional law I have already outlined.

I am going to give three citations to the House that articulate the powers of the House with reference to the possibility that other public statutes may appear to get in the way. The first is Maingot, second edition, page 20. It states:

...a privilege may not be diminished, prejudicially affected, or repealed save by express statutory enactment to that effect.

Second, Beauchesne, 4th edition, page 96 states:

No general statute or order in council can override the privileges, immunities and powers of the Commons. As the prerogatives of the Crown can only be given away or delegated to others by the consent of the Crown stated in express terms, so the rights, privileges and immunities of the House of Commons cannot be taken away by implication or by vague terms of any statute, but only by the express words of the law or by the express resolution of the House.

In this particular case, *House of Commons v. Canada Labour Relations Board*, [1986] 2 F. C. 376, the Federal Court of Appeal held that it is a well established principle that an express provision of a statute is necessary to abrogate a privilege of Parliament or its members.

The problem here is not just the assistant deputy minister of justice's being wrong and fully disregarding any reference to parliamentary law and Parliament's constitutional purpose, but it actually describes that government officials would not be absolved from respecting statutory duties if required to testify before a committee.

These are not the words of an ordinary citizen over the counter at Tim Hortons. These are the words and pronouncements, the position, of the Department of Justice over the hand of the assistant deputy minister for the public law sector.

These and other words in this letter show no knowledge or regard for the law of this institution and betray on the part of the department a shocking and unprofessional ignorance of parliamentary law, and that law binds our democracy together. If these words were crafted with others and with ministerial approval, in my view it would constitute a conspiracy to undermine Parliament and the ability of the House to carry on its constitutional functions.

Privilege

•(1035)

Either way, in simple ignorance or with subversive intent, this document over the hand of the assistant deputy minister of justice constitutes a contempt and cannot be allowed to stand under our Constitution.

I gave written and polite notice of my concern over this opinion to the assistant deputy minister on January 27. There was a polite reply, although it was not a substantive reply.

On the issue of obstruction, I am going to provide three very quick citations on the matter of obstruction of witnesses. The first, and colleagues will forgive me for going back so far in history, is from the year 1700, from the United Kingdom House of Commons, Westminster. It reads:

...that if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence, the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

That is from the United Kingdom's *Journal of the House of Commons*, February 21, 1700, volume 13, page 350.

Second, I will bring it a little bit further into the present. This is from Erskine May, 21st edition, page 131:

Any conduct calculated to deter prospective witnesses from giving evidence before either House or a committee is a contempt.

Just to be really precise about this, here is a third quote, from Erskine May, same volume, page 132:

This matter was considered in 1935 by a committee of the Commons which reported that, in its opinion, it was a breach of privilege to give any advice to a witness which took the form of pressure or of interference with his freedom to form and express his own opinions honestly in the light of all the facts known to him; and the House resolved that it agreed with the committee in its report.

The proceedings in 1991 in the justice committee and in this House involving the persons known as Légère and Gingras may for some have raised at that time arguably legitimate questions as to the extent of the power to send for persons, papers and records. Speaker Fraser seems to have allowed for that, notwithstanding his clear 1987 words referred to earlier.

At this time, 18 years later, following the report of the committee that reviewed that subpoena power, the unanimous House order to the government to turn over the unexpurgated documents to the justice committee at that time, the 1999 publication of a book here on this very subject, and the publication of two editions of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, there are no uncertainties, in my view, or questions unanswered.

There is no unclear law as to the powers of the House and its committees.

I would like to reuse, with some licence, the dictum, "There are none so blind as those who will not see, read or learn". Those who purport to govern and administer Canada must be taken to know the place of the Magna Carta and the events of 1648, as messy as they were; 1689, the Bill of Rights; 1867, our Constitution; and 1982, in our constitutional history. They must also be taken to know the constitutional accountability of the government to this elected House with all its inquiry functions.

Canadians do not elect governments; they elect a House. The breach by that party, the alleged breach that I have brought to your attention here today, is in this light a cardinal insult to this House and all Canadians represented here.

If the breaches were co-ordinated in a conspiracy... Perhaps I should not use that word in the criminal sense, but if people get together to bring this to us and present this in a certain way, then I say that if they did that, it would be constitutionally seditious and immediately deserving of sanction.

•(1040)

Lastly, there is no place in this country where this issue can be raised and acted on. There is no department of government and there is no court allowed to interfere. There are no other persons who can come into this House to protect the constitutional foundations of this country, only the 308 persons here. So if we do not stand up for our Parliament's role on behalf of Canadians, then there is no one else out there to do it. It is an attempt to undermine the work of Parliament and its committees that I place before the House today. If we do not stand up, those efforts to undermine our Constitution will have succeeded. We cannot let that happen.

I will close in saying that I am, of course, prepared to move an appropriate motion if you find a prima facie case here. I indicate to all colleagues, including those who will rise on this matter today, that there is the opportunity to work in a non-partisan, collaborative way to craft a resolution, to craft a motion that would suit the needs of the House and the people of Canada. I say that because at some point the Speaker will have to make a ruling and there is only so much time we have to work on this. But it is possible; it is not impossible.

The Speaker: Order. The Chair has received another letter on basically the same subject matter from the hon. member for St. John's East, and I will hear him now on this point.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE
CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege concerning the House of Commons' right of access to documents it deems necessary to hold the government to account.

As the Speaker of the House will know, the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan is studying the issue of Afghan detainees captured by Canadians, who may have been subjected to torture, and potentially Canada's complicity in violation of its obligations under international human rights law and other matters.

I will not repeat to the House how vital and fundamental such a responsibility of Parliament is. It is part of our duty, and one of the fundamental roles of the House of Commons, to hold the government to account. In order to assist us in doing that, Parliament has certain rights, privileges and powers.

It is only through this House and the elected members of this House that Canadians are able to hold the government to account. That is a basic tenet of our democracy. In fact, that right is recognized explicitly in section 18 of Canada's Constitution Act, 1867. In fact it has been, I suppose not surprisingly, recognized as a constitutional right in the House, notably on October 31, 1991 by Speaker Fraser, at page 4309 of that day's *Hansard*.

Also, the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed, recognized and acknowledged that this is a constitutional right and a constitutional privilege of members of the House of Commons to carry out their work. It was recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in *New Brunswick Broadcasting Co. v. Nova Scotia (Speaker of the House of Assembly)* found in the 1993 Supreme Court of Canada Reports at 1 S.C.R. 319.

In pursuance of its obligations to carry out the investigation, members of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan asked for certain papers and have sought the assistance of this House to get them.

On December 10 this House passed the following motion:

That, given the undisputed privileges of Parliament under Canada's constitution, including the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested, and given the reality that the government has violated the rights of Parliament by invoking the Canada Evidence Act to censor documents before producing them, the House urgently requires—

—I underline “urgently requires”—

—access to the following documents in their original and uncensored form:

The motion then notes the list of documents requested and follows with:

—accordingly the House hereby orders that these documents be produced in their original and uncensored form forthwith.

Forthwith, I suppose, is subject to some interpretation. However, over three months have passed since that House order was made and not one single document of any kind has been presented to the House in response to that order. In fact, 14 weeks have passed and no response has come from the government, nor has the government put in place, or sought to put in place, a parliamentary process to make these documents available.

There has been no approach, to my knowledge, to other members of the House or to members of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan. There has been no attempt to devise a method for receiving these documents by members of Parliament, despite the publicly expressed willingness by me and others to discuss this issue and find a way of bringing them before the House.

Page 475 of O'Brien and Bosc states that orders for the production of documents must be met “within a reasonable time”. Given that the government prorogued the House on December 30 and we did not meet again until early March, the government has had plenty of time to work out a method to make these documents available to the House and to honour the order. The government has failed to do so.

We recognize that the government cannot and should not be expected to dump hundreds or thousands of pages of unredacted documents on the table of the House of Commons. That is not what

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the House has asked for. It has demanded its constitutional right for a procedure to hold the government accountable for its actions.

We are aware of national security concerns and we have indicated publicly our willingness to discuss these valid concerns and provide a method of protecting them. However, we are not prepared to compromise on Canadians' right to have an accountable government that does not use national security as a catch-all phrase to cover up embarrassing or damaging information.

• (1045)

In a number of press articles shortly after the vote in this House, the Canadian Press for example stated on December 12:

The Conservative government indicated Friday it was prepared to ignore a parliamentary vote calling on it to release uncensored information on enemy prisoners.

The Minister of Justice is quoted as saying:

Parliament exercises significant powers, yet Parliament also appreciates the importance of protecting confidential information.

He said:

The government's position on this matter is clear. We must make every effort to protect sensitive information that if disclosed, could compromise Canada's security, national defence and international relations.

Following the break and following the failure of government to deliver a document to members of Parliament, my colleague from Ottawa Centre wrote to the Minister of Justice on February 3, 2010 asking for the production of these documents. He said:

The production of these documents is essential to the ongoing study at the Special Committee on Canada's Mission in Afghanistan on the transfer of Afghan detainees. Canadians deserve full accountability from their government on the detainee file.

Then he said:

Furthermore, I would like to ask you as the Attorney General whether you will obey this House Order?

That was on February 3 and on March 11, over a month later, there was a reply from the Minister of Justice. In it he did not indicate that any documents would be forthcoming. In fact, he discussed the appointment of Mr. Iacobucci. He said:

Mr. Iacobucci will report to me on proposed redactions, including on whether the proposed redactions genuinely relate to information that would be injurious to Canada's national security, national defence, or international interests.

He went on to say:

Mr. Iacobucci will prepare a report in both official languages that I will table in the House of Commons. That report will include a description of his methodology and general findings.

I have both of those letters and I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table those letters.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table these documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, the government has appointed a retired Supreme Court justice, Mr. Iacobucci, to review the documents and advise the government on this matter.

Privilege

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the government has the right to seek advice from anyone it wishes, whether it be Department of Justice lawyers or other lawyers, or retired justices who are continuing to act as lawyers. That is certainly the government's right. In this particular case, the government waited three months to even consult with Mr. Iacobucci.

As far as we are concerned, it is not a major concern to this House that the government is seeking advice. Obviously, we have respect for Mr. Iacobucci. The government has the right of course to consult with any number of people, but it does not change the order of this House. The order is binding, and with consultation or no consultation, the government must obey.

The government's establishment of a separate parallel process outside of parliamentary oversight, parliamentary accountability, or even involvement, does not satisfy the very explicit requirements of the House in relation to the documents. For all intents and purposes, therefore, the engagement of Mr. Iacobucci to give the government advice is irrelevant to this motion.

I would like to address the potential argument that the government may make to excuse its behaviour.

In O'Brien and Bosc, page 83, it states that a breach of privilege includes "deliberately altering, suppressing, concealing or destroying a paper required to be produced for the House...". It may also involve failing to produce papers formally required by the House without a reasonable excuse, or disobeying a lawful order of the House without a reasonable excuse.

This includes the defacing of documents by redactions, expurgations, black marks or whatever we want to call it, and we have all seen those documents, certainly is destroying or concealing a paper required to be produced by the House, and therefore we expect to get them in their unexpurgated form.

The question is whether there is a reasonable excuse for disobeying an order of this House. It is clear to us that this a breach of the privileges of the House. In fact I would go so far as to say that the government's behaviour is tantamount to contempt for this House. The government may take issue with the phrase "without reasonable excuse", and I want to address it directly.

There is no reference in our Standing Orders to national security. In fact we see the issue of national security as a red herring. Parliamentarians have themselves acknowledged the valid national security concerns and have repeatedly indicated their willingness to work around them.

The motion that passed in the House in December did not say that the documents must be publicly tabled, placed on the Internet or handed out to the public for all and sundry. The motion allows for flexibility and for an approach by the government to work with the opposition parties and parliamentarians to satisfy the concerns on all sides. It is not acceptable to use national security as an excuse to hide embarrassing information. It is also not acceptable to use it as an excuse when the government has made no attempt to work around it.

There are numerous ways that the documents in question could have been made available without divulging state secrets, and there is no reasonable excuse for failing even to address the issue in the

House. These issues have been discussed with the parliamentary law clerk as to how a committee could receive documents and yet protect national security. What we need to do is find a way to acknowledge and respect the privileges of members of Parliament to hold the government to account on behalf of Canadians, while at the same time protect national security.

Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that there is a clear case for the finding of a prima facie breach of privilege, and if you agree, I am prepared to move a motion. I want to indicate that this motion has already been discussed with other members of the opposition parties. The Bloc Québécois has indicated that it supports our motion in this regard.

It is important to put the motion on the record to understand where I am coming from in terms of what we expect to see happen in order for the House to be able to exercise its parliamentary privileges, and at the same time, find a way to get these documents before it so that we can do our constitutional duty.

● (1050)

The motion would read as follows: "That the House considers that the government's failure to provide the documents specified in the order of December 10, 2009, is tantamount to contempt and therefore orders the Minister of National Defence, the Attorney General and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to be called before the bar of the House immediately and hear the Speaker read this order to them:

That it be an instruction to the Special Committee on Canada's Mission in Afghanistan to adopt rules and procedures for the reception and handling of the documents demanded by the House order of December 10, 2009, in a manner that safeguards national security and other confidentiality requirements while respecting parliamentary privilege, after receiving advice from the law clerk and parliamentary counsel;

That the special committee report these rules and procedures to the House no later than 21 calendar days following the adoption of this order, provided that if the House is not sitting when the report of the committee is completed, the report may be deposited with the Clerk of the House and it shall thereupon be deemed to have been presented to the House, provided that no later than 6 p.m. on the 20th calendar day following the adoption of this order any proceedings before the special committee shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the report shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment; and

That, on the 30th calendar following the adoption of this order, if the government has not provided all the documents to the special committee, which shall receive them on behalf of the House in their original and uncensored form, at the next sitting of this House the first order of business shall be the consideration of a motion that the Minister of National Defence, the Attorney General and the Minister of Foreign Affairs be found in contempt of the House and that such a motion shall have priority over all other business until it is decided in the same fashion as a motion relating to a question of privilege".

Mr. Speaker, I would be prepared to move that motion if you should find that there is a prima facie breach of the privileges of this House. I would note that there have been consultations on this motion with the table officers as to its form and compliance with parliamentary rules and it is in a form that we believe can be presented to this House.

That is my presentation on parliamentary privilege. I believe there has been established a prima facie breach of privileges of members of this House by the attempt of the government to delay and avoid accountability, and I ask that you so find.

• (1055)

[Translation]

The Speaker: I have received a third notice of a question of privilege on this subject. It comes from the hon. member for Saint-Jean, whom I will now hear speak.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE
CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on December 10, 2009, the House passed a motion requiring the government to produce a series of documents, in their original and uncensored form, related to the question of Afghan detainees.

This motion, which I will not read in its entirety, said:

That, given the undisputed privileges of Parliament under Canada's constitution, including the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested, and given the reality that the government has violated the rights of Parliament by invoking the Canada Evidence Act to censor documents before producing them, the House urgently requires access to the following documents in their original and uncensored form—

I will spare my colleagues the list of documents. The motion ends with the following:

—and accordingly the House hereby orders that these documents be produced in their original and uncensored form forthwith.

I should mention that the motion lists documents belonging to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of National Defence and the Attorney General of Canada.

I would first like to say that under Standing Order 49, this order of the House was not cancelled by the prorogation and is still valid in the current session.

To date, the government has not complied with this order of the House and it has stepped up efforts to show that it has no intention of following through. The most recent tactic was the tabling by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, on March 16, of the government's terms of reference for the review of documents by Justice Iacobucci, which did not include a timetable. I believe this particular gesture was the government's way of signalling to the House that it would not produce the documents. It was also this gesture that convinced me to raise a question of privilege in order to bring to your attention, at the earliest opportunity, a breach of Parliament.

What is at stake is that the government is challenging the law and Parliament's authority to ask for documents, under the pretext that these documents are confidential and that providing them to Parliament would endanger national security and the successful conduct of Canada's foreign relations.

Privilege

I completely disagree with the government's position because there are ways of doing things properly. I believe that the refusal by the government, particularly the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General of Canada, who are responsible for these documents, to comply with the order adopted by the House on December 10, 2009, strikes at the dignity and the authority of the House.

The authority of the House to require the production of documents is a well-established right. In fact, O'Brien-Bosc states on page 136:

By virtue of the Preamble and section 18 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, Parliament has the ability to institute its own inquiries, to require the attendance of witnesses and to order the production of documents, rights which are fundamental to its proper functioning.

In this sense, the rights are part of and protected by parliamentary privilege, as indicated by Maingot on page 190 of the second edition.

The right to institute inquiries is part of the *lex parliamenti*, which is included in the "privileges, immunities, and powers" expressed in s. 4 of the *Parliament of Canada Act* and referred to in s. 18 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

I do not have to tell my colleagues that parliamentary privilege is one of the cornerstones of our parliamentary system. Privilege, as May indicates on page 60 of O'Brien-Bosc:

—is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively...and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals. Thus privilege, though part of the law of the land, is to a certain extent an exemption from the general law.

Given that Parliament's right to institute inquiries is a matter of parliamentary privilege, it is up to the House, and the House alone, to determine how it will exercise that right.

• (1100)

This is Bourinot's opinion. As early as 1892, on pages 337 and 338 of the second edition of his book, he addresses the issue of the confidentiality of documents.

[English]

...there are frequent cases in which the ministers refuse information, especially at some delicate stage of an investigation or negotiation; and in such instances the house will always acquiesce when sufficient reasons are given for the refusal.

He goes on to say:

"But it must be remembered that under all circumstances, it is for the House to consider whether the reasons given for refusing the information are sufficient. The right of Parliament to obtain every possible information on public question is undoubted and the circumstances must be exceptional and the reasons very cogent when it cannot be at once laid before the Houses".

[Translation]

In short, by virtue of parliamentary privilege, the House clearly has the authority to demand that documents be handed over, and this authority is not subject to common law. Furthermore, it is up to the House alone to decide what documents it should have access to, however confidential they may be, in order to properly carry out its duties.

Privilege

This is not the government's role, nor that of a government-appointed independent adviser, no matter how respectable and distinguished he may be. To allow the executive branch to decide what documents to disclose would amount to giving the executive branch control over the exercise of legislative power and denying one of the primary functions of this assembly, recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Vaid case, that is, holding the government to account.

Accordingly, given that one of the most vital roles of the House of Commons is holding the government to account and that, in order to do so, it has the right to demand that documents be handed over when necessary, I believe that anyone who does not comply with its orders is therefore in contempt of the House.

O'Brien and Bosc define contempt on page 82 as follows:

—any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House, such as disobedience of its legitimate commands—

Page 240 of Maingot indicates that:

Disobedience of rules or orders is an obvious contempt and would include refusing to attend at the Bar of the House after the House had so ordered, refusing to personally attend and to produce the documents requested by a committee—

The text of the December 10, 2009, motion called on the government to immediately produce a series of documents. On March 18, 2010, it is clear that these documents still have not been produced and that the government is using tactics and manoeuvres to buy time and avoid producing them.

If the government truly had any intention of producing the documents, it would have done so a long time ago. It has had more than enough time to talk in good faith with parliamentarians about coming up with a strategy that would take into account the confidential nature of the documents, which it has not done.

Three months after the motion was adopted, after an abusive prorogation and with threats of contempt hanging over it, the government decides to appoint an independent adviser to review the documents. This is not an act of good faith. It is just another attempt to buy time. The government is acting in bad faith and is showing contempt for Parliament.

I find this situation to be intolerable, and the House must take action in order to preserve its dignity. By refusing to produce the documents requested by an order of the House, the government, more specifically the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General of Canada, is undermining the authority and dignity of the House and must suffer the consequences.

If the Speaker decides that there is a prima facie case for my question of privilege, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

I would like to add a nuance to what my NDP colleague said. We worked together on this motion, and I am ready to move it when you deem the time is right.

●(1105)

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has something to say on this topic.

[*English*]

I will recognize him this moment.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Yes I do, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the questions of privilege raised by hon. members for Scarborough—Rouge River, St. John's East and Saint-Jean. You are quite correct in stating that most of what has been heard this morning on these questions of privilege are quite common to a central issue.

I would like to make a few general comments with respect to some of the comments made by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River in his intervention. Initially, I should also say the questions of privilege are fundamentally and historically raised at the first opportunity. This has generally been an accepted requirement of the House. I would first argue that these questions of privilege have not been raised at the first and the earliest opportunity, since they are referring to an order of the House of December 10 and now we are well into the month of March. However, Mr. Speaker, I would trust your judgment on giving that some consideration.

With respect to one of the first points raised by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, he seemed to take some issue with comments and statements made by the Minister of National Defence. I would point out that words of a minister are really matters of debate and, quite frankly, differences of opinion are matters of debate in the House, not a question of privilege.

The second point raised by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River was also raised by the member for St. John's East and the hon. member for Saint-Jean, and that is the crux of the arguments on production of documents surrounding the Afghan detainee issues and whether Parliament has the right to ask for those documents to be produced.

I would like to make an initial response to all these questions of privilege and raise some points that I think should be taken under very careful consideration, and I trust you will, Mr. Speaker.

The immediate question for decision is whether there is a prima facie evidence of a breach that would justify setting aside all other business, consider such a motion as might be allowed by the Speaker and considered by the House. It is by respectful submission that, at this time, such a finding is not justified.

The most critical point for your consideration, Mr. Speaker, and is the crux of this issue, is the order of the House, passed on December 10, listed a considerable catalogue of categories of documents and ordered that, “accordingly the House hereby orders that these documents be produced in their original and uncensored form forthwith”.

Privilege

However, and this is the critical point, the order of the House made on December 10 made no provision to protect the security of these documents as outlined in the December 10 order of the House. No protection of the security of these documents was made in that order. Were these documents to be produced right now under this order, these documents would be immediately and fully in the public domain, with no consideration for the sensitivity or the security concerns contained in those documents.

I would also like to ask a question of all three of my hon. colleagues who raised these questions of privilege, and that is simply this. Could they ever give an example where the House has compelled the government of the day to produce documents that endangered national security or the security of our military? The answer is quite clearly, no. They are asking for that now, with no provisions in place to protect the security of such documents.

In fact, I would point out in his intervention the member for St. John's East talked about the Afghanistan committee putting in place security provisions to protect security of these documents. Why has that not been done now? There is much more work to be done on this issue, yet although the member for St. John's East seems to indicate the security provisions must be made and must be provided, nothing has been done to date. Yet he is asking for documents to be produced without provisions to protect the security of these documents and to protect the security of our military and of our country.

Every member of the House knows and fully understands that the issues of military and diplomatic security are at issue concerning the release of these documents. I do not think there is any question of that.

• (1110)

Let me just quote some comments made by the Attorney General on March 5 of this year. He said:

The government acknowledges that it is appropriate that decisions on the disclosure of information in these circumstances be reviewed independently from government. This will ensure that parliamentarians will have as full and complete access to government information as is necessary to perform the function of holding the government to account, but no one wants to cause injury to Canada's national defence, international relations or national security.

The security of the nation and the conduct of international relations are fundamental to the constitutional duties of the Government of Canada.

Members will understand that there are matters which governments must keep confidential in order to protect the public interest, even in the freest and most open of societies.

Nonetheless, as I have stated, the government acknowledges that it is appropriate that decisions made by officials on the disclosure of information in these circumstances be reviewed independently from government.

I am pleased to inform the House that the government has engaged an eminent jurist and legal expert to undertake an independent, comprehensive and proper review of the documents at issue, including the information that was proposed to be withheld from release.

A review of statements by the member for Vancouver South, who put forward the December 10 motion, shows that he is now in favour of a public inquiry, not the unrestricted publication of the documents in question. There is obviously an ongoing process under way to find a resolution to the conflicting need of the House for information and the requirement to preserve military and diplomatic security.

As recently as June 8, 2006, Mr. Speaker, you ruled that national security, when asserted by a minister, was sufficient to set aside a

requirement to table documents cited in debate. That was supported by an earlier ruling found at pages 28627 to 28631 of the *Debates* for November 2, 1983. I would point out that you went on to say that the Speaker had no role in reviewing documents in this circumstance.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, there is an ongoing process to prepare documents for the House. Officials of the Department of Justice and Justice Iacobucci are engaged in preparing documents. The House has always accepted that national security justifies withholding papers from the House. In fact, once again, the member for St. John's East indicates that they are not asking for everything to be produced and to be made public. Our government has put in place a process to protect the security. Let that process work.

In this instance, our government is taking unprecedented measures to disclose what can be disclosed. We have put in place a review process by a person of expertise, experience and repute. I submit that these measures indicate that the government is making every possible effort to comply with the order of the House of December 10, consistent with the competing requirement to protect the security of our forces and our international obligations. The Minister of Justice has kept the House well informed of all of our efforts in this regard.

The government will want to respond in greater detail to these points raised by my three hon. colleagues. I would ask for that opportunity at a later date.

• (1115)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to burden your ears too much, but in light of some of the comments that have been made, I want to make a couple of points to, I hope, clarify the situation. Obviously, it has been a matter of some contention over the last several months and a matter of some emotion between members. That is understandable, with the many allegations and accusations that have been made flying in almost every conceivable direction.

With the comments made by my colleague and also by the member for St. John's East and my colleague from the Bloc, with whom I have served with on the Afghan special committee, as well as my friend from Scarborough, whose leadership on this issue for many years has been outstanding, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of issues.

It is a serious mistake for the government to believe that what is being asked or sought is simply that documents be laid holus-bolus on the table without any regard for national security and, to borrow the phrase from my colleague from Regina, looking at the question of the issue of protection of the military.

The protection of the military and questions of national security are matters of utmost importance to all members of the House, certainly to members of our party. What we believe can be done is not beyond the ability of the House. It is done in many other parliaments. Indeed, there are circumstances under which it has even been done in this House. It is perfectly possible for unredacted documents to be seen by members of Parliament who have been sworn in for the purpose of looking at those documents.

Privilege

There is a clear difference of opinion between the opposition and the government. The government believes the appointment of Mr. Iacobucci as its special counsel provides a suitable implementation of the House of Commons resolution in December. We believe it does not, that in fact there is a legitimate issue still as to how the House can find a way to implement the resolution without having a negative impact on the issues which the government has raised as concerns.

It was for the purpose of making that one intervention, Mr. Speaker, that I wanted to rise to say that there really is a misunderstanding on the part of the government, and I take it in good faith that it is not deliberately misinterpreting what people are saying.

We are saying that it should be possible for the House to find a means to implement the resolution without having a negative impact on national security. The government is saying that the route it has taken is the only possible or the best possible implementation of the House resolution. That is a legitimate difference of opinion. That is why you are the Speaker. You are asked to make these judgments and to make these determinations, and we look forward to the judgment call that you make.

It is an important question as to the rights of Parliament to be able to deal with documents. I want to endorse the comments that my friend from Scarborough has made with respect to the question of the letter that went out from the Department of Justice, which could only be interpreted as having a chilling effect on people who are appearing before a parliamentary committee. I think it is entirely inappropriate.

● (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief.

I would like to bring up two points. First, the government representative said that we had not raised this question of privilege at the earliest opportunity. I remind members that Justice Iacobucci's mandate was presented to the House on Tuesday. That was the first time we had seen it. In the hours that followed, we prepared a motion, of which you have a copy, Mr. Speaker. We also worked with the NDP. It seems as though we acted as quickly as possible.

Second, I also remind the House that Justice Iacobucci's mandate has no time frame.

This morning, Amnesty International announced that it could be up to two years before the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan has access to the documents. I am sure everyone will agree that a lot can happen in two years, and we need to find the truth as quickly as possible.

I will conclude by saying that the government is being completely unreasonable if it does not accept these proposals. The Bloc worked with the NDP to create a motion to maximize cooperation between the opposition and the government.

I remind members that the second paragraph of the suggested motion states:

That it be an instruction to the Special Committee on Canada's Mission in Afghanistan to adopt rules and procedures for the reception and handling of the

documents demanded by the House order of December 10th, 2009, in a manner that safeguards national security and other confidentiality requirements while respecting parliamentary privilege, after receiving advice from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel;

I think that is reasonable. It was also brought up by the Liberal member.

I trust your good judgment, Mr. Speaker, as you review our question of privilege.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I know that eventually at some point debate on this issue will be cut off if we seem to be going in circles, but I just want to respond to comments made by my colleague from Toronto Centre who spoke of the fact that security provisions can be put in place.

I would point out again, as I did in my initial submission, that the order of the House of December 10 contained no such security provisions. The order of the House that was passed on December 10 requested that documents be produced immediately with no respect and no consideration to security concerns.

That is the crux of this argument. How can documents be produced that may endanger our national security and the security of our military or our international diplomatic efforts?

Once again, the member for St. John's East talked about the special committee on Afghanistan proposing security measures be put in place. It has not done so, and yet it is asking for documents to be produced anyway.

How can the government possibly protect its national security interests and produce documents in this matter? It simply cannot. There has to be much more work done to ensure the integrity of these documents, to ensure that national security interests are protected.

The order of the House of December 10 does nothing to consider that very serious consequence which may occur if these points of privilege are accepted.

Mr. Speaker, I gravely implore you to consider these points when making your judgment.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just quickly, I am assuming, given the fairness that you always treat these arguments with, that the government will be allowed further argument on this.

I am standing only to request that we be given the opportunity to respond, particularly on the issue that the parliamentary secretary has now raised, both in his initial statement and now, with regard to the whole question of national security.

I will only make this one point and would want to reserve our right to argue it more extensively. The argument over national security is one that, given the rights of Parliament, is not to be determined solely by the government. If it were really serious about that argument, there would have been extensive discussions and negotiations after the motion and resolution of December 10.

The Address

We have now provided for a system that we believe would be acceptable to the opposition parties, the majority of parliamentarians, in the resolution that was heard from my colleague from St. John's East.

Mr. Speaker, I simply will terminate by asking you to give us the opportunity to respond once the government has come back with its full argument.

• (1125)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. We, too, of course, would like the opportunity to respond when the government comes back.

Following up on what the member for Windsor—Tecumseh said in support of the member for Toronto Centre and the motion from the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, I want to make the point regarding security and all other national issues, access to information, et cetera, that there is the supremacy of Parliament over any rules related to these.

It is the responsibility of Parliament, not just the government, as was just mentioned. There are precedents which we will bring up in further debate which have ruled on the primacy of Parliament in these issues, not in the primacy of something that would inhibit Parliament to that information.

It would be the responsibility of Parliament to protect national security, but it still has the primacy of access to information that it needs on this issue and any other issues of major national importance.

The Speaker: The parliamentary secretary, in his submissions, requested that the matter be deferred for a while to permit ministers who have submissions on the issue to make them to the House, and I am quite prepared to do that.

I will deal with one issue at the moment, and that was the question of timeliness of the request to raise a question of privilege in the House. I note the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River filed his request before the session of the House began, which was the first opportunity he could do that following the prorogation of the previous session, and therefore the fact that the order could not be complied with and that tablings might not be done during a prorogation.

Accordingly, in my view there is no lack of timeliness in this case. The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River had not made his presentation in the House because I asked him to hold off so we could see what would happen with the inquiry that Mr. Justice Iacobucci is carrying out.

When the matter came to a head yesterday and everyone else indicated they would go ahead, I indicated I would hear arguments from all three members who had submitted letters on this point, but I do not believe timeliness is an issue, and accordingly, I will dispense with that one now.

[*Translation*]

I am prepared to hear other arguments on this matter from the ministers who were mentioned in the questions of privilege raised. I will then come back to the House with a ruling.

I thank all honourable members for their comments today, which will be of great assistance in dealing with this difficult matter.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: When this matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas had the floor. There are five minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks. I therefore call upon the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one issue not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, in an area where serious recalibration is necessary, is with regard to the use of security certificates in Canada. We are seeing security certificates overturned and quashed by the courts.

The latest was on December 14 when Justice Richard Mosley of the Federal Court of Canada quashed the security certificate against Hassan Almrei. Mr. Almrei had been detained on an Immigration and Refugee Protection Act security certificate since 2001 as an alleged terrorism suspect.

The most recent certificate was issued in February 2008 signed by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and the then Minister of Public Safety, who is now the Minister of International Trade. That is eight years in jail, never having been charged, tried or convicted of a crime. It is still hard to believe that is possible in Canada.

Justice Mosley, in quashing the certificate against Mr. Almrei, noted that he “was not a member of an organization that there are reasonable grounds to believe has engaged in terrorism”. That is a very serious conclusion.

However, there is another aspect of Justice Mosley's decision that is also very serious. As part of the judgment, he also ruled that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and the former Minister of Public Safety were in violation of their duty of candour to the court, noting that they had failed to provide full information on the case to the court and that they did not fully review all the information available about the case when they signed the security certificate against Mr. Almrei in 2008.

This is extremely troubling given the extraordinary circumstances of security certificates which suspend the usual process of justice in Canada. The security certificate allows for the indefinite detention without charge, trial or conviction; it withholds evidence from the accused and his or her lawyer; and it prevents even the special advocates who do get to review all the evidence from communicating with the accused about specific details or allegations. It works in camera, in secret.

The Address

Given the extraordinary circumstances under which a security certificate is used, Judge Mosley points out that the government, CSIS and the ministers signing the security certificate must present all the evidence at their disposal, even that which is unfavourable to their case. He notes that in this case the certificate was:

—assembled with information that could only be construed as unfavourable to Almrei without any serious attempt to include information to the contrary, or to update their assessment.

The judge found the ministers in breach of their duty of candour to the court. It should be pointed out that he also, similarly, found CSIS to have breached its duties.

New Democrats have long held that the security certificate process should be repealed. We feared exactly what has taken place, that the process would not be used appropriately and that due diligence would not be done, that there would be an abuse of these extraordinary powers. The government must respond to this judgment and this situation. I happen to believe personally that this matter is so serious that both ministers should be removed from cabinet and the use of security certificates should be suspended given the failures of these ministers.

Recalibration was the word used by the government to describe the need for prorogation. Serious recalibration and serious accountability measures are needed especially in light of this abuse of the security certificate process.

The Speech from the Throne provided no recalibration. It was just more of the same. There is no coherent vision of how to protect or create jobs for Canadians. The government could have made choices to ensure all Canadians benefit in an economic recovery, but it chose not to.

There is no movement to stop the corporate tax giveaway that diverts billions from lifting seniors out of poverty or helping women and children. There will be \$6 billion more given to profitable corporations, big banks and big oil companies, which is especially ironic when the banks are announcing record profits.

There is no tangible commitment on climate change. The government called climate change one of the most important challenges but offered no plan to address it, other than deregulating and speeding up tar sands development and ending the role of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

There is no new commitment to public transit. The government could have chosen to dedicate 1¢ per litre of the gas tax to public transit. There is no national housing program and no new affordable housing or homelessness commitment. There was silence on health care. There was nothing significant on child care. There was nothing on pay equity and there was no commitment to fair trade. Instead, the outrageous free trade deal with Colombia is the first thing that is back on the agenda.

Sadly, this is yet another disappointing agenda from the government.

• (1130)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the hon. member speak because he clearly still has not read the economic action plan from last year. Had he read last year's action plan, he would know that there were

significant resources for community centres, roads and bridges, tax cuts for families and funding for transit across this country.

I was delighted to participate in a \$1.5 billion announcement in Toronto. His province received funding for transit, for the development of low income homes and for unemployment. In the Speech from the Throne, we talked about the reduction of red tape. We talked about moving forward with continuing our investments for communities across Canada. I can only assume that he still has not actually read the throne speech or the first part of the economic action plan.

I wonder how the member can continue to talk about the things that he talks about when he constantly votes against all of these investments that we are making, whether it is for low income Canadians, whether it is extending \$100 for a family so they can have choice in child care, whether it is funding for our transit system, whether it is reducing tariffs on our manufacturers so they can have more money to invest in themselves and in their business or whether it is giving families more money in their pockets so they can invest in themselves and in their families.

Why does the member constantly vote against the things Canadians want and the things our budget and throne speech set out, which are jobs and growth for Canada, so we can continue to lead the world in economic growth and provide a country that is the best country to live, work and invest in?

• (1135)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, that was almost longer than my speech.

I will just pick on one aspect of what the hon. member raised, which is the commitment to child care that is absolutely lacking in the throne speech.

In my community, after housing, the most significant expenditure of any family is child care, and that is even before food. The government's \$100 a month, which I think is even taxable, hardly makes any dent in the child care expenses of an average family.

However, in the throne speech and in the most recent budget what assistance is added to that? For the lowest income families, they will get another \$3.25 a week toward their child care expenses. I am sure there was dancing in the streets when people heard about that generous contribution toward the child care expenses of Canadians. It amounts to nothing and it is absurd.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Burnaby—Douglas raised in his speech the fact that the government mentioned the issue of nuclear disarmament. I would like to ask the member for his assessment of Canada's work in this area over the past few years. Has Canada been playing a role in building a world without nuclear weapons?

The Address

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, Canada used to play a very significant role in the whole question of ending nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation. We used to have an ambassador for disarmament who had an advocacy mandate as part of its role. Sadly, that is no longer part of the role for the ambassador for disarmament. Folks like, in the past, Douglas Roche and Peggy Mason, had that mandate and did considerable work in raising awareness and contributing to the whole movement toward nuclear disarmament.

The position still exists and it is staffed by very able and dedicated public servants, but, sadly, they do not have that advocacy role and it should be restored.

There is still significant participation by Canadians in non-governmental organizations working toward this goal, but Canada's capacity to participate in the various negotiations has declined. We do not have the public service capacity that we used to. Canada was recognized in the past as a significant player in the whole question of verification of the reduction of nuclear arms. Sadly, we have lost that capacity in some regard now. We have experts but their experience has been underutilized in that area. Canada has not come out in support of initiatives like an Arctic nuclear weapons-free zone. Canada has not endorsed the idea of a negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention.

I am glad there was a mention in the Speech from the Throne on the question of nuclear disarmament and nuclear proliferation but we need to get back on track and we need to put a lot more into that question.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be sharing my time with my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Mississauga—Brampton South, whose riding is second to none.

I would first and foremost like to congratulate our athletes for the superb job they did in Vancouver. The pride that we experienced as an entire country as we watched these superb men and women in their quest for excellence was truly humbling. We truly have reached a milestone, both through their achievements and as hosts of these winter games. That pride continues to grow as we watch our Paralympic athletes take on the world. We are all cheering them on as they strive for the top of the podium.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to offer a reply to the Speech from the Throne because I feel, as do a great number of Canadians and constituents in my riding of Davenport, that the government missed an opportunity to address issues that are important to Canadians, and by this I mean issues from housing to homelessness, public transit, child care, the environment, creating green jobs, the arts and seniors' concerns.

Most clearly, the Speech from the Throne demonstrated that the government's most recent prorogation was not about recalibrating its agenda but about missed opportunities. A Latin proverb states, "History repeats itself", but opportunity does not.

While we were prorogued, a number of major international events took place and Canadians would have preferred that their parliamentarians had been here at work and dealing with these troubling times. On January 12, the people of Haiti were struck by a terrible earthquake where entire cities were destroyed and an already

struggling society was once again set back. We all watched with undivided attention as the relief efforts unfolded. We have still not been able to understand the full extent of the devastation in Haiti before we took action.

The response of our soldiers and our workers was remarkable. Canadians stood together in unwavering resolve and opened their hearts, their homes and their wallets, all in an effort to contribute to the relief efforts. There are multiple challenges facing Haiti and I hope we can work with the Haitian government and the people to deal with these challenges.

I cannot help but think, however, that so much more might have been accomplished had parliamentarians been in Ottawa, working together regardless of party affiliation, to speed the process further or define more and better ways to help the aid make its way to Haiti.

One such measure might have been to send a major Canadian figure as an envoy to Haiti. We lost a valuable opportunity to send a champion on behalf of the country. We missed a great opportunity to find and use someone whose prestige would bring together both private and non-governmental organizations in an effort to make a real and lasting difference in the relief and rebuilding efforts in Haiti.

Both the United States and Brazil, the other two countries leading the relief effort, appointed special envoys to Haiti to deal with the crisis. The United States called on the service of two former presidents, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, to direct those efforts. The decision was not a partisan one. It was a human one. Those two Americans, regardless of political stripe, fostered an effective and lasting partnership with the Haitian community.

Canada has a wealth of former statespeople who could have been called upon. Why did we not call upon former prime ministers, like Paul Martin, Jean Chrétien, Kim Campbell, Joe Clark or even Brian Mulroney, to fulfill this position for us?

On February 20, flood waters crashed through the Portuguese Islands of Madeira killing 42 people, injuring hundreds and causing billions of dollars worth of damage. This is another event that took place when we were prorogued.

I had the opportunity to speak with a number of members of the Portuguese Canadian community and express my deepest condolences. We lost the chance to express our deepest condolences as a nation from this venerable place and, moreover, there was no opportunity for us to discuss what we could do as international leaders to help in this time of need.

Unfortunately, tragedy also struck in Chile just before Parliament resumed. It was with truly heavy hearts that we watched a terrible force of nature destroy so many communities.

● (1140)

Last week I attended a vigil at Queen's Park in Toronto where members of the Chilean community were asking the government to also match, dollar for dollar, the contributions that have been made, as it did in Haiti for the relief efforts. I encourage the government to do so.

The Address

Canada is an international leader and, as an international leader, people around the world look to Canada in times of need for guidance and assistance. The Parliament of Canada is the foremost institution of our nation and when there is no one to answer, to lend support or to speak to the world, we lose our role as leaders.

In order to no longer miss these opportunities, our priority should be institutional reform. Parliament is a venerable institution. In this place, we have achieved so much, from universal health care to the Canada pension plan.

Our party has asked that the Prime Minister give 10 days written notice and specific reasons should he intend to seek prorogation. This would give Parliament the opportunity to debate the merits of prorogation. We have also suggested that Parliament should not be prorogued within a year of a Speech from the Throne unless Parliament consents. Prorogation should not be a way to avoid scrutiny, so it cannot be used to escape a confidence motion or committee work.

We took an important step forward with yesterday's motion to require the Prime Minister to seek a resolution from Parliament to prorogue for more than seven days, I would ask that the Prime Minister also respect the will of this House.

The Speech from the Throne did not truly address the realities that seniors face today. While a seniors' day is welcome recognition of the contributions that our greatest generations have made for us, without the substance to make a significant difference, it does not amount to much more than another day. What is another day to low income seniors who spend over 55% of their income on food and shelter? When we take into account extra expenses, such as health care, clothing and transportation, times are becoming increasingly difficult for seniors. This becomes even more urgent when we consider that the percentage of Canadians over 65 years of age is expected to double in the coming 30 years.

Seniors in Canada are worried and, overwhelmingly, do not believe that their interests are being considered by the government. During a round table, one of the suggestions our caucus made was for the creation of a supplementary Canada pension plan that would enable Canadians to invest more for their retirement. Constituents in my riding of Davenport have told me that they support these measures, so I do not see why the government refused to act on this plan.

The Speech from the Throne also did not take jobs into account. Where are the green jobs? Green jobs are the jobs of the future. They are the single greatest and most sustainable way for us to make an investment in our future. Especially coming out of the recent economic crisis, we should, now more than ever, start preparing for the jobs we will need in the future, the way that countries across the world are already doing.

We see that countries, like Brazil, are ahead of the curve. They have emerged from the recession and are now emphasizing environmentally friendly public policies and job creations through hydroelectric development.

In my own riding of Davenport, the government has a perfect opportunity to take action in this regard for the much needed electrification and expansion of rail routes.

Our caucus developed a number of suggestions going forward to deal with job creations. We have acknowledged that there is a major problem when the youth unemployment rate is double that of the overall unemployment rate. Canadian youth are looking to us now to help them earn money for school and to get extra experience in the fields in which they are training, just as we will look to them soon as the leaders of our country and the captains of our industries.

Canadian entrepreneurs are looking to us to help foster innovation. If we can lend any assistance to these small businesses, we will be helping them to create the jobs that we will need in the future and we will be establishing a strong Canadian brand. We have identified the need and now we need to move forward and take action on this now, instead of waiting for it to become a larger problem in the future.

We must not miss the opportunity to continue to be a leader in the human rights field. Canada has a long and proud heritage of being a beacon around the world for the pursuit of human rights. While not mentioned in the throne speech, we need to renew our commitment to protect human rights at home, as well as in our approach to international relations. We cannot just say that we will stand up for what is right. We must demonstrate to the world that we are starting here at home.

● (1145)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently. The member's speech was full of so many inconsistencies I do not even know where to begin. He talked about Seniors' Day at one point and said that seniors do not care about recognition, but food and medicine. But earlier in his speech, he talked about the people of Haiti and that somehow it was more important to them to have a former prime minister visit Haiti than it was to get the food and medicine our government has been providing.

He also mentioned in his speech that history does not repeat itself. One of the reasons we made so many reinvestments in the armed forces was precisely so that history would not repeat itself. We all remember the former Liberal government's response when the tsunami hit Sri Lanka. It took that government two weeks to decide what it was going to do and another couple of weeks to figure out if it could rent a plane to bring our equipment over there.

The response to Haiti by this government has been completely the opposite. We were the first country to be there. Our soldiers were on the ground working right away. Canadians responded in record numbers with over \$100 million for the relief effort. I am extraordinarily proud of what Canadians and our armed forces have done. I am extraordinarily proud that we are leading the way on reconstruction in Haiti. I am proud of the fact the Governor General has visited there with the Prime Minister.

I wonder if the hon. member will not join me in congratulating the armed forces and the people of Canada for all the hard work they have done to help rebuild Haiti.

The Address

• (1150)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I believe one of the first things I mentioned was my congratulations to our armed forces and personnel for their wonderful efforts in Haiti. It is unfortunate that the hon. member did not understand what I was trying to get at, but I was trying to say in a cooperative manner that we should all work together on this very important issue. I was not actually trying to be partisan on the issue of Haiti. When we are dealing with people who are faced with calamity and catastrophe we should all work together, so I did not want to make this a political issue.

What I was trying to say is that we should accept the challenge like other countries have done of sending a special envoy to coordinate efforts. When we look at the U.S., for example, it has no problem calling upon former leaders to assist in getting more funding and coordinating efforts. I was suggesting it would be a wise idea for the government to do the same thing.

What has been missing in Haiti has been coordination. There are several hundred NGOs working in Haiti, and if we do not get this right this will be a disaster that could last for a very long time. We do not want to miss that opportunity. We want to make sure it is not just money that we send to Haiti, but also coordination. That is what is very important and what needs to be done. I am hoping there will be one person to deal with that and not several agencies—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, contrary to the government member's comments, I want to tell the member for Davenport I did like his speech, which hit some very valuable points. One of the points he brought up was the whole issue of providing matching funds for the victims of the earthquake in Chile, which the government has so far been very silent about. So far we have had no matching funds by the government for donations by Canadians, unlike for Haiti. There are no Canadian warships loaded with supplies or talk of waiving immigration rules. Simply put, our response has been totally embarrassing as far as the earthquake in Chile is concerned.

I would like to ask why the hon. member thinks the government is dragging its feet. It cannot be an issue of money because we know that in the case of Haiti, there is about \$200 million the government is probably going to be matching, whereas in the case of Chile we are talking about much smaller numbers. We had \$10,000 raised at a social a couple of weeks ago. We have another social in Winnipeg with 1,000 tickets already sold for this weekend. But all told, the numbers are going to be much smaller in terms of matching aid when dealing with the issue in Chile.

I would like to ask the member why the government is dragging its feet on aid to Chile.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, the vigil that I attended last week was comprised of people from all parties. It was an initiative put together by Rosario Marchese, the provincial NDP member for Trinity—Spadina, along with other members of the provincial parliament. Certainly, the Chilean community and the members who were there are very concerned that the government is not giving equal attention to this very important issue facing the people of Chile. I am not sure, and cannot answer, why the government is not

responding in the same way and matching the funds, but I would ask it to do so, because Chile is also one of our major partners and we need to be there for Chile. I would encourage the government to be there.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne was full of spin and very light on substance. When the Prime Minister called on the Governor General to prorogue Parliament and give himself three months off, he claimed he needed time to recalibrate. Yet when we came back and heard Her Excellency deliver the speech, it was really full of rehashed ideas.

The speech lacked vision. Something that really stuck out in my mind was the lack of investment in the middle class and the fact there was really no plan for job creation. In fact, the government subsequently imposed a \$13 billion job-killing payroll tax in the budget, which will have a devastating impact on all Canadians, particularly in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South.

In its reply to the Speech from the Throne, the Liberal Party has proposed an amendment to reflect our wish that Her Excellency not be burdened with future excessive requests for prorogation. I hope the government takes that into consideration.

I would like to give some context of how we got here. How did we arrive at a point where we have had four speeches from the throne in four years? While the government and Prime Minister wanted three months off to recalibrate, all we received when we returned was a potential change to *O Canada* and, fundamentally, the status quo.

Back in December 2009, the government was being rocked by the Afghan detainee controversy. It was really desperate to avoid accountability. When confronted with the serious allegations on the issue, the Prime Minister decided to do what he does best: He shut down Parliament. Again, in a crisis, he realized that he was in trouble, so he asked the Governor General to prorogue the House of Commons.

This was further validated by a remark made by his former chief of staff Tom Flanagan:

I think his problem is that the government's talking points really don't have much credibility. Everybody knows that Parliament was prorogued in order to shut down the Afghan inquiry, and the trouble is that the government doesn't want to explain why that was necessary.

There were rallies across the country against prorogation. Canadians, including angry constituents of mine and across the country, were coming out regardless of their political affiliation and signing petitions and engaging on the issue, trying to demonstrate clearly to the government that this was completely unacceptable.

I realized just a few days ago that the Prime Minister has a love for social media. He was on YouTube. I hope he also had an opportunity to visit a Facebook website that has over 220,000 individuals against prorogation and read the comments and thoughts on his actions when it comes to prorogation.

The Address

On January 25, when we were supposed to be in the House of Commons, my colleagues and I and the Leader of the Opposition were here in Ottawa. We were doing what we should have been doing, that is, working on behalf of our constituents and Canadians. We organized well over 30 round tables, featuring a whole range of discussions on issues that matter to Canadians. This was done before and after the Olympics. We put forward concrete proposals and solutions before the Speech from the Throne and the budget to demonstrate that we were working and, more importantly, that we had concrete ideas to help advance the agenda for Canadians.

We recognize that we sit in a House of Commons with a minority government. In that situation, we would have thought the government would take upon itself the ideas we had presented and incorporate them into the budget and the Speech from the Throne. Unfortunately, it did not respect the will of the House, whose majority is comprised of opposition parties.

As I said before, we have had four speeches from the throne in four years. In my opinion, the root cause of this particular pattern is the fact the government really lacks accountability. It is running and hiding whenever it can. Sadly, it is an example of a pattern that Canadians are all too well aware of. I am going to cite some examples that will illustrate this point when it comes to accountability.

The government fired the nuclear whistleblower, Linda Keen, for her warnings about the Chalk River reactor. As president of a quasi-judicial organization who was doing her job to look out for the best interests of Canadians and to promote safety, she was fired for being critical and honest and upfront with the government.

• (1155)

The government also refused to renew the contract of the RCMP Public Complaints Commissioner, Paul Kennedy, after he was critical of it. That is another example of another individual being refused or ultimately pushed aside. It also shut down the Military Police Complaints Commission before Richard Colvin was set to appear, and failed to renew the contract of the commissioner, Peter Tinsley.

Unfortunately, I also saw first hand that the government had a book, a dirty tricks manual, to grind parliamentary committee business to a halt. I saw this firsthand in my committee, when the government would play games to avoid accountability.

The government also withheld information from the elections commissioner, which necessitated a police raid on the Conservative Party headquarters.

It also refused to provide adequate funding for the independence of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The Parliamentary Budget Officer is very clearly doing his job and, of course, time and time again his numbers have consistently refuted the government's numbers, and the budget officer has questioned the credibility of the government's numbers in accounting and forecasting. Again, the government has marginalized him and his office.

The government also attacked the public servant Richard Colvin for doing his public duty to truthfully respond to questions from Parliament.

I digress a bit, but another broken promise was clearly with respect to the upper House, the Senate. The government promised only to appoint elected senators, but we have seen in the past few weeks that recalibration was really about appointing a whole new set of senators.

The government promised never to raise taxes. On that I give the example of the EI payroll tax increase, which is a job killer. Furthermore, the government broke its promise on income trusts, and raised personal income taxes when it came to power.

Thus there is this consistent pattern of lack of accountability when it comes to the government. This is really the root cause of why we had the Speech from the Throne. As I said, it is the fourth one in four years.

I could go on with many other examples, but the government has a pathological aversion to accountability. It holds our institutions in contempt and tries systematically to undermine public authority, while increasing the power and control over an already over-centralized PMO. It is no wonder that it produced a Speech from the Throne that offers nothing for the middle class or on creating jobs.

What is missing from the Speech from the Throne? What elements are fundamentally missing that should have been included? Despite its extraordinary length, the speech contained no specific measures to create jobs or to help the middle class, as I said before. It had no specific investments for research and development and had nothing new on clean energy.

Of course, the government is going to continue to invest in clean energy, but it has cancelled our eco-energy program and has ensured that we are well behind other countries in terms of investments in this particular sector. In fact, China has invested far more in green technology and in creating green jobs than Canada.

There was nothing on pensions. Even though this is supposed to be a priority, the government said it wanted to consult Canadians. Again, it is punting the issue and dragging its feet.

However, we have put forward concrete proposals when it comes to pensions. We were very clear about our proposals in the letter we sent in advance of the budget and the Speech from the Throne. This is an issue that is a cause of concern to many Canadians. It comes up time and time again and it was missing from the Speech from the Throne.

There was nothing on culture. Can one imagine a Speech from the Throne with nothing in it on culture, and nothing on dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder among veterans?

The key issue for me is the fact the government should be dealing with the number one issue, the economy. Its \$13 billion payroll tax is in sharp contrast to creating jobs. In fact, numerous independent sources, like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, have indicated that this particular measure will kill over 200,000 jobs.

The Address

I want to quote the *National Post*, which I think fundamentally summarizes my position on the Speech from the Throne. It stated that:

the [Prime Minister's] government used just 740 words last year to set the stage for its \$56-billion deficit. Yesterday it needed more than 6,000 words to prepare us for the next stage. Yet we still have only the vaguest notion of what specific actions will be taken to get Canada's economy back in balance.

● (1200)

The Speech from the Throne is all about rhetoric, spin and gimmicks. The government is not accountable. I have listed a whole range of examples on that. Unfortunately, the government has done very little to help my constituents, the middle class and to create jobs.

● (1205)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Madam Speaker, talk about rhetoric. The hon. member stated in his address that his party held some round tables. While we out in our ridings consulting with Canadians, the Liberals were holding round tables because they were afraid to be back in their ridings.

Despite all these round tables, when the throne speech was brought forward by the Prime Minister and the budget, the Liberal Party did not even move a simple amendment to the budget, something that is standard around this place. The party brought nothing forward.

When the Liberals had an opportunity to have their issues or policies debated for a full day in the House, they spent the entire day talking about the fact that they actually had no ideas. They want us to stop advertising and they want us to stop consulting with their constituents because they have no ideas.

The Liberals have no ideas on the environment, the budget, on how to get Canadians back to work, creating jobs, job growth, protecting Canadians, national defence or natural resources.

The member was critical in his speech, but he did not provide one solution, one thing that the Liberals would do differently.

It is remarkable that after all this time in government, there has been one vote of non-confidence, which the government survived. We have had two minority governments now that have lasted longer than most other ones.

The member should be proud of—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would like to give the hon. member for Mississauga—Brampton South the opportunity to respond.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Madam Speaker, I will provide a response on two components.

With respect to the round tables, not only did we hold them in Ottawa, but I held one in my riding, constituency of Mississauga—Brampton South. I got together over 250 small businesses with the leader of the official opposition to look at solutions. We heard directly from people in the audience and from the panel members about the government's job-killing payroll tax, which again counterproductive to creating jobs.

In terms of putting forward a concrete proposal, the leader of the official opposition put forward a set of solutions well in advance. We

dealt with issues such as jobs, pensions, clean energy and jobs in the environment. Shortly thereafter we also proposed a list of examples of where the government could save money, because the government is wasting taxpayer money. That amounted to over \$1.2 billion.

The initiatives that we proposed, with the pensions and supplementary pension plans, with cash advances on capital cost allowances to help small business and other proposals would be funded by government's waste of taxpayer money. Not only have we put forward ideas, we also had cost savings to go with that as well.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Oak Ridges—Markham certainly follows the adage that the best defence is a good offence. When we listen to the government, people would think we were the ones who prorogued the House.

The brain trust in the Conservative government decided that this was perhaps a good idea, to prorogue the House and set the stage for a potential election, following the great results it expected from the Olympics. The government did this when it was 10 points ahead in the polls. It did not anticipate that this would be a total political disaster, that it would end up losing its 10% and would be in the mess it is in right now.

Now the Conservatives are very sensitive about that issue. I think they are trying to deflect the whole issue to other issues. They are trying to say that provinces prorogue houses. Provinces do but they do it in consultation with the opposition.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague's assessment is absolutely correct in that the prorogation resulted in rallies across the country. Regardless of political affiliation, Canadians came out and showed their outrage against the government's maneuvering tactics to avoid accountability.

As I indicated before, the Prime Minister has now shown some new love for social media. His YouTube video was up a few days ago in which he responded to Canadians. I strongly recommend the Prime Minister also visit the Facebook website, where over 220,000 Canadians showed their protest against the prorogation.

The fundamental issue is the government is continually putting forward Speeches from the Throne because it is trying to avoid accountability. Sooner or later it is going to have to respond to the concerns of Canadians.

● (1210)

Mrs. Alice Wong (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by Her Excellency the Governor General. I will be splitting my time with the member for St. Catharines.

The throne speech described these times of both "great uncertainty and great optimism". Where there are uncertainties, there are bound to be opportunities, which is also where optimism is often found.

The Address

The global financial crisis has no doubt dampened the spirits of our nation and left us in the dark for a while, but Canadians proved ourselves to be a people of strength and resilience, who remain true to our identity even in the midst of turbulence. Although the dark cloud of the global recession has not yet left us completely, Canadians know that we have weathered the storm very well and should be proud of our achievements thus far. Through it all, we have not forgotten some of the core values that make us Canadian. We continue to welcome newcomers on to Canadian soil and foster the growth of our next generation.

We are a country of immigrants. In the throne speech, the Governor General stated that, "To be Canadian is to show the world that people drawn from every nation can live in harmony".

I believe Richmond is a great example of this. Recently, I had the opportunity to attend a peace and harmony forum, where children and young adults sang and recited scriptures from the Bible, chapters from the Koran, quotes from Confucius and other great thinkers and verses from famous poets. This is the mosaic we proudly present to the world.

I represent a riding of this great diversity. Richmond is a beautiful city, where people from a wide spectrum of ethnic backgrounds live and work. Our country's diversity is one of our strengths. I cannot think of any other country in the world that is so accommodating and so generous to those who want to call this great nation of ours home. Thousands of people each year come to Canada to make a better life for themselves and their families.

The government certainly recognizes the importance of new immigrants to Canada. We are committed to a system that will provide the best opportunities for newcomers to succeed, while protecting the interest of all Canadian citizens. The pan-Canadian framework for the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials is part of the government's strategy to bring the best workforce in the world to the Canadian job market.

Since 2009, the government has committed over \$50 million over two years through the Canada economic action plan to develop this framework. Going forward, the government will continue to work with the provinces and territories to strengthen recognition of foreign credentials through the framework to help internationally trained workers and professionals put their training and knowledge to work in Canada as soon as possible.

On the flip side, the government also recognizes the severity of unscrupulous immigration consultants and their negative impact on our immigration system. In March 2009, the hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism announced a public information campaign to combat immigration fraud and to warn the public against unscrupulous consultants.

Following a year of hard work, the hon. minister announced in February of this year that the government would launch a package to reform the regulation of immigration consultants, which will include severe penalties for those who commit fraud. Clearly, the government is on the right track in protecting the integrity of our immigration system and the welfare of all Canadians.

Canada's economic action plan is working. Job protection and creation are Canada's top priorities. That is why we have continued

to weather the economic storm with Canada's economic action plan. This plan is working in Richmond. Tax dollars are being prudently invested in projects that will benefit the public, such as making people's commutes on Highway 99 quicker with the bus lane expansion, or ensuring people's water and sewage systems are maintained to the excellent standards in one of the cleanest urban watersheds in the country.

The people of Richmond and the neighbourhood will also continue to enjoy a better life resulting from other projects, such as improved community centres and swimming pools, the green pathway on the dike and the library of the Kwantlen Polytechnic University to name just a few. Besides the public sectors, industries and businesses are starting to hire. Jobs have been created and the numbers will keep growing.

● (1215)

I cannot refrain from talking about the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and Paralympic Games. Richmond was an Olympic host city and is the location of the Olympic Oval, a world-class long track speed skating venue. We have welcomed the world and boasted with the Canada Line. Our airport, the YVR, also world class, is the most accessible.

Canada was witness to athletic excellence and Canadian athletes inspired us all with their determination and skill. The Canadian Paralympic curling team is skipped by Jim Armstrong, who is currently joined by another Richmond resident, Darryl Neighbour, on the team. Also, Richmond is the home of Rick Hansen and Alexa Loo.

However, we cannot rest on our accomplishments. We must continue to build our skills for future competitions. I am not only referring to athletic competitions, but the competition of other hands and minds.

Now I would like to comment on job creation and fostering the next generation of working Canadians. In the throne speech, Her Excellency aptly pointed out that, "The success of Canada's economy depends on a skilled and educated workforce". In order to be a world-class economy, we must be educated and trained. Being competitive in today's economy means having the skills and training to adapt to a dynamic global market.

The government believes in fostering an environment for our people to excel at home, and it is evident that we walk the talk. The government has never ceased to invest in the growth of our people through providing grants, tax credits, apprenticeships and support for training programs so Canadians can obtain the skills and training they need to achieve their goals and dreams. Under Canada's economic action plan, this government allotted \$1.9 billion to enhance the availability of training, an investment made toward short and long-term skill training or upgrading for workers of all fields and expertise.

The Address

The government also recognizes the need to give young people a hand to help them smooth out the transition from the campus to the workplace. Especially in our recovering economy, this transition might not be easy for many young Canadians. According to Statistics Canada, the youth unemployment was 15.1%, the highest of any age group.

Young people have a tough time finding jobs to get themselves through school or sustain their livelihood after they are done with school because of the global recession. This government has set in place several programs to bridge the way for young Canadians to enter the job market.

To give an example, the existing career focus program provides wage subsidies of up to \$15,000 to businesses and non-profit organizations to hire high school graduates. Another example is the \$20 million two year targeted funding delivered through the Canada summer jobs program, an incentive for employers to hire summer students.

The games have amazingly united Canadians and fostered our national pride. What lies ahead is to continue to make Canada the best place in the world we all call home.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to draw the member's attention to page 1 of the throne speech. It talks about the earthquake disaster in Haiti. We applaud what the government did and how it responded to the Haitian disaster, but there was a disaster in Chile as well, just days before the throne speech was read. Yet there is no matching funds for Canadian donations. There are no Canadian warships loaded with supplies going there or any talk of waiving any immigration rules.

Last Saturday, a social event in Winnipeg raised \$10,000. Hundreds of people attended. This weekend in Winnipeg there is a social event with over 1,000 tickets already sold to raise funds. These people are asking this question. Why is the government reluctant to provide the same treatment to the victims of the Chilean earthquake as it did for the victims of the Haitian earthquake and match the funds?

• (1220)

Mrs. Alice Wong: Madam Speaker, helping people who are struck by unfortunate disasters is the priority of Canadians. However, sometimes we have to do one thing at a time. Canada definitely shows sympathy for the Chileans and their troubles. I am sure CIDA is constantly monitoring the situation and will render whatever help we can as a nation.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the parliamentary secretary when she talked about creating jobs for youth, et cetera.

In the throne speech the Conservatives said, "as chair of G8 and G20 this year, our government", meaning the Conservative government, "will lead the call for a globally coordinated approach to the withdrawal", and I underline the word "withdrawal", "of economic stimulus".

The whole world is saying we have to invest so that jobs can be created to get us out of this downturn in which we find ourselves.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the government was going to encourage stimulus spending, but the throne speech said the opposite.

Could the parliamentary secretary please clarify this confusion?

Mrs. Alice Wong: Madam Speaker, I think in difficult times we had special measures to tackle the economic downturn caused by the international recession. However, there is a time when we have to plan for the exit. Now that the economy is getting better, we should also plan ahead to tackle the big problem of deficits. This is true for all over the world. The world leaders will sit together and work out a plan. We are proud that Canada is hosting the G8 and the G20. We are taking the lead.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to know whether the member could simply talk to her minister or the Prime Minister and ask them when the government is going to provide matching funds for the Chilean earthquake. Days are going by and people need help. It is about time the current government stepped up to the plate and did the right thing.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Madam Speaker, I am proud to say that Canada is the first to help many nations when there is a disaster. Our nation is working very closely. I am sure the minister responsible for CIDA is watching our Chilean friends closely so that we can give them whatever help we can.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity that has been given to me by the Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism by sharing her time with me. She is doing an outstanding job on behalf of this government. Her riding is in British Columbia but her travels with respect to multiculturalism have taken her across this country. For a member who was just elected a little over a year ago, she is doing an outstanding job for our government, and I applaud her for that.

The response to the throne speech which the Prime Minister gave on March 11 focused on what we need to do as a government and what this Parliament will focus on, with jobs and economic growth remaining our top priorities. In order to deliver on jobs and economic growth, three specific things were outlined in both the throne speech and in the Prime Minister's reply to the throne speech.

The first was tax reductions and enhanced EI benefits, which will provide direct support to Canadians. Let us not forget that the success of our long-term economic strategy is based on short-term stimulus funding. It is also based on tax reductions, both corporate and personal, to make us more competitive from a corporate and personal perspective. This will leave Canadians with more money in their pockets and the ability to spend that money as they wish.

Individuals who are unemployed, hopefully only for the short term, are going to see enhanced EI benefits. These enhanced benefits will provide direct support to Canadians right across this country.

The Address

The second thing the Prime Minister mentioned was infrastructure programs in partnership with the provinces, territories and municipalities across the country. Twelve thousand projects are under way. Those 12,000 projects represent a direct investment in our communities, putting people to work and laying the foundation for prosperity.

From a local perspective I have to look no further than the Applied Health Institute at the Welland campus of Niagara College, which is in a riding not held by a member of our party. It is located in a riding held by a member of the New Democratic Party, a member who voted against the 2009 and 2010 budgets. The Applied Health Institute represents an investment of \$20 million from the federal government, \$20 million from the provincial government, and \$20 million from Niagara College.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice and I were able to tour the institute earlier this year. We toured the construction sites. This institute is going to change the face of the college for years to come. It will change the face of the Niagara community just based on its long-term focus as a health institute.

At Brock University, construction is well under way of the bioresearch facility, 110,000 square feet of research space, of incubator space. This will create the types of long-term jobs that will contribute to the success of the Niagara community.

The third thing the Prime Minister addressed was economic growth. We have to make sure that we regain our economic form within the G20 and the G7. Businesses are hiring again. Just last month 20,000 new jobs were created in this country. Close to 160,000 net new jobs have been created over the last eight months.

This speaks very well for the future of our strategy. This speaks very well for where the budget that was most recently introduced in the House is going to take us.

We are planning for recovery. We are planning to wind down our stimulus plan by March 31, 2011. Let us not forget the purpose of the two year stimulus funding. Our stimulus plan put \$19 billion back into the Canadian economy. It was very specific. It was a short-term approach to make sure that people were getting back to work during the recession. However, to be responsible, we need to make sure that those projects are completed on time and on budget. We need to make sure that they lead us out of the stimulus funding program and back into a situation where we have not just recovered from an economic perspective, but that our finances are back in the black.

● (1225)

We also want to ensure that we are restraining federal spending. It is important to understand that as outlined in the throne speech, the 2010 budget is all about making sure that we have complete fiscal control of the federal budget and federal spending, but we are not going to do it in the way the previous government did in the 1990s.

We are not going to cut transfer payments on education. In fact, over the last five budgets, each and every year we have seen a federal government which has invested in education in this country.

We are not going to reduce transfer payments with respect to health care to the provinces and territories, as happened in the 1990s

under the previous government. We believe the provinces have the responsibility for the delivery of health care and the federal government has the responsibility for ensuring that we help cover the costs.

There has been a lot of talk by the opposition and the government about pensions. We are not going to reduce pensions. We are going to make sure that the funds are there in order to cover the costs for the pensions that we are responsible for at the federal level.

Third and most important, we are going to focus on the continued growth of our economy. We need to build the jobs and the industries of the future. We recognize that to ensure long-term growth, the private sector needs to grow, and in order to grow, businesses need to make sure they are competitive. That is why by 2015 we will have the lowest corporate tax structure in the G7, which will make us that much more competitive. The corporate offices of Tim Hortons is just one example of companies that are coming back to Canada and have recognized that it is a wise and solid investment and a wise and solid business decision.

That is why we will continue to invest in infrastructure across this country, whether it be bridges, buildings, roads or sewers. Where our responsibilities are, in partnership with the provinces, territories and the municipalities, we will ensure that we are ready, that we are targeted for growth and understand the need for solid infrastructure. This is what individuals base their decisions upon with respect to their private lives in terms of where they are going to live and raise their children, where their families are going to grow. It is also an opportunity for corporations and businesses to understand that this is a country that is ready and willing, when it comes to infrastructure, to partner with them to grow their businesses in this country.

That is why we are creating the conditions for economic growth through lower taxes and a stable investment climate. We have the strongest banking system in the world. We have the strongest economy coming out of the recession. We are making the tough decisions to ensure that when the recovery is in full swing, Canada will be in first place, just as we were with respect to our gold medal total at the Olympics.

The Prime Minister also outlined three additional issues in his response to the throne speech.

First, we will ensure that Canada is the best place for families. We will support families and communities and keep our streets and our communities safe by continuing to get tough on criminals and to get tough on crime.

Second, we are going to ensure that from a national perspective, we will safeguard our national security. We will stand up for those who helped build Canada, because Canadians believe that sacrifice and hard work should be recognized. As we strive to create an even better future for our families and communities, our government will stand up for those who built and defended their communities and this country.

The Speech from the Throne also made clear that Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will come to an end in 2011. The throne speech outlined that our efforts will focus on humanitarian aid and development.

The Address

Finally, we will strengthen a united Canada in a changing world. We will protect our unparalleled natural beauty. We will be asserting our sovereignty in the north. We will recognize our aboriginal heritage. We will stand up for what is right in this world.

The throne speech identified the importance of our economy, identified the importance of families in our country, and identified our country's role in this world. I am proud to say that the throne speech is a great foundation upon which this government is going to build over the next number of months and years.

• (1230)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the parliamentary secretary. There is one comment I want to make and one question I want to ask him.

With respect to health care, he talked about what the government did. What he is neglecting to say, and it is unfair, is that it provided nothing in any additional money. For the record, the money that is being transferred is the 2004-05 allocation of \$56 billion by a Liberal government over a 10-year plan. He can even read the paper today. It confirms it.

He said that the government wants to keep more money in the hands of Canadians. I agree with him. We can do it by reducing taxes. I want to ask him a question about page 52. His Minister of Finance and Prime Minister said that taxing on jobs is a killer. We agree. That is why we were reducing EI benefits over so many years.

I will ask him to read page 52 of the budget. It shows that between 2000 and 2006, when the Liberals were in government, EI premiums were going down and then it kind of froze. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the government is going to be raising EI premiums to the tune of \$13 billion. That is taking money out of people's pockets. How can he justify that?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Madam Speaker, I happen to agree with the member opposite when he stated that his government actually reduced EI benefits during its time in government. That is exactly what he said and he is right. For the record, I think it would be important for him to read his comments in *Hansard* after, because it certainly points out that his government did nothing for those who needed assistance during the recession while his party held government.

However, let me state very clearly for the record that it was his government and finance minister that decided that the best way to balance the budget and find savings was not to work hard here in Ottawa. It was simply to cut health transfers to the provinces and territories, of which they are finally starting to recover in this country.

• (1235)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, there are a couple of issues I have with the member's speech. He said that Canada has a strong banking system. It is largely recognized that that is the case. That is what has probably saved us from the mess that we see in the United States right now.

However, we should know here that the government had absolutely nothing to do with that. As a matter of fact, if it had had its way, it would have been deregulating the banking system in the race to the bottom following George Bush. It was the previous

government and the oppositions at the time that forced the previous government to not allow a consolidation of the banks or regulations. The government is simply benefiting by something that was actually kept in place by the previous government.

Let us deal with the issue of corporate tax reductions. The Conservatives once again think that they can race to the bottom on corporate tax reductions and that we are somehow going to have a better economy because of it. The evidence is just not there. Statistics Canada said that business spending on machinery and equipment has actually declined.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Madam Speaker, I can barely rise to respond to that question because I am blown away that a member from the fourth party in the House, the NDP, is actually defending our banking system. He is defending the banking industry.

It is good to see this morning, because every time members of that party stand up, they are trying to strip down a system so that it does not have the ability to do what it did during this time of recession. In fact, it helped this country and led this country to ensure that we are not in the position of one of our North American partners and certainly other partners around the world.

We are talking about the reduction of corporate taxes. We are thinking and moving toward ensuring that corporations have a competitive advantage to do business in this country and to ensure that when companies from outside of this country want to invest, they are going to look to Canada because they know we are competitive, aggressive, and a good place to do business.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Sherbrooke.

Today I am going to talk about a subject that is perhaps not immeasurably important, but that is still very important, since it concerns the government's intention, as expressed in the Speech from the Throne, to abolish the firearms registry, at least for long guns.

This intention on the part of the government has mobilized a lot of people in my constituency. I have met with several crime prevention organizations, since this is one prevention tool that fits perfectly with Quebec's philosophy on crime. The Conservative philosophy revolves exclusively around enforcement and punishment.

I have also met with women's organizations. This is a question of very particular concern to them, because unfortunately, most victims of spousal violence are women.

I have met with the mayors and police chiefs in my riding. Everyone agreed that something had to be done to block the government's intention of abolishing a tool that is widely used by police.

Then I went out to see the people in my riding. I spent time at a lot of metro stations. My urban constituency has eight metro stations, and you can meet a lot of people there. A petition was circulated that I have tabled in the House; 1,500 names were collected in a few days.

The Address

That figure has to be put in perspective: those names were collected in my riding alone, in a few days. That is huge; there was enormous enthusiasm. It was unbelievable; people were lining up in the metro stations to sign the petition. They clearly care about the firearms registry. This is a visceral issue in Quebec, because it came out of the terrible tragedy at the École Polytechnique.

I tabled the petition in the House on March 8, International Women's Day. This is very much a question that concerns and affects women in particular. The firearms registry has been particularly useful in relation to spousal tragedies and murders committed with long guns, a factor that the Conservative government wants to dissociate itself from.

The other reason why women in Quebec, and feminist Quebecers, are greatly concerned about preserving the firearms registry is of course the event that led to the registry: the terrible tragedy at the École Polytechnique de Montréal. That tragedy was the height of misogyny and cowardice; an individual who held women responsible for all his misfortunes and probably for his own mediocrity took the cowardly step of murdering 14 young women with a firearm.

Those women, in the flower of their youth, were murdered with a weapon that the Conservatives want to remove from the firearms registry: a Ruger Mini-14. This is adding insult to injury for all the women who made this the fight of their lives and who decided to take this tragic event and create something out of it.

The firearms registry is the legacy of the victims, the survivors and the families of the victims, who did battle to ensure that Canada, like most countries in the world, would have a firearms registry. We have to be honest when we come to this debate, and talk about the real numbers.

I am often surprised to see the adversaries—and the Conservatives in particular—send the debate right off the rails. It is sort of like a pirate hijacking a vessel. The Conservatives are acting like pirates by taking the debate hostage and saying any old thing and its opposite.

•(1240)

I offer as evidence the response we often hear from the Conservatives. They say that, in any case, most crimes, murders and homicides are not committed with long guns, but with handguns.

From a statistics standpoint, they are not entirely wrong. In 2007, 67% of homicides were committed with handguns as opposed to 17% with shotguns or hunting rifles. What they failed to say, however, was that in 1997, in the early days of the gun registry, the proportion was significantly different. Handguns were involved in 50% of murders, while shotguns or hunting rifles were involved in 39.9%—over twice as many.

Where the gun registry was most useful and had the greatest impact was in the case of shotguns and hunting rifles. The figures show that it was with these weapons that the registry had the greatest impact. It had less impact in the case of handguns.

The government is proposing to eliminate the most useful and effective part of the registry, the one that has had the greatest effect in statistical terms.

They are constantly giving out false information and fear-mongering. This is like Halloween, but without the pumpkin. There is nothing funny about this. They are frightening hunters by telling them that they will be treated like criminals if they are caught in the woods without a registration certificate, will have a criminal record and will no longer be able to travel. That is totally ridiculous.

This is not at all the case. An individual carrying an unregistered weapon will have it confiscated and have a few days to get it back it by submitting a registration certificate. It is a little embarrassing, but there have to be consequences when people fail to respect the law. In any case, it is far less serious than when people forget their vehicle registration, which leads to a hefty fine.

We must cut the Conservatives off at the pass. They will not change their mind, because they are short-sighted on this matter. Two men can block their path and we must convince them to do so. They are the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the NDP.

And when I say Leader of the Opposition, I mean the leader of the Liberal Party. The Bloc Québécois voted unanimously against this bill. Last week, my colleague from Ahuntsic asked the leader of the NDP a question. He tried to shake off the question like one would try to shake a dog off one's leg. That impresses no one. I am not comparing my colleague to a dog, of course. I am using that analogy to explain what the NDP and the Liberals think of this issue. I am sure that my colleagues understand.

These two leaders have to stop with their doublespeak, have the courage of their convictions and take measures to stop the Conservatives in their tracks.

I will finish by speaking about the importance of the gun registry. During my 10-minute speech, the registry was consulted by police nearly 70 times. They did not consult the registry because they had nothing better to do. They took the time to consult it nearly 70 times since my speech began because it is useful to them.

As parliamentarians, we have to trust the police, respect the memory of the victims at the École Polytechnique and all of those who have been abused since then, and establish a gun registry. We have to show political courage and vote against the government bill and the Speech from the Throne, which would get rid of the gun registry.

•(1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my learned colleague on his speech.

I want to focus on the budget's transfer of corporate taxation on the backs of the citizens of this country. The government will be implementing the HST in British Columbia and Ontario which will add billions of dollars to the tax obligations of our citizens. We also see the reduction of corporate taxes in the country staying essentially flat over the next five years, while personal income tax will go from approximately \$100 billion to \$150 billion over the next five years.

The Address

I am wondering what the member's comments would be on the wisdom of a tax policy that puts more taxes on the backs of ordinary working Canadians and takes it off of corporations leaving Canada with the lowest corporate income taxes of any of the G8 or G20 countries, far lower than it needs to be to be competitive in the real world.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Madam Speaker, before I answer the question, I would like to come back to what I was saying earlier.

I said the firearms issue irritates the NDP as much as a dog you want to shake off your leg. Here is another example: although I was just talking about that issue, the NDP preferred to ask me a question about another topic altogether. While the subject of his question is certainly relevant, I would have liked to have heard his reaction to my speech.

As a responsible opposition party, the Bloc Québécois consulted Quebecers and submitted a plan to the minister that included their demands, their solutions and their suggestions regarding the budget. The Bloc is the only opposition party that did so. We did the math. The plan was drawn up by our colleague from Hochelaga. I would like to point out what an excellent job he did on that plan, which is entirely credible and addresses the issue of tax shelters, taxation—

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I listened to the member's speech for 10 minutes and I did not hear any content having to deal with the throne speech itself.

The member from British Columbia asked a question and he was asking for an answer on corporate taxes and the member refused—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I thank the hon. member for his point of order but I believe that it is a matter of debate.

Mr. John Cannis: Madam Speaker, you are quite correct, because in the throne speech—

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question I just asked the member dealt with the Speech from the Throne, which is the matter under debate. The Speech from the Throne dealt with taxation policy.

My hon. colleague stood up and impugned my reputation in the House by stating that my question had nothing to do with the topic under discussion and then he proceeded to talk about the gun registry, which has nothing to do with the Speech from the Throne. I would ask—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I want to state for all hon. members in the House that the Speech from the Throne is very generous in allowing speeches on the subjects that are important to members of Parliament. Of course, whether a member of Parliament answers a specific question is a matter of opinion. No one is obliged to answer every question put to him or her.

[Translation]

Is the hon. member rising on a point of order or has the matter been resolved?

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, I would like to point out, as I was saying at the beginning of my speech, that the Speech from the Throne specifically talks about abolishing the gun registry. That is what I was talking about.

[English]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, you are quite right. In the throne speech the government talks about abolishing the gun registry, so the member was right to speak to it.

The member talked about consultations, the police and so on. I have one question and one clarification when he pointed out that the Liberal Party was supporting it. He is inaccurate. We are not supporting the legislation to abolish the gun registry.

Our side stands and says that the police support it and the government stands and say that the police do not support it. Could the member clarify why the police associations do not come out with a clear statement stating that this is their position with no ambiguity in their response once and for all so Canadians know exactly where these associations stand?

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Madam Speaker, I will begin by making a clarification. I did not say that the Liberal Party was against the gun registry. I said that the leader should show some courage and impose the party line on his caucus in order to block the Conservatives. Otherwise, it is far too easy to say, in ridings where it is popular, that the leader is for the gun registry, and then meet with groups in other ridings where it is less popular and say that as an individual member, he or she voted against it. This doublespeak is too easy and that is what I took issue with.

Now, I believe there is clear unanimity. The vast majority of police forces and associations of police chiefs have been clear on this. Obviously, there will always be some constable somewhere who disagrees or finds the whole thing useless.

The National Assembly of Quebec has unanimously adopted a motion on the issue three times. These are people from all parties, from the extreme left to the extreme right and straight through the centre. There is a very strong consensus. I have met with them.

The best proof or the best testimony from the police is that they consult the registry 10,000 times a day, or six or seven times a minute. If the registry did not help with their work, they would not consult it. They would not waste their time with it. That is the best testimony.

• (1255)

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber for splitting his time with me. He is very generous.

The reason some members have risen on points of order today is that there is a fundamental problem. We seem to be discussing the menu after we have eaten the meal. We are discussing the Speech from the Throne today, but the budget has already been passed, in collaboration with the Liberal members who were careful not to vote.

The Address

I can never say it often enough: when it comes to a throne speech or a budget, the Bloc Québécois does its homework. Once again, it has done it. The Bloc held consultations to clearly identify the needs and aspirations of Quebeckers.

In both the throne speech and the budget, there are two groups that have been seriously overlooked: the overlooked poor and the overlooked rich. Some of the overlooked have specific needs, whether in terms of social housing or employment insurance—the people who are not entitled to it and the people whose benefits could be improved or who could have greater access to them. The overlooked also include older workers who have specific needs and seniors whose guaranteed income supplement puts them at or below the poverty line. A host of needs have not been met.

At the same time, some of the overlooked are wealthier. The government has overlooked the oil companies, which enjoy enormous exemptions and which should be making a greater social contribution. It has also overlooked the beneficiaries of tax havens. Billions of dollars are being allowed to go somewhere other than the economies of Canada and Quebec. Workers have also been overlooked, because they are not being taxed fairly.

Today, I hope to have time to address a few very specific issues. I would like to discuss the Canadian apparel and textile industries program, funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, the community access program, broadband access technologies and telecommunications.

Let us start by talking about the Canadian apparel and textile industries program, formerly called CANtex. A company in my constituency has had an opportunity to become better known, as we can read in *Les Affaires* for the week of March 13 to 19. In spite of the situation that has prevailed in the apparel and textile industry for years, FilSpec has succeeded.

When I first came to the House, we were well aware that industry was having major and fundamental problems that had to be addressed. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives were up to the job. We will recall that in the case of apparel and textiles, there was talk at the time of loan guarantees. There was talk, just as there had been talk about research and development and investing more money in CANtex. Fortunately, at least a little money was invested. When I say “a little”, that is putting it mildly.

An analysis of the budget and the 2009-10 estimates spending reveals that the government's contribution under the Canadian apparel and textile industries program was \$4.513 million. Members will say that that is not much and indeed it is very little. At the time, we called for an increase in the amount, but the government did not do its job. We are now faced with the events in the apparel and textile industry. Endless job losses have hit ridings such as mine and that of my colleague from Compton—Stanstead.

The government would do extremely well to provide sufficient funding again.

● (1300)

I will speak briefly about the comments in the journal *Les Affaires* between March 13 and 19, 2010, which I mentioned earlier. It stated that competition from emerging countries in the textiles sector was threatening the survival of FilSpec. The result is that this firm

specialized in the production of high-tech yarns for very specific applications. The survival of these so-called soft industries depends on innovation and thus on research and development to establish a very specific niche. Even though they may not have huge production, they have a niche with an international clientele.

Unfortunately, at certain times, the Canadian dollar increased hugely, creating export problems. Programs such as CANtex helped businesses export as well.

To demonstrate the capabilities of the firm, the author asked whether they could one day create a material that, like Harry Potter's magic cape, would make its wearer invisible. The president, Ronald Audet, did not say no. Moreover, his firm has almost met this challenge, because, for the Canadian army, the plant developed a yarn that goes into the manufacture of clothing that cannot be detected by infrared light. There are also antimicrobial yarns for the health sector and flame retardant yarns for firefighters. The plant is located in Sherbrooke and specializes in high-tech yarns.

I will end my reference to the journal, but I wanted to point out the importance of innovation. The government says that research and development is everything and that the future belongs to innovation, but it does not put its money where its mouth is.

Nothing is created, nothing is lost. It is a simple equation. World exports equal world imports. That is an absolute. So eventually, when there is a level playing field, the only thing that will set economies apart is not the exploitation of badly paid workers abroad or the exploitation of the environment or the social fabric of other countries, but innovation.

The government invests in certain sectors, but it invests more or less in other vital sectors. The manufacturing industry is a source of jobs that must not be abandoned, because the best hope of creating jobs is in high-tech and innovative manufacturers.

I recall that not so long ago—in 2009—my colleague from Shefford asked a question regarding CANtex in the House. He said it was important to continue the program to enable the textile industry to become more competitive and develop its markets. Unfortunately, the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) responded rather vaguely, providing absolutely no reassurance for the members of the industry that includes FilSpec.

In terms of innovation, the government is trying to eliminate the paper burden as much as possible. So it is asking the public to use the Internet. Unfortunately, to all intents and purposes, no mention is made of the community access program. It will therefore likely be eliminated. Yet we need it. Even the government, in its aim to reduce the paper burden, should keep it because all departments are asking us to work with the Internet and download forms from it.

● (1305)

More money must also go into making access to broadband even more—

The Address

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I too would like to make a brief comment about the Speech from the Throne. I see that my Bloc Québécois colleague is trying to give Canadians the impression that certain things are important from a Bloc perspective.

I have a question for him and his party. Do they believe that the government across the floor really understands the aspirations and needs of all Canadians, no matter where they live?

Would they not agree that, because of the incompetence shown by this government so far, it has not presented a throne speech that fulfills anyone's aspirations, as any government should at the beginning of a new session?

Do they agree with the Liberal Party's position that we still need to look at much of what was said in the speech?

Mr. Serge Cardin: Madam Speaker, I wonder about what my colleague just said. We could ask him the same question: does the Liberal Party agree with the throne speech or not and will it vote or not?

Every Bloc member voted against the budget and will vote against the Speech from the Throne. All of the Conservative government's aspirations do not come close to fulfilling Quebec's aspirations, including the most important one, of course. Yet during the election campaign in 2005, the Conservatives said they would be open to Quebec and would respect its jurisdictions and its status as a nation. They never did, and that is what we want them to do.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to draw the member's attention to page 8 of the throne speech, which talks about the formation of a national securities regulator. I know that certainly the province of Quebec and the province of Alberta, and certainly in the past the province of Manitoba and others, were basically opposed to this because it did in fact interfere with provincial jurisdiction.

Having said that, if this national securities regulator is to be formed and if it is run the same way that all the old securities regulators were formed, which is primarily being toothless, then how is that going to be plus?

My argument is that it is not the structure here that matters, it is who is running it, how aggressive it is, and what sort of rules it follows and regulations.

We can set up all the—

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Sherbrooke has the floor for a very brief response.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, the member is right when he says that it is not the structure that matters, but how that structure is managed. We have a concrete example before us: the federal government does not function as it should.

I do not believe it is the fault of the structure, but that it is the government's will that is lacking. There are always those who would go against the aspirations of others.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a very brief question. I note that the member spent some time talking about his concerns about the manufacturing industry in Quebec. However, I also note that just in January, while manufacturing sales were up 2.4% across Canada, in Quebec they were actually up even more than that, 3.2%. That actually represents the fifth month of gains for manufacturing sales in Quebec. So, it would appear to me that the province of Quebec is doing extremely well, in terms of recovery, particularly in that sector of the Quebec economy we know to be so important.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Sherbrooke has about 30 seconds to respond.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Madam Speaker, it is all relative. How many jobs does a 2% increase in manufacturing sales represent? Compare that to all the jobs that have been lost since the crisis began.

The Conservative government has not been able to adequately respond to the needs of businesses, which stated loud and clear that they needed loans and loan guarantees and funding for research and development in order to increase exports. Furthermore, the government's fiscal policy makes it difficult for Canada to export.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will share my time with my friend, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[*English*]

I am delighted to address the House today in reply to the Speech from the Throne. This being the first opportunity I have had to address the House in this third session, I want to start by thanking the people of Simcoe North for giving me the tremendous honour to serve them here and at home as their member of Parliament.

It has been over four years since I was first elected and there is not a week that goes by that I do not marvel at the generosity and perseverance of the people in my riding. Their stories and their history, their aspirations and their struggles, it makes me want to get up every day really early and go to work for them.

There are many that I could mention, but by way of example I think of a constituent in the township of Ramara who is devoted to expanding political discourse in our country, a man by the name of Ken Szijarto. He is a man with a young family who expects, in fact demands, only the very best from his elected officials who represent him and why should he not? On controlling spending, on accountability, on keeping taxes in check, people like Ken hold our feet to the fire each and every day. Where would we be without constituents like him?

The Address

Another constituent of mine lost his leg in a motorcycle accident just a few years ago and once he realized that he had to get on with his life and get over this hurdle, he overcame his disability and he started running. In just three years he set three world records and can run the marathon in just a hair over three hours. We welcomed Rick Ball as he brought the Paralympic torch on stage here on Parliament Hill just a few weeks ago to start the Olympic torch relay last month.

[*Translation*]

The francophone community in Lafontaine, Penetanguishene and the township of Tiny has set an example, inspired me and supported me as I learned French over the past few years.

[*English*]

In January and February I took the opportunity to hold a series of town hall meetings on the budget of course, but also on other topics of a federal nature. I want to thank the people who took the time to come and share their concerns and questions with me. I would also like to thank Ms. Danielle Prince, the history and politics teacher at Midland Secondary School for actually assigning her grade 12 politics class to attend one of my town hall meetings. Those meetings gave me a closer sense of what my constituents expect as we tackle this post-recession period.

In a nutshell, what I heard was that the tax burden has little or no room to grow, that Canada's pension system must be dependable, that investments in education and innovation will usher in prosperity for ourselves and the next generation, and that people want to wear their Canadian pride on their sleeve. They want to be proud of Canada's place in the world.

None of this, I am sure, comes as any surprise to us parliamentarians, but it is refreshing to see unfiltered optimism and thoughtful suggestions show the way forward.

I take my cue from the people of Simcoe North. By the way, Simcoe North is smack dab in central Ontario right on the bottom end of Georgian Bay and with Lake Simcoe on the eastern side.

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

Our region, like most regions in Canada, is seeing higher employment rates and is optimistic about the future.

The Speech from the Throne highlighted how important and urgent it is for us to complete our economic action plan.

We are starting to climb our way back up after falling at the end of 2008. Our government's measures over the past year have paved the way to a stronger economy.

[*English*]

Employment has been on an upward track since July, gaining 159,000 jobs. Manufacturing sales, as I previously mentioned, the backbone of Ontario's economy, rose 2.4% just in January, the fifth consecutive month for gains and the highest level since November 2008.

Labour productivity grew 1.4% in the last quarter of 2009, the first increase since the third quarter of 2008 and the highest quarterly increase since 1998. The Conference Board of Canada has reported

that our stimulus plan helped preserve or create about 70,000 jobs in Ontario last year and will create another 40,000 this year.

The measures we are taking in our jobs and growth budget will move to further that economic success. Along with the commitment to completing the economic action plan in its second year, the Speech from the Throne ushers in a plan to return to a balanced budget.

Canadians know and accept that the deficit budget was necessary, but they are just as convinced that we must return to balance in a reasonably short time. They know this from their own experience, in their household and in their business. Borrowing temporarily for an unexpected financial pressure is acceptable provided we get back on track as the financial urgency eases. Our government is following the same course.

[*Translation*]

By maintaining the courage of its convictions in the years to come, Canada will emerge from the worst recession since the second world war as strong as all the other developed countries in the world. And we will do so without increasing taxes and without cutting transfers for education, health or pensions.

[*English*]

Spending restraint must be part of the plan, and it is. Our government will trim the cost of government by \$17.6 billion over the coming five years and end the stimulus spending as planned.

However, being competent managers of the public dollars to which we are entrusted is not the only purpose we serve. Slaying the deficit, balancing the budget and resuming regular payments toward the national debt in the not too distant future are not an end in themselves. They are the way forward for a stronger Canada.

Just as we are proud of what we have accomplished, we also realize there is much more to do. The Speech from the Throne outlines the kind of Canada we aspire to have, a Canada that is building the jobs and industries of tomorrow, mustering the best minds, technologies and resources to create jobs, growth and opportunity, bolstering our science and technology strategy to take full advantage of a digital economy and opening up new markets for our producers, manufacturers and service providers and strengthening trade with our biggest trading partner, the United States. We are improving the way we do business for our energy, mineral and power producers, while protecting our environment, and finding new and better ways for our agriculture, fisheries and forestry producers to build their businesses, invest and succeed in the best economy in the world.

It is a Canada putting families first by protecting the health and safety of our foods and consumer products, preventing accidents that harm our children and youth and ensuring the safety and security of our neighbourhoods by strengthening the laws and the sentencing of criminality.

It is a Canada, as the speech remarks, whose people are rooted in their history and institutions. Our history includes our indigenous people, the first people of this land.

The Address

I have the great honour to serve on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I have had the opportunity to listen carefully to the hopes and struggles of Canada's aboriginal people. The Canada we envision through the throne speech recognizes the contribution of aboriginal people in building the country we inhabit together. Young aboriginal people in Canada particularly, who number proportionately larger than their non-aboriginal counterparts, will be a great source of inspiration and prosperity for their families and communities in the years to come.

We have a lot to be proud of, how, after shouldering the toughest economic downturn since World War II, we are coming to grips with Canada emerging stronger than when we went in. We should celebrate that, of course, but we must consider what that means in human terms.

In my riding, it means people are going back to work. It means college enrolment is up 30%. We are seeing people with a tremendous degree of optimism buoyed only by the tremendous show of national pride we saw from our athletes, visitors and fans at the Olympics and Paralympic Games in Whistler and Vancouver.

This rekindled civic spirit, the hope and optimism about Canada also lays down a marker for what Canadians expect their governments. Almost to a person, they are quite willing and able to do the heavy lifting in their own lives and occupations, but they sure want to know that we here in Parliament have their backs and are working just as hard beside them.

I am pleased to support the Speech from the Throne. We are laying the course in the right manner. I encourage all members to support it when we have the opportunity to indicate our support.

● (1320)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we know, the Conservative government, beginning next year, will start to increase employment insurance premiums and will do so for the next four years. I believe, according to its documents, it expects to raise about \$13 billion with what most experts agree is a tax on labour. As we know, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which I regard in some ways as the backbone of our country's economy, has said that this could cause up to 200,000 lost jobs.

What does my hon. colleague have to say to the report put out by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business with respect to all these job losses?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Madam Speaker, one of the great things about our economic action plan was how we responded quickly to the people who through no fault of their own ended up without jobs.

This was a massive economic global recession, the worst since World War II. What we had in our country was an EI program that responded. There were more dollars through our budget commitment in the economic action. People were able to get to work.

It also included work-sharing. They were able to get the dollars they needed to support businesses to do some short-term layoffs but allow businesses to keep growing. It was estimated that this resulted in preserving up to some 250,000 jobs across the country, just by work-sharing. It is a great program and we are sure going to keep it strong.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard references to manufacturing, jobs, young people and, in particular, to hope and optimism.

The young people who live in British Columbia are very concerned about the environment and what kind of world they will inherit and live in for their generation and for the generations to come.

The throne speech stands as a stark repudiation of a green economy and, I think, the hope that they express. It transfers environmental assessments from the Environmental Assessment Agency to the National Energy Board. It contains no real substantial targets for greenhouse gas reduction. It fails to create a national industrial strategy that will position us to a clean energy economy, one that puts a lot of money and resources into an economy that is sustainable in the long run.

Would my hon. colleague comment on the throne speech and its deficiencies in respect of the environment?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Madam Speaker, the young people of Canada should be concerned about the environment and the work we do that might in any way bring it under some concern.

That is exactly why for the last four years the government has continued to invest record amounts of money, working with the provinces to invest in the research that is needed to advance technologies. We know we need to use technology to come to grips with issues like greenhouse gas emissions.

We have signed onto the agreements, worldwide, from Copenhagen. We will ensure that environmental protection continues to be a standard that will be in place as we grow and create opportunities for young people. The two have to be dealt with at the same time.

This is a government that has expanded parks and has a record of cleaning up lakes. It has taken the investments that are needed to actually make concrete interventions to improve Canada's environment.

We will stay on that track, but we also have to work with our partners in municipalities and provinces to ensure regulations are strong but also workable.

● (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be in the House today. I sincerely believe that the Speech from the Throne and budget 2010 are mindful of Quebec, as they are of all the other provinces and all the territories in this great country.

The Speech from the Throne lays out the government's broad priorities—priorities that are faithful to Canadian values and that focus on what is most important to Canadians.

The Address

The budget sends a clear message: Canada has returned to economic growth following the deepest recession since the 1930s. This budget aims to contribute to this recovery and sustain Canada's economic advantage. To do that, the budget contains measures in three broad areas. I am going to review them, because it is useful to reiterate them.

First, under year 2 of Canada's economic action plan, the budget provides for federal stimulus measures totalling \$19 billion, complemented by \$6 billion from provinces, territories, municipalities and other partners.

Second, the budget invests in a limited number of new, targeted initiatives to create jobs and stimulate economic growth for tomorrow. The budget is based on innovation and makes Canada a destination of choice for businesses wanting to make new investments. This will all have tangible effects on Canada as a whole, including Quebec.

Third, budget 2010 provides for a three-point plan that will bring Canada's finances back to balance after the economic recovery.

The priorities of this government focus not only on every province and every territory, but on every Canadian. This is particularly true when it comes to the environment, in areas that are of concern to Canadians, like water pollution, protecting wildlife and plant life, and, of course, climate change.

The government's position on the environment is very clear: we are going to find a balance between economic priorities and environmental priorities. We are going to be proactive in our stewardship of our spectacular natural treasures, and we will preserve them so we can pass them down to future generations.

Budget 2010 provides for over \$190 million in new measures to support a cleaner, more sustainable environment and to continue to achieve Canada's climate change objectives.

Among those measures are the following.

A \$100 million investment over four years to support clean energy generation in Canada's forestry sector, through the next generation renewable power initiative. This investment will contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by developing, marketing and implementing new clean energy technologies in the forestry sector, including biofuels, renewable electrical power and chemicals from forest biomass.

Eligibility for accelerated capital cost allowance for clean energy generation equipment will be expanded to include heat recovery equipment and distribution equipment.

Sixteen million dollars over two years to continue to implement the government's action plan to protect the Great Lakes by cleaning up areas where the environment has suffered the most degradation.

Thirty-eight million dollars over two years for Canada's invasive alien species strategy to reduce the risk of invasive animal and plant species flourishing in Canada.

Up to \$11.4 million over two years to deliver meteorological services and navigation services in the north, to meet Canada's commitments to the International Maritime Organization.

Eight million dollars over two years to support community-based environmental monitoring, reporting and data collection in the north.

Also, \$18.4 million over two years for the preparation of the government's annual reports on key environmental indicators, such as air and water cleanliness and greenhouse gas emissions.

These new resources build on the sustained investment that began with Canada's economic action plan to make our economy more viable and strengthen Canada's position as a clean energy superpower. This investment includes the following.

One billion dollars over five years for the clean energy fund. This fund supports research and development for clean energy systems and demonstration projects, including carbon capture and storage initiatives.

• (1330)

One billion dollars over five years for the green infrastructure fund. This fund is intended to support priorities such as the production and transportation of sustainable energy and carbon transmission and storage infrastructure.

Three hundred and eighty million dollars allocated exclusively to the ecoenergy retrofit—homes program, which encourages Canadians to make their homes more energy efficient.

In 2009, the government also allocated \$1 billion over three years to the pulp and paper green transformation program. This program provides incentives for pulp and paper mills to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and become leaders in the production of renewable energy from biomass.

We understand very well that the growing exploitation of our resources requires us to make more enlightened environmental choices than ever before. We are therefore committed to take effective international measures to fight climate change.

The Copenhagen agreement was a big step forward. It laid the groundwork needed to get all the major greenhouse gas emitters to act to reduce their emissions.

The agreement represents a turning point for Canada and for all the other countries committed to implementing it effectively. It is the first detailed global agreement on climate change. It is the first global agreement under which the principal greenhouse gas emitting countries quantified their commitment to reduce their emissions. They include the United States, China and India.

We have to work to turn these political commitments into a binding treaty. This will be the focus of the negotiations this year. To advance these negotiations, Canada will pursue its active and constructive dialogue with its national, continental and international partners.

The Address

As stated in the throne speech, we will also honour the financial commitments we made under the agreement. Canada will release funds to help developing economies reduce their emissions and adapt to climate change. Canada's Minister of the Environment is holding talks with our international partners to establish the level of contribution per country.

Our desire to harmonize our climate change policy with that of the United States goes well beyond greenhouse gas reduction targets. We must continue to push for a process that would coordinate our respective regulations. Close collaboration has thus far led to excellent progress in the automobile, marine, aviation and biofuel sectors. However, we still have more work to do.

Our approach to climate change is based on rigorous science. As we are all aware, this year is the International Year of Biodiversity, which is a fitting opportunity to reflect on our rich natural heritage and our duty to protect it. It would be remiss of me not to mention it. Canada is a leader on the international stage when it comes to biodiversity. We were the first industrialized country to ratify the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Our government has invested significantly in biodiversity. From Darkwoods in British Columbia to the ecosystem in the greater Nahanni area of the Northwest Territories to Deep Cove, Nova Scotia and many other places in Canada, the government has taken measures to protect more than 100 million hectares of land—almost 10% of Canada's land mass—and 3 million hectares of ocean.

We have dedicated \$275 million over five years to measures related to species at risk. We have also invested \$225 million in conservation programs for natural areas. This investment played an important role in acquiring 122,000 hectares to protect the habitat of 79 species at risk. We invested \$5 million in working with provincial and federal partners in order to find a solution to the issue of invasive alien species that are threatening the native fauna and flora.

• (1335)

[English]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, you must be as shocked and surprised as I am to listen to the litany and recounting of information, I guess propaganda would be a more impolite term, of what the government members opposite have been delivering.

Can anyone imagine, in an environment where we have seen all of the institutions of Canada being dismantled one by one, where we have seen the economy fall apart over the course of the last 24 months, where we have seen one person after another lose their jobs, where factories have been closing one by one, where the forestry sector has been collapsing mill by mill, where the mining sector alone has been able to survive and where the fishing and agri-production centres have been collapsing, that the members opposite come forward and shamelessly recount all of the great things they have done?

They seem to have forgotten. The parliamentary secretary is part of a government that has increased the national debt by \$100 billion. Every Canadian is now on the hook for \$3,000. It has increased the deficit by \$53 billion over the course of a year, another \$2,000 for

every man, woman and child, and he sits here recounting the great glories of his government.

When will he be embarrassed enough to say, "I apologize"?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague, but I did not understand the question. He did not ask one.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to deal with the government's shift of the taxation in this country from corporations to ordinary Canadians. When the government is finished, ordinary Canadians will be paying more than four times in taxes what corporations are paying.

We see here basically a race to the bottom. We have corporate taxes going from 40% down to 15%, when the American tax rate is still 35%. Why do we need to be so much lower than the Americans? We have Nordic countries that have corporate taxes in the 50% range and they are doing just fine.

No better sources than Statistics Canada and Finance Canada, which have said that business spending on machinery and equipment have declined as a share of GDP and that total business investment spending has declined as a percentage of corporate cash flow.

We also know that IT use by Canadian business is only half of what it is in the United States.

Where is the proof that these corporate tax reductions will work?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I want to point out that the Conservative Party has been through two extremely difficult recessions. We had year one of Canada's economic action plan and we are starting year two. But this member and his party voted against workers. In my province, his vote counts. He voted against workers in Quebec, against unemployed workers in Quebec, against all of the tax cuts we have in Quebec. That is the problem. The Conservatives are not working only for Conservatives; we are working for the Liberals, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP.

• (1340)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I could not help but listen to some of the questions going to my colleague who just gave a wonderful and excellent speech.

I was wondering if he could take a moment to explain for the member opposite, who was part of the coalition, how important it is to keep taxes low for corporations, because corporations do create jobs and stimulus to the economy and we are competing around the world. Could he explain for the member how it actually works?

*The Address**[Translation]*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member has 15 seconds to respond.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

When there are corporate tax cuts, new jobs are created. That is common knowledge.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Charlottetown.

I am honoured to stand today to pay tribute to the people of Etobicoke North and to respond to the Speech from the Throne, the speech to provide the government's vision for the country, to set out its broad goals and directions and the programs it will undertake to accomplish those goals.

The speech should rejoice in Canada's history, build on our country's great spirit, our core values, what we stand for and why we exist, reaffirm our timeless purpose, passed from generation to generation, and should set the course for a greater future.

The speech should create opportunities for families: the opportunity for a first-class education; an excellent health care system when people need it most; the chance to get a fulfilling job; and the ability to contribute. It should provide care for society's most vulnerable: our children; those who suffer from brain disease, such as ALS, MS or dementia; and our aboriginal citizens. We must commit to closing the gap in a generation.

Governing means creating opportunities for every Canadian and not merely administrating. Where is the government's fierce resolve to do whatever it takes to dream of the future Canadians want and deserve, while addressing the tough decisions we face about our growing deficit, our warming climate and the future of our health care system, all of which will have an impact on future generations?

Where is the understanding that in building Canada's future, tackling climate change for example, there will not be one single defining action, one technological fix or one miracle moment? Rather, real action will require relentless steps in one direction: energy efficiency, transportation changes, personal responsibility and building greater momentum.

I would like to mention a case to highlight vision and catalytic policy to stimulate progress. For the next few minutes I will highlight the vision of His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia who is transforming education and modernizing the business environment to become one of the top 10 most competitive countries in the world. Before I continue, I appreciate the differences in our society and our economy but it is the vision we must learn from.

When the kingdom was established in 1932, education was available to very few people, mostly the children of wealthy families living in the major cities. Today, however, there are 25,000 schools, 11 universities, with an astonishing 22 more currently being built. Female students make up a little over half of the nearly five million Saudi school and university students.

Most recently in 2009, over 3,000 dignitaries from around the world attended the official inauguration of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, or KAUST. It came with an endowment of \$10 billion and aims to be one of the world's great institutions of research, with partnerships with 27 universities, including Caltech, Harvard and Stanford in the United States, and Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College in the United Kingdom.

Government ministries, private companies, investors and the Saudi public all repeat the mantra of the 10x10 vision. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has shown significant improvements in the World Bank's Doing Business rankings over the last five years, leaping from 67th position in 2004 to 38th in 2006, 16th in 2007 and to 13th in 2009, ahead of advanced economies such as France, Germany, Japan and Switzerland.

The kingdom's exceptional performance and membership in the World Trade Organization has been driven by the vision of His Majesty.

In 2006, the Global Competitiveness Forum, an annual meeting of top business leaders, international political leaders and selected intellectuals and journalists, was founded. It is the premier event on the road to the World Economic Forum's Davos meeting.

The kingdom has actively encouraged domestic and foreign investment in the country, created new ministries and the National Competitiveness Centre, established the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority and privatized companies.

● (1345)

Canada must dream and dream big. In the past, Canadians built a country-wide railway system, they fought in World War I and World War II and they travelled to space. And remember the Allies gave 2% of GDP to rebuild Europe.

We have to negotiate for our children who are not here. We have to accept moral responsibility. With every tough decision, we must ask if this is something our children would be proud of.

As someone who taught at a business school, I understand that we must slay our country's biggest deficit in history, \$56 billion. We must confront this brutal fact while retaining unwavering faith that we will prevail in the end.

The Address

However we cannot do it by destroying what makes us Canadian and in some cases uniquely Canadian. Let me take health care for example. Worldwide, we are now seeing major movement between public and private financing. Countries with a public financing scheme are trying to discover what the private sector might have to offer. Countries with the private sector, like Australia and the U.S., are looking to the public sector for advantages.

Today Canadian health care is at a crossroads. We must fix the system that served us so well for many years. We cannot let it slip away.

Thankfully, making improvements does not necessarily require higher spending. If we look at hospital costs across 10 OECD countries, we see wide variations. If unit costs could be reduced to the level of the best performers, average costs could potentially be reduced between 5% and 48%.

Opportunities for cost reduction include more emphasis on preventive medicine and the social determinants of health, such as early detection visits and mammograms. We know that diseases are cheaper to treat if they are caught earlier.

There are opportunities for better coordination. Problems can happen throughout health systems but most particularly at the barrier between primary, specialist, acute and long-term care. This is recognizing of course that we have a federal-provincial system.

There are opportunities to reduce drug spending. For OECD countries, drug spending is annually increasing at 5.7%, outstripping growth for other types of health care and GDP.

While we work to meet this challenge, a tectonic shift is taking place in medicine. For the average patient the movement is subtle, but ultimately it will affect the entire landscape of health care.

Genomics will allow tomorrow's physician to predict in utero or at birth what major diseases a person is likely to develop. Vaccines will be created specifically to treat an individual person's cancer. Stem cells will be used to regenerate a specific tissue lost to disease or trauma. I have seen heart cells beat in a petri dish. They will be used to repair the heart after a heart attack.

I know stem cells are scary for some people, but they have to understand that stem cells can be taken from adults. As an adult I can choose to take adult stem cells from my hip bone.

Medical information will be digitized and instantly available. Medicine will become safer.

I left a job I loved to run for elected office because I believed and still believe today that it is the job of government to make life better for Canadians today and to have a dream to build for a better tomorrow.

What I wanted to see in the throne speech was real vision for the future. It was not there. I wanted acknowledgement of our immense challenges, our aging baby-boomers entering their high demand period for health care, a recognized problem worldwide.

Today one in three, or ten million, Canadians will be affected by neurological or psychiatric disorder or injury at some point in their

lives. Brain disorders and injuries will become a leading cause of disease in the next 20 years.

I want to see our current challenges and our future challenges laid out frankly and honestly with a plan to take action in the short term and in the long term.

• (1350)

Most of all I wanted to see promise, building hope for a better future by taking the right steps now. That means not only reducing the deficit, but building the social safety net now and in the future, as this side of the House was able to do in the 1990s.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I must say that I was actually shocked at the member's example bringing forth the vision of King Abdullah and maybe comparing that to how the Liberal Party would like to see Canada.

We are talking about Saudi Arabia, where women's rights are pretty much non-existent, there is no democracy, a fair justice system is lacking and health care is for the rich.

I have listened to the Leader of the Opposition's speech in response to the Speech from the Throne. There was absolutely no vision. There was nothing. It was vacuous speech. I was wondering if that is what the hon. member is putting forth. Is that the vision of the Liberal Party for Canada, that Canada should be more like Saudi Arabia? Is that what she is saying?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, absolutely not. I was highlighting that Saudi Arabia had a vision for its people to build for education, to build for a better tomorrow. How could any country go from 67th position in the world economy, back in 2004, to rank at 13th by 2010, with the goal of being in the top 10? They have done it by inviting Harvard University professor Michael Porter to come and consult with the government. Now their companies are having growth of 6,000% and 8,000%. It was simply to highlight that we need vision, and in this example I used a vision for health.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government continues to shift taxes from businesses to working people. For an example we only have to look to the harmonized sales tax in Ontario and in British Columbia, which will take effect this summer.

The government also intends to rely on personal income tax for more than four times as large a share of its revenue in the future as the contribution from corporate income tax. In other words, ordinary Canadians will pay four times more in personal income tax than businesses will pay in corporate tax.

Statements by Members

It is important to note that wealthy Canadians receive a large portion of their income in the form of stock options, equity, dividends and profits. Corporate tax cuts actually increase their incomes. Furthermore, that income is taxed at a lower rate than the income of the average worker.

I would like to ask the member how this is fair to working people.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the question. I think that is a question for the other side of the House.

My concern is certainly that we in the Liberal Party would like to see a focus on more money for Canadians who have low incomes. We would like to see child health care. We would like to see a focus on our seniors.

Where was the investment in our seniors? Population aging has tremendous implications for Canada, where most elderly people would not be able to meet more than a small fraction of the cost of the health care they incur. The average hospital stay for our seniors costs \$7,000, and that does not take into account emergency and cardiac care.

Where was the investment in prevention? We know what the global risks to health are. They are high blood pressure, tobacco use, high blood glucose, physical inactivity, overweight and obesity. These factors are responsible for the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

We know that reducing these risk factors along with alcohol use and cholesterol, and increasing our fruit and vegetable intake, will increase global longevity by about five years.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate, could I ask for a little order, please, out of respect for the members of Parliament who are speaking? I know this is collegial conversation, but the noise level does go up.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Charlottetown may start his comments.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to participate in the debate from the Speech from the Throne, although I should say at the outset that I find the debate, and I guess the whole Speech from the Throne, somewhat unusual and somewhat strange. A Speech from the Throne has a very long tradition in history, in our Commonwealth, in our western democracy system, under the Westminster system. Usually, it is the agenda of the government, read by Her Majesty the Queen, or in the case of Canada a representative of Her Majesty the Queen. It basically sets out what the government intends to accomplish over the term of the Parliament, or the session, and lays out a best-case scenario, if everything goes well, of what that government intends to accomplish. Of course it is read by a representative of Her Majesty the Queen.

This document is somewhat strange because this, as we know, is the third Speech from the Throne we have had in about 15 months. We did have a Speech from the Throne in November 2008. We had another one in February 2009. And now we have one in March of this year, and it really is not an agenda. It is not a vision. Basically,

what I see it being is a list of certain items that are going on in the country, the crisis in Haiti and the Olympic Games, and it is a list of programs. I think the government went to every department and agency in Ottawa and asked for a list of what they have been doing over the last five years, and this has all been appended into the Speech from the Throne. It really does not give anything in the way of an agenda or a vision or what the government really intends to accomplish over the next session of this, the 40th Parliament of Canada.

I am going to make the submission that there are a lot of issues facing Canadians. These are issues that I think should have been in the Speech from the Throne. They are issues that Canadians are talking about. Of course the first issue was the prorogation of this House, this assembly, that occurred back in December of last year. That is what they are talking about. They certainly would have liked to have seen something in the Speech from the Throne that would put some limits, some restrictions, on that right to prorogue this Parliament, this assembly.

Besides that, there are a number of other issues that I do believe warrant a public discussion, which should have been in the Speech from the Throne. The first issue I will mention is the whole demographic transition that the population of Canada is undergoing. We are becoming an older society. We have fewer children. There is a much higher dependency rate. There are fewer citizens under the age of 18 and a lot more over the age of 65, which of course increases our dependency rate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I will have to interrupt the hon. member until after question period. When he resumes his speech, he will have six and a half minutes left for his comments and five minutes for questions.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

TRIBUTE DINNER

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Madam Speaker, on March 25, Community Living Mississauga will be honouring one of Mississauga's most outstanding citizens, Mr. Victor Oh.

For decades, Victor Oh has selflessly contributed his time, talent and resources to community and charitable organizations. As president of the Mississauga Chinese Business Association, he ensured that the MCBA was a key sponsor of the race against racism.

Victor has been active in assisting newcomers to the Peel region to settle into our community. Each month, he hosts a reception for new Canadian citizens. He has also served as vice-chair of Safe City Mississauga and is the recipient of the Robert Boyne Memorial Award for his community work in promoting and advancing crime prevention.

Last year, the Prime Minister chose Victor Oh to travel with him on his historic visit to China as a trusted adviser.

Statements by Members

I ask all members of the House to join with me in congratulating Mr. Victor Oh.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to read a letter from one of my constituents on the topic of climate change. It says:

Dear Prime Minister:

We are Canadian citizens who know full well that we, and our children, will have to take personal responsibility during huge unpredictable changes inherent in the climate crisis.

We are not idealists. We are not unquestioning scientific groupies. We are well-read and very well educated. We are the mothers and fathers of med students, lawyers and former pages in the House.

I believe that an unalterable mistake is being made in the lack of commitment to cut back emissions. We are deeply disappointed with your values.

Respectfully yours,

Beverly Birkman-McKendy

Dorval, Quebec

I agree with Beverly's comments. I strongly urge the Conservative government to take swift action to address the issue of climate change. Not to do so would give proof to the description that has been made of them in the House—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ERIK GUAY

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to a great athlete, a resident of Mont-Tremblant in my riding, Erik Guay.

On March 11, with his second super G win in five days and his third consecutive podium finish in as many days, this 28-year-old alpine skier got his hands on the small crystal globe that goes to the best skier of the season in super G. Erik Guay is the first Quebecker to receive such an honour.

On the heels of his disappointing fifth-place finish in two events at the Vancouver Olympic Games, he ended his season with a bang by finishing first overall in super G.

This outstanding athlete, whose trainer is quick to describe him as a competitive, mature skier with a flawless mental game, is certainly a source of inspiration and pride for all of us.

My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and I want to congratulate Erik Guay on his achievement.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with the International Day of la Francophonie being celebrated on March 20, the New Democratic Party would like to wish all the francophones and francophiles here in Canada and abroad a happy International Day of la Francophonie.

Despite the progress we have been able to make in Canada over the past 40 years with respect to bilingualism and support for French-language minority communities, unfortunately there is still too much inequality.

If you think of the government's lack of will to foster the French language, you might wonder if the situation is even getting worse.

Despite its great promises, the government has disparaged the rights of francophones since coming to power, and the francophones of this country have had enough. With the International Day of La Francophonie upon us, I have a wish to make. I wish that the government will once and for all recognize the francophones of this country as full citizens and give them the rights to which they are entitled.

I am very proud to be a Franco-Ontarian.

* * *

[*English*]

DEMOCRACY

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard people say that Canadians are not interested in the political process. I disagree. I recently held 17 town hall accountability meetings throughout my riding and my constituents brought to me a wide range of issues, including the economy, justice and agriculture issues, to mention a few.

I am proud to say that many of the things my constituents were asking for have already been delivered by this Conservative government. They generally supported the targeted short-term stimulus funding but made it clear that it was time to bring the budget back into balance. Our government has delivered with a responsible plan to do exactly that. They told me that they wanted our justice system to focus more on protecting society and victims of crimes and less on criminals, and we are doing exactly that.

For democracy to work, we as MPs must keep in touch with those we represent. Therefore, I thank everyone who attended one of my town hall meetings for doing that and for participating. Democracy is indeed alive and well.

* * *

● (1405)

WORLD FIREFIGHTER COMBAT CHALLENGE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a young man from my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's. Dwayne Drover, originally from the small town of Lourdes, a community of 550 people, can rightly claim to be a world champion.

At the World Firefighter Combat Challenge held in Las Vegas in November, Dwayne finished first in the individual category earning him the title of the best firefighter in the world. In addition, Dwayne placed first in the tandem competition.

Dwayne is a firefighter with the City of Waterloo Fire Department in Ontario, and, when preparing for a competition, trains five to six hours a day, in addition to carrying out his regular responsibilities.

Statements by Members

After winning the challenge in Las Vegas, Dwayne said that the experience for him was the equivalent of winning the Stanley Cup.

We all know how important firefighters are and the incredible personal sacrifice they make in safeguarding the lives of others.

I ask all members to join me in saluting all firefighters and, in particular, Dwayne Drover on this remarkable accomplishment.

* * *

UNIVERSITY ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, London, Ontario has a secret that is hard to keep. We have a rising star who is gaining national and international prominence.

Last week, Jen Cotten was named the outstanding female athlete of this year's Canadian University Championships.

As a University of Western Ontario student, Jen has broken many records and leaves as the most-decorated university track and field athlete, male or female, ever. She has come to dominate the pentathlon, as well as the long jump, high jump, shot put and hurdles.

At major national and international competitions, Jen has been awarded the most valuable athlete, the most outstanding athlete, the most valuable female performer and the most outstanding female athlete. She has also been recognized with other prestigious awards but is extraordinarily modest and keeps a great sense of humour.

Jen Cotten has our best wishes as she looks ahead to the next summer Olympics in 2012. Getting there will be a lot of work but we have every confidence IN Jen. Her resume already reads like the Olympic motto, "Swifter, higher, stronger".

While we will cheer loudly for Jen, it will never be louder than her deeply proud grandfather, the member for Oxford.

* * *

[Translation]

CLARA HUGHES

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to Clara Hughes, a prominent athlete from Glen Sutton, in my riding of Brome—Missisquoi.

The crowning achievement of Ms. Hughes' amazing career was certainly winning the bronze medal in the 5,000 metre long track speed skating event at the Vancouver Olympics.

Let me just say loud and clear that this was her sixth medal in five Olympic Games. Clara Hughes is one of only four athletes in the entire history of the Olympics to win medals in both the summer Olympics—in cycling—and the winter Olympics—in speed skating.

A tremendously generous athlete, Ms. Hughes donated the prize money from her medal win to the children sponsored by the "take a hike" organization, and in Turin, she donated \$10,000 out of her own pocket to the "right to play" program.

We in the Bloc Québécois extend our warmest congratulations to Clara Hughes.

JUSTICE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, our government announced legislative changes to strengthen the way the young offenders system deals with violent and repeat offenders.

Yesterday, a bill to strengthen the National Sex Offender Registry was announced. The Protecting Victims From Sex Offenders Act would further protect our children and all Canadians.

Our government believes that Quebecers and Canadians have the right to feel safe in their communities. Our government is going one step further by making the protection of society the key principle of the federal correctional system.

Today, we introduced a bill to amend the International Transfer of Offenders Act.

Our Conservative government continues to move forward and put public safety first in order to protect our families and our communities.

* * *

● (1410)
[English]

OSCAR PETERSON

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the National Arts Centre just kicked off a fundraiser to honour Oscar Peterson, arguably the greatest jazz man of all time.

Peterson grew up in Montreal in humble circumstances and rose to the top of his art.

Generations of Canadian musicians have been influenced by his talent, and so it is appropriate that the NAC should commemorate his distinguished career.

[Translation]

Oscar Peterson made generations of Canadians dance, cry and pause to reflect, especially at his many appearances at the Montreal International Jazz Festival.

His music is part of the cultural history of Quebec and Canada. His personal story will continue to inspire Canadians and to honour our society.

I encourage Canadians to contribute to the National Arts Centre campaign and to discover or rediscover the music of this great Quebecer and Canadian.

* * *

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is now implementing year two of Canada's economic action plan. This plan has helped Canada cope with the effects of the global recession better than nearly every other industrialized country.

Our plan cut taxes for families. We extended EI benefits to help the unemployed and we expanded skills training for those moving into new jobs. In every corner of this country, almost 60,000 infrastructure projects are putting Canadians to work and building hope in the largest cities and smallest towns.

Our plan is working. Since last July, almost 160,000 new jobs have been created, but our work is not yet complete. We will not be satisfied until all Canadians who have lost jobs are working again. Canadians can count on our government to continue to put jobs and the economy first. Jobs and economic growth remain our priority.

* * *

TUBERCULOSIS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tuberculosis rates among aboriginal Canadians are skyrocketing at levels higher than many third world countries. This is a national emergency that needs an urgent plan of action and yet the government has no plan, not even on first nations reserves for which it has clear constitutional responsibility.

Can anyone imagine that Inuit TB rates are 185 times the national average and the Minister of Health, the member for Nunavut, is not even raising an eyebrow, all the while trying to slough the responsibility off onto provinces and territories? Aboriginal TB rates are 51 times the general public and yet the government refuses to pay for X-rays to test residents on reserves like Garden Hill in Manitoba. TB is a treatable disease but Canadian lives are still being lost.

However, members do not need take it from me. They need only look at the research and the recent award-winning *Winnipeg Free Press* series by Jen Skerritt and follow up by reporter Mia Rabson. TB is called "the forgotten disease". It certainly has been forgotten by the government and that must end today.

* * *

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has continuously taken action to get tough on crime and protect our communities. I am particularly proud of the Tackling Violent Crime Act that targets dangerous offenders, impaired drivers, sexual predators and those who commit serious gun crimes.

We did not stop there. Just this week, the Minister of Justice introduced legislation to strengthen the way the young offenders system deals with violent and repeat young offenders.

Yesterday, the protecting victims from sex offenders act was tabled in the Senate. This act would further protect our children and help victims.

Today, the Minister of Public Safety tabled important amendments to the International Transfer of Offenders Act. These amendments would ensure that the protection of our society is the paramount consideration when assessing requests for the transfer of international offenders.

We continue to call on the opposition to support our tough on crime measures. Canadians expect action and we are delivering.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

RENDEZ-VOUS DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from March 5 to 21, we are celebrating the 12th Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, in connection with the International Day of La Francophonie, which will be celebrated on March 20.

Quebec singer Mario Pelchat has agreed to be the spokesperson for the rendez-vous, and he invites the 9.5 million francophones in Quebec and Canada to join the celebrations. I encourage members to participate in the many activities that will be held in their ridings, like the ones organized in my riding of Rivière-du-Nord on March 6 at the Salle André-Prévost and on March 12 at the Salle Antoine-Lessard.

I extend a special invitation to all my colleagues to come to Val-d'Or, in Abitibi, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year and was named Francoville 2010 by the Office québécois de la langue française.

This year, the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie has created a network on Facebook for anyone who loves the French language and La Francophonie. The network is called "Rendez-vous de la Francophonie".

I invite all francophones and francophiles to come out and enjoy the festivities.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Sunday, March 21, marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

This year, in light of the upcoming 2010 Soccer World Cup in South Africa where the theme will be "disqualify racism", efforts will be made to prevent racist incidents because still today, in all regions of the world, too many individuals and communities suffer from injustice due to racism.

Fifty years ago this Sunday, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa against the apartheid "pass laws". In 1966, the UN General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

On Sunday, we must take the time as a nation to cherish the rich diversity of humankind that makes Canada such a vibrant community and respect the dignity and equality of every human being, regardless of colour, nationality, language or culture.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader has found himself at odds with Canadians. He cannot stand our jobs and growth budget. He cannot stand that our economy is recovering. He cannot stand that Canadians have rejected his tax and spend ways. So, he is taking a break and he is on his tax and spend road show.

The Liberal leader may try to convince Canadians his uncoded spending promises provide an alternative to our jobs and growth budget, but his alternative is clear. The Liberal leader will raise our taxes and kill jobs. We know this because he said it: “we will have to raise taxes”.

The Liberal leader might think his March break lecture will change the facts, but Canadians know better. Higher taxes kill jobs. When the Liberal leader chooses his tax and spend road show over the work of this House, he proves what we have been saying along. The Liberal leader is not in it for Canadians, he is only in it for himself.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

TEN PERCENTERS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the public clearly detests the practice of mass mailing millions of nasty pamphlets known as ten percenters to voters outside an MP's own riding. There is no way we can paint a moustache on that pig and call it Brad Pitt.

The House voted Tuesday to end the practice. The Conservatives voted to keep it, but yesterday, the Prime Minister seemed to indicate that he too was ready to get rid of out-of-riding ten percenters.

Would the Prime Minister confirm this point today, and are we all now on the same page for the Board of Internal Economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an odd question coming from the Liberal Party. I am told that just in the last few days our members have received mailings from the members for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Toronto Centre, Eglinton—Lawrence, York Centre, Winnipeg South Centre, Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, and Etobicoke Centre.

The position of our government is clear. If all of the parties wish to abolish this particular subsidy for mailings outside of an MP's own riding, of course this party would be delighted to do that. Of course, we would also like to see the \$30 million direct tax subsidy to political parties abolished.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the Prime Minister that 69% of the mass mailings that are done come from the Conservative Party and not from this side of the House.

I take it that what the Prime Minister has done is confirm the point that we are all on the same page. I hope that makes life easier for you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me ask the Prime Minister a different question.

The governance problems that have been of concern at First Nations University have been fixed. No one condones the administrative mistakes that were made in the past, but they are past. A new structure is in hand. The University of Regina is prepared to handle the money matters while First Nations University concentrates on the learning of students.

Will the Prime Minister give it a chance?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again I think I have been very clear on the subject of these mailings. Of course the Conservative Party, as I said, will support eliminating them. My point is that the statement made by the Liberal Party yesterday that it has already ended its program is completely untrue.

In terms of the second question the member asked me, our concern is with aboriginal students. The Minister of Indian Affairs has made it clear that we will take action to ensure those students are protected, but no level of government will continue to support the kind of abuse we have seen at that particular institution.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the administrative deficiencies that the Prime Minister speaks of have been corrected and it is time now to aim for the future.

For several hundred young aboriginal students every year, if there is no First Nations University, there will be no higher education. It is not right to visit upon these innocent young people the past sins of others.

The total amount needed by First Nations University is about one-third of what this Parliament has been spending annually to print and distribute those wasteful ten percenters. Would it not be more appropriate to give that money to First Nations University?

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, I am not sure where the hon. member is coming from on that. What I read into that is that he would like to get rid of the political subsidies to political parties in order to help fund some other important things.

If he wants to talk about that, that would be interesting, but what we have said on First Nations University is that we continue to see a litany of announcements. The latest one is that \$400,000 that was destined for student scholarships is now missing.

Oral Questions

We have said that we will continue to support those students. Sixty-five per cent of them receive funding from the federal government. That continues, as does our support for the Indian students support program, which they can apply for.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in July 2009, the G8 summit communiqué contained words committing the member states to “voluntary family planning” and “sexual and reproductive health care”.

I would like to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs, how is it possible that Canadian foreign policy has been hijacked by the tea partiers on the other side, taking us away from great traditions and taking us away from the principle that our policies should be consistent with what the government agreed to last year?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, at the upcoming summit the G8 leaders will discuss and chart the way forward to tackle child and maternal health.

As we have been saying all along, we are not closing the door on any options that will save the lives of mothers and children, including contraception. And as we have been saying all along, we are not opening the abortion debate.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a total change in the party policy announced yesterday and then today by the government. In his budget, the minister announced cuts of nearly \$200 million in funds for the poorest and most vulnerable countries.

How are these cuts in sync with a policy that aims to care for women and children in Africa? What she has just announced is totally incompatible with that.

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government knows how to manage its finances. We are in fact increasing the budget for CIDA, for its international assistance. We have been doing that consistently. We will reach a level of international assistance never reached by any other government in the history of Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAX HARMONIZATION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, no progress is being made in the matter of tax harmonization. The Prime Minister told us yesterday that Quebec had not harmonized its tax. And yet, the 2006 budget clearly indicates that it has.

The federal government also used the excuse that Quebec was collecting a tax on a tax. That has also been resolved. We were also told that Quebec did not charge the sales tax on certain goods, such as books. There are similar exceptions in other provinces, and that has not prevented the government from concluding agreements with them.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that what he really wants is to collect the GST instead of Quebec?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 18 years ago, Quebec signed an agreement not to harmonize the GST with its sales tax, but to collect both taxes. This arrangement is completely different from what was done with the other provinces.

If Quebec wants an agreement like that concluded with the other provinces, which honours the spirit of our obligations to the other provinces, we are prepared to look at it. We are holding discussions in good faith.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is saying that Quebec has not harmonized its tax with the GST. In the 2006 budget, the Conservatives said that Quebec did so. In one of these instances, they were not telling the truth, to put it mildly

Quebec has resolved all the issues that were raised. Why not provide compensation? Is collecting the tax the real problem? The Prime Minister should say so clearly.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the GST and the QST are two separate taxes. They are collected by Quebec. This is not the situation in the other provinces.

If Quebec wants a harmonization agreement like the ones signed with the other provinces, we will continue to negotiate with Quebec in good faith on this.

* * *

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to revisiting the issue of Quebec's collecting the GST, the government wants to strip Quebecers of another financial tool by establishing a single securities commission. Although participation would be voluntary, in reality it would mean the disappearance of the Autorité des marchés financiers and the transfer of Quebec's regulatory authority to Ontario.

Why is the Conservative government attacking Quebec's economic and financial autonomy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, participation in the Canadian securities commission is voluntary. Only those provinces that wish to participate will be included. That means Ontario, British Columbia and a number of others, but not Quebec. It is up to Quebec to decide.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to undermining Quebec's autonomy, it seems already that the creation of a single securities commission will be a very expensive bureaucratic monster. You have to be totally out of touch with reality to want to waste \$161 million in these times of record deficits.

Oral Questions

Is the government's real objective to force all AMF stakeholders and users to do business with English voice mail in Toronto, to trump unanimous resolutions by the Quebec's National Assembly, in short, to dismantle Montreal's financial hub?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are at a stage where we want better international regulation. In terms of our financial sector, we are looking to improve regulations in Canada.

This is a provincial jurisdiction. It is up to Ontario and British Columbia, not Quebec, to decide if they wish to collaborate with the federal government in this matter. The Quebec government can only make decisions for Quebec.

* * *

[English]

PROROGATION OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister was on this side of the House in the opposition, he used to state, with considerable conviction, that the prime minister, any prime minister, had a moral obligation to respect the will of the House.

Yesterday, the House expressed itself very clearly in stating that the Prime Minister shall not seek a prorogation of beyond seven days from the Government General without the express support, through a resolution, of the House of Commons.

Will the Prime Minister respect the will of the House?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I gather it has been the will of the House to replace the government with an unelected coalition. If that is indeed the will of the House, the members know they have to get a mandate from the people of Canada and they cannot tinker with the House rules to work around that reality.

When we speak about the will of the House, I understand pretty clearly from this question period that the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois want to end the ten percenter program outside of our own ridings. Is this also a position of the House that the NDP is prepared to endorse?

* * *

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has just informed us that he will not respect the will of the House.

[Translation]

Yesterday, I asked the Prime Minister if his government's position was that contraception does not save lives. He refused to respond. The Federation of Medical Women of Canada has a clear position on this issue. The World Health Organization, USAID and Action Canada for Population and Development have all said that contraception saves lives.

Does the Prime Minister agree?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's position is clear. I believe the minister answered this question. The government is looking to work with G8 countries to save lives, to save mothers and children throughout the world. We are not closing the door on any option, including contraception. However, we do not wish to debate abortion in this place or elsewhere.

[English]

Once again, I ask the leader of the NDP to join with the other parties and endorse the end of the ten percenter program outside our ridings.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we have learned now is that the government will leave its options open.

I want to ask an extremely clear question of the Prime Minister so Canadians as well as the other countries coming to the G8 summit can know where Canada is going to stand.

Does the Prime Minister agree with the broad sweep of opinion that is extremely clear, that contraception saves lives? The initiative to put the health of women and children into the forefront in these discussions is something we applaud, but it is extremely important the Prime Minister answer this question.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think I have pretty clearly answered the question. I do not think I could be clearer.

On the other hand, the leader of the NDP talks about respecting the will of the House. My question is this. Does he respect the votes that his own party casts in the House of Commons? His own party voted a couple of days ago to abolish the ten percenter program for mailings outside of our own ridings. The other three parties apparently support that. Does the leader of the NDP still support that or not?

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, less than a year ago, the government made a formal commitment to support voluntary family planning at the G8.

Why does it now want to block access to contraception for African women?

Why are the Conservatives so obsessed with trying to push these George Bush-like doctrines on the world's poor?

Does this government believe in the benefits of contraception?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me again be very clear and reiterate that at the G8 the leaders will discuss maternal and child health. In fact, as I have articulated, there are no doors being closed even including contraception. There will be fulsome discussion and they will chart a way forward to help save the lives of mothers and children.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is doublespeak. Every year, 1,500,000 women die because they do not have access to family planning services.

The government is giving in to the religious extremist lobbies at the expense of African women.

Maternal and reproductive health is a human right. Contraceptives are essential to the health of African mothers. The use of condoms in Africa could mean the difference between life and death.

Can the Prime Minister explain to Canadians why he is against this simple, proven method of preventing STDs?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I do not know how to be more clear. I thank the member for adding some more information that will be taken into consideration by all the G8 leaders. In fact, as I said, they will discuss this and they will chart the way forward to help mothers and children and to save their lives.

For the member, we do have the facts. We know that most of the women and children who are now dying are occurring in Africa and in Southeast Asia. That is the problem we want to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver South.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to a lawyer for Amnesty International, Mr. Iacobucci will simply be providing a second opinion that could possibly take two years. Britain has stopped all detainee transfers. It is concerned about torture right now.

The Conservative government continues to transfer detainees to possible torture. Why? Why will it not call a public inquiry and end this sordid spectacle?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see the Liberal Party is back on message. No one wants to jeopardize public safety or national security and nobody wants any information released that might jeopardize the men and women who serve us in Afghanistan.

Therefore, I call on the hon. member to put confidence in Mr. Iacobucci. Let him do his job and support the work he is about to do.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government may have forgotten, but people remember that months ago the International Criminal Court prosecutor in The Hague initiated a preliminary investigation into the conduct of the Canadian government with regard to torture. Yet the government continues to transfer detainees to a serious and substantial risk of torture. The prosecutor may commence a full criminal investigation. A public inquiry may persuade the prosecutor to not commence a full criminal investigation.

Why not do the right thing and call a public inquiry?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, a public inquiry is not necessary and, as the hon. member knows, public inquiries take a great deal of time. We want a more expeditious process to assist in this matter. We all want to protect public safety in our country.

Oral Questions

I ask the hon. member to put confidence in Mr. Iacobucci. He deserves it and he should have the support of all hon. members.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRIFOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for more than a year the Conservative government has hurt Quebec's agrifood industry with its 98% Canadian content standard for labelling products as "Made in Canada".

The Minister of State for Agriculture, who himself recognizes that the standard has had negative repercussions on processing, is undertaking a second completely useless consultation. Yet he had promised to press the real Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to address the agrifood industry's concerns.

Is this an acknowledgment of powerlessness by the Minister of State?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. It is the action of a minister who is listening to what people are saying about the problems they are facing. I met with representatives from the association of processors and I spoke with a number of people who explained to me that applying the 98% standard was creating problems for them.

We agreed to keep this standard. Now, we will be talking with them about excluding certain products linked to food preservation such as salt, sugar and spices. That will be clear for consumers, and it will also allow processors to resolve their problems.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the least we can say is that the minister engages in passive listening. He claims that he wants to consult with people, yet he has already decided what will be done. He does not need to hold another consultation to find out what the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food showed two years ago, namely that the consensus is to set the standard at 85%.

Will the real Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food stop wasting the agri-food sector's time and money, face facts and change the disputed standard, as producers, processors and consumers are demanding?

• (1440)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we listened to the Bloc, concentrated pineapple juice from overseas should be considered a product of Canada when only 14% of the content is pineapple juice and the rest is water. These are the kinds of things we want to avoid. We want to make sure that we help processors and that consumers know what they are getting. That is why we believe that excluding some products that extend the shelf life of food will achieve our goal and make everyone happy.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for some time now, relatives of victims of crime have been asking for the right to collect EI benefits during their recovery. Compared to the Conservatives' bill, the Bloc Québécois bill is more generous and further ahead in the legislative process. Moreover, the Bloc bill is supported by the association founded by Senator Boisvenu.

If the government really cares about helping the families of victims of crime, why is it refusing to get behind the Bloc Québécois bill?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we indicated in the throne speech, we plan to introduce a program to help the family members of victims of crime.

We believe it is important that these individuals have time to heal and get through these difficult times. We want to introduce an employment insurance program that takes this into account.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate what my colleague just said. The Bloc Québécois bill goes further than the government bill by proposing 52 weeks of employment insurance for the relatives of victims of crime and protecting their jobs for at least 24 months.

By refusing to support it, are the Conservatives not proving that the families of victims of crime are really not a priority for them and that they simply want to advance their own partisan criminal justice agenda?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. We want to help the families of victims of crime.

I would remind the Bloc members that in the past year, we have implemented six or seven different measures to help workers and people who lose their jobs. Every time we proposed good measures, the Bloc stood up and voted against them. We will help victims by introducing a special program for the families of victims of crime.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the day after the opening ceremonies of the Vancouver Games, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages said, "I thought the opening ceremonies were brilliant, beautiful, spectacular on television, but there should have been more French." In response to my question of March 4, he said, "We kept our promises regarding the official languages during the Olympic Games."

Sometimes two ministers contradict one another. How does the minister explain contradicting himself?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party may be the only party that is very proud of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We are also very proud of the Games when it comes to the official languages, and we are not alone. Pascal Couchepin said that the Vancouver Olympic Games set an example in terms of linguistic diversity and that it would be difficult to do any better.

That is absolutely right.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister is sticking to his position, but it is not clear which one.

While he went on and on to assure us that linguistic duality was respected at the Games, some 40 complaints were filed with the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Will the minister admit that the simple fact that his directives were issued in English only is evidence perhaps of negligence, or at least indifference, but certainly a lack of leadership?

Fortunately, we had our athletes to be proud of, because this government gives us nothing to be proud of.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely ridiculous. He mentioned the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser. Commissioner Fraser said he was impressed by the level of bilingualism at the Olympic Games and quite pleased with the government's commitment.

[English]

The member for Ottawa—Vanier said that the contract was signed only in English. That is because the lawyer from Vanoc who signed the contract agreement with the federal government had a choice between signing it in English or French. Being a smart lawyer, which is to say not a Liberal, he did not sign a contract in a language he does not speak, so he signed the contract in English. In this contract, there are 15 clauses that make the requirements for official languages clear. We delivered on official languages.

* * *

• (1445)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has now been nearly a month since the disgraceful behaviour of the Minister of State for the Status of Women at the Charlottetown airport. However, the Prime Minister has still not imposed any sanctions or consequences on the minister for her outburst.

What does that say to the people of Prince Edward Island and all Atlantic Canadians? It says that if people slander one of the great provinces as a hellhole, they get to stay in cabinet. Why is the Prime Minister unwilling to fire his minister for her shameful behaviour?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in this place in the past, our colleague, the Minister of State for the Status of Women, has made a very sincere apology to the individuals in question. They have accepted that apology.

I think it is in the best interests of the Canadian people that we focus on their priorities. In Prince Edward Island, they want us to focus on jobs, the economy, and improving our justice system. Let us put aside these divisive issues, come together, and work for Canadians.

Oral Questions

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian aviation regulations are explicit. Section 705 says that anyone at an airport who displays argumentative or disorderly behaviour or repeatedly shows belligerent behaviour has committed a level three offence. Anyone else would have been arrested and maybe even ended up on the no-fly list.

However, if a person is a Conservative minister, all he or she has to do is utter a weak, half-hearted apology. Is there something in those aviation regulations that exempts Conservative cabinet ministers?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the men and women who work at our airports have a difficult job. They work hard. I know that all members of all political stripes, be they in the government or the opposition, will want to join me in saying that we should work together to help support those who work to keep us safe.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that this Conservative government is committed to ensuring that our communities are safe places for people to live and raise their families. Today, the Minister of Public Safety introduced legislation in the House to further protect Canadians from serious violent criminals. We have continuously taken action to get tough on crime and protect our communities.

Could the Minister of Public Safety update the House on this important piece of legislation and how it will further protect Canadians?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank that member for his very hard work on this particular file. This morning I was pleased to have tabled in the House legislative amendments to the International Transfer of Offenders Act. Canadians want a corrections system that protects the safety of victims and law-abiding Canadians.

This act will ensure that the protection of our society is of paramount consideration when assessing requests for the transfer of international offenders. Our government remains committed to holding offenders accountable for their actions in Canada and abroad, and we will continue to put the rights of victims over those of criminals.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently Canadians learned that packaged meat destined for their dinner tables is inspected just once a week, while meat being shipped to the U.S. is checked every 12 hours. Now we learn that Siena Foods, a facility connected to the tainted deli meats, was stopped by CFIA from shipping to the U.S., yet still allowed to produce food for Canadians.

Could the minister explain this double standard? Why is the government not putting the health of Canadian families first?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I

am pleased to have the opportunity to stand up and actually get the real facts on the table. Siena Foods was shut down by the CFIA last Friday. It was delisted for American shipments on Tuesday, a full four days later.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to the minister, it was a voluntary shutdown by the company. However, the unusual numbers of deaths and illnesses from listeriosis this year and the growing HVP recall point to a pressing need for more inspectors protecting Canadians from tainted food.

The government has not increased the number of meat inspectors since the 2008 listeriosis crisis. The old hires were not assigned to meat inspection. The new hires that the government promised are still in training and not on the street yet. The existing inspectors are working overtime as a band-aid solution.

Why is the government not making food safety a priority for Canadians?

• (1450)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at every opportunity this government has reinvested in CFIA, after years of Liberal cuts, which really decimated the organization.

We have given them the opportunity to hire new front line inspectors. There have been some 450 front line inspectors added since we took office. There is a whole new round of hires going on, strictly on the ready-to-eat and meat side. We will have hundreds of new inspectors by this time next year dedicated to that front line operation.

At every juncture, the NDP has voted against that. That is unfortunate and shameful.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Superior Court dismissed the Conservative government's motion to block the class action suit filed by the victims of the contaminated water in Shannon. Instead of using diversionary tactics, the federal government should acknowledge its responsibility and compensate the victims who have already suffered too much.

Since 500 cases of cancer do not seem to be enough for the Minister of National Defence, can he tell us what it will take for him to take responsibility: 600, 700 or even 1,000 cases?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, this issue goes back a number of years.

We have great concern, obviously, for the people of Shannon. That is why we are working with them, working with the municipality and the provincial government.

Oral Questions

In fact, at Canadian Forces Base Valcartier we are providing potable water to Canadian Forces members and their families as well as the municipality, and since 1998, successive federal governments have spent upward of \$60 million with respect to this issue.

We will continue to work to assist the municipality of Shannon. It is a matter of concern. We are seized with the issue and there has been, as the hon. member has mentioned, court actions. We continue to look for solutions.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC CITY ARMOURY

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's national capital commission has been totally excluded from the process to reconstruct the armoury, which is delaying development work on Quebec City's parliament hill. The National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion calling on the federal government to involve the national capital commission.

Will the minister responsible for the Quebec City region answer the call of the elected members of the National Assembly?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member for Québec had been paying attention, she would have realized that during Jean Baillargeon's consultations, the national capital commission had the opportunity to make itself heard. When the building expert held consultations in the Quebec City area, the national capital commission was again consulted.

It is important to remember that in the last budget, the government made a commitment to rebuild the armoury. The Bloc and the hon. member for Québec voted against it.

* * *

[English]

CRAB FISHERY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2005 crab fishers in CFA 23 and 24 accepted a co-management plan that would lend equity and stability to their fishery.

All terms were honoured, with the traditional fleet getting 60% of the TAC, and new entries getting 40%. A key provision would see this arrangement go to a 50-50 split once the TAC reached 9,700 tonnes, which it did last year. Unilaterally, the minister threw the agreement out, greatly shortchanging 650 fishers.

Will the minister re-establish this provision and return fairness to this fishery?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sharing allocation decisions are always difficult decisions. I received advice from many sources, from the department, from the various fleets, from the report, and from direct submissions.

It is impossible to accept and agree with all the advice, but a decision had to be made. The panel's recommendations were carefully considered. Each licence gets an equal share of the quota.

All fishers benefited from the modest increases in quota last year, and they will in the future.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those with 17,000 pounds did not benefit quite as much as those with 250,000 pounds.

There is another injustice served up the government. The co-management plan clearly identified that no new entrants would be allowed in this fishery, yet the minister's predecessor, against strong recommendations from the department, allowed a licence for Tim Rhyno.

Will the minister revoke this licence and honour the 2005 agreement?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, sharing allocation decisions are always difficult decisions. I was not here when the licence was issued. Our main focus, our main priority, is conservation of the stocks for the future. That is why we have stabilized this industry.

* * *

● (1455)

AVIATION SAFETY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the government acknowledged that it was wrong for leaving safety in the hands of business jet owners. I am glad they are taking back the responsibility for safety, something the NDP and safety advocates have been pushing for, for many years.

However, most Canadians do not fly on business jets but on major carriers like Air Canada and WestJet, where Transport Canada has also gotten out of the safety business.

Will the minister do for the major carriers what he has done for business aircraft and take back responsibility for safety?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the New Democratic Party and my friend opposite, when I reviewed the issue I, too, was a bit surprised that the previous Liberal government put the fox in charge of the henhouse.

We did a lot of listening, not just to our NDP friends but indeed to our various employees at the Department of Transport. We will ensure that the strong public interest in safety is done by members of the hard-working public service.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in its report on the crash of a medevac flight at Sandy Bay, Saskatchewan, the Transport Safety Board said that the department was so busy getting out of safety oversight that it really did not know what was going on with the airline involved. The problem is that inspectors must be inspecting, not checking paperwork.

Will the minister put the inspectors back in the field, right now, ensuring the safety of all Canadians when we fly across this great country?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at Transport Canada one of our most important priorities is to ensure the safety of the travelling public.

We are working hard with our employees. We are working hard with industry. We are working hard with advocates on this important issue. We have a new director general for aviation security who is working hard with our team in every part of the country.

We are going to do everything we can to ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to ensure that the travelling public is safe when people board a commercial aircraft.

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ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has shown real leadership when it comes to promoting and defending Canada's Arctic.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs inform this House what our government is doing to defend Canada's sovereignty in the north?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. No previous government can match the Conservative government's commitment to Arctic sovereignty.

Our claim is long-standing. Our claim is well-established and based on historic title. I will personally be able to reassert Canada's sovereignty at a meeting on the Arctic with the Arctic foreign ministers next week here in Gatineau.

This government is taking real action. We have taken real action with our new Arctic patrol ships. We are doing the mapping. We are doing what we had announced.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative ministers normally comment without hesitation on sentencing in provincial courts. Just this week the immigration minister sent out a press release lauding a B.C. court decision saying, "It sends a message, they will be caught and they will be punished".

Strangely in the case of a past Conservative MP, we hear nothing but silence. The government's "do the crime, do the time" mantra seems to change to "do the crime, pay the fine", when it comes to one of its own.

Why the silence in this case when the government is so anxious to speak on every other?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are very careful about commenting on any case. One of the things I have commented on continuously is the Liberal record or lack of record of standing up for victims and law-abiding Canadians.

I invite the hon. member, if he has any suggestions to pursue and to help us in our criminal law agenda, to come forward with those as soon as possible.

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Val-D'Or may be excluded from the food mail program. Hundreds of jobs and significant economic spinoffs are at stake.

The Valpiro workers, the Kepa Transport truckers, those who work for ADL and Ben Deshaies are worried. Local elected officials and the Cree are asking the federal government to consider the economic impact of this program on the Abitibi—Témiscamingue—Nord-du-Québec region.

Will the minister promise to bring the people from the region before a parliamentary committee before making a decision?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have had over 70 different hearings in communities all across the north and northern Quebec, everywhere that food mail has been used. We heard a consistent message. People want some sort of food nutrition program for the north. Our government has not only supported that in theory, but in the budget we came forward with an additional \$45 million to add to that. That is the key part of funding any food program for the north, and the Bloc members voted against it.

It is a little rich to ask for specifics about how they might preserve jobs in Val-d'Or now.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, two full-time Nova Scotia Supreme Court justice positions, which had been occupied by bilingual justices, were filled with unilingual anglophone justices. There is now only a single bilingual justice in the court.

Two other positions will need to be filled soon in Yarmouth and Sydney, which have a significant proportion of francophones.

Will the Minister of Justice ensure that representatives of the francophone and Acadian communities in Nova Scotia are part of the nominating committee, and will he promise to appoint two bilingual justices to the court?

Business of the House

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to support the promotion of both official languages, and particularly on the bench. We have regular discussions with chief justices to make sure that we meet the linguistic needs of every province.

We encourage minority language communities to apply for judicial appointments. It is very important to this country and certainly to the judiciary itself.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 1990s the Liberal Party decided to slash transfers to the provinces for health and education. Now senior Liberals are calling for government to raise taxes on the one hand, but on the other hand they are questioning a plan endorsed by the C.D. Howe Institute, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives.

Could the President of the Treasury Board tell members of the House if our government will take the misguided Liberal approach?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I regret that my colleague was shouted down by the members opposite. He has raised an important point.

We will not be following the Liberal pattern of slashing health care and social transfers or raising taxes. In fact, what we will be doing is continuing our economic plan for this year. We will also be freezing the salaries of MPs. For the next three years, all departmental spending will be frozen. We will not be raising taxes.

We agree with the recent evaluation of our plan. If I may quickly say, in hindsight the Chrétien government cut too much and hurt people—

The Speaker: That will draw to a conclusion our question period for today.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the Thursday question, seeking information from the government about what it plans to have on the order paper for the rest of this week and next week.

I would remind the government that the House was subject to prorogation for a very long time so that the government could engage in recalibration, but so far, in looking at the agenda, only four or five recycled bills have been put on the order paper and it seems what we have now is procrastination.

I wonder if the government could beef up the agenda a bit so we could get on with the business the government considers to be important.

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying how much I

appreciate your sending me the photocopy of the rules that govern our operations in the House, in particular the rules on the scope and asking of the Thursday question and my response.

Hence, I am going to hesitate this week from launching into a full-blown debate with my hon. colleague about prorogation and the fact that so many of his colleagues seem not to understand that prorogation is over and the House is back in business.

When it comes to the business leading up to next Thursday, I would note that we will continue today with the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Tomorrow we will begin debate on second reading of Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act, known as Sébastien's Law.

Monday, March 22, will be day three of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Tuesday will be the last supply day for the opposition. Hopefully, we will get some meaningful motions put forward by the official opposition and they will show up for the debate.

We will continue with the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, followed by Bill C-2, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

If time permits, we could start Bill C-3, An Act to promote gender equity in Indian registration by responding to the Court of Appeal for British Columbia decision in *McIvor v. Canada* (Registrar of Indian and Northern Affairs).

* * *

● (1505)

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (C)

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition, I might conclude by stating there have been consultations among all parties on, and I believe you will find unanimous consent for, the following motion. I move:

That, in the Supplementary Estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, laid upon the Table Wednesday, March 3, 2010 by the President of the Treasury Board, Vote L37c under FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE — Canadian International Development Agency be deemed to have been designated as Vote 32c.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader 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)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, in the list of business given by the government House leader, he made mention of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement implementation legislation. Could he say again which day he intends to call that legislation?

The Address

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, recognizing that there are consultations ongoing on that particular bill, it would be my intention to consider that next Wednesday.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a point of order with respect to something I saw and heard during oral question period. It involved a member of the opposition, the member for Québec, and was directed at our minister responsible for the Quebec City region.

When the minister spoke, the Bloc member for Québec made inappropriate gestures and used unparliamentary language in remarks about our minister.

[English]

I was completely offended by what I saw and heard. I believe the member from Quebec owes the minister a sincere apology. I do not believe we should put up with that kind of behaviour here in this honourable place.

I am here to work very hard for this country. The minister is working very hard for the country as well and particularly for the province of Quebec. To have to put up with those kinds of remarks, which I cannot even repeat in the House, is absolutely unparliamentary.

I would encourage you, Mr. Speaker, to view the tape and consider what the Bloc Québécois member had to say and what she was gesturing toward the minister, and ask that she apologize to the minister as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our colleague opposite is evidently unable to relay the specific remarks of the member for Québec. I know that we are not supposed to speak about the absence of colleagues, but I will say that she is not here at present as she had to catch a flight to return to her riding.

However, in points of order, knowing what was said is necessary to determine whether remarks are unparliamentary. In the case of inappropriate gestures, the burden of proof falls on the member raising the point of order.

Therefore, I believe that you should at least wait for the member for Québec to return in order to obtain an explanation.

• (1510)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the gestures made by the member for Québec were so unacceptable that it would be inappropriate for me to repeat them for you. I am asking you to look at the video. If you wish, after this exchange, I could meet with you to show you the gestures she made. I can also repeat the words she used but it would be very inappropriate to use such unparliamentary language in the House. However, I am prepared to speak to you, one-on-one, after this exchange, if you wish.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her diligence. We can certainly discuss this and I could also see what shows up on the video. That concludes this point of order for the time being.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: Before question period the hon. member for Charlottetown had the floor for his remarks. There are six and half minutes remaining in the time allotted to him for his comments. I therefore call upon the hon. member for Charlottetown.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I started my remarks prior to question period, I said that this is a strange debate because there really is not anything in the Speech from the Throne that I would consider has anything to do with an agenda, a vision or futuristic programs. It is a compilation of things that might have been done in the last three or four years. It talks about the situation in Haiti and it talks about the Olympic Games, but really there is nothing there at all.

There is probably a reason for that. This is the third Speech from the Throne in 14 months. It makes a mockery of the whole thing. Anyway, this is what is in front of us. There are several issues that we should be having a public discussion about and which should be in the Speech from the Throne.

The first one is the major demographic transition that is going on in Canada which will have dramatic effects on our labour force, on our future health care costs, on our pensions, on our care of the elderly. There is no public discussion going on about that at all. Some think tanks are writing reports, and some of them are quite alarming, but in the Speech from the Throne and the budget, there is dead silence. I find that alarming.

That leads to the second point, and that is the whole issue of pensions. This has become a very important issue for Canadians from coast to coast. Statistics indicate that approximately two-thirds of Canadians do not have sufficient savings for their retirement. There were no proposals in the Speech from the Throne. There was nothing in the budget. I know that some discussions are going on and there is a lot of hiding behind this jurisdictional shield. The federal government has the power to convene and to show leadership. I am looking for leadership on this particular issue and I know that all Canadians are as well.

The Address

As we look forward as a society with a declining workforce we have to look for greater productivity. Our productivity is substantially lower than that of the United States and it is falling lower. Forty per cent of all Canadians do not have the literacy and numeracy skills to compete in the knowledge economy. Nothing is being done about it. No leadership is being shown by the government. Very little leadership is being shown by any of the provincial governments. The universities are not involved in this issue. The community colleges seem to be ignoring it. It just does not get any public discussion anywhere. This issue will affect dramatically the future productivity of this nation. It is an issue that I thought would have been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne.

Dealing with the issue of productivity, there are significant barriers to post-secondary education developing in Canadian society. A lot of high school graduates are deciding not to go to university or to a community college. Their decision is based upon income. They do not want to incur the significant debt that is required. That is becoming a determinant for people to go to university. The country will suffer because of that. That issue should have been included in the Speech from the Throne as we look at the business and agenda of this House going forward.

Perhaps the item that is most blatantly not in the Speech from the Throne is the whole issue of the environment and climate change. The Conservative government is in its fifth year of governing. There have been three environment ministers. There have been three plans.

The first environment minister's agenda was to create a made in Canada plan. Did we ever get it? No. Did we get anything done at all on the environment or climate change? No.

When she was dismissed, she was replaced with the second environment minister. His program was to bring forward very tough regulations so that the largest emitters in Canada would be regulated. Was this ever done? No, it was not done. Was anything ever done? No, nothing was done.

Then there is the third environment minister. His plan is to start a dialogue with the Obama administration. Has this dialogue started? We do not know. The other day he was reported in the press as saying that the dialogue may take two or three years, and in the meantime we cannot do anything.

I, and I believe most Canadians, find it troubling that we can go from one year to two years to three years to four years and not do anything about climate change, other than suggest that at some point in time we are going to start a dialogue with the Obama administration.

• (1515)

I know there is a certain percentage of Canadians who do not believe in climate change. They support the remarks of the Prime Minister that this is an unproven science and it is a socialist plot. However, the majority of Canadians do not support that thought. There should have been something in the Speech from the Throne dealing with environmental issues, dealing with climate change and dealing with a future agenda and programs that this country would expect to see from the government in power regarding the environment.

I come from the political ideology that I believe there is a positive role for the federal government to play. A country as large and as diverse as Canada cannot function if there is not a strong federal government. I am not seeing it, and I am certainly not seeing it in this Speech from the Throne. I really do not see anything. It is disappointing, but there is some explanation for it. This is the third throne speech in 14 or 15 months. That is probably one of the biggest issues that I would have liked to see in the Speech from the Throne, that is, the constant attacks on democracy and the institutions of democracy, such as this institution, Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the Liberal member, who spoke about climate change and said that a number of Conservatives did not believe in climate change. While the entire world believes that the future is in a knowledge-based and green economy, the Conservatives continue to turn a deaf ear.

This \$280 billion budget allocates \$180 million to energy efficiency and \$25 million to renewable energies.

On a per capita basis, China invests four times more than Canada in green and renewable energies, while Europe invests seven times more, Korea invests 16 times more, and the United States invests 18 times more.

How can the Liberals support the throne speech and the budget when the Conservatives deny the existence of climate change and are not investing any significant amounts of money into green and renewable energies?

• (1520)

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the comments made by the questioner. There is a certain segment and depending on whose numbers we believe, probably 20% of Canadians do not believe in climate change. They share the comments of the Prime Minister. They think it is an unproven science and it is a socialist plot for the developing countries to take money from the developed countries.

The member makes a very interesting point that a lot of countries, such as Germany, China and the United States, are really into developing the green economy. Most economists believe that is the future, that we have to transition from carbon-based fuels to alternate sources of energy. Technology is what is going to take us there. A lot of countries are ahead of us. Canada is not doing very much. Some of the provinces are doing some things, but it is disappointing to see the role taken by the current federal government.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the member to be an excellent chair of the public accounts committee. As a matter of fact, he has been the chairman now for about four years. I knew him from before I even got to this place.

The Address

I liked what he had to say about the lack of initiative on the part of the government to negotiate with the United States. We know that tourism on both sides of the border has dropped off a lot since the imposition of the new passport regulations, and here we have the government wanting to introduce a new biometric passport when it cannot even get the old passport to work properly. It should be negotiating with the American government to have a reduction in the price of the passports on both sides of the border for a six-month period or perhaps a two for one promotion, anything to get the tourism business back on track along the border.

I wonder whether the member would like to comment on that aspect of the throne speech.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue. The member is quite right. Over the past 6 to 10 years we have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of United States tourists coming to Canada. It is not just one issue that is behind it; there are a number of issues. There is the thickening of the border. There was the confusion over passports, do people need them, do they not need them. There is the marketing issue. There is the price. Another issue was the whole way the government handled the GST rebates for foreign visitors. Altogether this has led to a dramatic reduction, unfortunately, for our tourism industry. It is just not a priority.

This is one of those issues the government has backed away from because it thinks it is a provincial jurisdiction. I take the contrary point of view that this is very much a federal jurisdiction. The federal government ought to show leadership. It has the power to come forward with national strategies. It could be doing a lot more to assist our businesses in the tourist industry.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every so often around this place as members of Parliament, we get a chance to advance the aspirations and dreams of the people we meet, the folks we represent. This is one of those occasions for me.

Some months ago I was door knocking in the former township of Osgoode which is in the south end of the amalgamated city of Ottawa. I knocked on the door of a soldier who had just returned from Afghanistan. When left for Afghanistan, he left behind a five-day-old newborn with his wife and he went to serve out his mission in one of the most dangerous places in the world. He came back and applied for parental leave under the employment insurance system, and why would he not? The employment insurance program provides parental benefits to individuals who are adopting a child or caring for a newborn, which he was. The only problem is that during the time when he was risking his life overseas on our behalf, the period of eligibility for collecting parental benefits had expired. While he was sacrificing for us, the system expired the benefits he had paid for his entire life as a working Canadian through EI premiums.

It struck me as an incredible injustice that we could ask people first to pay into the employment insurance system with the promise that one day they might draw from it in order to extract the parental benefits that are part of the program and then send them into harm's way and tell them when they got back that the benefits for which they had paid would no longer be theirs.

I brought this matter to the Minister of Human Resources and she acted swiftly and decisively to have the finance minister put the following words into the budget documents:

For Canadian Forces members whose parental leave is deferred or interrupted because of the military requirements, the Government will extend the period in which they are eligible by another 52 weeks.

That is the right thing to do. It is about families and soldiers. We are all here because of those who sacrificed before us. We have a great duty to work every day and in our own small way to try and repay that sacrifice. If members look at the budget documents that I just cited, they will find that is exactly what we have done here.

I want to thank that soldier who brought this concern to my attention. It is due to his work that we were able to identify this problem and fix it for soldiers who make similar sacrifices in the future. I thank him and I thank the House for giving the occasion to serve people like the gentleman on whose doorstep I learned of this problem. I hope that we can all put aside our differences on an issue as unifying as this one to help our soldiers and our families, to uphold the great pillars of what make our country so great: hard work, family, patriotism, sacrifice.

With the passage of this budget and this particular provision, I hope we can do that.

• (1525)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the member sits on the public accounts committee as well. I want to ask him about the shifting of the tax burden from corporations to individuals. I guess if the government could offer some proof that this strategy actually works, more people may be converted to the idea.

However, the government has simply reduced its corporate tax from 40% down to 15% over the last few years, while the Americans are still at around 35%. There is no need for our country to be that much lower than the United States, especially when corporate taxes in some of the Nordic countries are at 50%.

If there were results coming out of this, the government would have an argument, but Statistics Canada and Finance Canada have said that business spending on machinery and equipment has declined as a share of GDP. Kevin Lynch, former Clerk of the Privy Council and cabinet secretary, said that IT use by Canadian business is only half of the United States.

Despite Canadian corporate taxes, the productivity growth is actually worse. Experts are exposing the government's policy as not working the way it says that it will. Why does it keep blindly following Ronald Reagan economics, or what George Bush called voodoo economics, when it has been proven not to have the desired effect?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I should say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Red Deer.

The NDP member believes in taking an American style approach to the economy. He lauded the fact that Americans tax their businesses at much higher rates than we do in Canada. He is pointing to a system in the United States that has led to massive deficits and unemployment rates that are much higher than in Canada.

The Address

In this country, we have our own economic action plan. We do not want to go down the American road of overspending and overtaxation, which is why we are lowering taxes. We cut the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. We lowered income taxes, lifted hundreds of thousands of poor Canadians off the tax rolls altogether and brought in tax credits for kids sports, student textbooks, tradesmen tools and passenger bus passes.

Those are all tax measures that help middle-class, hard-working Canadians and the NDP voted against them. I notice that the NDP and the other coalition parties are now supporting a new tax on iPods that will hammer everyday Canadians who are simply trying to take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy music and culture. We believe in music and culture here. We do not believe in taxing people for using an iPod.

That is the fundamental difference. We take a proud Canadian approach. They are seeking inspiration on the other side from other countries that have failed.

• (1530)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a note here from Tom Shoebridge, the founder and executive director of the Canadian Screen Training Centre, the Summer Institute of Film and Television. It reads, "It is with personal and professional sadness that I announce the permanent closure of the Canadian Screen Training Centre after 29 successful years, effective April 1, 2010. The cutbacks by the federal Conservative government to all of the national film schools in 2008..."

We listened to the remarks of the parliamentary secretary and agree with them in terms of the veterans. However, there are so many areas that, in previous budgets and this budget, the government has cut, which injures the ability to get into arts and culture.

Being that he is parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, would the government consider changing its mind on these cuts, as it has done on the CAP and the anthem that was in the throne speech?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, of course we support the cultural sectors in this country but we do not support the iPod tax that the coalition parties are proposing. I think that would hurt middle-class Canadians who are trying to enjoy Canadian culture.

I thank the hon. member for agreeing with us in our efforts to extend employment insurance parental leave to soldiers who return and have small children who they had originally left behind. It is an opportunity to allow those soldiers to spend more time with their children, much deserved time in light of the enormous sacrifice they make for us every day. I am encouraged that the member will support us on that initiative.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton for sharing his time with me. I am pleased to participate in the debate on our government's Speech from the Throne.

Just over a year ago, I gave my maiden speech on budget 2009 just before it was passed by this esteemed House. After that vote, in a moment of reflection I stood outside the Centennial Flame and looked back at the beauty of Parliament's Peace Tower. As I phoned home to speak to my family, it struck me just how significant our role is in charting the future of our country and how important a

strong Canada is in leading the way in a world that is beset by strife and chaos.

In participating in this debate today, I have the same sense of pride, a sense of pride in our nation's past accomplishments, a sense of pride in the way in which we are handling the myriad of issues that we as Canadians face today and a sense of pride in the plans that our government has for facing new challenges as they will no doubt occur in the future.

I know that this throne speech, as well as budget 2010 that was passed last week, were crafted after an extensive consultation process. It was my honour to accept the invitations from both the Prime Minister and the finance minister to participate in this consultation process.

I am also delighted to see that many of the points raised by my constituents have made it both into budget 2010 and the Speech from the Throne.

I also thank my constituents for their ongoing advice and support. I am honoured to act as their voice here in Ottawa and I am proud to play my part in ensuring that all Canadians can share in the dream of a strong and united Canada.

The advice given to me from municipal councils and chambers of commerce was for a budget that continues with targeted stimulus spending, a budget that protects core spending and transfer payments and finds savings in departments through program reviews and the elimination of inefficient programming. The budget that we just passed, the second half of Canada's economic action plan, does exactly that.

I agree with the people of Red Deer that the needed investments in core public infrastructure and services that are being addressed through our economic action plan, coupled with the competitive tax regime promised in the throne speech, will give them the freedom to be innovative, productive and independent. It also gives them confidence that we will be able to restore our fiscal balance while still respecting the health and social transfers that our provinces, territories and municipalities so desperately depend upon.

Red Deer has many economic advantages but it is not without challenges. A rapid growth rate during the past decade had strained infrastructure budgets by inflating costs for both labour and materials. Then, as the recession hit, we found that current investments were being put in jeopardy, capital had vanished and people had lost their jobs.

However, our economic action plan has been able to help. Many people are taking advantage of new programs that were introduced, such as extended EI benefits and training, and will continue to do so with the new measures that our government has announced in this throne speech.

Our government is also creating jobs by commissioning important infrastructure projects with the help of provincial and municipal governments. These partnerships have supported our investments with matching funds, thereby expanding the scope of the many job-creating projects that are helping Canadians all across our country.

The Address

Our government's commitment to communities through our economic action plan, stimulus funding, the Building Canada fund and RInC program have provided improvements to local recreational centres and infrastructure in the communities of Red Deer, Penhold, Innisfail, Sylvan Lake, Delburne and Bowden.

With the help of the Government of Alberta and municipal councils, we are also making essential investments in waste treatment systems in Red Deer, Benalto, Lousana and Red Lodge.

Recently I was pleased to join my provincial and municipal counterparts to address the construction of pipelines underneath the Red Deer River. This infrastructure will allow for continued growth in the southeast corner of Red Deer and provide a sewer link between southern communities and the waste water treatment plant.

Waste water and sewage system projects may not sound very interesting, but in the words of Mayor Morris Flewwelling of Red Deer, "although it's not very exciting stuff, it's very necessary stuff". The same co-operation has been experienced by all municipal councils and those projects that were shovel-ready are proceeding as planned. Another example is in Red Deer county where, under the leadership of Mayor Earl Kinsella, essential improvements to roads and waste water systems will also be completed.

With the support of the Alberta government and our local representatives, the hon. Luke Ouellette, the hon. Maryanne Jablonski and MLA Cal Dallas, these and other projects in our community have highlighted the true co-operation of all three levels of government.

• (1535)

Exciting opportunities are ahead for Red Deer. Red Deer's Regional Airport Authority is working hard to enhance its service to meet the present and future needs of our communities.

Red Deer College, under its new president, Joel Ward, is looking at new and exciting plans for its institution that will ensure that RDC continues to lead the way in both innovation and service delivery. Our government is doubling the budget of the college and community innovations program with an additional \$15 million per year. This program, as well as our ongoing commitment to specialized trades training and applied research, will enhance opportunities for both students and local businesses alike.

Agriculture is also vital to our community and our government recognizes the Canadian agriculture sector is a key economic driver for all rural communities. Our government has launched many initiatives in our economic action plan to help the agricultural sector deal with the pressures and improve its competitiveness, including the \$500 million agriculture flexibility fund and the rest of the suite of business risk management programs.

We have a commitment of \$75 million over three years to support slaughter operations to ensure that our ranchers have access to competitive processing plants within Canada. With this plan we will help reduce costs of production, improve environmental sustainability, promote innovation and be able to better respond to market challenges.

The government is promoting access to foreign markets for Canadian agriculture products through the establishment of a market

access secretariat. We have also extended support to the hog industry in order to assist it with restructuring.

We know that Mother Nature can wreak havoc on the agricultural industry. It was this government that recognized the need for a disaster assistance program for Canadian producers and, in consultation with the provinces, we implemented the agri-recovery program so that we are able to quickly respond to producers involved in agriculture disasters.

Canada's hard-working farmers and ranchers will continue to persevere in these difficult economic times. As we approach seeding and calving season, I know the producers in my riding will be very busy but, as always, I will be looking forward to their advice and comments, even from the seats of their tractors, as our government works to secure market access for our agricultural products and works to ensure freedom of choice for western Canadian grain farmers.

Our government has taken numerous measures to ensure that senior citizens of Canada have a retirement income. Among these measures, our government has introduced tax free savings accounts and income splitting for Canada's pensioners. To support seniors and those planning for retirement, our government will continue to work with the provinces and territories on options to further strengthen Canada's retirement income system.

In addition to these measures, designed to allow seniors to keep more of their own money, we are also ensuring that community level supports exist so that seniors have the opportunity to participate in social activities. Initiatives, such as the new horizon seniors program, will keep seniors together and active in their communities. Our government has committed an extra \$10 million in this initiative to assist these community level programs.

We have evidence that Canada's economic action plan is working. I have seen the results in my riding. However, we must continue on course for the next fiscal year to ensure the stability of all of the work and investments that we have made.

Our government's Speech from the Throne has set the direction for this session of Parliament. As we come out of this recession, we can be comforted that Canada has weathered the storm and will emerge stronger than ever.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech. He spoke about seniors and said that the government would be creating a seniors day.

The Bloc Québécois was saddened to see that there was nothing in the budget to improve the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. That is an important demand. If we want seniors to celebrate on their day, we should be able to guarantee them a decent minimum income, which is not the case currently.

Can our colleague explain why they want to establish a seniors day but not necessarily support seniors who are living in poverty and in need?

The Address

[English]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, seniors truly are the backbone of our communities and throughout the country. To pick the aspect of establishing a senior's day, although it is important and recognizes the commitment that seniors have given to our communities, I think there is a lot more that is being done. As I said in my speech, we are talking about the retirement income system and the changes that are being made there

We are also ensuring that when we look at things like the tax free savings account and income splitting, that seniors have access to these programs as well.

Those are the types of things that we are looking at to help seniors but we are also ensuring that we have community supports so that those who are in dire need, as was mentioned, have the opportunity to feel as though they are part of that community.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing missing from the throne speech is any talk of equality. Economists would tell us that if we want to have the best incomes, regardless of what measurement we talk about, whether it is the crime rate, or health, or trust or happiness, the more equal a society is the better the outcome. For example, at one end of the equality scale would be the Nordic countries and Japan. At the most unequal end would be the United States with Canada falling somewhere in between.

In an effort to make Canada a more equal society and to have a better outcome, what would the hon. think about investing in seniors? For example, a \$700 million investment to double the GIS would lift every senior in our country out of poverty and serve to make our society more equal and have a better outcome.

• (1545)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, it is important we look at the types of programs we have for our seniors.

With respect to the guaranteed income supplement, it is important for seniors to have the money they require. The key thing is to ensure that costs are down and that investments are such that our tax structure is able to deal with this. We have to be careful to look at the tax structure as well as some of the expenditures.

Back in the 1990s, I was involved with the Elnora Hospital board. That was a time when 25% of the funding for health transfers was taken away from our communities, which was a mistake. It is very vivid in my memory. The government at the time more or less blamed the provinces for the difficulties that were taking place in health care, even though it had downloaded those problems to them. It is important we realize that manipulation of dollars coming into our communities is a serious concern when it comes to looking after our seniors.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

For the second time in a year, the Conservatives shut down the work of Parliament. We know they did it to avoid the very important issues of Afghanistan and what happened to detainees.

I was very proud to attend the anti-prorogation rally that took place in Vancouver on January 23. It was wonderful to see the young

people who came out to the rally. Some people had not been to a political protest before, but they came because they absolutely did not buy the very flimsy and transparent reasons the Prime Minister gave for proroguing the House.

Yesterday we debated the NDP motion to place limits on prorogation and prevent the abuses we have seen take place under the Conservative government. The NDP motion basically stated that if the House was to be prorogued for more than seven days, there had to be a resolution and vote in Parliament on the reasons for prorogation. I am very pleased the motion passed.

The reason the House was prorogued for five weeks was the government was supposedly recalibrating its agenda and setting a new agenda, with promises to listen to Canadians. When we heard the Speech from the Throne and the budget, there was no other conclusion but to say that it did not come up with anything new.

The things people in my community of Vancouver East need and have called for, whether it is child care reform, an end to homelessness, the need for affordable housing, protection for seniors or an end to the HST, none of those are included in the Speech from the Throne or the budget.

Several major organizations in Vancouver, child care groups like First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, when asked in the prebudget consultations, made it very clear to “Give priority to federal tax and program spending that will increase Canada’s investment in early childhood development”. They pointed out that for every dollar invested in child care, we put something like \$2.30 back into the economy. That is an important economic and social investment, which helps women in the labour force and families overall.

When we compare the economic investment and the positive results, consider that the OECD and UNICEF rank Canada dead last in the provision of early learning and child care. We should be ashamed of that.

What did the Speech from the Throne and the budget produce in that regard? In terms of the Speech from the Throne, child care was mentioned exactly twice. Housing was only mentioned once compared to the crime agenda, which was mentioned 12 times. We begin to get a bit of a comparison of where the emphasis is by the government.

The only changes made in terms of anything to do with child care was a measly increase of \$3.35 per week for the universal child care benefit. That will not create a single day care space, not in my riding, not anywhere else across the country. In fact, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC called this measure one of the greatest failures, saying that the taxable \$100 a month baby bonus “is NOT a child care program”.

The Address

This is a huge issue for working families. After housing in British Columbia, child care is the second highest cost facing B.C. families. That is astounding. I am going to speak about this in a couple of minutes. Housing is bad enough, but the second highest cost facing families is the cost of child care. In fact, \$1,200 per month is the average cost of care for a child under three years.

In 2010 a metro Vancouver family with a four-year-old and a two-year-old in full-time child care will pay \$23,700 annually in fees. That is astounding. For the average working family, that digs a big hole in its pockets and monthly income. Even for the child care spaces that are available, there are huge waiting lists.

● (1550)

Right across from my constituency office in Kingsway in Vancouver, the brand new Mount Pleasant Community Centre 3 Corners Child Care Centre was forced to shut down its waiting list. Why? It has over 400 names on the waiting list and it decided it did not want to give parents a false hope about getting their child into care when the list was already so long.

That is a pretty dismal record. It really disturbs me that this daily reality that the average family faces around child care and housing was not even addressed in the throne speech or the budget.

I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about the housing issue. In my community of east Vancouver and the downtown eastside and in Vancouver generally, a crisis is taking place. I participated in some of the events during the Olympic period in Vancouver. For example, the Red Tent Campaign, which was organized by the Pivot Legal Society, had 500 emergency red tents established. A tent village was set up in a vacant lot on East Hastings Street that was to be used for parking for Vanoc vehicles because people were so desperate for housing.

We and other groups appealed to BC Housing to help find people shelter so they could move out of the tents into appropriate space. About 70 people did secure housing, but there is still a number of tents sitting in that vacant lot, on the mud, waiting for a proper housing solution to come forward. It is so outrageous, in a country as wealthy as Canada, that the Conservative government cannot give housing a priority.

I have a housing bill, Bill C-304, which calls for a national housing strategy and for the participation of all levels of government. It has huge support across the country, from municipalities, from first nations, from housing organizations, from faith groups. I hope when the bill comes back to the House for report stage and third reading, it will go through.

I could not believe there was nothing in the budget for housing. People in the downtown eastside, students, seniors, even families making modest incomes cannot afford affordable housing, whether it is in Vancouver or metro Vancouver generally. This was a huge failure in the Speech from the Throne.

It has been same with pensions. Our pension critic, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, has done a tremendous job in bringing forward the issue of pensions and the fact that people are getting ripped off in their private pension plans and that the public pension plan itself is not doing justice to people. Many seniors are living below the poverty line.

We know a modest investment of \$700 million toward guaranteed income supplement payments would close the gap of poverty among seniors. It would be such a dignified and important thing to do. Did we see it? No. What did we see? Instead we saw the mad race to the bottom by the government giving away another \$6 billion in corporate tax cuts that are scheduled for this year. It is the hypocrisy and contradictions. The people who actually need the help, who should be the priority in our country, are somehow left out on the margins in the cold. Yet these wealthy corporations are doing very well. We know the banks have doubled their profits, for example, but they still get these big corporate tax breaks. I just find it very shameful.

As the member for Elmwood—Transcona pointed out a few moments ago, how can the Conservatives live in good conscience with this kind of massive tax shift that is taking place?

Another point is the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is coming to an end March 31. This is so important in my community. Groups like Healing our Spirit BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society and the Indian Residential School Survivors Society have used this money to help with the healing process. Every day I see the impact of residential schools on survivors and what it means to people in my community. Why is this program coming to an end? Why was it not included in the budget for a further commitment? It is so essential to the respect and dignity of aboriginal people.

● (1555)

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to quite a bit of what the hon. member had to say in her speech. She talked about the universal child care benefit, housing and taxes. I will comment on the housing piece of this.

I am assuming she read the budget. There was \$1 billion again this year for affordable housing. Just a few weeks ago in my riding, we announced a number of projects for affordable housing and low income housing, renovations that are going to be done in New Brunswick. Just in the Fredericton area more than 300 units are going to be improved, which will help with energy efficiency.

She also talked about the universal child care benefit. It boils down to fairness. We have both rural and urban taxpayers in this country. The universal child care benefit allows all families, rural and urban, to pick their choice of child care. Some rural people do not have the opportunity to take advantage of some of these large daycare operations.

How does the member believe it is fair for rural taxpayers to bear the burden for everybody else, as opposed to a fair system like the universal child care benefit?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, is it not just so typical of a Conservative member to pit one group of people against the other and say we are going to make rural people pay for an urban program?

The Address

The fact of the matter is that the Conservative so-called child care program has not created one single new child care space. It is an absolute failure in terms of addressing the urgent needs of families who need child care not only in urban areas but in smaller communities as well. Yes, parents should have a choice, but many parents want to choose a group child care setting because they understand the importance of early childhood development. For the Conservatives to pit one group of parents against another is truly shameful.

In terms of housing, that member should know that the money in the budget was already in the former economic stimulus plan. There is no new money. It is not an ongoing provision for affordable housing in this country. I will take him on a tour of the downtown east side if he wants, and he can see the crisis that is taking place there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to our colleague talk about social housing. Basically, what was presented in the budget was already part of the 2009 economic action plan. What is there in terms of social housing, mainly targeting seniors and persons with disabilities, is good. However, there is nothing for low income families.

This is important because, as our NDP colleague mentioned, more and more people are living in poverty and facing hardship. And access to housing in larger cities is becoming increasingly expensive.

If we want to lift these families out of poverty so that they can ensure the best resources for their children's education, then social housing must be a priority. I would like to hear the member's thoughts on this.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the hon. member's comments, because he is right. A housing-first policy is so fundamental to any anti-poverty strategy. If people do not have secure, appropriate, affordable, safe housing, there is very little else in life they can deal with in a proper way, whether it is going to school or work or dealing with issues they might have.

This idea that we need to ensure that all Canadians have appropriate housing, no matter where they live or who they are, to me is a fundamental human right. This budget failed on that score. The money that is there is a leftover from the previous year. There is no new commitment to housing, and there is no long-term commitment to housing.

This goes back to a former Liberal government that cut out the federal government from the provision of housing. I will say that the homelessness we see on our streets today is a result of those disastrous decisions that were made more than a decade ago. That is what we are seeing not only in my community but in other communities. Unfortunately, the Conservative government has not made it better. It has only made it worse.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to follow the member from British Columbia, who has made a fantastic speech on the Speech from the Throne.

I certainly will get into some of the negative aspects of the throne speech and the actions of the government, but at the beginning I think I should point out that we do see some positives in what the government has presented in the throne speech. For example, we are pleased that the government promised to investigate the murders of 500 aboriginal women. We are pleased that the government is concerned about workers affected by corporate bankruptcies. We are pleased about its help for military families. We are also pleased about the government's intention to endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, its support for Obama's efforts on nuclear non-proliferation and its commitment to boost support for apprenticeships and skills training.

Having said that, throne speeches are often very vague and they are promises of what we are going to do in the future. Many times I have seen in the province of Manitoba that the same material keeps appearing in throne speech after throne speech over a number of years. The government never actually gets around to doing anything about it. Therefore I hope that in this case it is going to be different and that these points that we support in the throne speech are not only announced in the throne speech but are actually acted upon and dealt with over the course of the year.

There is a large number of issues coming out of the throne speech that I want to deal with. Unfortunately there is not going to be enough time in this particular speech to deal with all of them.

However, I want to start out by talking about the whole issue of Canada-U.S. cross-border tourism. A couple of weeks ago, several members of the House were on a Canada-U.S. congressional visit. We had the member for Kings—Hants and the member for Berthier—Maskinongé along. We attended the governors conference and after that we had some visitations with congressional members.

These are ongoing visits. I was involved with them for a number of years as a provincial MLA; perhaps I went down a dozen times. It seems sometimes that we are making some progress, and the next year when we visit we find that the progress we made has been reversed.

We were meeting on a half-hour, individual basis all day long. I think we met with 40 people from Congress and quite a number of senators. One of the issues, among others, that we dealt with while we were there was that we made certain we got across to them the whole idea that cross-border tourism figures are down. They understand that too.

The issue is what we can do about it. We have lodge owners and fishing camp owners across the country who have seen the numbers and their revenues drop off a lot. We felt that government should be making it easier for people to cross the border, and one of the ways we can do that is by reducing the cost of passports.

The government should be making an extra effort on its part to do exactly that. U.S. citizens actually do not need a passport to get into Canada. They just need a passport to get back into their own country. The result is that when passport costs are so high, \$80 per passport, a lot of people are unable to afford them.

The Address

We had a Congress person tell us, and the member would agree, that he multiplied the cost of the passports just for his own family. He said that is \$400, and he might think twice before he makes that fishing trip to Manitoba or Ontario. This is a member of Congress. So what would the average person have to say about those sorts of costs?

Clearly we have to get greater numbers of people holding passports on both sides of the border, and perhaps a two for one, a half-priced passport for six months, should be attempted to try to solve this problem.

• (1605)

Instead, what we have is the government's talking about biometric passports.

The government saw this coming. It saw that the Americans were going to require passports. We were given at least a couple of years' warning on this. And the Province of Manitoba, and other provinces I believe, asked the federal government to intervene, to go to the passport office and have the passport office introduce, basically, an enhanced card so that people could go across the border for a visit to the United States. They were told they were on their own and they should develop their own card. So the Manitoba government has spent, I do not know, \$13 million I think at this point developing its own card, duplicating the processes of the passport office and offering this card to people at \$35 or \$40. To be honest, it is not getting a big uptake at this point because people are saying that if they are going to pay \$30 for a card that would just get them across the border, they may as well add another \$30 or \$40 to it and have a passport with which they could go across the world.

By the government's dragging its feet and not forcing the passport office to deal with the program, we now have this cottage industry across the country with all these provinces and border states developing enhanced driver's licences, in a way competing with and duplicating what the passport office is already doing. Meanwhile, time is going by and the lodge owners are suffering as a result.

It is fine that the government is announcing it is going to look at biometric passports. But when it does not even have its existing system working properly, then I think that might be a pipe dream, at least for the short term.

The Nexus program has been around a number of years. We spoke with a congress person who had not renewed his Nexus card.

There just seems to be a plethora of programs, a lack of coordination, a lack of advertising, and a lack of understanding by the public out there as to how to get these programs. If people get a Nexus card, not only do they have to go through all the security and the applications but they can only use the card at certain borders. I have been told that, for example, the Nexus lane has next to nobody in it. There is a dedicated lane at the border for people with Nexus cards. But since very few people have the card, there is hardly anybody there. It is like the Maytag repairman sitting there, waiting for the next customer to come through.

That is no way to be running a country. That is no way to be facilitating business.

We all know that the bad guys are not going to go through the border. They are going to go around the border. For several years now, at every one of the Midwest legislators' conferences, I bring up this point and I get full agreement from pretty much everybody. People from North Dakota and South Dakota and anybody who understands the issue will tell us that there is a broad uninhabited expanse along the border, and bad guys cross there. They import liquor, cigarettes, drugs, guns and so on across the border. They fly them across the border. They do not line up at the border crossing. We have constrained ourselves, tied ourselves up in shackles and knots and made it a real chore for people to get across the border, and the bad guys just go around it. So we have all the good guys lined up at the border, and the bad guys are walking around the border. It is time for us to rethink this whole border issue.

I do not think I have a lot of time to talk about these new airport scanners. The government is spending \$250 million per scanner, I think it is, and the bad guys have already figured out that all they have to do is put the explosives in body cavities and they defeat the scanner. We do not have them installed yet, nor paid for, and yet they are already redundant.

I am told that my time is up, but I would be happy to take any questions that any members have on this or any other topic.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague, with whom I attended a meeting in Washington with some governors. We met with several American congressmen and congresswomen.

The border is an issue of vital importance. I always have the impression that the Americans are the ones who decide how we should protect our own borders. They are the decision-makers on this kind of issue. I would like to hear the member's thoughts on this.

I would also like to hear his thoughts on the issue of health care. It seems that right-leaning governments, like the Conservative government for example, want to privatize health care. That was a hot topic when we met with the American governors. We learned that the American health care system costs approximately \$7,500 per person, while the Quebec and Canadian system costs about \$4,000.

We must continue to support a universal public health care system, like Quebec does. Governments must back this public system in order to ensure that the public receives the best possible care. That is not currently the case in the United States, where a large part of the population—30 million Americans—have no access to health care.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important point and the Americans are having that fight right now in the United States Congress. Most Canadians, Conservatives included, find there is a very big disconnect when they listen to Americans on health care, and even Conservatives find it hard to believe there could be these arguments from essentially the working class and poor in the United States that somehow we should have a private system.

The Address

As I said, I really do not understand it, but I understand that the Democrats are getting together as we speak and that Congressman Kucinich just converted yesterday to the plan, and within a few days the American Congress will probably be passing a health care bill. We can only hope that over time the system will evolve more into the system we have in Canada, France, and in England since 1949 and other parts of the world, because the Americans certainly are out of step with the rest of the developed countries as far as health care is concerned.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague started his remarks by recognizing or giving the government some credit for the help it said would come for military families. I too hope that it will indeed materialize, but as a former member of the veterans affairs committee I know that we have heard time and time again of the need to do something about post-traumatic stress disorder among veterans. We have heard, of course, about the impact on families when their loved ones return from military action.

What is noticeably absent is even the indication of an acknowledgement by the government of how serious this issue is.

I would ask my colleague if he is aware of how serious this issue is, and why does the government not see fit to deal with it?

•(1615)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question from the member. I was simply pointing out that this is certainly an issue. It was mentioned in the throne speech and my colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, will certainly be involved in this issue and is well known in Parliament and around the country as a strong supporter of veterans issues.

My son is in the reserves in Winnipeg and may in fact be posted to Afghanistan sometime later this year. So I too am very concerned about this whole issue and think we have to come to grips with it. The days of just sweeping it under the carpet and ignoring it and hoping it will go away, I would hope are long past, even for a Conservative government.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise you that I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Niagara West—Glanbrook.

As the champion for seniors in this government, I am privileged to speak about how older Canadians will help fulfill the pledge in the Speech from the Throne to build a stronger Canada now and in the future.

Since coming to office, this government has taken a multifaceted approach to supporting older Canadians and it will continue to do so. It is no secret that Canada has an aging population. Indeed, one in seven Canadians today is over the age of 65, but in two short decades more than one in four Canadians will be a senior.

This demographic shift will have a profound effect on Canadian society and, thanks to our superior health care and quality of life, Canadians now enjoy one of the longest life expectancies in the world. The sheer numbers of new seniors, however, will pose a challenge to the sustainability of our social programs and economy. We must be ready to meet the needs of an aging population and harness the energy and expertise of this invaluable resource for the

benefit of all Canadians. I assure the House that we are working hard to be ready.

Who are Canada's seniors? Are they people who spend most of their time travelling or on the golf course? Do they mostly stay at home, busy with family or perhaps caring for grand kids? Are they often engaged in their communities as volunteers or active in service organizations? Perhaps seniors simply change their work-life balance somewhat and are still engaged in the workplace to some degree. Are they individuals who now spend more time mentoring and coaching others, sharing their life lessons in various ways? Of course, seniors are all of these things and many more.

We must be careful not to impose preconceived ideas about seniors. That is why, as one of our first steps, this government created the National Seniors Council to help us understand both the concerns and aspirations of Canadian seniors.

Last year, the council held round tables across the country to gather evidence from seniors about two key issues: volunteering and positive aging. The council's report will increase our understanding of how seniors stay healthy, active, and engaged and continue contributing to society.

Certainly we already know that many seniors stay active through volunteer activities. In fact, studies show that seniors who volunteer put in more hours per year than any other age group. With the replacement value of all volunteer work in Canada priced at about \$14 billion, the financial impact of seniors in our communities is very evident.

However, the value of their contribution goes beyond dollars and cents. Seniors benefit from building social networks and staying physically and mentally active, and others in society benefit, gaining fresh perspectives and the intangible wisdom that can only come from a lifetime of experience.

To encourage positive aging, the Government of Canada provides \$35 million each year to enable seniors to engage with each other and mentor younger Canadians. I am pleased to note that budget 2010 provides an additional \$5 million per year for the new horizons for seniors program, bringing the total to \$40 million.

The Government of Canada has also undertaken several initiatives to enhance the financial security of seniors. Each year, more than four million seniors receive old age security benefits and three million receive a cheque from the Canada pension plan. In addition, the guaranteed income supplement provides extra support to seniors with little or no other income.

The Address

●(1620)

We are proud that poverty among seniors in Canada has fallen from a rate of 21% in 1980 to less than 5% in 2007. That is one of the lowest rates in the world. To assist the lowest income seniors who want to increase their income level, we now allow them to earn up to \$3,500 and still receive GIS. In addition, we have increased the age credit for more than two million modest income seniors in recent years. We also introduced tax free savings accounts and income splitting for Canada's pensioners. All told, we are providing over \$2 billion in tax relief for seniors and pensioners, in addition to over \$33 billion a year for OAS and GIS.

We are continuing to work with the provinces and territories to further strengthen Canada's retirement income system.

One of the biggest expenses for seniors is the upkeep of their homes, yet many seniors want to stay in their own homes for as long as they can. The Government of Canada, through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's renovation programs, offers financial assistance for low-income households, including seniors. These programs assist with home modifications and adaptations to allow seniors and persons with disabilities to live independently in their own homes.

Under the affordable housing initiative, the federal government has committed almost \$2 billion over five years to improve and build affordable housing and help the homeless. These programs benefit low-income Canadians, including seniors. The federal government also provides close to another \$2 billion each year to support social housing, approximately one-third of which is occupied by seniors.

In Canada's economic action plan, we injected another \$400 million over two years for the construction of housing units specifically for low-income seniors. New handrails in the bathroom may increase seniors' comfort levels in their homes, but safety issues go far beyond nuts and bolts. It is another hard truth that between 4% and 10% of seniors in Canada experience abuse of some kind, whether physical, financial or emotional.

Our government has dedicated \$13 million over three years to help seniors and others recognize the signs and symptoms of elder abuse and to know how to get help. In addition to a national awareness campaign, we are also developing tools and resources to help front line professionals in the health, financial and justice sectors to deal with this issue. In this fiscal year, we have also invested in 16 different elder abuse awareness projects across the country through the new horizons for seniors program.

The Speech from the Throne also commits the government to create Seniors Day. This would become an annual occasion to honour the contributions of older Canadians and underscore how they continue to shape the fabric of our nation. Seniors Day would be a natural symbolic step for a government that has such a solid track record on seniors issues. It would allow us to celebrate the value that Canadian seniors add to our society and the respect and honour we want to give back to them.

In closing, let me emphasize that seniors have helped build this country. They not only have our thanks and gratitude, but also our support. Their government is committed to working with them.

●(1625)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is clearly very passionate about seniors, seniors issues and how seniors are treated in this country. However, I would like to ask her if she would be willing to go one step further. That one step further would be to double the GIS in this country to ensure that not one senior lived in poverty in this country.

I have talked to a number of seniors in my constituency who are on fixed incomes. Most of them are in their eighties and they cannot afford to live in their homes. They are in perfectly good health but they just need more money. They are not disabled. They do not fall under any of those sorts of programs. They just need enough money to pay their heating and electricity bills. Of course, now that Ontario has the harmonized sales tax, all of that is going to cost more.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague would at least indicate that she would consider doubling GIS to ensure that not one senior in this country lives in poverty.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for his concerns for seniors in this country. It is true that although we have a very low level of poverty among seniors, less than 5% and we are proud of that, there are some who do struggle.

As I mentioned earlier, we have brought in a number of measures to assist such individuals. The OAS and GIS already provide an income level for seniors that is slightly above the low income cut-off level in our country. In addition, there are programs to assist them in maintaining their homes and, to some degree, retrofitting them for special needs.

These programs, OAS and GIS, already contribute \$33 billion a year to our seniors and we continue to monitor those levels. There was an increase in GIS in 2006 and the amount of GIS also rises each time the cost of living increases every quarter.

We will monitor this issue and I thank my colleague for raising it.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that page one of the throne speech talks about the earthquake in Haiti and what the government is doing about it, and I do want to commend it for its actions on that, three or four days before the throne speech there was also I believe the biggest earthquake ever in Chile, and huge amounts of damage have occurred there as well.

The government has decided to match donations from Canadians for the earthquake in Haiti, and members of the Chilean organizations and Canadians supporting them across the country are in full agreement that the government should match funds.

The Address

We had a social on March 6 in Winnipeg which raised \$10,000. We have another one coming up where 1,000 tickets have been sold for a social event this Saturday in Winnipeg. These people want to know, when is the government going to announce equal treatment, matching the funds and contributions for this earthquake in Chile?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, that question would more properly be directed to my colleague, the minister for international development. I was hoping for a question about seniors because that of course is my portfolio and the thrust of my speech.

It does give me though an opportunity to point out, to my colleague, to the House and to Canadians as a whole, that many retired Canadians in the seniors demographic have not only given support for these earthquake-ravaged countries, but in some cases have actually travelled to these countries to provide practical, on the ground assistance. We are proud of all the volunteer work that our seniors are engaged in both here at home and, in some cases, abroad.

•(1630)

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in response to the government's Speech from the Throne that was delivered by Her Excellency just a few short weeks ago.

The speech conveyed a strong message to Canadians throughout the country as to how our government is delivering or guiding the nation through this global economic recession. In this way, I found the title of the speech rather appropriate in describing Canada as a stronger country with a stronger economy now and for the future.

While there have been a number of initiatives this government has been working on over the last few years, certainly one of the things I applaud that we have been doing is looking at some of the deficits we have in infrastructure in this country. It is important to know that it has been many years since there has been the kind of spending this government has done on infrastructure here in this country. It has been many years since the kind of money has been put into roads and bridges and buildings, and has been as significant as we have delivered in the last number of years.

One of the other things I find encouraging, as well, is the knowledge infrastructure that we continue to build. It has always been my thought process that we are going to move from the jobs of yesterday, and some of the jobs that we continue to struggle with, whether it be manufacturing. I know that my areas of Niagara and Hamilton have issues in terms of the steel production. We have issues in terms of some of the manufacturing.

I really believe that one of the things we are going to need to do as we move forward in the future is deal with this knowledge gap or deal with the commercialization of technology. Our government spends all kinds of money every year on R and D technology. It spends all kinds of money on a number of different initiatives.

I believe that one of the things that is important if we are going to find those jobs of the future is the need to deal with how we can commercialize some of that technology. There were definitely measures in the budget that dealt with some of those things.

First, though, I wanted to talk about some of the things that have been happening in my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook, some of

the things that have happened there and what my constituency has been able to do.

As we look at what is going on, certainly small-sized and medium-sized businesses that form the foundation of my riding's economic makeup have risen to the challenge. Many entrepreneurs have taken advantage of the government's economic stimulus programs and have helped create hundreds of new jobs in their first year. Much of this money has been allocated to these businesses to address the needs of the future and to ensure viability in the years ahead.

Most recently a number of local businesses in my riding, in the community of West Lincoln, received low interest loans to help them grow. This funding will be of great help to these committed members of our community who are working hard to ensure that we emerge from this recession stronger than before.

On that point, I would like to highlight some of the headline investments that have been made to the great benefit of my riding's residents. Just before Christmas I had the opportunity to announce a joint federal-provincial investment of \$12 million to fund the building of a new YMCA in Grimsby, in Beamsville, which will also work to benefit the surrounding communities of Lincoln and West Lincoln.

Further to this good news, I am very pleased to see that construction will start very soon and will create additional jobs for my community. I know we are all well aware of and familiar with the many benefits that come from a YMCA, not only from the point of view of families but the sense of community, as well as the fitness centre. I believe that my constituents are all very excited about the prospect of that.

We have seen other local infrastructure in my riding that have very real benefits, including dollars that will be flowing to Pelham, Fonthill, West Lincoln and Grimsby to assist with everything from major road construction to revitalization of the entire downtown core in Pelham.

Just last Friday my colleague, the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, was in Hamilton announcing \$200 million that is going to go for waste water. If we think about that and the kind of project that involves, towns and cities just do not have that kind of money. Without that help from our government, Hamilton would have a hard time developing some of the lands it needs to develop in order to attract new businesses. This is a very important part of seeing things grow.

One of the other projects that has been very close to my heart is the Marydale Park in Glanbrook. This joint federal-provincial funding of over \$2 million will mean that this park will become a reality. The amazing thing about this park is that it is going to be one of the first barrier-free parks in Ontario, not just wheelchair accessible but barrier free. We can think about the opportunities this affords young people and teenagers with disabilities who are just not able to enjoy a camping experience as a result of what they have to deal with in most places. The fact that they are going to have playing fields, trails, pools and all these things, will mean so much more to these people who are unable to enjoy the camping experience.

The Address

•(1635)

Certainly CYO in Hamilton needs to be commended because many volunteer hours have gone into this project to make this a reality. Not only will the construction jobs from these projects provide the community with short-term relief, but I believe it will also provide a wide range of full-time jobs that will become available once these projects are complete.

Recently, with the Minister of State for Science and Technology, I was able to announce a \$2 million contribution, low interest loan, for the construction of the Canada Bread Company, as it will be looking at developing and putting in a new state-of-the-art production facility in Glanbrook. Canada Bread will be one of the first anchor tenants in the North Glanbrook Industrial Business Park and, as I just mentioned, part of that \$200 million for waste water will also help provide the services that are needed so this type of investment could happen.

This investment will be over \$100 million made by the company, Canada Bread, to construct a 375,000 square foot bakery facility. This new world class plant will feature leading-edge equipment, best-in-class technologies, and is being touted as one of the largest bread plants in North America upon completion. This new plant will be supporting up to 300 new jobs and create approximately 120 construction-related jobs during the construction phase of the project. That will be helpful for those residents in my community.

New technologies that are being implemented in this facility leads well into what Her Excellency spoke to when she commented on the unprecedented investments in Canada's economic action plan that the government is building by bolstering up our science and technology strategy.

This goes again to some of the things I said earlier about how important it is to look at how we commercialize and deal with technology.

One of those other companies that does a great job in my riding is called Accipiter Radar. Accipiter Radar has been there for a number of years and it has been working on state-of-the-art radar technology. It has attracted the attention of people in the U.S., homeland security, as well as some of the companies we have here. It does a phenomenal job and it does great work for a small company in a very small town.

These are some of the things I believe are important. I was pleased to see in our budget that we committed \$20 million for Pathways to Education, which has been very near and dear and close to my heart. This organization has done phenomenal work. It has taken the drop-out rate in certain areas, such as Regent Park, that was north of 56%, to below 10%.

We are concerned about the economy where we need people to have knowledge, and there is this dirty little secret that if we do not finish high school, there is no way we can get into post-secondary education. Pathways, through mentoring, tutoring and some short-term and long-term incentives, has given these kids hope. These kids, who were dropping out, hanging around gangs and taking their cue from the drug dealers on the street, are now being mentored in a way where they get to see people, professionals, come in and

demonstrate the kinds of things that they could just maybe one day hope to accomplish.

I believe these are the kinds of investments that are so important because if we look at a less than 10% drop-out rate, it is better than the provincial average, which is around 25% or 26%. Now 80% of those people are going on to post-secondary education. That is a pretty exciting thing.

This is just one way our government believes that we can change the way things are happening in this country. It is coming alongside organizations like Pathways. It started one community in Regent Park. It is now in seven communities across the country, from coast to coast, and moving on a number of additional initiatives.

I am very excited about the prospects for this country. This has been too long in coming and the government has done a great job to put Canada back on the map where it belongs.

•(1640)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my questions have to do with the vision of the throne speech, because so many elements of it seem to be somewhat shortsighted.

One element I speak of is regional development agencies. There is one in southern Ontario and one in my area of Atlantic Canada. For the most part the programs were initiated years ago with a five-year term. There was a long-range outlook. It seems that all these programs do not have that now. Several initiatives are year over year. It is hard for many of the development agencies, and certainly for local economic development groups, to engage in these programs not knowing if they will receive funding in the following year.

The other issue is the rural aspect. I wonder if my colleague could address cost sharing. A lot of smaller communities are unable to put up their share for the programs, which makes it problematic certainly in my riding.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, the member asked a number of different questions about programs.

One example of how we have brought some permanency and stability to local governments in particular is through the gas tax transfer. From year to year local municipalities did not know what was going to happen, whether it would be permanent. We raised it and we made it permanent. That is just one example of how municipalities can count on this government for a source of funding that will be there year after year. As a result, they can plan things.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the government keeps insisting that the economy is reasonably strong, the fact is 800,000 workers are on EI and a lot of them are about to run out of benefits. There are very few jobs for them.

The government says the economy is going to grow by 2.6% in 2010. It has to do at least that since the working age population is growing by 1% per year. The budget's own unemployment projections show jobless rates increasing from where they are now at 8.2% to 8.5% and falling slowly after that.

How is the government's rosy picture of developments going to solve this problem when clearly it is not being solved by its initiatives so far?

The Address

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I would respectfully disagree with the member's statement. Our government has been clear. While we are seeing some signs of improvement, by no means are we out of the woods just yet. That is why we are still trying to move forward and look at different ways to help.

One of the ways to help is by freezing EI premiums. We are going to freeze the premiums that businesses and employees pay.

Another example is by temporarily extending the maximum length of work-sharing agreements. If we can continue to stretch out some of the help, we hope that the economy will continue to grow.

As we have said, there is still work to be done. These measures are in place to help these companies.

• (1645)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been in this House for a number of years with the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook. He has been such an advocate for seniors, whether it is on income splitting or dealing with the horizons for seniors program. At all times he has stood up and pressed for help for our seniors.

I come from a riding with the second highest concentration of seniors. I would like my colleague to comment on how important it is to now have a Minister of State for Seniors at the cabinet table to deal with their issues.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I was the critic for seniors when we were in opposition. One of the things I heard was how important it was that there be a voice at the table for seniors. When we became government we created that ministry to deal with a range of issues, such as helping with new horizon programs, disability programs, and other things that our government has been able to implement.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

In the last three months there have been many voices raised to illustrate the serious problems people in my constituency are currently experiencing, at the same time, and very appropriately, reminding us of the battles to be fought to ensure that the government grasps the seriousness of the issues and that Quebec comes through this in better shape.

There is still a lot of work to be done to improve the living conditions of many of our fellow citizens. Whoever we are—men, women, seniors, young people, immigrants, people with disabilities—we all aspire to live in a society where our values and choices are respected, and where the ideas of fairness and caring are not just empty words.

The participation of the people of Vaudreuil—Soulanges has been invaluable and contributed greatly to the report that the Bloc Québécois presented, “Saisir l'occasion pour le Québec 2010”. The report is available on the Bloc Québécois Internet site. Together, we undertook a crucial effort to give them back their voice in Parliament during prorogation.

It is obvious that the present government has chosen to follow the path laid down in its 2006 economic statement, at the expense of the extremely pressing needs of Quebec.

With this Speech from the Throne, we have too many people falling between the cracks, while forecasters all agree that the economic recovery is weaker in Quebec than in Canada.

The throne speech of the Conservative government is far from perfect. It makes it glaringly obvious that Quebec's needs will be ignored, once again, even though the Bloc Québécois has developed reasonable proposals that take the current economic situation into account.

Our priority is to help people get through the crisis. We have proposed measures to stimulate job creation and preservation, in particular in the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

We have asked that education transfers be restored to 1994 levels, to stimulate the economy, to help Quebec and the provinces and to prepare for the future.

If the Conservative government is truly serious when it says we have to invest in education, we need \$800 million for Quebec alone.

When the Conservative government tells us that it will not reduce health and education transfers, it fails to mention that capping equalization payments deprives Quebec of \$1 billion in revenue. It has made unilateral cuts and it is determined not to restore the transfers. That is unacceptable.

Quebec was the first province to harmonize its sales tax with the federal tax. What is the real reason why Quebec is being deprived of \$2.2 billion? Why is the federal government working so hard to undermine the capacity of the Government of Quebec to help its people, by reducing the financial resources available to it?

The Prime Minister's statement is quite surprising and contradictory. Members can see this for themselves, by going over what was said by the Bloc Québécois and the government during question period yesterday and today.

I would also add that we have proposed strategic investments, to reduce our dependence on oil, and at the same time to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

I was not surprised to hear what the people of Vaudreuil—Soulanges had to say at our various meetings, when they clearly identified the endemic underfunding of regional environmental protection organizations. They are suffering bitterly from the inertia of the Conservative government, which, year after year, has ignored calls for increases in their operating budgets.

Businesses that are keen to innovate environmentally and that develop green energy expertise help to enhance productivity and contribute to the economic recovery. They also help to improve our environmental performance.

Businesses with an environmental focus have significant influence. They create new jobs and support the major shift our society must make in protecting the environment, for all of us and for future generations.

The Address

It is not surprising to see that, in the fight against climate change, the Conservatives are continuing to do what they do best, which is nothing. As they did in Copenhagen, they are refusing to eliminate the benefits given the oil companies.

At the very least, we can say they are increasingly moving away from the Kyoto objective, although the Canadian government had committed to reduce its emissions by 6% below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012.

There is nothing on transportation. The throne speech is silent on the major investment needed in public transit.

Prorogation changed nothing. The Conservative government is steering the same course with its recovery plan, which is inadequate and unsuited to the reality of Quebec.

•(1650)

While growth in Quebec will be slower than in Canada, the government provides no additional measure to stimulate the economy. Where the forestry sector is concerned, the throne speech confirms that forestry companies were left to their own devices, which led to closures and layoffs. Loans and loan guarantees are needed to get the industry back on its feet.

The Conservative government is also continuing to attack culture by trying to make it easier to raise the ceiling on foreign ownership in telecommunications. By saying that the recession is not over, the government is making the right diagnosis, but is not offering the right remedies for Quebec.

Employment insurance reform is more than necessary. The Bloc did great work and was able to gather what I consider very realistic proposals based on what our fellow citizens face when they lose their job. Every day, each of the members on this side of the House meet with people who are unemployed, and the message is clear. What they really need is money in their pockets and in the economy.

The Bloc Québécois has proposed a significant improvement to the plan so as to provide greater access to everyone who loses their job. We believe that, with these changes, each year an additional 148,000 people will have access to EI. The elimination of the waiting period would mean that people would receive their first cheque in less than 14 days. Why not take a new approach to processing applications based on the assumption that the claimants are acting in good faith? That is the approach used in the processing of income tax returns. It is clear that the government has really no intention to make EI more accessible.

The Conservative government has ignored a vital resource in my riding and throughout Quebec. The contribution of community agencies often goes unheralded. In addition to helping out many of the people of Vaudreuil-Soulanges, they too create quality jobs in the region. We cannot consider economic recovery without the community agencies, hence the need to ensure they continue to exist and carry out their mission. Community agencies are known for their considerable ability to adapt and have always been forward thinking and creative in difficult times. It only makes sense for these agencies to demand better financial support so that government objectives tied to the well-being of communities hit by the economic crisis are not compromised.

The Canada Summer Jobs program allows organizations and businesses to hire students for the summer. While the program takes into account local needs and priorities, our various community organizations and businesses have an ever-increasing need to fill positions. While manpower was available, these positions that were not filled could have helped with succession planning in a number of sectors, enhancing employment skills in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges area in both the short and long term. Enhancing the Canada summer jobs program would have been an appropriate and tangible way to help young people. We have to support the creation of quality jobs, not ignore well established programs. The government could transfer the administration of the program to Quebec, with full compensation, as previously suggested by the Bloc Québécois.

In this time of fragile recovery, choices have to be made, forcing the government to reassess some priorities based on the money available. The Bloc Québécois will continue to call on the federal government to use the annual surplus from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to supplement its investment in social housing to the tune of 1% of federal expenditures. If the Conservative government had implemented the proposals put forward by the Bloc a long time ago and invested heavily in social housing, we would probably have been better off during the housing crisis. Some families currently spend 60% of the family income on rent, while this percentage used to be much lower.

I have to say a few words about the measures for seniors. The Bloc Québécois proposes that guaranteed income supplement benefits be increased by at least enough to bring them up to the poverty line, this in addition to making these benefits automatic and paying retroactive benefits in full. There are also measures dealing with culture and agriculture.

I will conclude by saying that any enhancements to programs such as the guaranteed income supplement, social housing and employment insurance have been totally ignored by this Conservative government. Measures are needed to help these people, and we make it our priority.

•(1655)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, Official Languages.

The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois knows all too well the devastating news in the Davie shipyard about the 1,590 people who are about to lose their jobs. The member should look at page 10 of the budget. I will repeat what the government said in the throne speech. It said:

And recognizing the strategic importance of a strong domestic shipbuilding industry, it will continue to support the industry's sustainable development through a long-term approach to federal procurement.

The Address

The next day we got the budget and we got the estimates. Here is the budget and there is not a word on the JSS vessels for the military and not a word on the icebreaker it has called the Diefenbaker which itself is a \$750 million project that it bragged about. The previous defence minister said that the government would build three armed icebreakers for the far north.

We in this country have \$20 billion to \$40 billion worth of work to do on big ships so that yards like the Davie yard could be employing those 1,590 workers for an incredibly long time.

Why does the member think the government has abandoned this policy, thrown these people out on the street and completely ignored its own words in the budget and throne speech?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for his question.

The conclusion we must reach is that more than one industry has been abandoned. The federal government invests first in the nuclear industry and in other sectors like the oil industry.

We too are disappointed. Quebec's economic structure is based on the manufacturing industry and on the development of the forestry industry. Unfortunately, the government has let Quebec and those two industries.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the major issues in my colleague's province of Quebec, which has a connection with my province of Newfoundland and Labrador, is the attention given to forestry.

There have been these small snippets of what are called subsidies and breaks, which, if we take them in general, are just a small drop in the bucket compared to other industries. I have always said that the government singles out certain industries to receive that much more attention than the others. I will not accuse it of being crass political but, nonetheless, it is out there.

In the member's case and in my case, the provincial governments have dealt directly with the forestry companies with loan guarantees in the case of Quebec and expropriation for Newfoundland and Labrador, but they have been beneficial in many respects.

I would like the member to comment from her perspective, provincially and perhaps even in her riding, how the forestry industry is not being benefited by the Speech from the Throne or even the budget for that matter.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, that industry has asked among other things for loan guarantees. However, the government has made no commitments to give those guarantees either in the budget or in statements it has made in the last few weeks.

The Bloc Québécois proposed a strategy for private woodlot. I invite people who are listening to our debate to read the document they can find on the Bloc Québécois' website.

We also proposed green energy initiatives. We have requested several times that regulations take into account the investments that were made since the 1990's to comply with our international environmental commitments. These are important levers that could be used to help the industry.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the Speech to the Throne presented after the Conservatives prorogued the House for over two months.

I have sat in the House of Commons for over five years. After the Speech from the Throne was delivered, I realized that it is difficult to believe that this Conservative government has any real intention of helping the people who are really in need, just as it was difficult to believe that the Liberals had any such intention when they were in power.

When the budget was presented, we learned that the oil companies were being given tax deductions, even though they pollute and rake in billions of dollars in profits. The government is prepared to give them tax deductions to improve their productivity, at the same time as it is failing to provide any support for people who have lost their jobs, the unemployed.

Even banks have been given tax deductions. We are well aware that banks in Quebec and Canada are making huge profits. Very recently, statistics showed that the CEOs and presidents of those banks were receiving salaries of \$2 million, \$3 million, \$4 million and \$5 million a year, and yet, once again, banks are being given tax deductions. These banks benefit from tax havens and hide their profits, at the expense of the redistribution of wealth among all members of society.

In the throne speech and the budget, we see absolutely nothing to help low-income families in terms of social housing. Nothing. There is no money for that. There is no will to help low-income families, no will to help the unemployed. At the time, the Liberals slashed the employment insurance program. In fact, that has continued, thanks to the Conservatives' policies. They have looted it, and stolen billions of dollars. Nearly \$60 billion has been taken from the unemployed, money that came from employer and employee premiums. That money has been stolen. And in addition, 50% of people who lose their jobs do not even have access to the scheme.

There was nothing in the budget to support the unemployed. Increasing earnings and eliminating the two-week waiting period are just a few examples of what should have been done. We are not talking about billions of dollars. We are not talking about supporting people whose annual salary is \$2 million or \$3 million or \$4 million or \$5 million. We are not talking about supporting oil companies that are making outrageous profits. We are talking about helping the poor. There is no will on the part of this Conservative government to help people. There is no will to help seniors who for many years have also been deprived of the guaranteed income supplement and are living in poverty. We have called for an increase in the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. No, there was nothing in the throne speech to support seniors and increase the guaranteed income supplement. There was nothing about this in the budget. The Conservatives played politics and announced a seniors day.

The Address

•(1705)

We agree with having a day set aside to recognize seniors' contribution to our society, but these seniors still need to be able to support themselves. Whether it be in big cities or in the country, many seniors are living in extreme poverty in unfit housing.

We want the guaranteed income supplement to be raised to support low income people. There is nothing to help elderly people in need. We are not talking here about people who earn \$50,000 or \$100,000 a year. They would not be entitled to this supplement.

In Quebec, there is a crisis in the forestry industry. Quebecers realize that in the federal system there is no desire to respect their needs and expectations. We saw that in the latest budget. Huge amounts are being invested in the automobile and the oil industries. I say that, partisan politics aside.

Many jobs have been lost in the forestry industry. The government gave a miserable \$170 million to support it, but gave \$2.7 billion to the automotive industry. People are disappointed. This comes not from me but from Jean-Pierre Dansereau, the director general of the Fédération des Producteurs de Bois du Québec, in his remarks on the latest federal budget. This is why the Conservatives are at 15% or 16% in the polls in Quebec. They do not plan on introducing new measures to help the forestry sector.

Joy is not abounding at the Conseil de l'industrie forestière du Québec either. This industry has to survive in order to benefit from the few measures of interest in the finance minister's budget. The forestry industry in Quebec is dying and needs financial support. It needs loans and loan guarantees. The measures announced may meet some needs, but the industry would have preferred refinancing at a commercial rate in order to survive the crisis rather than support for new technologies.

As regards the manufacturing sector, in 2004, I and some of my colleagues cited the closures of textile plants around Huntingdon and in my riding. We called for loan guarantees from the Liberal government, which was in office at the time. We called on it to support the manufacturing industry, which we were about to lose. But the Liberals did nothing to support it. Many plants closed their doors and people found themselves without a job.

Today, the forestry industry and in the manufacturing sector are still in crisis. The Liberals and the Conservatives are tarred with the same brush. When the time comes to help people in need, to help industries in crisis, the parties in the House do not want to support them.

•(1710)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the member's last sentence he said that there were industries out there that the government had not protected. In a motion that was put in front of this House by the Bloc Québécois, it talked about aeronautics, and I understand the gravity of the situation in Montreal with Bell Helicopter, Bombardier and others, and it talked about the forestry, which I completely understand, but there was not one mention of the fishery.

[Translation]

It is very important for Quebec's east coast. It is very important for those of us in Newfoundland and Labrador, but it is also important for Quebec. Why not?

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, we cannot include everything in one motion. I hear mumbling among the Liberals. I would like to see them try to include all issues facing a community in a single motion.

We know that the Bloc Québécois has been energetically seeking better conditions for fishers for several years. They have lost a lot of money. Moreover, many of them are seasonal workers.

They requested better access to EI because they are seasonal workers. And it is the Liberals who reduced access to EI. The hon. members know it but now they claim that they want to help fishers. Fishers are facing many challenges, and the Bloc Québécois has always been there to support the fishers of the North Shore and the Gaspé.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I draw the member's attention to page 8 of the throne speech, which speaks to the implementation of a national securities regulator. The member should know we have had a number of fights over this issue over the last number of years with Quebec, Alberta, Manitoba and others, calling it a jurisdictional issue and wanting to keep the control of securities regulation under provincial jurisdiction.

The federal government somehow thinks that by setting up a national securities regulator, it is going to solve the problem. My argument has been that it is not the organization so much as the people who run the organization.

If a national securities regulator keeps doing what it has been doing in the past, which is hiring people from the industry that it is supposed to be regulating, then it is basically an inactive and ineffective organization. For example, Conrad Black committed his white collar crimes in Canada, yet it was the Americans who put him in jail. What is the point of having a national organization if it is no more effective than the provincial organizations that are in place right now?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, the New Democrat member is talking about safety, but we are talking about justice. The Bloc Québécois has been proposing various justice measures for many years now. I am thinking of release after serving one-sixth of a sentence. We introduced a bill on that, but the government is ignoring it.

The government has proposed its own measures. We often hear about smart crime, but not necessarily about hard crime. In Quebec, we have all kinds of measures to prevent crime, measures that have significant positive effects. Thanks to those measures, we have one of the lowest crime rates in Canada.

But the government wants to get tougher and put more people in jail. It is not aligned with Quebec in matters of security and justice.

The Address

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex.

Oshawa is often considered the Canadian ground zero for the financial crisis that gripped the world over the last 18 months. Its economic reliance on General Motors and the many feeder plants led some naysayers to believe that a mass exodus would occur and quickly turned Oshawa into the Flint, Michigan of the north.

This government's commitment to putting the Canadian economy first through the creation and implementation of the economic action plan has ensured that not only will Oshawa navigate through this storm, but she will emerge as a stronger, more economically diversified city.

Phase one of the economic action plan recognized the economic diversity of our nation and the programs introduced were tailored to meet the specific needs for the country's different regions. This well thought out approach to the global downturn allowed communities like mine across the nation to apply and receive unprecedented federal investment in aging infrastructure, parks and community centres, new and exciting economic engines, educational and research facilities. The list goes on and on.

Global economists cite the Canadian example time and time again. Our financial institutions are the mark for others in the G20. Our finance minister, the hon. member for Whitby—Oshawa, was named the finance minister of the year for drafting the blueprint, which serves as a map to economic health and future prosperity.

Investment and the creation of new jobs and growth were the goals of the economic action plan and reiterated again in the Speech from the Throne. The plan is working and we must stay the course and see it through to its completion to ensure all Canadians benefit from a newly invigorated global leading economy.

For those who would question our government's direction, I would like to cast a light on ground zero and use Oshawa as a litmus test for the economic reaction to the economic action plan.

When people think of Oshawa, their minds instantly turn to General Motors. Oshawa is home to award winning assembly plants and some of the finest manufacturing professionals in the entire world. However, their excellence would be no shield to the economic storm that would bring GM to its knees and threaten to force Canadian jobs south of the border.

Our government responded by being the first at the table with a plan to keep jobs in Canada. This investment was controversial to some, but tough decisions had to be made and our government did not hesitate. We are seeing that investment pay off. In Oshawa alone, additional overtime shifts and temporarily laid-off workers are being added on a consistent basis. General Motors sales are improving and it is paying back its loans faster than expected.

We are committed to the creation of the jobs of tomorrow, jobs that will have Canadians leading the way globally in technology and innovation. This strategy starts in the hallways of our post-secondary institutions. This initiative began last year with the creation of the

knowledge infrastructure program. This program created a two year \$2 billion economic stimulus measure to support infrastructure enhancement at post-secondary institutions across Canada.

The program provides funding to support deferred maintenance, repair and expansion projects at universities and colleges and responds directly to the need indicated by post-secondary institutions to improve existing campus infrastructure across the entire country. A major portion of this infrastructure is near the end of its projected life cycle and in many cases does not adequately meet the needs of today's research and teaching activities.

This program not only led to improved facilities at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and Durham College, which both call Oshawa home, but also led to outside investment by the private sector. General Motors of Canada took advantage of increased funding at the university and entered into a partnership with the school for the founding of the Automotive Centre of Excellence, which will guarantee that the next generation of automotive innovation will be born in Oshawa.

Another program that was immensely successful in protecting economies that were especially susceptible due to heavy reliance on a single industry was the community adjustment fund. The eligible communities were defined by specific criteria, using indicators such as job losses and unemployment rate. Only communities with a population of less than 250,000 were eligible. This targeted approach added an extra shield to those who were feared to be hardest hit. Budget 2009 provided \$1 billion over two years for the fund.

Oshawa again benefited from the fact that the government recognized that we, as well as similar communities, needed special measures to ensure growth alongside the larger urban centres. The city of Oshawa definitely benefited from successful applications to the CAF.

The community adjustment fund has supported activities such as the community transition plans that foster economic development, science and technology initiatives and other measures that promote economic diversification. The fund is being delivered nationally through the regional development agencies, Industry Canada as well as the newly created Federal Economic Development Agency for southern Ontario and Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. These two newly created agencies provide expert insight on how best to promote growth in the respective regions and will continue to be a staging point for developing future growth.

The Address

• (1720)

The government has accelerated work to assess and remediate federally contaminated sites, with over \$153 million worth of projects under way or completed. This work is helping to create jobs and economic activity in communities across Canada, while contributing to new green spaces and cleaner bodies of water and soils and enabling long-term development.

Through this program Oshawa is at the brink of a resolution to a 40-year-old dispute, which will see a once stagnant harbour spring back to life and balance both industrial growth as well as recreational use. The Oshawa Harbour was identified by name in last year's budget and has been allocated over \$9 million to bring this hidden jewel back to its former natural brilliance.

These are only three examples, three programs which were able not only to allow Oshawa to provide potentially crippling economic disaster, but to emerge poised to be a leader in the fields that extend beyond our traditional excellence in manufacturing.

With the first phase of the economic action plan now completed and the positive results of the plan being reflected in Canada's strong fiscal performance among the G20, this government will now implement the second and final phase of the economic action plan.

The final phase of our economic action plan outlined in budget 2010 has three main priorities: first, to implement and confirm the remaining \$19 billion in stimulus measures to help create and maintain jobs; second, to invest in limited but targeted initiatives to build jobs, foster economic growth in Canada and make Canada an attractive destination for new business investments; and third, outline our plan to return Canada to surplus and bring balance to our finances over the medium and long term.

First and foremost, the government is committed to jobs and economic growth. The government was able to effectively and efficiently get record amounts of stimulus funding out the door in 2009. Thanks to these measures, we are seeing some signs of recovery, however, the recovery remains fragile.

There are approximately \$19 billion left of stimulus measures that will take effect in 2010. This \$19 billion includes: \$3.2 billion in personal income tax relief, including the enhanced working income tax benefit, WITB, to strengthen work initiatives for low income Canadians; \$4 billion to protect Canadian workers, including additional EI benefits and more training opportunities to help unemployed Canadians in hard hit cities like Oshawa; \$7.7 billion in infrastructure stimulus to create jobs; and \$1.9 billion to create the economy of tomorrow. This investment will strengthen our capacity for research, accelerate private sector investment and enhance the ability of Canadian businesses to invest in the global markets. There are \$2.2 billion to support industries and communities. This funding will provide support for hard hit sectors, such as forestry, agriculture, small business and culture.

Commitments are in place for almost 16,000 projects across the country. With the remaining stimulus, measures going out the door, the government is taking big steps to encourage investment in the Canadian economy to foster growth and create jobs.

Just one of the measures we have taken is to make Canada a tariff-free zone for manufacturers. This government will be eliminating all remaining tariffs on productivity, improving equipment and goods imported for further manufacturing in Canada. Manufacturing cities such as Oshawa will benefit from this policy. When implemented, this will provide approximately \$300 million in duty savings for Canadian businesses.

Furthermore, the government has made it a goal for Canada to emerge from the global recession with a highly competitive tax system that will attract investment and create jobs.

This year Canada will have the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7. By 2012, Canada will have the lowest statutory corporate income tax rate in the G7. Improvements will also be made to Canada's system of international taxation to facilitate investments, cut red tape, streamline the compliance process associated with taxation of cross-border activity.

These measures will ensure that Canada's tax system is able to compete on a global scale, create jobs and help grow the economy. Economic growth will not only be targeted in our traditional markets, but also for the green industries and jobs of tomorrow.

The final phase of the economic action plan includes measures to promote energy investments and help deploy clean energy technologies. Some of the measures include establishing a next generation renewable power initiative and implementation of advanced clean energy technologies and expanding eligibility for accelerated capital cost allowance investment in clean energy.

• (1725)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much enjoyed listening to the member's comments. He talked about the investments to date. We went through our program review in the early 1990s. We talked about short-term pain for long-term gain.

In this specific case with what the government is doing, I am very concerned for the future. We agree with the Minister of Finance's statement when he said, "Deficits are a cancer; the accumulating total national debt progressively limits the government's freedom to act". We agree with that. According to the government's graphs, the deficit is growing. It will start to drop in 2014-15. How will the government address this?

We worked very hard to reduce the debt. The government paid down part of the debt. By 2014-15, we will be \$622 billion in debt. That is \$122 billion from the day the Conservatives took over. How will they address that? To use the minister's words, it is going to limit the government in running this country.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. We hate debt too. There is one thing we are going to do that the Liberal Party did not do. When the Liberals had to decrease the debt, they cut transfers to the provinces for health care. It was shameful. The Liberals cut \$25 billion out of the transfers to the provinces. We do not think that is the way to go. We do not think that is the priority for Canadians.

If the member will read the budget, the Minister of Finance has put together a plan to return us to surplus, which is extremely important. I compare that to what the Liberal leader offered in his reply to the Speech from the Throne.

We have to choose between strong economic leadership and basically no plan from the opposition. We have a strong vision for Canada and the opposition parties have the vacuous ramblings of a coalition. They are only interested in power. We have a plan for the future and all they have are empty promises with no costing. I think the choice is clear.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member and the rest of the government members repeat the myth that reducing corporate taxes is going to increase jobs. They have presented no evidence or studies to show that. In fact, we have evidence that indicates exactly the opposite.

Statistics Canada and Finance Canada indicate that business spending on machinery and equipment has declined as a share of GDP. Total business investment spending has declined as a percentage of corporate cash flow. That is from Statistics Canada. IT use by Canadian business is only half that of the United States. Despite Canadian corporate tax rates being well below those of the United States, business sector productivity growth is actually worse.

Corporate taxes are already low. American corporate tax is around 35% and the Conservatives want to go to 15%. They do not have to reduce them that drastically to have a positive effect. Where are the member's studies to show that reducing the corporate taxes to 15% is going to produce those jobs?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I can comment on the NDP philosophy for attracting business to Canada. First, the NDP would like to regulate companies to death and then tax them to death. Then, when the companies are failing, the NDP would like to subsidize them with taxpayers' dollars.

The member does not understand that when we have low corporate taxes, corporations come to this country and invest. That is what we are promoting. We are promoting more foreign investment. We are giving tax breaks to new investments in machinery just as he said. It is true that in the past we have had to do some things to improve productivity. That is what this economic action plan is all about.

We are not going to tax corporations to death so that they will leave the country and take the jobs with them that we think Canadians want us to focus on. That is why Canadians are glad that the Conservatives are in power and not the NDP.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ) moved that Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (family leave), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am once again very proud to introduce Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (family leave), at second reading.

This bill would amend the Canada Labour Code to allow employees to take unpaid leave from work for a period of 52 to 104 weeks for the following family-related reasons: the inability of their minor child to carry on regular activities because the child suffers a serious physical injury during the commission or as the direct result of a criminal offence; the disappearance of their minor child; the suicide of their spouse, common-law partner or child; or the death of their spouse, common-law partner or child during the commission or as the direct result of a criminal offence.

This bill also amends the Employment Insurance Act to allow these employees to receive benefits for up to 52 weeks while on leave instead of the 15 weeks currently provided for sickness benefits.

In December 2007, the Quebec National Assembly showed the way by passing Bill 58, which allows employees and their families who were the victims of a criminal act or who are mourning a suicide or have a missing child to take unpaid leave and keep their jobs for a period of up to 104 weeks.

Unfortunately, the current federal legislation results in discrimination against people whose jobs fall under the Canada Labour Code. Since these people do not have their jobs guaranteed, they can take only 15 weeks of sick leave. The failure of the federal legislators to act in this regard has created two categories of workers: those who can get through difficult times with their jobs intact and those who are forced to choose between losing their jobs and returning quickly to work.

It is one thing to allow people to take some time off and return to the same kind of job, but the result will be the same if they do not have enough income to meet their needs: they will have no other choice than to return quickly to work. It is particularly difficult for them to rebuild their lives. In the view of the Bloc Québécois, which has always been very concerned about victims and their families, the federal government should immediately follow Quebec's lead for a number of reasons.

Private Members' Business

We know very well that suicide, violent crimes and disappearances are tragic events that are very difficult for the families of the victims. These events cause great psychological distress for many relatives and parents. The victims' families wait and worry, mourn and frequently feel depressed, often over extended periods of time. In cases of murders and disappearances in particular, more than two years can pass between the criminal act and the resolution of the investigation. During this period, family members are deeply affected. They cannot pursue their regular activities. They have access to support and help, but they have no financial support. Additional financial worries are the last thing they need.

It is terrible to think that, at present, these people are left to their fate and have to keep working during this period as if nothing had happened because they have to meet their family's needs as we all do. These people need time to get over such difficult events and gradually rejoin the work force at their own pace. Denying and ignoring that is simply adding insult to injury.

Sadly, several disappearances and murders have shaken Quebec in recent years. I think of Cédrika Provencher, Nancy Michaud, Alexandre Livernoche, Julie Surprenant, Julie Boisvenu, Jolène Riendeau and Natasha Cournoyer. We can also think of the 14 victims of the tragedy at the École Polytechnique, as well as the shootout at Dawson College that claimed the life of young Anastasia De Sousa.

• (1735)

In my riding of Compton—Stanstead, Isabelle Bolduc was assaulted and murdered in 1996. Last Friday, the incident in which Whitney et Tracy Hannah were shot to death in Belleville, Ontario, is another example of these terrible tragedies for the families.

I have given but a few examples, but it is for the relatives, friends and loved ones of all these families that I am fighting today and calling on the cooperation of all parties. After all, because of the pain and suffering and other impact of violent acts, are the victims' families not victims themselves? Grieving following a disappearance, murder or suicide takes longer than in other instances, particularly when rape or violence has taken place. There are more feelings of frustration, rage and powerlessness. This is especially true when a crime or suicide is involved.

This reality has been recognized by several members of this House, including Conservative members. For instance, the hon. member for Thornhill expressed with conviction compassion and concern for the lives of victims. Moreover, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada as well as the Minister of Public Safety made an official commitment in April 2009 to support the loved ones of victims. The former public safety minister and member for York—Simcoe said this, and I quote:

This Government recognizes that crime places a heavy toll on individual victims, their families, communities and society-at-large. Supporting victims takes a collaborative effort, and this Government is committed to continuing to work with our partners to help victims of crime—

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour said:

All members here certainly sympathize with those whose loved ones have been victims of violent crime. There is no question about that. It can take a long time for anyone to fully heal from that kind of tragedy.

There were symbolic measures to go with these fine speeches. This government even established the annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week in 2005 and organizes symposiums on that occasion. Such well-intentioned events look good on the calendar and provide great photo-ops, but how do they provide tangible help to the victims' families?

Not only are these types of measures inadequate, but the Conservative members are talking out of both sides of their mouths. According to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour:

The employment insurance program already responds to the needs of Canadians in these difficult circumstances. Most provinces already offer a variety of supports... such as coverage of medical expenses, as well as access to counselling services.

I invite him to say that to families who have lost a child or a spouse to crime and ask them whether the medical coverage pays for groceries, rent and household expenses.

What is more, this government says that provincial compensation measures such as IVAC are enough for these families. But is \$3,000 really enough to cover a family's expenses for months? As a mother, I would say no. The government is lying when it says that 15 weeks of employment insurance with a bit of additional compensation can cover the needs of a family as it heals from such a tragedy. The reality is that in 2010, people who are filled with sorrow have to return to work as though nothing ever happened.

Despite that, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour went on to say:

[Justice Canada] already offers a variety of programs and services, including...the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

That is all very well, but a structure that costs \$1.5 million a year and serves "to ensure the federal government meets its responsibilities" is really not enough. What families need is not more administrative layers, but rather money to live on. Bureaucracy is being fattened up, but the relatives of victims who want to take time off work to look after their family and deal with their pain remain just as badly off.

With last week's budget, the government provided for some \$6.6 million over two years to increase support for victims of crime. Not only is this sum an affront, but what it covers and how it will be allocated remain a mystery.

Emailed questions to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development are returned unanswered for reasons of security.

• (1740)

This dubious excuse is used so often for so many reasons by the members opposite that it is meaningless.

Private Members' Business

Not only is this bill furthest along in the legislative process, but it provides a much better response to the needs of the families of victims of crime than the bill referred to by the Conservatives in the latest throne speech. The potential Conservative bill—which does not yet exist—will be much more restrictive, since it will provide special benefits only to the families of murder victims. The Bloc's bill, on the other hand, includes the families of victims of crimes causing death and of suicide victims.

The potential Conservative bill promises these people access only to employment insurance sickness benefits, that is, to 15 weeks of benefits. The Bloc calls for benefits that could extend to 52 weeks, when the situation requires it.

On December 10, the Conservative government, the one that keeps saying how it wants to help victims, said that it would vote against Bill C-343. It added that it would introduce its own bill excluding any type of new EI benefits. If that happens, the public will rightly understand that this government prefers to fill prisons with minors rather than help those who really need it. That is a serious mistake. If the Conservative government were consistent, it would support this bill without hesitation and turn its words into commitments for affected families.

Since they came to power, these Reform Conservatives have talked ad nauseam about being tough on crime. Law and order for them is nothing less than a government priority. They loudly proclaim that their goal is the well-being and security of the public, focusing their speeches on cracking down on criminals. The measures adopted prior to prorogation on prison terms are law and order measures only. The parents and partners of victims are left to their own devices and too often forgotten. This is why it is not enough to fill the prisons. Support must be given to those affected by these crimes.

If the members of this House oppose this bill, they will no doubt say that these measures will cost the government too much, with the extension of EI benefits from 15 to 52 weeks. The members opposite are saying that the bill will cost over \$400 million. As usual, they are either miscalculating or lying deliberately. Fortunately, the type of tragic event requiring 52 weeks of benefits does not happen often. There have been fewer crimes committed in recent years, which considerably reduces the number of such incidents and thus the number of people needing EI benefits for 52 weeks.

Similarly, there are not many people who would become eligible for EI after the adoption of the bill. Everyone reacts in his or her own way to the loss of someone, but for some eligible people, a loss of income is not an option. We can also see that for some people, remaining at work is a way to get back to a normal life after a while. There are also people who do not work or who cannot find an insurable job or who do not work enough hours to be eligible for benefits. For all those reasons, the \$400 million projected by the government is far too high. It is certainly a far cry from the Conservative government's defence budget.

Employees and employers are contributing enough to EI to allow families affected by such traumatic events to collect benefits. The government does not pay into EI. The \$56 billion surplus that simply vanished from the EI fund makes the low cost of the bill all the more

obvious. It is clear that if the government really cares for victims and their families, it will not hesitate for one second to support the bill.

• (1745)

If, however, the government votes against the bill, the public will conclude with good reason that it is totally indifferent to the families of victims. People will not soon forget because they have always been very sensitive to that issue.

[English]

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, a paragraph in the Speech from the Throne states:

Our Government will also offer tangible support to innocent victims of crime and their families. It will give families of murder victims access to special benefits under Employment Insurance. It will introduce legislation to give employees of federally regulated industries the right to unpaid leave if they or members of their families are victimized by crime. And our Government will introduce legislation to make the victim surcharge mandatory, to better fund victim services.

I wonder if the member would care to make a comment on that particular quote.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Madam Speaker, first of all, my bill has already been introduced. It can be voted on and sent to committee.

Second, the Conservative bill is not even ready. We hear a lot of rhetoric and good intentions from the other side but they never do anything. Third, my bill contains two elements that are missing from the measure the Conservatives are planning.

We include suicides in violent crimes. We also increase the number of weeks of EI benefits from 15 to 52 to give people an opportunity to live in peace without financial worries.

For these reasons, it is important that my bill be passed before theirs. It can take a long time for a bill to be passed. The bill that the Bloc Québécois has introduced is better than the Conservative bill.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is probably an example of a fissure of opinion where it has been sort of described as something that is an intention and something that is far more specific in this particular situation. Obviously this program that the member is putting forward is a tad bit more generous than what we are seeing on the other side.

My first question is this. The Conservatives will say that it cost \$400 million. I would like to get the member's estimate on what she believes it will cost.

Private Members' Business

The second question is this. The member talked about 15 weeks of benefits going to 52 but the qualifying period could be different. For instance, in my riding one needs 420 hours to qualify but for sick benefits one needs 600 hours. So there is a national standard for the hours needed for sick benefits but not a national standard for regular benefits which is based on unemployment numbers in a certain region to qualify for regular EI.

Is the member talking about a national standard or will she link this to the regional rate of unemployment, that and the total cost of the program?

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Based on the study we have conducted, the program would cost approximately \$50 million.

Individuals have already applied for special sick leave benefits under EI, but they never specified the reason as being murder, suicide or what not. So, we established a comparison between sick leave benefits and compassionate care benefits for informal caregivers under the EI program. We came up with a figure of \$50 million.

Regarding the new special benefits program the federal government is talking about, I would have liked to answer my colleague, but each time we send an email to the minister, it is returned with a message saying that it cannot be delivered for national security reasons. We were asking her what the program included, how much the ombudsman was costing and what she was planning to do with the \$3.3 million per year, but we were unable to get an answer.

This is a bill that is close to my heart. My daughter knew one of the victims. These people need financial assistance and support. To help as many people as possible, I am very open to the idea of referring the bill to committee for consideration and I am prepared to answer any question.

• (1750)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will tell the member at the outset that we will be supporting the bill to send it to committee.

I know the member has done a lot of consulting with different groups in drawing up the bill. I know the Canadian Labour Congress, which represents three million workers in this country, supports the bill. I would like to know whether she has any other—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Compton—Stanstead has 20 seconds to respond.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Madam Speaker, for the past four years, since 2006, I have been meeting people. I have tabled petitions in the House of Commons. This bill has the support of entire towns. We are talking about human lives here. We are talking about people who have to cope with the loss of a loved one who has been murdered. The focus is on the human side. I do have the support of many people.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate that the member for Compton—Stanstead has an interest in this particular bill. When my colleague read the portion from the throne speech, one could hardly say that it is a message of indifference. In fact, it is a message of compassion.

I rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-343. The bill proposes amendments to the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and would provide for unpaid leave for federally-regulated employees whose family members were victims of violent crime. It would also create a new EI benefit to provide temporary income support to eligible family members who take this unpaid leave.

Our government empathizes with those who have lost loved ones due to violent crimes or suicide. It can take a long time for anyone to fully heal from this kind of tragic loss. People need time to work through their stages of grief and to learn to cope. There is no particular magic formula for what is the right amount of time to deal with this kind of trauma or turns of events. That is especially true when grieving families are victims of violence.

What we need, therefore, is an approach that is flexible enough to meet the unique needs of families in these circumstances. We need an approach that is compassionate. We also need an approach that is as accessible as possible for those who need this kind of assistance. Looking after the needs of citizens who fall victim to violent crime is a priority for this government, has been a priority of this government and will continue to be a priority of this government.

As indicated in the remarks I made in the House on December 10, 2009, our government is concerned about the impact of violence on all Canadians. We are taking action in a manner that is balanced and fair. There have been several references to this bill indicating that this legislation is based upon legislation that was recently implemented in the province of Quebec. This legislation provides a strong example of how a government can support those who are suffering from a violent criminal act. It is my understanding that the Quebec legislation was largely due to the successful efforts of the Murdered or Missing Persons' Families' Association and, in particular, its past president, Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu.

Members may recognize his name as Mr. Boisvenu was named to the Senate by the Prime Minister on January 29, 2010. Mr. Boisvenu was recently part of the announced legislation to strengthen the National Sex Offender Registry and the National DNA Data Bank yesterday with the Minister of Public Safety, and just days ago, he helped announce legislative amendments to strengthen the way the young offenders system deals with violent repeat young offenders. We welcome him to the Senate and wish him every success as he continues to work on behalf of victims of crime to ensure they receive the support they deserve from every level of government.

The member for Compton—Stanstead is to be commended for bringing this issue before the House. We can all see the intent of this bill, which is to give comfort to families who are in a situation that can only be described as heartbreaking. That intent is laudable.

Private Members' Business

For any family member, the loss of a loved one is painful. It is almost unimaginable when that loss involves a child. I do not think any member of the House or any citizen of this country would ever expect a grieving family to simply carry on after a few days off. There needs to be more time to heal and a comprehensive plan to support these individuals as they come to grips with the impact this violent criminal act has had on their lives. I will be frank. We need to be broader in our approach than this bill permits.

Members on this side of the House understand the need to support victims of crime. This is why our government has had such a strong record of helping individuals whose lives have been fundamentally changed by violent crime.

It was our government that created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. This position was created to better meet the needs of victims of crime in areas of federal jurisdiction. It was with great pride that in April of 2007, the Minister of Justice named Steve Sullivan as the first ombudsman. Victims can contact this office to learn more about their rights under federal law and the services available to them or to make a complaint about any federal agency or federal legislation dealing with victims of crime.

● (1755)

In addition to its direct work with victims, the office of ombudsman also works to ensure that policy-makers and other criminal justice personnel are aware of victims' needs and concerns, and to identify important issues and trends that may negatively impact victims. Where appropriate, the ombudsman may also make recommendations to the federal government.

It was our government that contributed \$52 million to the victims fund to improve the experience of victims in the criminal justice system. This fund provides individual victims of crime with emergency funding to prevent undue hardship when there is no other source of financial assistance. It also provides funds for family members of homicide victims to assist them with the expenses incurred to attend early parole eligibility hearings or National Parole Board hearings. This is in addition to the support for NGOs that encourage the development of new approaches, promote access to justice for victims of crime, improve the capacity of victim service providers, foster the establishment of referral networks and increase awareness of services available to victims of crime and their families.

It is important to remember in the context of this debate the significant role provinces play, both in administering the criminal justice system as well as providing supporting for victims of crime. This bill can only apply to federally regulated industries, which comprise around 10% of the Canadian workforce. That is why the provincial and territorial implementation component of the victims fund is designed to encourage implementation of federal, provincial and territorial legislation for victims of crime. This would include Criminal Code provisions, such as victim impact statements and testimonial aids as well as support for adherence to the Canadian statement of basic principles of justice for victims of crime.

However, our work is not done and we have committed to doing more. That is why the following piece was included in the Speech from the Throne:

Our Government will also offer tangible support to innocent victims of crime and their families. It will give families of murder victims access to special benefits under Employment Insurance. It will introduce legislation to give employees of federally regulated industries the right to unpaid leave if they or members of their families are victimized by crime. And our Government will introduce legislation to make the victim surcharge mandatory, to better fund victim services.

This is not a new commitment by our government. During the first hour of debate in the second session of this Parliament on December 10, 2009, I signaled the intent of the government to bring forward its own legislation to assist victims of crime and their families.

While there may be similarities between the broad direction the government has indicated and the member's bill, I do not wish to unduly get the member's hopes up. When I spoke to the bill in the second session of this Parliament, I indicated that the government cannot support the bill. That position has not changed. While we share a common purpose, there are significant details in this bill that will inadvertently increase the cost of such a program or have unintended consequences.

There is also a need for a more comprehensive approach to this issue. While having time off to grieve is essential, our government has taken a more participatory approach to the criminal justice system. We have worked across multiple departments to address the needs of those affected by crime. Without revealing any details of the coming government announcement, I can only say that the government's approach will be more encompassing when addressing the needs of family members.

The member across may question why we would not simply be able to amend her bill at committee. The problem is that the government's proposed changes would go beyond the scope of her bill, and once that scope is established at second reading, it would be procedurally impossible to amend it at committee stage. That is why it would make good sense simply to have this bill traded down the order paper or be defeated at second reading and to support the government's legislation when it is introduced in the House.

For these reasons, we cannot support the bill. I would urge all members of the House to put off consideration of the bill until the government has a chance to table the measures that were mentioned in the Speech from the Throne.

Canadians take great pride in being a society that cares for the most vulnerable and lends a helping hand to those who need it when faced with adversity. In that regard, there is much potential in the bill, but I would urge all members of the House to wait for the government's proposal to be introduced in its place.

Private Members' Business

Our government has deep sympathy for family members of victims of violent crime, and our legislation and legislative record demonstrate this. Not only are we providing victims of violent crime with the tools they need, we are also finding solutions to help protect our citizens from becoming victims of crime in the first place.

● (1800)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I commend the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead for presenting the bill. I thank her for her hard work and for her bringing this discussion to the chamber.

I think it is unfair, as the parliamentary secretary has suggested, that we wait for a government bill, which we have not seen. We have intent from the government, but I want to commend the member for going beyond intent and actually bringing something, a hard piece of work for us to discuss and to consider.

I am still working out my own personal thought about the member's bill, but I sense it is important legislation that would benefit discussion at committee. Therefore, I expect I will support it going to committee for a thoughtful response.

The members from the opposition side of the House have suggested there are some amendments that we might like to see. I understand the hon. member has indicated that she and her party would be open to listening to some of those thoughtful exchanges.

I come to this bill less as a member of Parliament, but more from my experience as a United Church minister. I have worked with families that have gone through great loss and some of those losses have been as a result of crime. I have worked with victims of crime and members of families of victims of crime. I very much appreciate the intent of the bill and its understanding that in those times of great loss, in those times of grief, in those times of wonder, it is important we recognize that an injury to one is indeed an injury to all and that we, as a society, have to help the individual, which do through our government.

I am very much of the understanding that when I pay my taxes, it is my opportunity to share. When I pay my EI premiums, it is my opportunity to share in a collective opportunity, where we together recognize that each one of us could be a victim, and by the grace of God most of us are not. Therefore, we pool our resources together to help those who have been victims of crime or who are less fortunate in a variety of ways.

There is a long history in the way we have understood victims and offenders in crime. Originally, in most of common law, we understood that there were two parties in the crime, the victim and the offender. Over time, we changed our opinion to understand that the crime was not so much a crime against just the victim, it was a crime against Her Majesty, against the state.

Over recent years, we have seen a shift in that understanding to recognize there are many partners in that moment. There is an offender, the state and a victim. There has been a growing movement of victims' rights and an understanding that victims need care. They need to be supported, they need understanding and they also need financial resources.

It is very important to understand that at various times, various parts of the law need to change to adapt to a new understanding of what it is.

The government is proud to say that it stands with victims of crime. It has put some rhetoric in its throne speech. We will await that law. However, at the same time, this legislation is worthy of our support to take it to the next stage, to committee.

There is also something else besides simply that. The bill recognizes some of the changing demographics going on in the workplace and in society. It understands that when a child, for instance, has been the victim of a crime, the caregiver is probably not a homemaker at home. In 70% of Canadian families, the caregiver is a parent, mother and/or father, who is actively engaged in the workforce. Therefore, there needs to be protection, both under the labour laws and also under employment insurance provisions, to ensure the person can maintain his or her part of the livelihood that is necessary to support the family.

The hon. member has brought forth thoughtful legislation that recognizes the changing demographics of our labour force. We are behind the times in that. We still, especially on the other side of the House, tend to think of women being at home and men in the workforce. Therefore, when there is a family tragedy, that woman will still be able to help. That is not the case in most families. If it is a woman's choice, that is fine. However, most families need two incomes to maintain the family's standards of living.

● (1805)

The changes addressed both in labour law and in EI reflect our need to be part of that. We need to open our eyes to the fact that those demographics have changed.

This piece of legislation indicates that our EI system is not working. There is something disjointed. Opportunities that exist in one part of our country do not exist in other parts of our country.

It is interesting, maybe a little ironic, that the member from the Bloc Québécois is offering a Quebec solution to a national problem. I thank her for doing that, for offering the Quebec model in labour law to the rest of us in Canada who could benefit by putting that in national standards. For a long time the Liberal Party has argued that national standards are absolutely essential, that we maintain those across ten provinces and three territories and we celebrate them. I thank the hon. member for recognizing that for the rest of Canada, the federal legislation with respect to labour is falling short of the Quebec standard. We are being asked to raise the standards, especially with respect to federally regulated bodies, industries and agencies.

I want this bill to go to committee. We will be able to understand that EI is income replacement that needs to be understood as an insurance system. We pay premiums into that system. At various times in our lives, we need to take money out of the system. It is an employment insurance system, but it is not fairly understood.

Private Members' Business

I hope that as we open up the discussion on employment insurance, we might understand also that workers in Ontario are generally disadvantaged in this system. If we open up the discussion on EI, we can go a bit broader on this. We might start to look at the number of hours for EI qualification in Ontario, which is significantly higher than in other parts of the country. That means welfare demands, for example in British Columbia, Ontario or Quebec, are rising because people's EI benefits are running out.

This indicates that the government is failing to open up a grander discussion about EI, to recognize that employment insurance is not only used to help people in grand economic cycles, but also to help individuals and families who are struggling with real problems such as putting food on the table and putting a roof over their heads.

Getting back to this piece of legislation, it is important to recognize that there are still some difficulties in some of the definitions of family leave that would be offered. There has been some discussion about whether or not a parent is as important as a child as a victim of crime. Those who find themselves in the sandwich generation may have to take care of children and also elderly parents, and may be required to leave their place of work. They would want a guarantee that they would get their job back, but also would have income replacement during that time of grief or of loss.

I hope that the hon. member is open to consideration of the definitions and that they may need to be expanded and fine-tuned. We would welcome that kind of discussion with her at committee.

As we go through this, we end where I began, and that is to recognize that the Liberal Party is a party that stands with victims of crime. We are concerned about the incidence of crime. We recognize that the best way to address that is to prevent crime in the first place. We do not want to sweep up after a crime, which sometimes we need to do because the government has failed to prevent crime.

We need constantly to look at the continuum of this problem and recognize that we need to increase spending on the prevention of those things which could lead to an economic crisis for a family later. Our aim is to ensure that the government actually spends its full budget on the prevention of crime so that we can help people and stand with them in solidarity.

I look forward to a further debate on this issue.

• (1810)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this private member's bill, Bill C-343.

It was only December 10 that we were all assembled here. Primarily the same players who are making speeches tonight were making speeches that night. After that whole process, the Prime Minister prorogued the House, and here we are back again to repeat where we left off.

I have to commiserate with the member when the parliamentary secretary says to be patient, that the government is going to deal with the issue, is going to bring in a bill that she will like, so maybe she should drop her bill and give the government leeway to bring in its own bill. The same result may happen again. The Prime Minister

may prorogue the House or we may get into an election and the government will escape once again.

I am mindful of the social programs in Canada being somewhat behind those in other countries. For example, the national health care system in England, I believe, was brought in in 1949 right after the war when the economy was in bad shape. England had the foresight to bring in a national health care program. In Canada it was 1966.

France has a terrific health care program, social program. For those members who have not seen Michael Moore's movie *Sicko*, I think it is worth seeing. He profiles France's system, where people who have cancer are treated. This particular gentleman, after his recovery, was sent to the Riviera for three months to recover. In France, pregnant women have people who come in and do the laundry and cook meals. Members can see it is a totally different thought process, a different approach than we have in North America.

In France, the Scandinavian countries and England, the approach is more to try to stay healthy, and people get through their lives and are more productive if they are healthy in body and mind. The North American approach seems to be the opposite. It is basically the rat race, the little hamster on the wheel. We race our way to the end of our lives, perform our work and have as little government as possible.

Canada has the right wing, the neo-Reaganites I guess we would call them, trying to roll back the clock. I can just imagine if these people had a majority government. The country has been saved now twice from a Conservative majority, and I really am very happy about that. Hopefully we can save the country in the future from a Conservative majority. The Conservative agenda is to roll things back. We see it right now with the race to the bottom in corporate tax rates. There is no enemy out there, but I guess the Conservatives see one.

The United States has a corporate tax rate of 35%. What did the Conservative government do? It took the rate down to 15%. That is supposed to create jobs, but it has no proof that that is being done.

Just look at the parliamentary secretary's arguments. I read *Hansard* and I was here when he spoke back on December 10. He was talking about how this bill is going to cost \$400 million and saying, whoa, that is scary and we cannot do this. First of all, how does he quantify that?

• (1815)

With all the crime bills the Conservative government is bringing in, the parliamentary secretary has said the crime rate will go down. If that is the case, then all the great crime bills it is going to bring in will reduce the crime rates in the country, so the cost for the bill should be even less. But no. He obviously has a different view of where the crime rates are going because while the proponent of the bill suggests that the cost will be around \$50 million, he says it is \$400 million. He has it eight times as high. What does he think, that the crime rate is going to go up eight times, that we have to incur costs because of this bill?

Private Members' Business

I would recommend to the government, and I would certainly recommend to the House, that we proceed with this bill to second reading, that we make any amendments that we need, that we proceed and pass this bill, and get it as far along the way as possible while the government is considering its options.

I must say to the government, while it is considering its options, it should look at England, France, and countries that have really developed social programs, when it is developing its program, it should try to come up with and bring in ideas that work.

We already know that corporate tax cuts do not necessarily produce results that the government thought it would. We know that mandatory minimums, that were tried 25 years ago by Ronald Reagan, have resulted in huge expansive private prisons in the United States, filled to the capacity with inmates. The crime rates have gone up. There are so many prisoners that the governor of California, who we just saw a couple of weeks ago at the governors conference, is letting people out. The state cannot afford to keep them anymore.

Can you not learn from the mistakes of others? Do you not know that if you develop the prison system the way California has and fill it up with people, you are going to bankrupt the country and you will not be able to keep the people in prison anyway, at the end of the day?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. I would ask the hon. member to direct his comments to the Chair.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, I just got carried away there. I thought that perhaps there was some hope that the government minister would concentrate on consulting widely before he brings in the government bill.

We look forward to seeing what it has to say. But by no means should we ever defer to the government and somehow take this bill out of circulation just because it feels that it should be taken out.

I want to say that victims' rights is a fairly recent development. I know the women's movement has had a lot to do with victims' right. After 32 years in the insurance business, I know that we have had a tremendous number of break-ins over the years. People have tried to discover what the resolution was to their claim.

Back in the 1980s when there was a break-in and people tried to find out what the resolution was, they were abruptly told by the police, "No, that is all between us and the justice system. I guess you will have to find out about by reading it in the newspaper."

I am very pleased to recognize that, in Manitoba anyway, through the 11 years of the Conservative Filman government and the 10 years of the Gary Doer government that there has been considerable progress made in the area of victims' rights. That is something I think we can all agree with, that victims are the most important people in the process here. They should be handled correctly.

This member has done a terrific job on this bill. She deserves full credit for this bill. We should do our utmost to congratulate her and help her out. I know my colleague who spoke on this bill last time did have some questions; it was more a matter of clarification. The member for Hamilton Mountain was hoping for some question and answer time at the end to get answers to some questions she had,

merely for clarification purposes. I think those can be resolved when we get to committee.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Speaker, my Bloc Québécois colleague, the member for Compton—Stanstead, who has been fighting to have this bill passed for three years now, introduced Bill C-343, which would provide assistance for the families of victims of crime or suicide.

As a mother, I am very honoured to speak to this bill. I must mention that this bill has the support of a number of individuals and groups, including the Murdered or Missing Persons' Families' Association, whose current president told me that he supported the bill and wanted to see the Conservatives support it.

I think that when we are talking about human life and suffering, partisanship no longer matters. This bill is based on the recognition of a fundamental human reality, since up until now, families of victims of crime or suicide had to continue to work through their suffering, as though nothing had happened.

In a modern society like ours, workers who are confronted by tragedies like this must be able to have their jobs guaranteed. The federal government must follow Quebec's lead. Two years ago, with the passage of Bill 58, Quebec helped guarantee the jobs of these family members for up to two years. With Bill C-343, workers under federal jurisdiction will be protected, as are workers in Quebec. It is a matter of justice.

The bill does even more than that. As I said, the bill helps guarantee jobs, but it also allows these families to take a leave from work and to receive employment insurance benefits for up to 52 weeks. That would enable these people to deal with their suffering and work through their grief, although that can take a very long time. At least something would be done for them. Accordingly, the bill also proposes changes to the Employment Insurance Act.

On the face of it, this bill is not only important, but absolutely crucial for the families of victims of crime. How could anyone vote against it? I simply do not understand. Who could vote against this kind of bill, which proposes important measures for these families? Who? The so-called champions of law and order, who claim they want to work for victims and help victims? As usual, it is nothing but words, words, words. When the time comes to take real action and support a bill that, logically, should be supported, they do not want to. They do not show up.

Personally, and many Bloc members think the same thing, I would have thought that this bill would get the support of at least one Conservative—not two, one—at least the person who has publicly supported it from its inception and even helped create it. That would be only too logical. But yesterday we learned that the senator, the one Conservative who could have supported this bill, had gone back on his word. Suddenly, the bill was no good and, according to him, it was completely useless. He added that the Conservative solution, mentioned in the throne speech and the budget, is much better and that the Conservatives no longer needed to support this bill, which is completely useless.

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But that is not true. What the Conservatives are proposing and what this bill proposes are two completely different things. What they are proposing—or what we think they might propose—is an ombudsman, as my colleague mentioned earlier. So far, he has said the ombudsman position has been created, but upon reading, we learn that it will be created. It has not even been created yet.

I do not know what he is talking about. I am not sure he even knows what he is talking about. There is no ombudsman, and if there is one, I would like to know. We would all like to know.

• (1825)

What are we being offered? \$3.3 million. An ombudsman would cost \$1.5 million. This would leave \$1.8 million for the families of murdered children or other family members. There is nothing, however, for the families of family members who have been kidnapped. Naturally, there is nothing with respect to suicide. There is nothing for children who might have suffered severe injuries. Nothing. Can it be said that our bill and these proposals are one and the same? No. Logic dictates that they are not the same.

Our bill is much more generous. Incidentally, I thank the other two opposition parties for recognizing it outright.

Our bill was drafted with this person. To say that it is completely useless is tantamount to saying that the bill is useless to those having to cope with the disappearance of minor children, the death by suicide of a spouse, common law partner or child, and the families with minor children who have become disabled as a result of a crime, that it is useless and irrelevant to them. To say that this bill is completely useless shows contempt for all the families of victims of crime other than murder. I am sorry to say that I would never have expected such a degree of partisanship in this House.

Let us be clear. The Conservatives' proposal set out in the throne speech and the budget is a clunker, as they are called in the automotive industry. The reality is that we do not want their clunker.

As I said, we have the support of the new president of the AFPAD, the murdered or missing persons' families' association.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. The hon. member can continue her comments when this bill comes back.

• (1830)

[*English*]

As I said, the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to set the record straight. It seems that I dared to question the minister about certain things and I got a rather disagreeable response today to effect that his party was the only one that was proud of the performance of our athletes at the Olympic Games.

That is absolutely not true. Hon. members will recall that when Parliament resumed on March 4, the hon. members of the House from all parties celebrated and gave our athletes a standing ovation.

Hon. members will also recall that it was the same thing when Barbara Ann Scott came to the House with the Olympic flame. Everyone, without exception, was happy.

Today I heard the minister say that his party was the only one that was proud of the Games. Let us be clear: we were all happy.

My question on March 4 was on the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games. I dared to quote the minister himself, who said the next day in all the newspapers across the country that there should have been more French. Those were his words, not mine. I was quoting him. He was not the only one to say so either. The Premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, made some comments as well. I watched the opening ceremonies and I can say that, as a francophone, at one point I did not really identify with the ceremonies.

That is what my question was about. Today, again, the minister quoted the Commissioner of Official Languages with regard to the Olympic Games. Let us not forget what the Commissioner of Official Languages said about the opening ceremonies, “What I saw at the opening ceremonies was a concert which had been conceived, developed, and presented in English, with a French song. It wasn't what I expected”.

That is not at all what the minister told us today. I wanted to start by setting the record straight.

I wanted to know why the minister had given in to the Conservative habit of going into hiding and hiding documents instead of sharing information with Canadians. In this case it is somewhat understandable, because the specifications that I was looking for and that journalists were looking for were only available in English. We can understand why the government and the minister were embarrassed.

We had to ask the Standing Committee on Official Languages for the document. I would like to thank all the members of the committee for unanimously agreeing to this request. However, we had to wait an extra week for the document so that it could be translated. I can understand why he hesitated to make it public, but let's move on.

The specifications for the ceremonies, which we now have, say only one thing, and I will quote it. I think it is important that people know this. I am referring to point k in annex E of the document, a contribution agreement that committed Canadians to chip in \$20 million for the ceremonies. That is a significant amount. This is what it says:

k) Opening and Closing ceremonies will be in both official languages and the national anthem will be sung in its bilingual version; the program will include participants and events which represent both official language groups;

I believe that this is a bit minimalist, and it makes no reference to the equality of the two languages. We will await the conclusion of the study that the Commissioner of Official Languages is now conducting after receiving 40 complaints about the games and a number about the opening ceremonies.

• (1835)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. We too would like to set the record straight.

Canada's Olympic Games were magnificent. Even our minister found there was not enough French during the opening ceremonies. Everyone agrees. Nevertheless, Canadians have every reason to be proud of the organization and presentation of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Canadians and Quebecers will be left with lasting memories of the Games.

One of those memories will undoubtedly be the performances of our athletes from all over the country, francophone and anglophone alike, representing Canada, a country that is proud of its linguistic duality.

In that regard, throughout the games, both official languages were reflected in an exemplary fashion. The Canadian government and the organizers took every possible measure to make room for both of the official languages of the International Olympic Committee.

In terms of our accomplishments, I would point out that all signage, including directional signs, were in both official languages. Oral announcements were made in both official languages, first in French in accordance with the protocol. Documents and information on the Web for the public, media, athletes and dignitaries were also provided in both official languages.

The biographies of athletes and the daily updates were also written in both French and English. Bilingual volunteers were available and could be identified by the "Bonjour" pin they were wearing. Almost one million people visited Place de la Francophonie, which won a gold medal for the best place to celebrate.

The Government of Canada appreciates the positive comments of the Grand Témoin de la Francophonie and the Commissioner of Official Languages concerning the use of French at the games. The Grand Témoin de la Francophonie had this to say:

With regard to the French presence, expectations based on the promises that had been made were met.

He added that all promises were kept, particularly those with respect to competition sites and building signage. The Official

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Languages Commissioner added that French was well represented at the games. He concluded that it was very positive.

Even some Francophone journalists had good things to say about the use of French. A columnist with *La Presse* wrote the following:

I cannot remember a recent Olympic Games where French was as visible at the sites. The introduction of athletes, their short biographies, times and explanations were all given in excellent French. In fact, without swearing to it, at both places, there was more French than English.

We did what was necessary to ensure that the objectives of the Government of Canada with respect to official languages were met and we ensured that the games were for all of Canada. These games were the most bilingual of any to date, according to observers, and the bilingualism of a number of our athletes—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Speaker, I cannot deny that some things were well done. No one is denying that, but that was not my question. The parliamentary secretary is contradicting herself. I heard her say that everything was perfect, but at the beginning of her speech, she acknowledged that everyone agreed that there was a serious lack of French in the opening ceremonies.

Billions of viewers across the world saw the image we projected of our country, and that is where Canada's linguistic duality was not accurately represented. That is how I feel, but there are many others who feel the same way, including the Premier of Quebec, the Commissioner of Official Languages, and even the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, who had promised us something different.

The government needs to set the record straight and acknowledge that something went wrong. We want to know who is responsible for this and how they will ensure that it will not happen again in the future.

• (1840)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Madam Speaker, the minister was very clear today. In terms of the document we were talking about, we had to respect the language of the person who requested it. It was requested in English, so we provided it in English.

We had the francophone games, of which French was very much a part. As a true Quebecer, I hope that, should the Olympic games ever be held in Quebec, French will be a part not only of them but of all of Canada so that the Francophonie will flourish.

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

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

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