



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 27, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 27, 2010

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1405)

[English]

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, following today's historic address by Mexican president, Felipe Calderón, I rise in the House today to reaffirm the importance of NAFTA to the flourishing trading relationship on the North American continent.

Since NAFTA's implementation, merchandise trade between Canada, Mexico and the United States has more than tripled, reaching \$946 billion U.S. in 2008. Today, Canada, the U.S. and Mexico trade roughly \$2.6 billion U.S. in merchandise on a daily basis. That is about \$108 million U.S. per hour.

NAFTA has proven that liberalizing trade is an important tool in promoting transparency, economic growth and economic stability. It has been such a success to the North American continent that countries, such as Colombia, now also want to open their own markets to benefit from the economic prosperity on the North American continent.

I call upon parliamentarians to do what is right for Canada and for Colombia and to pass the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. Colombia is more than just its past civil injustices. It is time that those opposed to this agreement stop focusing on—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Davenport.

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PORTUGUESE FISHERMEN

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this day in 1955, the Portuguese ship, *Gil Eannes*, sailed into the port of St. John's, Newfoundland.

Four thousand Portuguese fishermen in beautiful costumes carried a statue of Our Lady of Fatima up the hill to the Basilica of St. John the Baptist where it was erected as a gift to the people of St. John's from the fishermen of Portugal in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the Basilica.

Those beautiful days in 1955 were a celebration of the close relationships that saw St. John's filled with Portuguese vessels and fishermen for six months each year for over 400 years.

The Portuguese fishing fleets and Portuguese fishermen who travelled across the Atlantic each year will continue to echo through history ever reminding the people of Newfoundland and all Canadians of this special period in their history and of their friends who lived just across the sea.

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[Translation]

DENIS GOUGEON

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in celebration of the world expo, the Presences Festival International Composition Competition held the final concert in its three-year international competition in Shanghai, China. Granby native Denis Gougeon won first prize with his piece entitled *Toy (Music Box)*. Mr. Gougeon is a composer and an associate professor of instrumental composition at University of Montreal.

The competition required that the composer interpret a folk melody with traditional Chinese instruments. Candidates were judged on their ability to blend these elements into a new piece of music. A Chinese melody, *Wuxi jing*, performed on bamboo flutes, was woven into Mr. Gougeon's composition.

I am pleased to congratulate Mr. Gougeon for his composition, which won the international prize on May 4. The Bloc is proud to highlight amazing artistic performances by Quebeckers on the international scene.

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[English]

ABORIGINAL HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year, this House voted unanimously to declare June as National Aboriginal History Month.

A declaration without action to back it up would be an empty promise, so I followed up on the NDP motion by contacting relevant federal departments and asking how they would observe Aboriginal History Month.

Indian and Northern Affairs is promoting the month on its website and at National Aboriginal Day events and promises to further develop new initiatives for June 2011.

Statements by Members

Parks Canada already had a strategic plan to increase the representation of aboriginal history subjects in its national commemoration program of people, places and events of historical significance. Three of those subjects are the following: designation of the Similkameen Spirit Trail in B.C., the Abenaki migration to New France, and finally, Chief Peguis' role in the Selkirk settlement. Those are three subjects I think very few Canadians know about.

This is the start of a national project to bring aboriginal history to the forefront in Canada. I encourage all members of the House to celebrate Aboriginal History Month in their ridings.

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ASBESTOS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide notice to victims of mesothelioma and their families who have not yet received compensation through provincial or corporate authorities.

This rare form of lung cancer attacks the lining of the lungs and sometimes the abdomen. Exposure could come from insulation in workplaces, in wall board and floor tiles at home, and even from the brakes of cars and trucks.

Those without compensation should know they are not alone. Canadian victims and their families have an additional potential recourse because the harmful products containing asbestos in Canada were manufactured in the United States. Thirty billion dollars are available for asbestos victims, even those deceased years ago, through U.S. settlement trusts.

Inquiries can be made by calling Health Canada at 1-800-433-0395.

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SATHYA SAI SCHOOL OF CANADA

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the people of the Sathya Sai School of Canada who have joined us here today and are celebrating their 10th anniversary. This is the only school of its kind in North America and I am very proud that it is located in Scarborough, Ontario.

On Sunday, May 30, I will be participating in the eighth annual Walk for Values organized by the school. I will join thousands of participants in the GTA to walk in the name of peace, non-violence, right conduct, truth and love. Since the walk's inception in Scarborough eight years ago, it has grown and this year will take place in nine Canadian cities. In addition, walks will take place in 60 other countries around the world.

I would like to congratulate and thank the Sathya Sai School of Canada for its efforts in reinforcing these values, not only here in Canada but around the world.

June 6 Walk for Values takes place here in Ottawa. I encourage all members to join me at this important event.

●(1410)

AGAINST THE ODDS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to an extraordinary constituent of mine, Al Trotter. Al is a retired lieutenant colonel with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He completed 44 missions in Germany, was then struck down, interrogated, sent to a German POW camp and eventually came home.

Through perseverance and pure determination, Al made it out of Germany alive and after more than 40 years he has finally told his story. His book, *Against the Odds*, which he co-wrote with his daughter, Leslie, has been published and is a must read for those wanting to learn more about what our veterans sacrificed and accomplished for Canada.

In Al's own words, "for our veterans, our gravest concern is that we don't want to be forgotten. 17,700 young men lost their lives in the Air Force in World War II".

I want to thank Al for taking the time to write this important book. His story will ensure that our veterans will never be forgotten and it is a great legacy for generations to come.

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[*Translation*]

CYCLING TRAGEDY IN ROUGEMONT

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 14, a tragic accident on Highway 112 in Rougemont shattered the lives of several families in an instant. Six members of the Saint-Lambert triathlon team were on their way to Sherbrooke for a training session when they were hit by a truck.

Christine Deschamps, Lyn Duhamel and Sandra De La Garza Aguilar were killed. All three were experienced members of the Saint-Lambert triathlon club, where they were training for Ironman events coming up this summer.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues and myself, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the families of the victims. Our thoughts are with them in this terrible time.

In closing, I would encourage motorists, cyclists and pedestrians to be careful and vigilant on our roads.

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[*English*]

G8 AND G20 SUMMITS

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in just under a month, Canada will be hosting the world's most influential leaders at the G8 and G20 summits. Canada hosting two major summits back to back is unprecedented and we are honoured to host the world leaders and showcase Canada on the world stage.

Statements by Members

We are on track to host secure G8 and G20 summits. We have a comprehensive security plan developed by Canada's best experts in the field, but what does the Liberal leader say? He said that he was "kind of ashamed" of Canada.

I can assure all members that on this side of the House we are not ashamed of our country. In fact, we are proud of Canada and I look forward to this unique opportunity to continue our leadership on the world stage.

This is an opportunity that all Canadians, even the opposition Liberals, can be proud of.

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DARFUR

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, members of the Canadian Jewish Congress Darfur Action Committee are in Ottawa to highlight the ongoing crisis in Darfur.

In the tradition of the Jewish concept of "*tikkun olam*", "to repair the world", CJC is joining with STAND Canada, The Darfur/Sudan Peace Network and the SubSahara Centre to advocate for the people of Darfur.

Mindful of international indifference to the plight of Jews in the Holocaust, these volunteers from across Canada are dedicated to making a difference and call upon Canada to take a high-level role in the diplomatic resolution to the conflict, and on this Parliament to create a committee for the prevention of genocide and other crimes against humanity. They further request that Canada take a leadership role in strengthening the friends of the UN assistance mission in Darfur, at the UN, where much remains to be done.

As the architect of the "responsibility to protect", Canada can and must provide greater leadership on Darfur.

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[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, unanimously passed in committee yesterday.

This bill will allow Canadian Forces members, who serve our country with pride, to spend time with their new child when they return from a mission.

Major Duquette, who originally brought this matter to the attention of the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton, said yesterday that getting this bill to pass has been the greatest achievement of his military career because it will have a significant impact on military families.

I call on all parties to help pass this bill quickly, so that military families can access the benefits they so rightly deserve.

●(1415)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, using over \$1 billion to host the G20 and G8 summits is so outrageous, it borders on indecency.

Let us look at what \$1 billion of Canadians' hard-earned money can buy. Some money could be used to compensate the small businesses and vendors who will lose their shirts because of the security lockdown. With Roy Halladay not being able to play and the CN tower shut down, surely the tourism industry will need some support.

Three percent of that \$1 billion would provide all Canadian children with a nutritious and healthy breakfast or snacks every day. We could lift all seniors out of poverty by increasing the guaranteed income supplement. Canada could pay one-third of the costs of the millennium development goal and save the lives of over 10 million women and children by 2015.

The Conservative government has completely missed its target by such a ridiculous amount it should be fired on the spot.

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HISPANIC CANADIAN AWARDS

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada recognizes the important geographic, social, political and economic ties between Canada and the Americas.

Our Prime Minister has been clear that a cornerstone of our foreign policy is a commitment to increased engagement in our hemisphere. Our history and our future require us to build and sustain solid bridges among our neighbours.

Today we were honoured to welcome President Calderón of Mexico and were privileged to hear his address to the Parliament. Here at home, the Latin American community is an impressive group. It is hard-working and energetic. Its music, art, food and culture enrich our diversity.

As chair of FIPA, I am pleased to congratulate and welcome here today a group of outstanding individuals, the winners of the Influential Hispanic Canadian awards. The calibre and diversity of their achievements is a reflection of the incredible contribution of the Hispanic community here in Canada.

I hope that many members can join me this afternoon between 4 p. m. and 6 p.m. at 131 Queen Street, room 851, where there will be an opportunity to speak and meet these talented individuals.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE RECORD IN QUEBEC

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is no coincidence that the Bloc Québécois wins federal elections in Quebec election after election. The Bloc Québécois is the only party that defends the interests of Quebec in the House.

The recognition of the Quebec nation by the Conservatives has turned out to be nothing but an empty gesture. The proof is that they are trying to reduce the weight of our nation in the House. They are denying the consensus of the National Assembly of Quebec, both against creating a Canada-wide securities commission and in favour of maintaining the firearms registry in its entirety. Quebec's voice at UNESCO is nothing but a sham with Quebec sitting on a folding chair and having to sing in harmony with the federal Conservative government. The government turns a blind eye to Quebec's troubled forestry industry, but has no problem giving the automobile industry \$9.7 billion in assistance.

The Bloc Québécois is clearly the only party that represents the interests of Quebec in this House. That is what Quebec voters have been reaffirming in every election for the past 20 years and will do again in the next election.

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[English]

VISION HEALTH AWARENESS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to propose to the House that all levels of government have a collective responsibility to raise awareness of vision health as every 12 minutes in Canada someone develops vision loss.

CNIB is promoting May 27 as Shade of Fun day because CNIB wants to make vision health awareness a priority for all Canadians. Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss in Canada. One million Canadians have some form of AMD which can be significantly reduced by wearing sunglasses.

Seventy-five percent of vision loss is avoidable and yet only 9% of Canadians know that UV rays from the sun can harm their eyes. Eighty percent of Canadians said that they wear sunscreen to protect their skin from the sun but only 17% said they wear sunglasses to protect their eyes.

I encourage all members of the House to wear their sunglasses for the next few minutes to remind ourselves and all Canadians to look after their eyes.

* * *

● (1420)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just as the latest OECD report has declared Canada to be a safe economic haven in a turbulent world and Canada's economic action plan is helping to build jobs and growth, Liberal members like the member for Ottawa South and his colleague, the former NDP premier of Ontario, are once again talking up a coalition with the Bloc and the NDP.

The fact is a Liberal-Bloc-NDP coalition would be a recipe for uncertainty and instability. Under such a coalition, Canada would be led by a Liberal leader who wants to raise taxes, Canada's economic recovery would be in the hands of the former NDP premier of Ontario and the current NDP leader, an untested tax and spender, and the Bloc Québécois would have a policy veto, the glue that made the last coalition possible.

Canada cannot afford someone who is just visiting. We cannot afford an NDP veto on the economy. We most certainly cannot afford a policy veto for the Bloc Québécois.

This latest Liberal musing about a coalition shows the Liberals are not in for Canadians. They are just in it for themselves.

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GEORGIAN COLLEGE

Hon. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, Ind. Cons.): Mr. Speaker, on April 8, I had the honour of announcing a \$4 million investment for a new campus of Georgian College in my riding of Simcoe—Grey. Tomorrow, we will be celebrating this expansion.

For over 25 years, Georgian College has had a campus in Collingwood, but has relocated 10 times to meet the growing needs of the area. At last, 2011 will mark its final move to its new permanent location. This new home for the college is expected to increase enrolment from its current 871 students to in excess of 1,500 in the next three years.

This new campus will serve Collingwood, Wasaga Beach, Clearview and the town of Blue Mountains. It will broaden employment, stimulate our local economies and attract new opportunities for business.

I want to thank my colleagues, the MP for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and the MP for Simcoe North, for their support. I would like to congratulate to Mr. Brian Tamblyn, the president, for his leadership and vision, but most importantly, the hard work and dedication of all the staff and volunteers for making this expansion in lifelong learning a reality.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, security costs for the three-day Toronto summit have already exceeded those for the Vancouver Olympic Games that lasted 17 days.

What is going on? Why is the Toronto summit the most expensive to date? How can the Prime Minister explain such incompetence?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a very big country. We are playing an unprecedented role on the world stage. We are doing something that rarely happens. We are having a G8 summit and a G20 summit. The Prime Minister has been providing great leadership.

We are concerned about two things. One is the safety of the world leaders who will be visiting our great country and the safety of people in the Huntsville, Muskoka and in the city of Toronto.

We will do all that it takes to keep these Canadians safe.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern of reckless spending that needs to be recognized. This is a government that inherited a \$13 billion surplus and turned into a deficit before the recession even began. Now it is spending more than a billion dollars of borrowed money on a summit because it could not even figure out where to hold it.

Why are Canadian taxpayers footing the bill for this kind of incompetence?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 9/11, security has become a new reality for Canadians and for people in every part of the world.

I think all members of Parliament, particularly those of us from Ottawa, were deeply concerned with the recent firebombing not three miles from this chamber.

We will work with international authorities to ensure that international leaders like President Barack Obama and the president of China, President Hu, and the people of Huntsville, Muskoka and, most important, the people in the large city of Toronto are safe.

We will do what we can to preserve security and to keep this summit safe.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the handling of this issue is comical. The Conservatives could not figure out a location. They could not nail down an agenda. They could not figure out who to invite. We would not organize a children's party this way. Now we are on the hook for a billion dollar security charge on top of a \$54 billion deficit.

Canadian families that do balance their budgets wonder why this incompetence has been allowed to happen.

• (1425)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party never misses an occasion to run down Canada.

Here we have great leadership from the Prime Minister, inviting leaders from around the world to come to Canada to talk about what we can do to help boost the worldwide economy and what we can do to help poor mothers and children in the third world. We are inviting world leaders from some of the most important countries to come to Canada.

Since 9/11, security is a new reality and we will not be intimidated by thugs and terrorists who would want to come to Canada and cause us harm. We are going to ensure that people are safe.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are questioning the government's management, not Canada.

A 2000% more expensive than the last G20 and 300% more expensive than any summit ever held, the government is spending more than a billion taxpayer dollars on the most expensive 72 hours of meetings in history. Dropped in a cabinet minister's riding that could not handle it, the government's mismanagement has now forced the meetings into two locations, one in the nation's largest city and a security nightmare.

Having run up the biggest deficit in Canadian history, how can the government look in the eyes of the unemployed and justify this billion dollar binge?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were shocked last week over the firebombing at the Royal Bank in Ottawa. This is a prime example of why we need to be prepared to face thugs and terrorists who threaten our safety.

I notice the Liberals on the other side are laughing. That is their attitude toward security. They are not concerned about security.

We are concerned about security. We are on track to host safe and secure G8 and G20 summits, two separate summits back-to-back. It is unprecedented. The cost is expensive but the security is worth it.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, shame on them. Shame on them for using security to try to avoid accountability. These meetings are supposed to be about austerity, about fiscal restraint. Here is a good place to start. Do not spend more than a billion dollars on 72 hours of meetings.

While the government slashes money from women's groups, international aid and others, it tosses more than a billion dollars in debt for three days of meetings because the Conservatives tried to stick them in a cabinet minister's riding. While the rest of the world did this for a fraction of the cost, they ran up the bill.

What is the government's excuse? If the minister knew these costs all along, why did he not do something to contain them? Why are we spending many times more than the rest of the world?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are on track to host safe and secure G8 and G20 summits. Our security plan has been developed and costed by Canada's best experts in the field.

We are honoured to host the world's most influential leaders at the summits this June. Unlike the Liberal leader who says that he is embarrassed of Canada, we are proud and ready to showcase Canada on the world stage.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government says it does not wish to reopen the abortion debate. Cardinal Ouellet candidly admitted yesterday that he was raising the abortion issue now because the Conservative government had revived the debate by excluding abortion from its maternal health policy for developing countries.

Does the Prime Minister realize that because of him and his refusal to include abortion in his maternal health policy for foreign nations the abortion debate is again raging in Canada and Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here we have another question on this issue from the Bloc. The truth of the matter is Canadians and Quebecers do not want to debate this issue. Canadians and Quebecers want us to save the lives of women and children in the developing world. That is exactly what our maternal and newborn health initiative is about.

We have a historic opportunity. I ask the opposition to stop this divisive debate and work with us and our G8 partners to save the lives of mothers and children.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa's bishop stated yesterday that a sizeable pro-life caucus is working behind the scenes within the government. The Prime Minister, who controls everything, must know about this caucus. He must also know that Kara Johnson, who was president of the National Council of the Conservative Party, is a member of Opus Dei, and that Nicole Charbonneau Barron, who will again be a candidate for his party in Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, is also a member of Opus Dei, and that a conservative member invited his colleagues to dine with Opus Dei leaders.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his policy is influenced by the fundamentalist religious right?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our policy is influenced by people like Sharon Marshall from World Vision Canada, who is telling us that over 24,000 children under the age of five will die in the developing world.

Our government is bringing the G8 leaders together in June to help save the lives of women and children. We have an obligation to try to protect and save the lives of women and children in the developing world. It is a noble and honourable initiative. I ask the opposition to support us instead of engaging in this divisive debate.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation said in committee that the government as a whole refused to include abortion in the maternal health initiative. In other words, supposedly pro-choice ministers

from Quebec were party to the decision to deny women their fundamental rights.

Can the Prime Minister tell us his reasons for excluding abortion from the list of measures to promote maternal health?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what led us to decide to save the lives of mothers and children was people like Sharon Marshall from World Vision Canada, who has said that she is outraged this debate is being raised in order to distract from the real issue on the table. The real issue is 8.8 million children are dying every year from causes that we could easily prevent with intervention that costs pennies.

We are listening to people like Sharon Marshall with World Vision Canada. We want to save the lives of mothers and children in the developing world. We have a consensus with our G8 partners. We ask the opposition to support this great initiative.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first the Conservative government cut funding for groups that help women, and now it is penalizing groups that do not share its backward ideology.

According to the former president of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, "The [Prime Minister's] government's policies and actions are systematically killing the women's movement and stifling important voices—".

Why is the Prime Minister so bent on shutting down anyone who opposes his conservative ideology, especially women?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that our government increased funding for women to an unprecedented level. We support projects across Canada, including in Quebec. We have to focus on improving the lives of women rather than pitting women's groups against one another.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everybody remembers all too well the \$1 billion boondoggle at HRDC, as it was called at the time, under Jane Stewart. Now the Conservatives have their own \$1 billion boondoggle at the G20 summit.

The government is now spending six times more than it specified in the general estimates presented in the House. Previous G20 summits cost a mere fraction of that, and they kept everybody safe: \$18 million in Pittsburgh; \$30 million in London.

How can this government and these Conservatives justify spending 30 times more than London did just a year ago to talk about austerity?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is providing major leadership on the world stage. We are doing something that is unprecedented, hosting both the G8 and the G20.

Leaders from around the world, from the most important countries, will be coming together to talk about what we can do to boost the global economy and to create jobs around the world. We are also working on our prenatal initiative to help African women.

The reality is that since 9/11 there has been an unprecedented need to ensure that the leaders are safe and secure, that the meetings can take place, and that we can ensure the safety of the people in both Muskoka and the great city of Toronto.

I think the member for Toronto—Danforth should be proud that world leaders will be visiting Toronto. We will be showing off a great city and a great—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives are making fools of themselves on the world stage.

First they came up with an ill-conceived and incomplete maternal health initiative that reopened the debate and was severely criticized by our closest allies. Then they kicked the Blue Jays out, making them the laughingstock of major league baseball. Now they are using the security excuse to waste taxpayers' money.

Does the Prime Minister realize what a mess he has made?

• (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I say to the House that the leader of the NDP is a great optimist, clearly, from his comments.

We are inviting world leaders from the G8 countries to meet in Huntsville to discuss the important need to boost the world economy. We are inviting the world leaders from the G20 to visit the city of Toronto.

The reality is that in a post-9/11 environment, security will not come cheaply. We are committed to ensuring that those world leaders are safe and secure so that those important discussions can take place. We are also committed and concerned about the security of the people of Toronto and Muskoka, and we will do what it takes to ensure that they are safe.

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FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that the Conservatives have mismanaged the summit. Maternal health has turned sour because of ideology. Guess what. There is now a new priority. The Prime Minister thinks that the banks need help in Canada.

BMO's profits only doubled in the last year. TD's profits are at \$1.18 billion. It is \$1.33 billion for the Royal Bank. They just got

another great big whopping tax cut courtesy of the Conservatives and Liberals.

Why is the Prime Minister off on a save-the-banks tour internationally next week?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is an honest difference of opinion between this government and the New Democrats. They want to tax more. They want to spend more. We want to ensure that low taxes help to create jobs, help to create hope, and help to create opportunity. That is why the government has made a significant effort to bring down taxes to make it as easy as possible for Canadian businesses to create jobs.

We are already seeing some unprecedented success. Just last month, 108,000 people got the call, and the voice on the other end of the phone said, "You got the job". That is 108,000 people who will be able to provide for themselves and their families. We will not let up on creating jobs and more opportunities.

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ETHICS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the Prime Minister was "justifiably riled" when he learned that Rahim Jaffer used his diplomatic passport while lobbying Cuban officials. It left the appearance that he had the backing of the Government of Canada. Now we learn that the industry minister appeared in his friend's corporate ad, using his ministerial title, to make it appear to Chinese buyers that the Government of Canada endorsed the product.

Is the Prime Minister also justifiably riled by his industry minister's violation of the rules? What is he going to do about it?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the regular tendering process at CFB Borden was used in awarding these contracts. The minister indicates that he had no involvement in issuing the contracts, nor did he intervene in order to secure the contracts to provide the cleaning products required.

There was no financial gain for the minister. In fact, this business owner has never made a political contribution to the minister or to any political party.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not about contracts. This is about an ad. This is about privileged access for their friends. Unbelievably, the industry minister used his ministerial title to huckster for his friend's ad in a foreign land.

How many rules were broken? The Conflict of Interest Code, the Treasury Board communication rules, the Prime Minister's code of conduct. Do rules mean nothing to the Conservatives and their friends? Does the Prime Minister condone this violation of his own rules, that he established?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the member across the way is wrong. The rules were followed.

Oral Questions

Now that the matter is dealt with, it is time for the member to rise and be held accountable for telling his constituents in election after election that he would vote against the wasteful billion-dollar long-gun registry. He has now decided that he is flip-flopping on that. He is breaking his promise to his constituents in order to take orders from his Liberal leader. It is time that the member rise and apologize for that flip-flop.

* * *

• (1440)

[Translation]

MATERNAL HEALTH

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only has the government disregarded international priorities in its agenda for the G8 and G20, but it is also completely isolating Canada on the issue of maternal health. Scientific communities in all the G8 countries are calling for the inclusion of measures to reduce the number of unsafe abortions. The science is clear: one in every seven mothers dies as a result of a backroom abortion.

Does the Minister for La Francophonie, who claims to be pro-choice, realize what they are doing?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is another question on this issue from the Liberal Party. The truth is, Canadians do not want to have this debate. Canadians want us to work with our G8 partners to save the lives of women and children in the developing world.

We know from all the care agencies around the world that there is a lot of work we can do. Some 24,000 children under the age of five die every day in the developing world. We have an obligation to act to help protect and save these children. That is what we are going to do with our G8 partners.

I ask the member to support us and end this divisive debate.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not include the environment on the G8 and G20 agenda, despite the wishes of the other member states and the UN. He wants to take away the right to choose from African women, which is the complete opposite of what the other countries and all of their scientific communities are calling for. He has isolated us on the international stage on all of the major issues. In Canada, he listens to no one, except Dimitri Soudas.

Why does the Prime Minister insist on going it alone, in Canada and abroad?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are listening to care agencies, such as World Vision Canada, who say that 24,000 children under the age of five will die today in the developing world. This June we have a historic opportunity to make a difference in the lives of women and children in the developing world. That is exactly what we are going to do. We have a responsibility to act to save the lives of women and children.

It is the right thing to do. We ask the opposition to please join us and our G8 partners in doing that and to stop this divisive debate.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the Quebec business coalition, the quality of the regulatory framework under the jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec was what helped us get through one of the worst crises ever better than most other countries. Now, the Conservatives, who wanted to deregulate banking as other countries had done, are saying that we should follow other countries' lead and have a single regulatory authority.

Why dismantle a system that helped us weather the financial crisis better than other countries?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear from the start on this: participation in the Canadian commission is voluntary. Provinces that do not want to join will not join. It is as simple as that.

Setting politics aside, I would like to quote Joey Davis of the Earl Jones victims committee, who just today said that a Canadian securities regulator holds the best potential to make a difference in preventing and deterring white collar crime.

I repeat: if Quebec wants its own system, it can keep it.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Earl Jones is a criminal who was not registered anywhere.

This morning, the National Assembly unanimously condemned this proposal, as all of Quebec's business communities have done. A single securities regulator has nothing to do with efficiency and everything to do with a minister from Ontario who is determined to steal our jobs and our powers for Ontario's benefit. Quebec's finance minister calls this an invasion.

The bottom line is that the Conservatives and the Liberals are colluding to invade our jurisdictions. In Quebec, we call that a barbarian invasion.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear. We are going to ask the Supreme Court to rule on whether we are respecting jurisdictions. Let them stop making insinuations. The Supreme Court will hand down its decision, and we will act within our jurisdiction.

That said, I am looking at the Bloc, which has apparently been standing up for Quebec for 20 years. For 13 years, it did nothing as the fiscal imbalance was created. It was our finance minister who corrected that imbalance less than two years after coming to power. That is action.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Institut national de santé publique du Québec believes that, since the Firearms Act came into effect, the number of suicides and homicides committed with firearms have decreased on average by 250 and 50 respectively per year. Over the course of seven years, the registry has saved 2,100 lives.

Why does the government want to eliminate the gun registry, a registry that saves lives?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday at committee we heard from front-line police officers with real experience. Officer Dave Shipman said that the long gun registry is not working to prevent gun crime. Criminals do not register their stolen or smuggled guns that are being used to wage war in our cities.

I think this indicates that there is a failure of that long gun registry. Front-line officers are saying that.

I would encourage those who voted for Bill C-391 to vote that way at third reading.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a Quebec delegation led by the Quebec public safety minister is in Ottawa calling for the firearm registry to be maintained in its entirety. Quebecers support controlling guns, including long guns. On three occasions, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously came out against dismantling the registry.

Why does the government want to eliminate the firearms registry, which is supported by Quebecers and saves lives?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish the member would stop misleading the public.

Let me be clear. While we support licensing of individuals, we do not support the long gun registry. It is wasteful, and it is time to end the criminalization of our hunters and outdoor enthusiasts once and for all.

A police chief recently called the long gun registry a placebo and said that it creates a false sense of security.

We hope that members of the Liberal Party and the New Democrats who voted for Bill C-391 vote again to end the wasteful registry.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, supported by police forces and a unanimous National Assembly, Quebec's public safety minister is calling on the Conservatives and New Democrats to save the registry. Why? Because the registry saves lives.

According to a study conducted by the Université de Montréal, the registry has saved over 2,000 lives over the past seven years. That means 300 lives every year.

Oral Questions

Does this mean nothing to the Conservatives and NDP? It is too expensive to save the lives of 300 Canadians every year?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to begin by eliminating the long gun registry. This registry has the negative effect of making criminals out of everyone who does not register a long gun.

Members like the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord represent ridings where many of their constituents are hunters. That member wants to turn them into criminals if they do not register their long guns. He should ask them what they think. I do not think those people would be so proud of him.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the President of Mexico respects the RCMP more than our own Prime Minister does, since he refuses to listen to our police officers.

The Prime Minister's partisan desires and his incompetence are going to cost us \$1 billion for three days of security during the G8 and G20 summits.

This billion dollars would pay for the registry until 2260, thereby saving 300 Canadian lives every year for the next 250 years.

Where are their priorities? How can they say that, at a cost of \$4 million a year, the registry is too expensive?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have addressed the issue of the gun registry.

I want to deal again with the G8 and G20 matter. Canadians were shocked last week over the firebombing at the Royal Bank in Ottawa. This is a prime example of why we need to be prepared to face thugs and terrorists who would threaten our safety. We are on track to host safe and secure G8 and G20 summits.

Unlike the Liberal leader, who has said he is embarrassed of Canada, we are proud and ready to showcase Canada on the world stage. We will make sure that there are secure and safe surroundings.

* * *

OFFSHORE DRILLING

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, President Obama has announced a moratorium on deep water oil wells and halted all drilling in northern waters.

Meanwhile, this government has taken no action to ensure that all current drilling is safe or that a disaster off one of our coasts would not result in the same catastrophic scenes we have seen in the Gulf of Mexico, with oil gushing on and on for more than five weeks.

Will the Conservatives follow the lead of President Obama and ensure all precautions are taken to avoid a tragic spill in Canadian waters?

Oral Questions

•(1450)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board announced on May 12 that it would begin a review of all rules and regulations.

First of all, I would remind the House that no such authorization has been granted. No drilling is taking place at present in the Arctic or the Beaufort Sea. We are pleased that American authorities have decided to suspend all drilling that was planned for this spring, because they have reached the same conclusions as we have here in Canada. They want to examine what happened in the Gulf of Mexico to better understand and improve the regulations to ensure the future safety of workers and to protect the environment.

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico threatens to spread to the east coast of the U.S. and Canada, in B.C. a recent poll shows that over 80% of British Columbians oppose oil tanker traffic and drilling on the west coast.

Prime Minister Trudeau set a moratorium in 1972 that was honoured by subsequent governments until 2006, when this government violated that moratorium to allow tankers with toxic condensate to travel off the coast.

Will the Conservatives now commit to making the 1972 ban permanent?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all take our environmental responsibilities incredibly seriously. The coast of British Columbia is one of the most beautiful places on the planet. We have tough regulatory regimes in place and we are always prepared to make them even tougher.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the OECD praised Canada's economic performance, noting that we will have the fastest growing economy in the G7 this year and next. An official said, "I think Canada looks good; it shines, actually".

Clearly Canada's economic action plan, which includes lower taxes, is working. In fact, since last July, Canada has created some 285,000 new jobs.

Could the transport minister please tell the House what the experts think about the Liberal leader's tax hike plan?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has recently been released an independent University of Calgary study that has confirmed what we have been saying all along, that the Liberal leader's tax plan would kill jobs.

In fact, the study that was released today says that the Liberal tax hike would lead directly to the loss of some 233,000 jobs. It called the Liberal plan to raise taxes "seriously misguided, putting Canada's tax competitiveness at a disadvantage among OECD countries".

In a period of economic uncertainty, Canada's economy cannot afford Liberal tax hikes.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems the Minister of Industry has a new sideline doing infomercials for his friend's business. All that is missing is the headset and he could be the ShamWow guy. Vince the Slap Chop guy has some new competition.

Celebrity endorsements are not part of a cabinet minister's job description. In fact, they are a blatant conflict of interest. The former minister for status of women got fired for a lot less.

Is the Prime Minister going to make room over there in the hall of shame for the Minister of Industry, or is he safe hiding in the Conservative good old boys' club?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear the member has taken on his own part-time job as a stand-up comic. I would encourage him not to quit his day job, though.

The reality is that this government continues to work hard to promote and support small business right across this land. We have lowered taxes for small businesses. We are creating jobs for small businesses. Small business across this country has never done better than under this government. We will continue to be a government of low tax and a friendly economic environment for our entrepreneurs from coast to coast.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one cannot use one's public office to further the private interests of one's personal friends and nobody should have to tell one that. This is not an isolated incident. In fact, these lapses in ethical judgment are becoming the hallmark of the whole Conservative regime. We have not seen such an arrogant disregard for ethics since the Chrétien years.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister stand up if he agrees with me that the Minister of Industry should be fired?

•(1455)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has gone too far. He has lobbed a lot of accusations and we have accepted in the spirit of democracy to have a discourse with him. We have defended the integrity of this government at every step of the way, but for him to compare this Conservative government to the previous Liberal government goes beyond any standard of proper etiquette in this House of Commons.

*Oral Questions***INFRASTRUCTURE***[Translation]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has announced that, from now on, ministers will answer for their staff's actions. The Minister of Natural Resources demonstrated the government's bad faith when, on the one hand, he denied a committee request that he testify as a minister and, on the other, he invited himself to different committee to answer for an employee's actions, where he stated that he had nothing to say because he knew nothing about the incident.

Does the Minister of Natural Resources's ridiculous behaviour not prove that this government has no intention of being held accountable?

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, as I answered the same member yesterday on this very same issue, this is the government that holds itself accountable and that is why we have decided we will ensure that our ministers attend committees to answer the questions. We will not allow our political staff to attend committees and be subjected to the abuse, intimidation and bullying tactics of the coalition opposition parties.

I note that in an ultimate display of hypocrisy, the Liberal Party filibustered at the government operations committee today to prevent the member from—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is another example of the Minister of Natural Resources's ridiculous behaviour; he even refuses to respond in the House. They have prorogued Parliament twice, given committee chairs a guidebook on obstruction, intimidated witnesses and refused to produce documents, and now the Conservatives are not allowing ministerial staff to appear before Parliamentary committees.

Does this series of events not prove that the Conservative government has no intention of being held accountable for its administration?

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the opposite. In fact I would think that the opposition would be applauding our ministers' attempts to testify in committee at every opportunity. We believe in ministerial responsibility. We believe in ministerial accountability.

As I was saying before I was so rudely cut off by the 35-second rule, the ultimate double standard was conducted today at the government operations committee when the Liberals filibustered that committee to prevent the member for Scarborough—Rouge River from testifying against the accusations that he was committing lobbying as a member of Parliament.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow when the Prime Minister addresses Canadian municipalities, will he be addressing their number one concern, how to pay for billions of dollars in new infrastructure that federal government waste water rules make necessary?

Nearly 1,000 Canadian communities will need upgrades to protect the environment and Canadians' health at a cost of \$13 billion. The government has made the rules, but it has said nothing about how it will help municipalities meet the new challenges.

Will the Prime Minister show up with real help for Canadian cities and towns or just more propaganda?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question. Mr. Speaker, do you know how many days it has been since the infrastructure critic asked me a question? It has been 175 long days.

What have we done in those 175 days? We have announced \$100 million to help the great city of Hamilton increase its capacity to make water safe. I have met with Peggy Nash several times about projects that affect her former constituents.

We have created a lot of jobs, a lot of hope and a lot of opportunity. We are going to continue to do just that.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course the minister opposite forgets to say that he forgot to come to work for 100 days, and that is why we could not talk to him. He also forgets to say that we asked for briefings from his ministry 11 times, and he said no every single time because he is afraid to answer questions.

We do not need more empty propaganda. What we do need is a long-term cost-shared funding strategy. Municipalities were staring down a deficit of infrastructure needs of \$123 billion before the government made its new rules.

Why does the government insist on cutting corporate taxes over the next two years—

● (1500)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is 2010. We do not believe that municipalities should be dumping raw sewage into our lakes, our rivers and our oceans.

This government is going to take action to phase these regulations in over the next 20 or 30 years. We are going to ensure we stand up and protect our water, something the previous Liberal government failed to do.

I hope the people of Parkdale—High Park will watch who is fighting for them. It is certainly not the members on that side of the House.

*Oral Questions***BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION LEGISLATION**

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' everything but the kitchen sink budget is yet another giant step away from the promise of transparency that those supposed reformists rode in on.

This Trojan horse is stuffed with all sorts of measures the government does not have the courage to present to Canadians as stand-alone bills. It is an abuse of power taken straight from the Liberal playbook, and it is an abuse of the trust of Canadians.

If the government has nothing to hide, why is it burying so many nefarious initiatives in one omnibus bill?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what type of initiatives she thinks we are trying to hide.

Would it be the \$500 million in transfer protection payments to the provinces? Would it be funding for organizations like Genome Canada, Pathways to Education Canada, or nefarious groups like the Rick Hansen Foundation? Would it be important reforms to protect federally regulated pensions and much more?

We presented a budget. I know the NDP members decided to vote against it before they even read it. We want Canadian families to get these benefits right away, and that is why we are working hard on their behalf.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess the minister's selective memory of what is in the budget is to be expected since it is over 880 pages long. In fact, that is my whole point.

Here are just a few of the items that should never have been in the budget. It gives the Minister of the Environment the power to eviscerate environmental assessments. It authorizes the fire sale of AECL with no checks or balances. It begins the deregulation of Canada Post. It puts the final stamp of approval on the government's theft of \$57 billion from the EI account, money that belongs to workers.

These provisions have no place in the budget bill. Will the government support the deletion of these sections and, if it must, reintroduce them as stand-alone bills?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, we will not.

The all-party House of Commons finance committee, chaired by the member for Edmonton—Leduc, who is doing a great job by the way, gave great scrutiny to this important piece of job-creating legislation, and the committee passed this budget bill without amendment. That is a committee that we have a minority on.

It shows there is all-party support for this great bill. Let us start creating more jobs. Let us start creating more opportunity. Let us get on with our economic action plan.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently Canadians were rightly shocked to hear of the sentencing in Malawi of a same-sex couple to 14 years of hard labour.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please inform the House what actions the government is taking to address this serious abuse of human rights?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has clearly spoken out against human rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation, both at home, as well as around the world. We strongly condemn the blatant violation of human rights, and of the promotion of freedom and the rule of law. Democracy is an integral part, as we know, of our foreign policy. Canada will continue to encourage its partners, including Malawi, to respect human rights and ensure equal protection under the law without discrimination.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after an employee complained of bad-tasting bottled water, tests by a private lab in Montreal found bacterial counts in Canadian bottled water to be more than 100 times the U.S. limit.

Then we found out that Health Canada does not have enforceable standards for bacteria in bottled water, while the U.S. does.

We know that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has few inspectors inspecting water bottling plants and that the government does not have a record of what its inspectors are doing.

Why was it necessary to have a private lab test bottled water on a whim to know we have a problem? Where was Health Canada? And why are we so behind the U.S. on this vital consumer safety issue?

● (1505)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have established high standards to ensure that bottled water sold in Canada does not pose a health and safety risk to Canadians. These standards include requirements for microbiological quality, composition, and product labelling as well. We continue to work with CFIA to ensure the safety of bottled water sold in Canada, and will take any actions required should the health and safety of Canadians be at risk.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the *New York Times* and UNICEF have added their voices to those Amnesty International and others to demand that Omar Khadr be treated as a child soldier.

Anthony Lake of UNICEF is even warning that the trial of Omar Khadr, who was arrested when he was 15, could set a dangerous international precedent for other child soldiers.

How can the government explain its stubbornness in ignoring treaties on the rights of children and refusing to repatriate Omar Khadr, the last westerner in Guantanamo?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of my colleague, I would like to remind members of the House that Mr. Khadr has been accused and the allegations against him include the tragic death of an American soldier. The American government is in charge of this file and the Americans will conduct the legal proceedings.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff, Minister of Enterprise, Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated and Minister Responsible for Trade of Saskatchewan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to ask the government House leader about the government's intentions regarding the parliamentary agenda in the days going forward.

Second, does the government have any new information or policies that it wishes to announce similar to the policy the government House leader announced earlier this week, to the effect that it would no longer allow political staffers of ministers to appear before committees when duly called by committees in accordance with the ruling laid out by the Speaker not that long ago on the Afghan detainee documents and the supremacy of Parliament? I am wondering if the government has more surprises on the policy front with regard to government accountability to Parliament through its committees, and the supremacy of Parliament and its committees in requiring persons, including ministers and political staffers and public servants, to appear.

I wonder if the government House leader would also address the issue of one of his members who was invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on a reference sent to it by the House of Commons regarding the breach of privilege of the member for Mount Royal and an NDP member by ten percenters sent into their ridings by a Conservative member. When the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs duly requested or invited that Conservative member to appear, the member declined to appear because, as a member of Parliament, under the rules of Parliament, he does not have to appear unless the House itself orders him to appear.

• (1510)

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): My first question, Mr. Speaker, would be to the Chair.

I am just wondering whether I would have equal time with the member.

Business of the House

The Speaker: A minister can have more; it depends how long his description of the business is going to be. We do not have time limits on this question or answer. The minister is well aware of that, I believe.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I am also well aware of the rules, and the rules for the Thursday question require a very succinct question about the upcoming agenda of the government, and the government House leader is supposed to be bound by those same rules as I understand them. On this side of the House at least, we always want to respect the rules of the House of Commons.

To be very brief in my response, I think I have answered that question repeatedly. We will not allow our political staff to be dragged before standing committees where the opposition coalition holds a majority of members and be subjected to the type of abuse we have seen. On behalf of those staff, I would point out that anyone who wants to research this issue can find it in the Hansard of the standing committees. Many of those meetings were televised. Members can see the type of abuse that opposition members of Parliament subjected those staff members to. Many of these staff members are very young people, oftentimes in their mid to late twenties. To be subjected to that type of abuse is completely shameful. It is intolerable and unacceptable. Our ministers will assume their responsibilities yet again and will be appearing at committees when there are questions to be asked of their departments and their staff. So I hope I have put that to rest.

On another issue I have raised a couple of times in question period, when it has come up, is the absolute hypocrisy of the Liberal Party in asking these types of questions of staff members and yet filibustering the government operations committee to prevent their own member of Parliament, the MP for Scarborough—Rouge River, from testifying and answering valid questions about his connection with a law firm that advertised on its website that the member could make “valuable contributions to [its] clients includ[ing] acting for foreign and offshore organizations in obtaining operating licenses, securing regulatory and governmental approvals for mergers and acquisitions, reviewing policies and conduct of Canadian Security Intelligence Services”—I repeat, “Security Intelligence Services”, Mr. Speaker—[and] advising bodies on international issues regarding cross border tax collection”. And it goes on and on about the services the member could provide in the form of lobbying. Yet the member was prevented from testifying today by the Liberal members on that committee, who wanted to filibuster.

This is a member of Parliament and it is the same standing committee that is supposedly looking into the alleged lobbying issues of a former member of Parliament, who has appeared at that committee and testified. At least he had the courage to do that, which is more than the member for Scarborough—Rouge River has done.

On the issue we are supposed to be discussing, the agenda looking forward to the next week of the House of Commons, today we will resume the debate on the report stage motions on Bill C-9, Jobs and Economic Growth Act. As we heard in question period, that is the much anticipated budget bill of the government.

This evening in committee of the whole, we will consider the estimates for the Department of National Defence.

Tomorrow will be an allotted day.

Routine Proceedings

Next week, if necessary, we will continue the debate on Bill C-9, followed by debate on Bill C-23, Eliminating Pardons for Serious Crimes Act. We will have as backup bills, Bill C-10, Constitution Act, 2010 (Senate term limits) and Bill S-2, Protecting Victims From Sex Offenders Act.

As I mentioned in reply to the Thursday question last week, Monday, May 31 has been designated as the day to consider the main estimates of the Department of Natural Resources in committee of the whole.

Finally, Tuesday, June 1, shall be an allotted day.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

• (1515)

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-522, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and respecting the Motor Vehicle Safety Regulations (student transport).

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to introduce my Boys in Red bill. The purpose of the bill is to prohibit the transportation of students in vehicles commonly known as 15-passenger vans. This enactment also requires the Governor in Council to make certain amendments to the Motor Vehicle Safety Regulations to limit the sale, importation and inter-provincial shipment of 15-passenger vans that are configured to transport more than one passenger.

[English]

I named this the Boys in Red bill in memory of the seven members of the Bathurst High School basketball team and their adult chaperone, who were travelling in a 15-passenger van and lost their lives in a road accident near Bathurst, New Brunswick in January 2008.

At this time, I would like to recognize Isabelle Hains, the mother of one of the students, who is on the Hill to see this bill introduced. Her work, along with the work of Mrs. Kelly and Mrs. Acevedo, two other mothers who lost their sons in the tragic Bathurst accident, has helped to ban these 15-passenger vans in New Brunswick.

This continues on. In British Columbia, another young man lost his life. These vans have been abolished in the United States.

I hope that I will receive the support of members of the House for my bill.

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

PETITIONS

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, genetically modified organisms have been the subject of great controversy and concern, and this concern has led to this petition.

The petitioners ask that the House forward the petition on to the ministry of health in order for it to look at the toxic, allogenic and less nutritional aspects of GMO modified organisms. The petitioners state that GMO crops could damage vulnerable wild plants and animal populations and harm biodiversity and could have other adverse impacts on our environment.

The petitioners are asking for an independent inquiry on the safety of genetically modified organisms. They are also asking if the government has clear evidence to show that GMO food is not a risk to humans or the environment.

Some 60 petitioners from the greater Toronto area have signed this petition. They are asking that it be referred on to the ministry of health and that consideration be given to the concerns that arise from the petition.

CAFFEINATED BEVERAGES

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first one, by dozens of Manitobans, is a call against Health Canada's authorization of caffeine in all soft drinks.

Health Canada announced on March 19, 2010, that beverage companies will now be allowed to add up to 75% of the caffeine allowed in the most highly caffeinated colas to all soft drinks.

Soft drinks have been designed and marketed toward children for generations. Canadians already have concerns over children drinking coffee and colas, and they acknowledge caffeine as an addictive stimulant. It is difficult enough for parents to control the amount of sugar, artificial sweeteners, and other additives that their children consume, including caffeine from colas.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to reverse Health Canada's new rule allowing caffeine in all soft drinks and not to follow the deregulation policies of the United States and other countries, and sacrifice the health of Canadian children and pregnant women.

• (1520)

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is also signed by dozens of Canadians and calls upon Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passenger bill of rights.

Routine Proceedings

Only in the last six months Barack Obama and his transportation secretary, Ray LaHood, have rocketed ahead of Canada by penalizing airlines for \$27,500 per passenger for tarmac delays of over three hours, and LaHood recently charged Southwest Airlines \$120,000 for overbooked flights.

It is time that a Canadian air passengers' bill of rights is brought into this Parliament. The bill should cover Canadian carriers anywhere they fly in the world. The bill should provide for compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and long tarmac delays. It should deal with late and misplaced baggage. It should require all-inclusive pricing by airlines in all their advertising.

Europe has had such laws now for over five years. A recent passenger recounted how much better treatment he received in Europe than in Canada, flying on the same Canadian airline.

The new rules have to be posted at airline counters, airline passengers have to be informed of their rights, and the process to file for compensation. If the airlines follow the rules, it will cost them nothing.

The petitioners call upon this government to introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

ELIMINATING PARDONS FOR SERIOUS CRIMES

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to rise once again to table a petition in regard to the ongoing requests that I am receiving from all across Canada from petitioners calling on changes to the pardons act. They are calling upon Parliament to prohibit the granting of pardons to convicted sexual offenders.

The government has already announced its intention to proceed with such changes, but petitions are continuing to pour in from all across the country because petitioners are concerned that the opposition will not choose to pass this. It will delay and stall the legislation, and they are very concerned about that.

I hope the opposition is listening. Thousands and thousands of Canadians from all across this country are calling upon just that.

FOREIGN TAKEOVERS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present today a petition signed by hundreds of people in the Timmins-Kirkland Lake region. It is apropos on a day when the United Steelworkers from Sudbury are here on the Hill, 11 months into a strike by the corporate bandit, Vale, which was able to buy one of the greatest mining companies in the world because of the failure of the government to do due diligence.

In particular, the petitioners are concerned about what happened with Xstrata. This month we have a thousand jobs being lost in Timmins. Our copper refining capacity in Ontario has disappeared. Our zinc refining capacity has disappeared.

The petitioners are calling on the industry minister, who should have been doing due diligence but instead was out hawking cleaning products for companies in his riding, doing commercials, to do due diligence on the foreign takeover.

Given the negligence of the government and the resulting damage that has been done to our base metals industry in Canada, the

petitioners are calling on the government to open up section 36 of the Foreign Investment Act, to make clear the secret deals that the minister has signed with companies like Xstrata and Vale, so that the public can know that the government is actually on their side, that the government actually has a vision for resource development in this industry and in this country.

We call our ministers to a higher standard to represent the interests of Canadians rather than hawking products and doing infomercials in their ridings.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of a number of Canadians. They are petitioning the House of Commons to ban asbestos in all its forms and issue a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities that they live in.

Asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known. This country remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos. In our own Parliament, we are taking asbestos out of the buildings, because of the deadly nature of asbestos, at a cost of many millions of dollars. It is banned for use in Canada, yet Canada continues to export asbestos to other countries of the world.

The petitioners are calling on Canada to end all government subsidies of asbestos, both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention. It is time Canada started acting with integrity on this issue. We banned it in this country for use. We should be banning the production and export of it. It is a deadly industrial product that has been known for many years to cause serious illness and death.

It is time Canada started acting on the principles, and took action to support and provide a just transition program for all asbestos workers and the communities that they live in. The key here is to ban the export of this deadly industrial killer and ensure that we do not contribute to deaths around the world.

* * *

● (1525)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 193 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 193—**Ms. Olivia Chow:**

With regard to the Toronto Port Authority (TPA), on a yearly basis and since its inception: (a) what amounts were incurred by the TPA on (i) public relations, (ii) lobbying; and (b) what is the breakdown of legal fees incurred by the TPA, with the justification for each amount spent, for (i) the TPA, (ii) senior executives, (iii) employees?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the Canada Marine Act, all port authorities, including the Toronto Port Authority, are autonomous entities under the strategic direction and management of its board of directors. The board has the authority to define hospitality and travel expense policies and to ensure compliance with these policies. The board has the authority to set contract amounts such as those for professional services.

Under subsection 37(1) of the Canada Marine Act, a port authority shall make available for inspection by the public, at its registered office during normal business hours at least thirty days before the annual meeting, its audited annual financial statements and those of its wholly-owned subsidiaries for the preceding fiscal year.

Subsection 37(2) of the act requires that the financial statements shall be prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and consist of at least the following:

- (a) a balance sheet;
- (b) a statement of retained earnings;
- (c) a statement of income and expenses; and
- (d) a statement of changes in financial position.

Furthermore, Subsection 37(3) of the act requires that the annual financial statements shall set out the total remuneration paid in money or in kind to each of the following persons in that year by the port authority or its wholly-owned subsidiary, including any fee, allowance or other benefit:

- (a) the directors;
- (b) the chief executive officer; and
- (c) the officers and employees whose remuneration exceeds a prescribed threshold.

The Toronto Port Authority has satisfied these requirements by making the information publicly available at their annual general meetings, as well as publishing statements from 2007 and 2008 on their website.

Should additional financial information related to the Toronto Port Authority be required, please contact the Toronto Port Authority at 60 Harbour Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5J 1B7.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 194, 196 and 197 and Starred Question No. 190 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 194—**Ms. Olivia Chow:**

With respect to government spending or contracts with Harbour 60 Steakhouse in Toronto by each department, agency, and crown corporation for the last ten years: (a) which have spent funds; (b) what were the amount of funds spent; (c) when were those funds spent; (d) who authorized payments; (e) which events included the use of funds for alcohol; (f) which events were linked to private business; and (g) which events were attended by lobbyists?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 196—**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:**

With regard to corporate taxation: (a) how many corporations in Canada paid no tax in each of the last ten years, (i) what were the names of these corporations, (ii) what were their combined revenues and profits in each of the last ten years; (b) how many corporations in Canada had an effective tax rate of less than ten percent in each of the last five years, (i) what were the names of these corporations, (ii) what were their combined revenues and profits in each of the last ten years; (c) what is the total amount of deferred corporate taxes for the last ten years; and (d) which corporations deferred more than \$1,000,000 and what were their combined revenues and profits in each of the last ten years?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 197—**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:**

With regard to poverty in First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations in Canada: (a) what has the poverty rate been in each of the last ten years by (i) province, (ii) age group, (iii) First Nations, (iv) status Indians, (v) non-status Indians, (vi) Métis, (vii) Inuit; (b) what are the goals for poverty reduction for each of these groups for the next (i) five years, (ii) 10 years, (iii) 20 years; (c) what are the leading indicators for tracking poverty; and (d) what has been the average household income in each of the last ten years by (i) province, (ii) age group, (iii) First Nations, (iv) status Indians, (v) non-status Indians, (vi) Métis, (vii) Inuit?

(Return tabled)

*Question No. 190—**Mr. Jack Harris:**

With regard to government of Canada interactions with the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS): (a) is the government aware of any allegations of torture or abuse by the NDS within Kandahar province since August 2005 and, if so, (i) what were the dates and locations of those allegations, (ii) what follow-up was done, (iii) what Canadian Forces or Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade investigations were carried out, (iv) what were the conclusions of those investigations, (v) is the government aware of any NDS investigations, (vi) what outcomes from NDS investigations were communicated back to the government; (b) have site visits been conducted on NDS facilities and, if so, (i) what date were they carried out, (ii) where were they carried out; and (c) did the government come to the assessment that "Canadian partnership in NDS projects without prior insight into its methods runs the risk of appearing to condone human rights abuses and acts which would be illegal under Canadian law" and, if so, when?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH ACT

The House resumed from May 26 consideration of Bill C-9, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: When the matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Skeena-Bulkley Valley had the floor. There are seven minutes left in the time allotted for his remarks. I therefore call upon the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately it is seven minutes. We are always in a deficit of time here, particularly when dealing with something as outrageous and undemocratic as what we have contained in these near 900 pages of Bill C-9.

I say undemocratic because within this Trojan Horse of a bill, the government has conspired to lump in just about everything it found to be too distasteful to see the light of day. Rather than have a fair debate about each of these important measures, and there are two or three that are actually laudable but the vast majority are not, the government has decided to make a Trojan Horse, an omnibus bill in which everything is crammed, and then point the gun of an election at the opposition to force a vote on something that probably many members in the official opposition, the Liberals, find distasteful as well, but will obviously cave into once the vote actually comes, because that has become a call-in response from the government almost since time immemorial. The government suggests something, the Liberal Party says that it does not like it, the government dares it to go to an election, and the Liberal Party gets out of the way as fast as it can and votes with the government again. It is a coalition by default and by any other name and function.

I will list for Canadians what is in this bill that we find so outrageous. One thing on the list is the sale of AECL. Yesterday 130 workers from AECL were here in Parliament, in the galleries watching the debate, demanding some sort of fairness. What struck me most in meeting with the workers after question period was how abandoned they felt by their government that would not even allow a fair and free democratic vote on the idea of selling their corporation. It is the largest crown corporation in Canada. It has received more money than any other crown corporation in history, some \$22 billion of Canadian taxpayer dollars. The legislation says that when the government seeks to sell it, it must bring it before Parliament in a separate bill.

What did the government do? It went around the rules and the legislation and rammed it into Bill C-9 so there can be no debate about the sale of AECL. There can be no bringing of witnesses to hear whether it is a good thing for Canadians or this is in fact a fire sale of a crown asset.

The government, of course, will not get that \$22 billion back. It will get far less, but maybe what is worse is that with no debate, no discussion and no evidence, the government presents nothing about the likely brain drain of the experts who work around AECL to

Government Orders

competitors who do not support the Candu reactor system. This was expressed clearly by the workers who were here recently. What are they going to do and who will do the upkeep on the Candus that Canada currently has on the books? That is just one piece of this outrageous and offensive bill.

Another piece of the bill is the raising of airport security taxes. This is from a government that says that it is into lowering taxes while at the same time it increases them. If raising taxes for the travelling public were not enough, it is also seeking to finish off the completion of the hated HST for Ontario and British Columbia, thereby putting it on any duties or any transactions that Canadians have when dealing with brokers. Buying mutual funds will now see further taxation from the government.

Is there any debate allowed about this? Is there any free and standing vote on this particular issue? Of course not, because it is a take-it-or-leave-it bill. It is 900 pages of a threat from the government, 900 pages saying to the Parliament of Canada and the people of Canada that if we do not like the idea of selling AECL without a debate, that is too bad for us, if we do not like an increase in taxes when buying a plane ticket, that is tough for us, and if we do not like the HST in Ontario or British Columbia, that is tough.

We see that type of political arrogance even within British Columbia right now. We are finding out today that every provincial riding in British Columbia have signed up enough citizens to a petition to revoke the HST. What is the arrogant response from the government and that in British Columbia? They do not care. They simply do not care about the functioning of democracy.

We have recall legislation in British Columbia that allows citizens to stand up, and it is a very high threshold, a very high bar to achieve, and British Columbians appear to be achieving it. Now that they have gone through all that work and all the volunteers out canvassing, and I am one of them who goes out and asks people to sign on, we find out that the government does not care about something called democracy, it does not care about representation and our voice mattering because it will ram the HST through anyway with no debate, no discussion, no voice for common people.

It has often been said that the best disinfectant is sunlight and we believe that to be very true when it comes to Bill C-9. We New Democrats have a proposition. With Democrat built right into our name, we like democracy. We like the idea of debate and free votes. We have said that we should take out the parts that need to be taken out and then have a debate about them. We implore other members in this House to see the wisdom of having a fair and free discussion on the elements of this bill.

● (1530)

Ramming everything it could think of into 900 pages of one bill and then making an election threat is not an accountable, transparent and humble government. That is a government that says that the will of the people matters little or not at all. That is disastrous, not just for the political fortunes of its party, which concerns me not, but for the fundamentals of how this place is meant to operate, which is that when we have a debate about something, we put it in legislation and bring it before the House. The government could do that with any of these pieces that it feels so proud of that it has to hide behind in Bill C-9.

Government Orders

We have simply said that, whether it comes to employment insurance, environmental protections, the National Energy Board, the airport tax, the HST and all of the other things rammed into this bill, the government must do the right thing and separate them out.

My last point is around the National Energy Board.

At a time when we are seeing a disaster taking place in the gulf, the President of the United States today saying that deregulation had failed them, that companies monitoring themselves was a bad idea, we see in Bill C-9 that the government is moving in the opposite direction, moving to more deregulation. It would give the Minister of the Environment the divine powers to decide what, if any, projects in the country get an environmental assessment at all. The minister can simply, by writ, decide that there is no environmental risk posed, in his or her own fictional or imaginary world, and, therefore, no environmental assessment happens.

We have learned that we need environmental protections, not just to save the environment but also to protect the communities and the economies on which we rely. This is not an economy versus environment debate and the government needs to realize that. It should allow the breakage of this bill, allow it to be separated so we can have a true and honest discussion, with witnesses and evidence, and allow the vote to stand freely and fairly. That is what a democratic government should do and that is what the government should do.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague really laid out for people back home what is so wrong with what is happening here. It is about the abuse of Parliament, the abuse of process and contempt for the systems that have been put in place in this Parliament going back right to the beginning. What we see time and time again with the government are the actions of the schoolyard bully, which is that it is the government's way or the highway. The Prime Minister has these tantrums if he does not get his way. We saw this when we were promised that we would have someone who would actually vet the appointments but the Prime Minister did not get his buddy, so he tore it up.

Now we see with this budget bill an absolute abuse of process where the Conservatives are trying to push through stuff that will help their friends in the oil industry by ripping up environmental regulations.

What does my hon. colleague think the opposition should be doing in order to stand up for the rights of parliamentarians and the rights of due process and to ensure a full study of some of these very controversial and bizarre plans that are hidden in the budget bill? What should we be doing, as Liberals, as Bloc and as New Democrats?

• (1535)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, what the opposition members should be doing is their job. Our job, when we see irresponsibility and an unaccountable government, is to stand up and oppose that on behalf of Canadians who sent us here to do this.

We saw the Liberals at committee sneak one of their members out the back door to ensure that the vote would pass to allow Bill C-9 to

come back to the House. We suspect that the same thing will happen here when the final vote on this outrageous bill comes.

We have seen this pattern of shutting down committees through the monkey-wrench manual the Conservatives produced. We saw it on the Afghan detainee documents. We saw it with the government's abuse of prorogation, shutting down the entire Parliament when questions arose that the government did not like.

Just the other day we finally had it confirmed where the Conservatives learned it from. They justified this bill, this outrageous abuse of democracy, by saying that the Liberals did it. They learned too well at the feet of the Liberals when they were in power and said that they did not like all the debate business, the discussions, the counterpoints and the views so they just rammed things through. That is not a lesson the Conservatives should have learned from the previous government and they should unlearn it quickly.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his presentation on Bill C-9, an 880 page omnibus bill, which is very rare in politics but not so rare when dealing with this particular Parliament and the present government.

While I do not agree with the nuclear option, the fact is that we have interests in nuclear development in Saskatchewan and in Ontario, and worldwide there is a big demand for nuclear power. Therefore, at a time when the future is looking rosy for the nuclear industry, why in the world would a government want to sell off the largest crown corporation in the country, a corporation in which we have invested \$22 billion in subsidies in its history? In some ways it seems like a repeat almost of the Avro Arrow of the Diefenbaker years.

I would like to know what the member's comments would be on those observations.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, here is the mismanagement of this particular industry by the government. We are aware of 120 new nuclear builds right now around the world and zero of them are coming to Canada and zero of them are being made by Canadian operations. That is 0 out of 120.

We would imagine that the government will address this bill this afternoon but I will make a prediction that it has no rationalization because it has presented no evidence and no reason to sell AECL right now and no reason to sell it this way. I will make a prediction that this afternoon, in the parliamentary secretary's speech, the government will continue to offer nothing to Canadians, nothing to the workers and nothing to those families who will be affected by this fire sale because it does not have any evidence. It does not have a process put in place to say that now is the best time to sell AECL for these following reasons: it studied it and asked around and this is the best deal for Canadians.

Government Orders

The government is doing it as a matter of convenience. The entire bill is about political expediency and convenience, ramming everything that it could not get individually through, put it all in one bill, hold up the threat of an election to the opposition and watch the Liberals cave again.

This is no way to run a country. It is undemocratic. If there is nothing more fundamental than that, I beg the government to reconsider the bill, break it up and allow us to have a debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to take part in this afternoon's debate on Bill C-9 concerning the government's budget.

We have amendments to part 24, which changes the Employment Insurance Act by establishing an account in the accounts of Canada to be known as the employment insurance operating account and closing the employment insurance account and removing it from the accounts of Canada. It also repeals sections 76 and 80 of that act and makes consequential amendments in relation to the creation of the new account. This part also makes technical amendments to clarify provisions of the Budget Implementation Act, 2008 and the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board Act that deal with the board.

As members will recall, in 1986, the Auditor General said that the employment insurance account should be integrated into the government's consolidated revenue fund. At the time, the government, companies and employees were contributing money to the employment insurance fund.

In 1988, after the employment insurance fund was integrated into the consolidated revenue fund, the Mulroney government started to chip away at employment insurance.

As I recall, that is when things started to change. Brian Mulroney's Conservative government was in power, and the Liberals were the official opposition. I remember that in 1989, in one of the papers—this is not the first time I have brought this up in the House—my predecessor, Doug Young, who was his party's employment insurance critic at the time, urged all New Brunswickers to fight changes to employment insurance because such changes would be disastrous for New Brunswick. That is why I said this is not the first time I have talked about this issue. I want to remind the House about the Liberals' attitude at the time.

In the spring of 1993—even at the end of winter that year—Jean Chrétien was the opposition leader. He then became prime minister. He sent a letter to a group of women in Rivière-du-Loup, Quebec, who were working to stop changes to employment insurance. As opposition leader, Jean Chrétien wrote that the government should not take action against victims, people and workers. He wrote that the government should focus on economic development. The country needed economic development to create jobs for people.

To everyone's great surprise, when the Liberals were elected in the fall of 1993, they continued along the same course. We cannot say they were any worse than the Conservatives because the Conservatives had begun employment insurance reform. We do not know how far they would have gone. The Liberals had taken over the ship. They had taken over the tiller and started focusing on

employment insurance. They also started thinking that what was in place was not so bad. Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney had agreed to the Auditor General's recommendation to put the money into the consolidated revenue fund. The Liberals realized that this gave them more money and that employment insurance contributions gave them more money.

The Conservative government had increased premiums to roughly \$3.08 or \$3.20 for every \$100 and the employer paid 1.3 or 1.5 times that amount. In other words, this represented roughly \$8. It was a cash cow.

● (1540)

Money was coming in and cuts were being made to employment insurance. The worst cuts came in 1996: the number of hours to qualify was increased to 910; 420 hours were required in areas where the unemployment rate was greater than 13%; new entrants had to accumulate 910 hours; 700 hours were required in areas with low unemployment; 700 hours were required for a person who was sick or disabled to be granted special leave; 700 hours were required for maternity and parental leave. So much money was flowing into the employment insurance fund that it could not be ignored. The federal government was running a \$565 billion deficit. It reduced the deficit by \$92 billion, \$57 billion of which came from the employment insurance fund.

Paul Martin, who was the finance minister at the time, told Canadians to tighten their belts to eliminate the deficit and pay down the debt. He robbed the employment insurance fund to pay down the debt and achieve a zero deficit.

At the time, the Conservatives, who make up the new Conservative government, condemned the theft from the employment insurance fund. Surprise, surprise, they returned to power in 2006 and this continued on into 2010. Now, they have presented Bill C-9, which is some 900 pages about the budget, and in which the government legalizes this theft from the employment insurance fund. That is what is going on here. By creating this new board, by creating a new fund and putting only \$2 billion in it, the government is legalizing the biggest national and federal theft in the history of Canada.

I am calling it a theft, because workers pay employment insurance premiums out of their paycheques as security in case they lose their jobs. It is not meant to be used to pay down the government's debt. Now, people are in need.

We have just been through a serious economic crisis. Some people have used up their employment insurance benefits and do not have a job. We could increase the number of benefit weeks. We could base the calculation on the best 12 weeks instead of the best 14 weeks. We could eliminate the divisor of 14, which would give the best 12 weeks. We could also increase benefits from 55% to 60%. We could give these workers a chance.

Government Orders

In other countries, like France, for example, workers receive 75% of their income. When I brought up the idea of increasing the amount people receive, when we asked the government to increase the number of weeks, all the Conservative government could think to say was that if we were to do that, people would work 10 weeks and would receive 52 weeks of employment insurance benefits. They would work only 360 hours and would receive EI the rest of the year. The Conservatives have no faith in Canadian workers. That is the problem. They have no faith in our fellow citizens.

I asked a member of the French national assembly if paying benefits of up to 75% of wages made people want to receive employment insurance benefits rather than work. His response was altogether different. He said that he truly believes in workers and citizens, and added that they are very hard-working and that they want to work. They pay into the employment insurance program, which protects them in the event they lose their jobs. He added that if these workers want to pay themselves a wage while they are unemployed, it is good for the economy and good for everyone. It is good for the regions and it is good for small and medium-sized businesses. When a citizen receives benefits, he does not take off the next morning for a sunny spot such as Florida.

• (1545)

Instead, he goes grocery shopping. He buys something, or pays his bills. It is good for our economy, for our local economy.

It is unfortunate to see that the government has included all sorts of things in Bill C-9. And the first thing it will say is that we voted against it, that we voted against the huge monster it has created. We cannot support this omnibus Bill C-9.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the points raised by my colleague. He said that this 888-page bill containing close to 3,000 clauses refers to a budget almost 500 pages long. On page 176, we see all the employment insurance contributions from businesses and workers, and on page 180 we see the employment insurance benefits that will be paid out to unemployed people. Nowhere in the 500 pages of the budget, the 888 pages of the bill or the 3,000 clauses do they do the math. They will steal \$19.2 billion over four years. That means that employers and employees will have contributed \$19.2 billion more than the amount of benefits paid out.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about this and how he would describe it. Is there a word that comes to mind to describe this move?

• (1550)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, only one word comes to mind: taking without asking is stealing. That is what is unfortunate. Workers, men and women who get up every morning, have built our country. They have families to support and they want to send their children to school, but poverty has reached the point where 1.4 million children in Canada are hungry. We do not need to go to Africa. Right here in Canada there are 1.4 million hungry children, while 800,000 people do not qualify for employment insurance. How can we vote for the budget this government is serving up?

What is sad is that the theft started in 1996 with the Liberals and today it will be sanctioned by the Liberals and the Conservatives. It is unfortunate to, once again, see the coalition between the

Conservatives and the Liberals, with its ties to Bay Street in Toronto. That is the problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-9 is an abuse of the public. The government is forcing through major changes without giving the public even a chance to sense what is happening. Nowhere is it clearer than with the \$57 billion that is being stolen from the EI fund.

The government cannot be honest with the public and neither can the Minister of Human Resources. When we asked the minister about her plan to shut down 15 of the 18 EI processing centres across Ontario, she could not even stand in the House and give an honest answer.

However, we know that Owen Sound, Orillia, Kenora, Belleville, North Bay, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Brantford, Etobicoke, Barrie, Peterborough, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, Thunder Bay, Kitchener and Oshawa centres are being closed. Why are they being closed? Because the government is stealing the money from EI. It is running out of money because it is giving \$1.7 billion in corporate tax cuts.

Why is the government unable to give an honest answer to Canadian workers? Why can the minister not stand in the House and explain what she is doing by robbing workers of access to EI, robbing them of the kind of processing for their EI claims, which they need at this time of recession?

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. Workers have always been the slaves of big industry. It is not the Conservative government that will support them. Workers pay into the programs so if they lose their jobs, they can get the money when they need it.

Other countries around the world look after their workers if they lose their jobs, especially if they pay into a program. In Canada our government takes the money and puts it toward the debt. It has had a deficit balance how many times because of the money from employment insurance. Of the \$92 billion paid down on the debt, \$57 billion came from the workers, from the hard-working men and women. The government took it away from them.

The only reason is because the Conservative government is reporting to Bay Street instead of reporting to the citizens of our country, the men and women who get up in the morning and do the work to build this good country in which we live. The government does not care about the workers. It has never cared about them. Instead it says that if it gives workers money, they will stay home.

The problem is the government has no respect for our workers, the men and women who get up in the morning and do the hard work.

Government Orders

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak against this ill-advised NDP motion, which is clearly a delaying tactic, and to speak for supporting jobs and Canada's economic recovery. Like my colleagues on the government side of the aisle, I am opposed to this motion.

I oppose this motion, because delaying or threatening to gut budget 2010 and the jobs and economic growth act would only threaten the economic security of Canadians. I oppose delaying over \$500 million in transfer protection payments to the provinces. I oppose delaying funding for organizations, such as the \$75 million for Genome Canada, the \$20 million for Pathways to Education Canada to provide support for disadvantaged youth, and the \$13.5 million for the Rick Hansen Foundation.

I oppose delaying important reforms to protect federally regulated pension plans, such as requiring an employer to fully fund benefits if the whole of a pension plan is terminated. I oppose delaying legislative authority to enforce the code of conduct for the debit and credit industry. I oppose delaying crucial tax changes to revitalize Canada's venture capital industry and much more.

I oppose delaying Canada's economic action plan. It is important that we stay the course and do what we must as legislators to ensure that we implement year two of Canada's economic action plan, as outlined in budget 2010, in a timely manner so as to best assist Canadians. Our government, through the jobs and economic growth act, is working to address the long-term opportunities and challenges our country will be confronting in the years ahead.

One of these key challenges is ensuring that our companies remain competitive in the global marketplace. We are determined to assist our hard-working manufacturers in meeting this objective. The jobs and economic growth act proposes to bring forward a series of economic measures to contribute to Canada's advantage now and in the future. One of these measures is the action we have taken to eliminate tariffs on manufacturing inputs, machinery, and equipment, which would make Canada a tariff-free zone for manufacturing.

Some have charged that the act is too ambitious, too large. However, if you were to carefully review the actual act, you would soon realize that because of the technical and legal requirements, the bold action to make Canada a tariff-free zone for manufacturing actually makes up over half of the act. In other words, half the pages in the jobs and economic growth act are the result of that one single measure.

Clearly, as suggested by its size, this measure has immense short-term and long-term benefits for our economy. This has been recognized by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, who were clear that in their view, budget 2010 and the jobs and economic growth act will help Canada's manufacturers and exporters compete. They said:

We worked with the government directly to reduce tariffs for manufacturing and I believe this is an important cost-savings mechanism for companies...[I]t is a bottom-line boost to cash flow for manufacturers at a time when it is needed the most.

By lowering production costs for manufacturing, this initiative increases the competitiveness of our manufacturers, which will help them better compete with foreign suppliers, both in Canada and

abroad. By reducing the cost of importing key factors of production, this measure also encourages innovation and allows businesses to enhance their stock of capital equipment. This is very important for improving productivity.

Equally important is the positive impact this measure is expected to have on employment. All in all, it is estimated that our move to make Canada a tariff-free zone for industrial manufacturers will create 12,000 new, good-quality jobs in the years ahead. This will certainly help strengthen our economy. That is why measures such as tariff elimination have been so widely applauded.

We have heard from business leaders, such as like Dani Reiss, CEO of that popular Arctic Canadian coat manufacturer, Canada Goose. He heralded it as "a great move" and said, "tariffs only made it more expensive to be a Canadian manufacturer. I think this move by the government will make 'Made in Canada' viable for more apparel companies".

However, the jobs and economic growth act does so much more. For instance, the targeted measures include the provisions in part 7 and part 8 of the bill that are part of budget 2010's actions for containing growth in government spending and ensuring that the government lives within its means. In particular, part 7 implements the budget 2010 commitment to freeze the salaries of the Prime Minister, ministers, members of Parliament, and senators for the 2010 through 2013 fiscal years.

● (1555)

By putting forward the salary freeze for the Prime Minister, ministers, MPs, and senators, the government is leading by example in budget 2010.

This initiative has been welcomed by Canadians. The opposition has also reacted positively to the proposed salary freeze, at least initially.

Before concluding, let me directly address those who have been critical of the jobs and economic growth act. They seem to have randomly pointed to select measures and for singularly political reasons have deemed them unnecessary. They would, it seems, delay or defeat the act to prevent these measures from going forward.

Many of these individuals, spurred on by vested interests, have used as their partisan punching bag the provisions that would allow competition in the outgoing international-mail marketplace. This is a measure that we know will directly save thousands of Canadian jobs. I ask those individuals to put partisanship aside and read the frank testimony the finance committee heard from a witness who spoke on this measure, a witness who pointed out that this competition has already been occurring for decades.

Barry Sikora is a small businessman from British Columbia. Mr. Sikora has been involved in the international mail industry for over 30 years. He has been employing people for over 30 years and contributing to his community for over 30 years. He was that witness, and he had a simple message: pass this act. In his own words, and I quote, he said:

Government Orders

...[M]y company employed 31 people. We're not a huge corporation; we're an average business in the printing industry. Now, because of this situation, we're down to 17 employees. Many of our customers have left us...[and] they have taken their business to another country. They have forced our industry to lay off long-time employees, and that's not a pleasant thing to do...Already we've lost a significant amount of business. We're hoping that it will come back, but...if this [act] doesn't pass, I'm out of business.

For those individuals who are spurred on by vested interests and their ideological, procedural, and partisan narrow casting, remember Mr. Sikora and the Canadians he employs and the Canadian jobs he would like to add. Think about those jobs lost and the families impacted if we delay or defeat this act.

Clearly, Canadians are looking to all members of this House to take action to support jobs and economic growth. We cannot afford to delay the implementation of budget 2010.

This motion by the NDP is simply a tactic to delay House consideration of measures that are urgently needed to ensure that Canada's economic recovery continues. That is why the government does not support the motion. Instead, we will continue to work with the opposition to ensure that this act is adopted by Parliament as quickly as possible for the benefit of all Canadians.

I therefore call on all members of this House to oppose this motion.

• (1600)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it hard to believe that the member could actually make that speech with a straight face.

The reality is that we have no objection to the government introducing its budget implementation bill. However, we object to the government introducing an 880-page omnibus bill that goes way, way beyond budget implementation.

It throws in a privatization process involving the post office that it could not get through in the last two years under two successive bills. The government knows that it cannot get it through, so it throws it into the budget implementation bill knowing that the Liberals have no choice but to adopt the whole bill.

The government has just thrown a whole hodge-podge of things into this bill to try to force it through on the threat of an election. That is totally unfair.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, the government is acting to save thousands of Canadian jobs by enabling competition within the outgoing international-mail marketplace. Canadian businesses will have more choice and opportunity for their outbound international mail if this legislation passes.

What we are really talking about today is delaying implementation of key elements of budget 2010, a budget designed to stimulate the economy and create jobs so that Canadians can go back to work.

The jobs and economic growth act is a testament to the proactive and ambitious actions our Conservative government has taken to ensure that Canada was not only protected from the worst of the global economic storm but will lead the global economic recovery.

The NDP claims to try to help workers, but has failed to give any suggestions or a plan to get more people back to work or create jobs.

That is what year two of Canada's economic action plan is about: helping Canadians emerge from economic hardship.

Instead of helping workers, the NDP is too busy playing political games. It is delaying the implementation of a bill designed to help Canadians and continue the fragile recovery that is already taking place.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised to hear the Conservative member talking about this issue. When we discussed it in committee with the businessman he just quoted, it was pointed out that this had absolutely nothing to do with the budget. It should have been discussed in the appropriate standing committee, where interested parties with the appropriate expertise could have asked questions. We had only a few hours to review 888 pages or around 3,000 clauses.

I really have to wonder why this member suddenly feels like this concerns him, because I do not recall him showing any interest in this matter at the Standing Committee on Finance.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I remind my hon. colleague that this bill passed through committee unamended.

Here are some of the provisions the NDP members are delaying with their political games: eliminating tariffs on manufacturing imports of machinery and equipment; narrowing the definition of taxable Canadian property; implementing important changes to strengthen federally regulated private pension plans; implementing the one-time transfer protection payment to the provinces; regulating national payment card networks and their operators; enabling credit unions to incorporate federally and to act as banks; stimulating the mining industry by extending the mineral exploration credit; creating greater fairness between single-parent and two-parent families with respect to claiming universal child care benefits; and implementing an enhanced stamping regime for tobacco products to deter contraband.

These are just some of the wonderful things in this budget bill. I ask the opposition members to get together and pass it so that we can get Canadians back to work and on track.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on the budget implementation bill at report stage.

[*English*]

I will try to keep my remarks focused on the first group of amendments proposed here today and yesterday.

Government Orders

As the vice-chairman of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, I have gone through the bill. I have heard testimony from expert witnesses on the bill. I have spoken to Canadians from all walks of life about the implications of the bill, and I have debated the merits of the bill with my colleagues.

One theme keeps surfacing over and over again: the lack of direction of the bill.

It is indicative of the fact that this Conservative government has no vision for Canada going forward.

[*Translation*]

The bill lacks vision and ambition, and shows a clear distaste for what a government can and must do to help its citizens and the country prepare for an uncertain future.

[*English*]

Also, the bill is so massive that it makes a mockery of the budget process and is a direct attack on our ability as parliamentarians to perform our due diligence.

There are countless items included in the bill that should be tabled in separate legislation so that MPs can properly study them and arrive at informed decisions about them.

The only reason I can think of to explain why the Conservatives have chosen to produce such a bulky and incoherent bill is that the Conservative government does not want us to be able to honestly and effectively debate in the open, because it obviously has something to hide.

This is the reason we are here at report stage having to debate all these extras piece by piece instead of in separate bills. One of those extra pieces that should be separated is the amendment to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, one of our most important pieces of environmental legislation. It is being gutted by the budget bill. It gives the environment minister unilateral power to avoid doing detailed environmental assessments on large projects by breaking the projects up into smaller pieces. The minister can establish the scope of the environmental assessment as broadly or as narrowly as he or she sees fit, whereas current legislation provides for public consultation.

This is a trend that occurs far too often with the government. There is no public input, no parliamentary oversight, and all decisions are made under a shroud of secrecy so it can advance its secret, hidden agenda.

[*Translation*]

Incidentally, the Supreme Court has already ruled on the matter of the Red Chris project, which involved allegations that the government had broken the law by giving the Minister of the Environment and any other responsible authority the power to change projects as they saw fit, without taking into account developers' proposals.

Furthermore, for the second year in a row, the government is using the budget implementation bill to weaken environmental laws. These amendments have nothing to do with the budget implementation. They constitute a direct attack on Parliament.

● (1610)

[*English*]

Another item in the report stage amendments is the increase in the airport travellers security tax. The problem here is that while this airport tax probably belongs in the budget, the fact the government is not calling it a tax probably means that it should not be included.

We are told that the fee is to cover the costs of purchasing new high-tech scanners. If this is the case, then it would not be asking too much to request that such a tax dedicated for a specific purpose be separated from general revenues. Instead, the moneys collected are going to go directly into the general revenues of the government and are therefore considered a tax increase.

However, when we ask how the amount of the tax to be levied was determined, we get no studies or facts to back up the request. No evidence is provided to prove that the costs will be offset by the additional tax or, vice versa, that the revenues from this new tax will offset the additional costs. This is what we call a hidden tax increase, which is why the Tourism Industry Association of Canada is against this tax.

Tourism is already down in every region of the country, and this tax would further dissuade people from travelling to and from Canada. Canadian airport authorities are already complaining that they are losing passengers, who are choosing to fly out of U.S. destinations. While Canada is struggling with its productivity, airports and travellers will be stuck paying more, while in the U.S. the government pays for airport security directly from its general revenues.

[*Translation*]

Another aspect of this bill that should be separate is the fact that this bill will close the former employment insurance account and change some of the provisions dealing with the new employment insurance financing board.

[*English*]

In other words, the government appoints a board to establish employment insurance rates, and then in typical Conservative fashion, the board is not consulted and the government does what it wants anyway in setting the EI rate, as we saw in the budget. The finance minister has already booked the revenues from the EI premiums using the maximum rate increases allowable, that is, 15¢ per \$100 of wages of the employees and an additional tax of 21¢ per \$100 of wages paid by employers.

Those who will be most affected by this tax increase will be small and medium size businesses and any worker out there. Not only is this tax increase permanent, but it will also increase exponentially every single year.

[*Translation*]

This bill does not address the need to create jobs now. Instead, it basically provides a framework for the Conservatives to raise employment insurance premiums by 35%.

Government Orders

[English]

After four years, an extra \$6 billion a year in revenues will be collected from a source that cannot afford to be taxed any more: the everyday hard-working Canadian.

Again, here we are. As I have said in the past, everything this government does is based on no public input, no parliamentary oversight, and all decisions are made under a shroud of secrecy to advance the government's secret and hidden agenda. This is unacceptable.

At a time when Canadians are demanding more openness and transparency from elected officials, the government has tabled a budget that is so bloated and incoherent that ordinary Canadians cannot possibly be expected to determine whether this budget actually addresses their needs. In order to meet the needs and expectations of Canadians, it is critical that we take stock of where we stand.

[Translation]

We do not really see how this budget will make Canada more competitive and more prosperous, or better prepare it to create jobs or protect workers' pensions. Budget 2010 is a failure not only because it does not prepare Canada for the challenges that lie ahead in the short and medium term, but also because it ignores their very existence.

[English]

When Canadians and parliamentarians are distracted from the real budget numbers, we forget to ask questions about these numbers, but we need to look at them because, after all, this is a budget bill and the numbers put forward by the minister in this budget do not look good. This budget will cost Canadians \$238 billion this year alone and add \$24 billion to our national debt. These numbers are troubling, but the government will try to argue that short-term pain is necessary to achieve long-term gain. The problem is that its long-term projections are even more troubling. This budget will add over \$100 billion to our national debt over the next five years.

I cannot, in good conscience, vote in favour of this budget because it spends too much and achieves too little, and because critical areas of concern have gone completely unaddressed while others have been covertly attacked because they do not fall into line with the government's radical right-wing ideology. I cannot vote in favour of this budget because it does nothing to get Canadians back to work, does nothing to protect the jobs that still exist, and does nothing to position Canada to succeed in the future.

Ultimately, I cannot vote in favour of this budget because I love Canada and this budget is bad for Canada.

• (1615)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member what he thinks about the \$57 billion the government is taking from the pockets of working women and men of this country, something this government is now rubber stamping via this budget.

I would like to know what the hon. member thinks about this \$57 billion the government is spending.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

When the Liberals were in power, they obviously made sure that we were in a healthy position. The money was always put aside and properly accounted for, and now the government is turning around and trying to hide it.

Actually, it is very easy to determine what happened to the money. The Conservatives took the money and spent it last year. They spent \$57 billion just last year, so the hon. member could ask them where the money is. They have answers for the hon. member.

The money was not only taken from individuals but was also taken from small businesses and medium size businesses. That money belongs to Canadians.

Tell the Conservatives to give it back.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 1995, when, in the midst of an economic recession, the Liberals started pillaging the employment insurance fund—if not stealing—they created a sort of precedent by reducing the number of benefits and access to employment insurance. Then, they just took the money that belonged to the unemployed and used it to pay down the deficit. The Conservatives picked up where the Liberals left off.

I would ask our hon. colleague what the Liberals will do if they take power. Will they give back the money they took from the unemployed, or will they turn a blind eye and keep on pillaging the EI fund just as they used to do?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc colleague for that very good question. I also want to thank him for the support the Bloc gave us during the recession, when we had to make some very hard choices.

He sees that the Conservative government is incapable of managing public funds. When the Liberal government was in power during the recession, money was invested in labour and in job re-entry and other programs. When the recession ended, there was still a surplus, which was always accounted for. What will this budget do? It will wipe the money from the books, and we will lose our oversight.

When we take power, we will decide what we are going to do. But I can say that we will not steal money, as the Conservatives have been doing for two years.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member to comment on the tax increases the government is bringing in on the security fees paid by air travellers. We are talking about a 50% increase. This is coming from a government that prides itself on lowering taxes, on reducing corporate taxes to 15%, and here it is hitting Canadian travellers with 50% increases.

• (1620)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, the government does not decrease taxes. The government has been the highest spending government year after year in the last four years. Never in the history of Canada has any government spent so much money as this government has.

Government Orders

The Conservatives are finding ways to increase taxes. The air travellers tax is a tax. The hon. member need not ask me how to substantiate it. We asked the witnesses who came before committee about this, but no one was able to present a single fact on how they came to that number.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, just now I heard a common refrain. I would have liked to have asked the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, whose riding is next to mine, a question. I was thrilled by my Liberal neighbour, who ended his speech by stating that he will vote against it for such and such a reason. I am certain that he will be there to vote against this bill. I did not have time to ask him why all members of his party will not be there to vote against this bill. He tells me they will be there. I hope they will have the courage to show up and to do as Bloc members do, to stand up and tell the House what they think. I have a great deal of respect for my colleague who is vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Finance, as am I.

As for the amendments proposed by our colleague from Outremont and his party, I take this opportunity to denounce Bill C-9 as unparliamentary. I had the honour of serving my fellow citizens at the National Assembly of Quebec fifteen years ago. Adopting budgets, presenting amendments, sitting on parliamentary committees is all part of the British tradition of the National Assembly and of this Parliament.

There used to be two major speeches in a parliamentary year: the throne speech and the budget speech. The budget speech was read and then there would be a myriad of laws sponsored by the Department of Revenue, Natural Resources and other laws that implemented what the finance minister had set out in his budget speech. There might be a specific bill to increase or decrease the sales tax. Or a bill to create a business tax, or various taxes, charges, and other economic measures. That was done properly by parliament, bill after bill, parliamentary committee after parliamentary committee. There was time to address questions to public servants, heads of crown corporations or ministers such as the Minister of Revenue, the Minister of Energy, and ministers with this type of expertise.

Today, we are dealing with an omnibus bill. There are thousands of clauses in its 887 pages. They have thrown in everything, including the kitchen sink. This bill contains items that were not even mentioned in the budget speech. We have never seen them. They have appeared from nowhere and suddenly are found in the budget implementation bill.

Some changes were proposed by the NDP. It would delete part 3 because it does not agree with this section that increases the air travellers security charge. There is an increase in the charge. This government says it never increases taxes, but there are proposals and parts of legislation that mention increasing charges. The Conservatives are either naive or incompetent. I will leave that up to them. This charge is for “air travellers security”. However, there is no travellers protection fund. The government will take the money and put it in the consolidated revenue fund. If money is ever needed for traveller protection, it will just be taken from the fund and given to whoever needs it. I fail to see how one equates with the other.

● (1625)

It is the same as with other parts. There are motions to delete part 24, which amends the Employment Insurance Act. Our colleague from Acadie—Bathurst gave a very fine speech on this. I asked him some questions and his answers were clear and to the point. He said that this was stealing—those are his words—and I agree with him. Again, what is the government doing? It is increasing the costs and shifting the burden to the employers and employees, and decreasing benefits as much as possible. But its bottom line does not suffer. These proposed amendments should be referred to a standing committee that is equipped to study these types of issues.

Then there is an amendment to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, which includes an exception for federally funded infrastructure projects. That is quite a mouthful and nothing is very clear. All this was included in an omnibus bill.

Let us not forget the National Energy Board. What does this have to do with the Standing Committee on Finance or with a budget bill? That is why we agree with the NDP that these practically unreadable parts of the bill should be deleted.

The Speaker ruled that we would study the bill in two parts because the other two parts deal with Canada Post and Atomic Energy Canada, two crown corporations that are unrelated to program budgets, revenues, taxes and charges. However, we will look at this later and we will say that we are in favour of removing this type of thing because it is unrelated.

I listened closely to the Conservative members opposite who came to oppose deleting certain parts, as the NDP is proposing. I have seen these members a bit in the House, but I have never seen them at the Standing Committee on Finance. Where were they? I do not know.

Parliamentary functions need to be taken seriously. We have to know what we are talking about. We cannot come here and read a speech that we have never seen before that was written by someone else. We have to have the confidence to state our opinions because we are competent enough to do so.

What we have seen today is shameful from a parliamentary standpoint. Members are reading speeches and quoting people. They quoted someone today that they have never seen or heard because they were not at the Standing Committee on Finance. But we were there. We were forced to study the issue when we felt that it should have been studied elsewhere.

The Bloc Québécois, which continues to work hard to defend Quebec's interests and to do its parliamentary job well, will vote in favour of the amendments put forward by the NDP. Once again, I hope that all of the Liberal Party members will hear the heartfelt appeal from the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel and will vote against this infamous budget.

Government Orders

• (1630)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. Bloc Québécois member regarding the \$57 billion that will disappear from the budget, if it passes. We could use that \$57 billion to help many people get out of poverty, including seniors, young people who are still in school and are hungry, and parents who are unemployed and cannot receive EI benefits because there is not enough money in the EI fund. I would like to hear the hon. Bloc Québécois member's thoughts on this.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, it can be difficult for people to grasp the meaning of billions of dollars, since it is such an astronomical amount. One billion dollars is the equivalent of \$1 million for every work day, five days a week, 50 weeks a year, for four years. And that is just \$1 billion.

Now imagine \$57 billion. The Conservatives are going to steal \$19.2 billion from Quebec and Canadian workers and businesses. Today we heard about the \$1 billion that is going to be spent on security for the G8 and G20 meetings, for just 72 hours. How much is that? That equals \$14 million an hour. Who in this House earns \$14 million an hour? No one. Who spends \$14 million an hour? The Conservatives.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question. I congratulate him on his excellent speech. He has been our finance critic since he joined us, and he is doing an excellent job.

Naturally, I find it shameful that the government has plundered the employment insurance fund, but at the same time, since 2004, when I became an MP, both the Liberals and the Conservatives have opposed bills that would improve the employment insurance system. They have opposed giving workers access to EI after 360 hours of work, and they have opposed eliminating the waiting period. While the government is stealing billions of dollars from the unemployed, it is denying them access to EI and refusing to improve the system. I think it is a real shame, and I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. Let us imagine that for the next four years, the surplus in the employment insurance fund, the money that comes from the pockets of employers and employees, will be around \$400 million.

Add that to the \$3.8 billion, and we have \$4.2 billion. If we add that \$4.2 billion to the \$6.8 billion, we have \$11 billion. Then, if we add \$8.2 billion, the total is \$19.2 billion. They got embarrassed and stopped there.

Imagine what we could do with that kind of money. Think about the waiting period. Workers are being told that they have lost their job, that there is no more overtime and that they have been the victims of cutbacks. A worker loses his job and we no longer have faith in him. He will have to live two weeks without an income. Absolutely nothing. Then, it can take a long time for the first cheque to arrive. We see that in our ridings, but they do not see that. It would be great to dream a bit and to imagine that this government could one day decide to be more social-minded and more supportive of the least fortunate. It has the money to do so.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a particular interest in taking part in the debate today on Bill

C-9 at report stage and the amendments that have been proposed. This bill would implement various initiatives the Conservative government included in its March 4 budget.

As many of my Bloc Québécois colleagues have already said, we are opposed to this bill for many reasons.

The measures in this budget do not meet Quebecers' needs. None of the major priorities of our region and Quebec as a whole—improving employment insurance and the guaranteed income supplement, helping our manufacturing and forestry industries, harmonizing the QST with the GST and introducing a real plan to help the furniture industry, which is going through its share of problems—is addressed in this budget.

We also oppose Bill C-9 because it is blatantly undemocratic. It is an omnibus bill, as a number of speakers have pointed out. It includes the privatization of Canada Post, for example, and measures that have nothing to do with a budget. Our finance critic mentioned that in his speech. The bill contains a number of things that have never even been discussed by the Standing Committee on Finance.

The government is trying to put measures in the bill that the House would not approve otherwise. The Conservatives know that the Liberals, who are weak politically, will support them. The Conservatives will be able to implement these measures and ram them down Quebecers' and Canadians' throats.

Among the many amendments we are discussing today, I would like to talk about part 24 of Bill C-9.

This part closes the separate Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board's account and opens a new account called the employment insurance operating account. It eliminates, once and for all, the surplus accumulated thanks to unemployed workers who kept contributing as the government tightened access to employment insurance. Employers and employees contributed over \$57 billion to the employment insurance fund. This omnibus bill eliminates for all time the accumulated surplus and starts over at zero. That is a real shame.

Once again, we proposed numerous initiatives to support unemployed workers, from eliminating the waiting period to improving the system. At the height of the economic crisis, 50% of the population did not even have access to EI. During that time, huge surpluses were building up in the employment insurance fund. This theft from the people of Canada and Quebec is sanctioned in Bill C-9, an omnibus bill.

Unemployed workers do not have access to employment insurance, and the government got billions of dollars out of them to finance other measures. Those workers paid taxes. They contributed to the government's treasury. That same government found another way to attack the poorest members of society by stealing money from the employment insurance fund.

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•(1635)

As I explained, the government wants the middle class and workers to foot the bill for the deficit, while banks, oil companies and the rich get off scot free. It gives tax breaks to banks that hide huge amounts of money in tax shelters. It gives tax breaks to oil companies and, as we know, it supported the auto industry while neglecting Quebec's unemployed workers and its forestry and manufacturing industries.

Unfortunately, the budget implementation act officially sanctions the federal government's embezzlement of money from the employment insurance fund, which started when the Liberal Party was in power in the 1990s. Embezzlement is exactly what it was. The government took money held in reserve for unemployed workers, money contributed by employers and employees, and put it in another fund to be spent elsewhere. That is what I call embezzlement. Over the course of 14 years, they stole \$57 billion. That is shameful. I am appalled.

Since 2004, the Bloc Québécois has been fighting here in this House to improve the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. That is another example of how the government stealing money, from seniors in that case. They have taken money from the unemployed. They refused to improve the employment insurance program. They have refused to use the guaranteed income supplement to support the seniors who did not receive this supplement for a number of years. Those seniors are not being reimbursed. The government always manages to support the banks and the rich to the detriment of the poorest in our society. That is what is happening in this House and it is shameful.

It is as though the 14 years of misappropriation never happened, thanks to this omnibus legislation. The debt is erased. They took \$57 billion from the unemployed and now they turn the page. They act as though nothing happened. It is shameful. It is like a magic trick. We know that the Liberals' weakness means that they will vote with the Conservatives and support this bill. But they will still have to live with their guilt because they also dipped into the fund. The Liberals and Conservatives will erase it all in the hope that people will have forgotten in a couple of years. But the Bloc Québécois will not forget. We will continue to denounce this Conservative government manoeuvre, which was supported by the Liberals, to misappropriate money from the employment insurance fund.

It is unbelievable if you think about it. They want to pretend the misappropriation of \$57 billion never happened and on top of that, help themselves to more money in the future, because the EI fund is accumulating another surplus with employers' and employees' premiums. Additional surpluses of \$19 billion are expected for the next three years. With that money alone, we could resolve the issue of the two-week waiting period for unemployed workers. In my riding, over 4,000 people have signed a petition on this issue, calling on the government to eliminate the two-week waiting period. We could improve the employment insurance system and make it more accessible for all workers.

But, no, what we see here instead is more of the same old story. The government stole \$57 billion from unemployed workers. It is going to help itself to another \$19 billion from them over the next few years and will do nothing to improve the employment insurance

system to allow workers to live more comfortably in a difficult situation, because many workers are losing their jobs. The government is still misappropriating money from the fund.

The Bloc Québécois would like the government to present a plan to pay back the money it misappropriated from the EI fund.

•(1640)

We call on the government to improve the employment insurance system, help unemployed workers and stimulate the economy. If we help the unemployed, people who are temporarily out of work could continue buying goods, paying their rent or mortgage and making car payments. They could continue paying their bills and supporting their families. This is good for the economy, for families and for many other things.

•(1645)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, the Budget; the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, Justice; the hon. member for Labrador, Vale Inco.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend for his presentation today on Bill C-9. In Canada the banks made \$15.9 billion in 2009. We have a government that is bent on reducing corporate taxation to as low as 15% over the next three years. And all the while that has been happening, the bank presidents are earning as high as \$10.4 million a year. While this is going on, we have in this omnibus bill increases to the air security tax, which is going to be paid by all Canadians. Those airport security taxes are going up by 50% making them and Canada the highest tax jurisdiction in the world, exceeding Holland which was the highest up until last year.

Would the member comment on how it is the government can get away with saying it is reducing taxes when it is actually increasing taxes for the vast majority of Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will answer part of the questions raised by my colleague from the NDP. We know that the banks have amassed enormous surpluses. I mentioned that in my speech. We have even heard of banks that use tax havens. There are bankers who earn enormous salaries to the tune of \$3 million, \$4 million, \$5 million, \$6 million or even \$7 million a year. There are people who leave those banks with a pension of between \$500,000 and \$600,000. And then there is the employment insurance fund.

People today no longer trust their institutions. That is serious. When we see a poor worker lose his job and see that the government is not supporting the company, or when an unemployed person opens the paper and sees that these bankers are pocketing huge profits, we understand where this lack of trust is coming from. The government is giving these bankers tax relief to boot. People end up no longer having any confidence in these institutions.

Government Orders

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, who is doing an excellent job. Bill C-9 has a full chapter on Canada Post and the removal of its exclusive privilege over letters for delivery outside Canada.

The president of Canada Post, who I just heard is leaving her job, told the committee that, in 2007, Canada Post lost \$80 million because of these businesses. They were freely dipping into and encroaching on the exclusive privilege of Canada Post, even though they did not have the right. We can only imagine the massive amounts of money that Canada Post will lose if this bill passes.

I know that my colleague is very sensitive to the loss in revenues for Canada Post, because lost revenues lead to lost services. In rural regions, like my riding and the communities my colleague serves, there are concerns. Is my colleague worried about this bill that puts an end to Canada Post's exclusive privilege over international mail?

• (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé only has time for a brief response.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

The government is actually privatizing part of Canada Post in a so-called budget implementation bill. This budget contains a measure regarding Canada Post that should not be there.

International mail is Canada Post's cash cow. The Canada Post Corporation is losing money, and the government is giving the profits to the private sector and the losses to the public sector. Cuts are often made in rural areas and not in major centres. In recent years, a number of post offices have been closed—

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise again to speak to Bill C-9. The bill has now come out of committee and our party has had to introduce several motions to attempt to make deletions to the bill. The bill is so massive, at 880 pages, it must be a record, certainly by weight.

We have 60 some motions covered by these resolutions. The other members who have spoken today have essentially explained how and why the bill has come to us the way it has. It has been quite a number of years since I can recall a similar approach being taken by a government, which takes me back to 1889-90 in a minority government in Manitoba when the Filmon Conservatives did similar omnibus bills over a two year period, I believe. Not only did we have the budget implementation measures put into a bill, but we had extra items thrown in. One was the privatization of a business in Brandon that had absolutely nothing to do with the bill at hand.

If we fast forward to the present, this is the type of frustration with which the members of the House are dealing. The government has taken not only the budget implementation act, which we all agree is something that should be dealt with, but it has thrown in many extra measures, which rightly belong as separate legislation.

The best example of this is the issue of the Canada Post remailers. The government over the last two years, or perhaps longer, has attempted to get Bill C-14 and Bill C-44 through Parliament, which would remove Canada Post's legal monopoly on outgoing international letters. This is the thin edge of the wedge to start to privatize Canada Post.

The government introduced that bill as two separate bill numbers in past years, brought it into a minority Parliament and found the opposition so strong that it could not get it through. Therefore, the government has taken that legislation and added into this omnibus bill.

The government has added in the sale of AECL, which the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has rightfully pointed out has cost the Canadian taxpayers perhaps \$22 billion in subsidies over its history. At the present time, nuclear looks like it is making a comeback. As the member indicated, we are looking at perhaps 120 new nuclear builds around the world. What the government is attempting to do is sell off this crown corporation, probably at fire sale rates and probably to foreign investors and American investors. They will then buy an asset, at a fire sale price, paid for by the Canadian taxpayer and will make a success of the company by building nuclear plants around the world.

This is what is being suggested. The fact is this element of Bill C-9 does not belong there. This is rightfully a subject for a different bill, a different day and a totally different subject for debate.

We want the Canadian people to understand what is going on here. A government that cannot get its way one way simply circumvents the process and attempts to bring it in through an omnibus bill.

• (1655)

After the second prorogation of the House, the opposition parties attempted to bring in motions and resolutions to put some qualifications on any future prorogations by the Prime Minister. It is high time the House adopt some rules on when the Prime Minister can prorogue the House.

Likewise, there should be some attempt made by parties to come up with some guidelines that the government should be able to follow for budget implementation legislation such as this. An independent panel of people, or an independent group of people, or any of our constituents, and I think my colleague, the member for Sudbury, would probably agree with me, will know the difference between what should be in a budget implementation bill and what is in this 880-page omnibus bill.

The privatization of Canada Post and the selling of AECL have absolutely nothing to do with traditional budget implementation. We only have to look at the environmental assessment issues. Our member from Edmonton spoke to this yesterday. The government is weakening the environmental assessment regulations. Once again, if it cannot get something through the House, it goes around to the back door.

It would take hours to deal with all of the issues in the bill, but I will talk for a couple of minutes about the taxation policy of the government. The government is reducing taxes on corporations, particularly on the banks. It is reducing the corporate tax rate to 15% at a time when it is already lower than the United States. It is doing it at a time when the banks made \$15 billion in 2009. It is doing it at a time when the presidents of those banks made up to \$10 million a year.

We have the highest paid CEOs in Canada. Gordon Nixon of the Royal Bank and Edmund Clark of the Toronto-Dominion Bank were granted about \$10.4 million in 2009. The CEO of CIBC was granted \$6.2 million. All of these presidents are in the stratosphere in terms of salaries.

What is the government doing while this is happening? It is sneaking through a huge increase in air travel taxes being paid by all air travellers in Canada. In fact, the increases are going up 50% on security fees paid on flights.

Representatives of the Air Transport Association of Canada, an organization that the government is very familiar with, provided testimony regarding the bill. The observations they made are these. In 2008, only two years ago, ATAC conducted a survey which ranked the security fees charged by governments and airports worldwide. Guess what it found? Canada's security charges, just two years ago, were the second highest in the world. Only the Netherlands was higher.

Guess what the government did? It increased those same taxes by 50%. After this tax announced in February, the Canadian security charges will be the highest in the world, having increased by 52% from \$17 to \$25 U.S. In the U.S. the charge is only \$5.

For a government that wants to be competitive with the United States, it has just made itself uncompetitive. Its taxes are much higher.

• (1700)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. The budget allows the Minister of the Environment to dictate the scope of environmental assessments. It allows the sale of all or any part of Atomic Energy of Canada. Could the hon. member tell me why these two articles are in a budget bill?

Second, putting Atomic Energy of Canada in the hands of private industries and allowing the minister to decide the scope of the environmental assessments, is that not like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, one would think the government would have learned by now, particularly with the food inspection process and the cases of listeria in the last couple of years and with the privatization of air inspections. The whole idea that somehow we could follow the Reagan blueprint and simply deregulate companies to the point where they could simply regulate and police themselves does not hold water and does not stand up under scrutiny.

We only have to look at the United States and the financial deregulation that has occurred over the last 10 years and the mess we have had. The world economy almost fell flat because of the deregulation that went on during Ronald Reagan's days. This is now being followed now by the neo-Conservatives, neo-Reaganites.

Government Orders

In terms of the environmental assessments, the member is absolutely right. How could the government simply take away the vetting process for projects when we see what has happened recently in the Gulf of Mexico. Because there is no proper supervision over oil wells, the U.S. now has an environmental disaster on its hands. This is what we will see in Canada, in spades, if the government follows this deregulation process.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about a clause in Bill C-9, one that is completely unrelated to anything budgetary. It is the clause that moves to privatize Canada Post, specifically the removal of Canada Post's legal monopoly on outgoing international letters or the remailer program.

My colleague from Elmwood—Transcona and I come from the same province. Both of us, as well as our other colleagues in the NDP, are concerned about other ways in which Canada Post is being privatized, for example, the closure of one of the four national call centres in Winnipeg, leading to the loss of dozens of jobs. The government has refused to do anything about it. We are clearly seeing a move by the government to chip away at an institution that we are so proud of as Canadians, an institution that provides a vital service, which is that of connecting us, of sharing communication.

Could I hear my colleague's thoughts on the injustice, and that is the privatization of Canada Post?

• (1705)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, if this is the type of activity and direction we see from a minority Conservative government, imagine what sort of direction we would get if we had a majority Conservative government, or if we were to get one in the future.

If the Conservatives are this brazen to put a clause into an omnibus bill to privatize parts of Canada Post when they could not do it through legitimate means by bringing in Bill C-14 and Bill C-44 over the last couple of years, imagine how dangerous they would be if they were ever in a majority situation. I think people would agree with that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here we are at report stage for Bill C-9, the budget implementation bill. The Bloc Québécois obviously voted against this Conservative budget at second reading because, once again, it does not meet the economic, social, environmental and financial needs of Quebec.

Nevertheless, with the complicity of the Liberal opposition, the bill was adopted at second reading and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance for thorough study.

What I find grievous is that the bill goes against two unanimous votes of the National Assembly of Quebec. We must remember that the Quebec nation was recognized, here in the House, and that this Prime Minister promised that there would be open federalism.

Government Orders

Quebec's unanimous request to the government for \$2.2 billion in financial compensation for harmonizing the sales tax was met with refusal even though agreements totalling \$6.86 billion were signed with five other provinces .

What can we say about the government's desire to meddle in the jurisdictions of the provinces and of Quebec by creating its national securities commission, even though Quebec voted unanimously against it? Quebec's entire financial sector is mobilizing against this power grab. An editorial in *La Presse*, a paper owned by the Power Corporation and dedicated to defending federalism in Quebec, stated: "The expression 'predatory federalism' is overused but that is what this comes down to."

What I find appalling is that the government is using this bill to make significant amendments to other laws. It does not have the courage to introduce and defend these amendments by introducing separate bills according to our democratic parliamentary rules.

At report stage, the NDP is proposing amendments in order to remove six parts of this bill. It makes sense and it is important that we support these amendments.

In the few minutes available to them, the witnesses that we heard in committee told us that they were dismayed by the lack of consideration given to such important matters as Canada Post's exclusive privilege, the privatization of AECL, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Employment Insurance Act.

Part 15 of the bill is entitled Canada Post Corporation Act, and it would allow Canada Post's competitors to collect mail in Canada and Quebec and ship it abroad. The fact that this measure is included in the bill shows the insidious way the Conservative government works and how it wants to completely deregulate the crown corporation.

The Bloc Québécois is strongly opposed to privatizing Canada Post, even partially. This crown corporation must remain a public agency and maintain universal services with uniform rates throughout Canada.

Many Quebeckers are concerned about part 18, which would privatize Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. There are no assurances in part 18 that the federal government will keep doing its duty and providing a supply of medical isotopes. The federal government must keep looking for suppliers of medical isotopes.

• (1710)

Part 24 of the bill amends the Employment Insurance Act. The Bloc Québécois called for substantial improvements to the system, including increasing the program's wage replacement rate to 60% of maximum insurable earnings, eliminating the waiting period, standardizing the qualification requirements at 360 hours of work, basing benefits on the 12 best weeks of insurable earnings and making self-employed workers eligible for regular benefits.

More generally, the government should submit a plan for reimbursing the funds diverted to its own accounts from the employment insurance fund. It should also drop its obvious intention to loot this fund once again; the fund does not belong to the government.

Instead, the current bill imposes the following measures.

The Conservatives' 2008 budget created a new crown corporation, the Canada Employment Insurance Financing Board, reporting to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

This board's duties included administering a separate bank account. Any annual surpluses in the employment insurance fund were supposed to be retained and invested until needed to cover the costs of the program.

Budget 2010 closes the board's separate bank account, the EI account, and creates a new one, the employment insurance operating account.

The government is permanently eliminating the accumulated surplus in the EI account, effective retroactively to January 1, 2009.

This account will therefore no longer exist and will be replaced by the employment insurance operating account, which will start from zero. Magically, the EI surplus, which amounted to more than \$57 billion on March 31, 2009, according to the Public Accounts of Canada for 2008-09, will disappear for good. I should point out that the money came from employers' and employees' contributions.

That part of the bill absolutely must be removed. It would be scandalous to penalize workers in Quebec and Canada like that.

The Bloc Québécois has a number of reservations about other provisions in the Conservatives' budget implementation bill.

For example, with respect to part 1 of the bill, which covers tax measures for individuals and corporations, the Bloc Québécois is particularly concerned about corporate tax strategies, specifically those involving tax havens.

We must eliminate access to tax havens. The six big Canadian banks reported net profits of \$5.3 billion in the first quarter of 2010. That is all very well, but why should they continue to avoid billions in taxes thanks to their subsidiaries in tax havens? The Bloc Québécois wants to eliminate this practice and make the banks pay their fair share of taxes.

Companies use tax havens to evade taxes too. According to the Auditor General's data, companies save up to \$600 million per year by doing business in tax havens.

The Bloc Québécois is calling on the government to walk the walk instead of proposing pseudo-solutions made up of nothing but words.

Still on the subject of banking, the Bloc Québécois has serious reservations about Ottawa's centralizing agenda with respect to credit unions.

Government Orders

Part 17 of the bill would amend the Bank Act to enable credit unions to incorporate as banks. This measure amends the Bank Act to create a framework allowing credit unions to incorporate as banks. The model is based on the framework applicable to other federally regulated financial institutions.

Although it is presented as optional, the Bloc Québécois is concerned that the amendment might actually reflect the government's hidden agenda to force credit unions to come under federal jurisdiction.

Once again, the federal government is demonstrating its desire to centralize power and decision-making at Quebec's expense.

The Bloc Québécois will therefore support the amendments proposed by the NDP, but the rest of the bill will still be unacceptable to Quebec.

• (1715)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Bloc Québécois member on his speech. Bill C-9 contains a clause on the environment that allows the Minister of the Environment to establish the scope of environmental assessments.

What does the Bloc member think about that clause? Does he think it belongs in a budget bill?

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I do believe that is one of the parts that the NDP has suggested we remove. I did not discuss it because I only had so much time. I completely agree with him because, if we were to give that discretionary authority to the minister, we would end up in the same boat as the United States, with the oil well in the Gulf of Mexico. Some studies were not carried out after political pressure was put on the former government in Washington.

I do not think such a measure belongs in a budget implementation bill, and certainly should have been the subject of its own bill, so that we could call witnesses to confirm our concerns about protecting the environment.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech. I have a question. Over the course of the years, \$57 billion has been taken from the employment insurance fund. But this omnibus bill would erase all of that. It will not be erased from our memory, though, because we know very well that this money was taken from unemployed workers.

The employment insurance fund is expected to have a surplus of \$19 billion over the next few years. How does my colleague think the government could invest this \$19 billion to better serve our workers?

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé for such a relevant question. The fact that the employment insurance fund will be turned back to zero and the accumulated surplus all but forgotten is a real scandal for our workers who worked so hard to establish that surplus. The worst part is that according to a clause in the budget implementation bill the government will be able to get its hands on any surplus that accumulates in the coming years.

We have to look at the financial needs of the entire Canadian population. In particular, I am thinking about seniors who are not receiving the guaranteed income supplement. It seems as though the government does not have the money to authorize an increase to the guaranteed income supplement. That is just one example of what they could do with the surplus in the fund.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Nickel Belt may ask a brief question.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, there is another intriguing provision in Bill C-9, and it relates to deregulating Canada Post's monopoly. This is the second time the Conservatives have raised this issue in Parliament, and they were not successful the first time. So they are incorporating it into a budget bill.

Why does the Bloc Québécois member think that they have included this issue in this bill? Is it because their friends are waiting in the wings, wanting to buy up a piece of Canada Post?

• (1720)

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank my colleague for his question. The partial deregulation of Canada Post to allow private remailing companies already exists, and that has been established. Numerous remailing companies are currently in business illegally, which the government is not really contesting.

This bill would allow them to continue operating, which must surely be quite profitable. Canada Post would lose revenue, thus endangering the universality of the services offered by our Canadian postal service.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand tonight on behalf of the people of Timmins—James Bay to speak to Bill C-9 and to set the record very clearly on what we are discussing here.

This is not a normal budget implementation bill where in the past we would debate whether we supported a certain vision of the government going forward. Of course, under a budget bill, this is a matter of confidence. What we are discussing tonight is the abuse of parliamentary process. When we look at the Conservative government, we are looking at a government whose only track record is abuse of public process and abuse of parliamentary process.

We could go through the issues of prorogation where it ran legislation. not once but twice. through the House and then flushed that legislation down the toilet because it was politically inconvenient to have to answer questions in the House of Commons, and then had to start the whole process over again, a completely staggering waste of taxpayer dollars.

We see the culture of secrecy that surrounds the PMO and all the offices of Parliament now and the inability of the public, the media and politicians to get answers from the government. We see it in the government's decision to create a manual to subvert the work of parliamentary committees, monkeywrenching committees so that work could not be done. This was handed out to the committee chairs to subvert the work of Parliament.

Government Orders

Now we see other examples of abuse of office. We see the industry minister, a minister of the Crown who is there to represent the interests of Canada on the international stage, acting like a cheap ShamWow salesman for some cleaning products in his riding. When that guy did not have a seat, would anybody have paid him to sell cleaning products? I do not think so. Maybe they would have hired him as a floor cleaner but not to sell cleaning products, yet he is standing there in front of a camera saying that he represents the Government of Canada and he is hocking products for buddies of his. This is a staggering abuse of the public process.

How does that tie into this bill? The government has taken numerous issues that should be scrutinized by the public and slipped them into the budget. It has insisted that we pass it right away or it will force an election. It will huff and puff and blow the House down if it does not get its way.

I am showing the people back home how big this budget bill is and telling them about all the hidden booby prizes that are left within this budget. One example is the decision to slip the HST into the bill to force it down the throat of senior citizens and people on fixed incomes in British Columbia and Ontario without debate. The government did not allow any hearings on this.

We see the decision, not surprising from a government that has become little more than the government of the tar sands, to strip more environmental assessment protections away from the Canadian public and from the environment. It does not have the guts to bring it into the House in a standard bill. No, it slips it into a budget bill and says that it is a matter of confidence.

We see the plan to sell off the AECL, our nuclear power agency, on the private market. Maybe it will get 10¢ on the dollar, who knows? That is a staggering decision to take but, again, it is not willing to bring this before the public. It just wants to slip it in and hide it away. It is an abuse of process.

Another serious issue is the destabilization of Canada Post that is under way with its privatization efforts. I represent a region that is larger than the United Kingdom. Mail is essential and mail has become more and more challenged over the years as more and more people are going online. For mail service in rural areas to survive, we need the balance and the income, and the income that it relies upon is being cut up, divided off and sold off to the private sector.

Another issue is softwood lumber. This is the government that sold out community after community to get a quick deal with the Bush Republicans, who are very much like the Conservative Party. Now we see another plan to raise lumber tariffs in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan by 10%. Our sawmills are staggering, what is left of them. They are barely able to keep going. Most of them are shut and the government is going to slip another 10% cost on that.

This is process after process of abuse. I am very shocked that what the government would do at the height of a recession is raid the EI fund and steal \$57 billion from the EI fund. That is not the government's money. This is money that was paid by Canadian workers as an insurance fund.

● (1725)

The government has bled red ink throughout the recession. Why? It is because it gave one corporate tax break after another. There was no fiscal prudence. The government came in with a surplus and immediately started giving it away in massive corporate tax cuts. For the folks back home, to get one of these tax breaks one has to be profitable. Who was making money in the recession? The banks and the big oil companies were making money so they got the lion's share of these tax breaks.

Further and further we see this country slipping into the red and what does the government do? It decides to take it off the backs of working families. In some areas, up to 60% of the people who pay into EI are not even allowed to collect it. \$57 billion of the EI fund is being stolen from workers, money that could retrain families and that could be used to help our people in communities who have been hit hard by the economy.

Just this past month, 1,000 jobs were lost in my riding. We not only lost the jobs but we also lost all the refining capacity of Ontario in copper and zinc, thanks, in large part, to the government's lack of a national vision in terms of dealing with companies like XStrata and Vale Inco. We now have 1,000 workers in Timmins who have been laid off or have lost their jobs permanently because of the government's boneheaded mismanagement of the base metal industries in Canada.

Now, just as these workers are needing EI, the government is shutting down the EI processing centres across Ontario. It is not doing this publicly. It is doing it in secret. When we ask the Minister of Human Resources a straightforward, straight-up question about why she is choosing, at this time in a recession, to shut 15 of the 18 EI processing centres in Ontario, she says that we are fearmongering. She cannot even stand up and say what her own department is doing. She cannot own up.

Those are the things that are being slipped through and hidden away from people. We see right now the EI processing operations in Owen Sound, Orillia, Kenora, Belleville, North Bay, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa, Brantford, Etobicoke, Barrie, Peterborough, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, Thunder Bay, Kitchener and Oshawa. It reads like a bus route to nowhere. All of these offices are being closed by the government at a time when access to EI processing is needed.

Why is it closing these centres? It is because it never did believe in maintaining a balance. The minister herself said that she did not want people to get fair benefits when they are unemployed because that might stop them from leaving the province and going to Fort McMurray to work in the tar sands.

Mr. Brian Jean: Hear, hear!

Mr. Charlie Angus: I hear the members cheering. They are cheering for the fact that when people lose their jobs and they cannot maintain their way of life, they have to go work for dirty oil in Alberta. This is what the government's plan has been all along. It has cut the EI processing operations. It does not even have the guts to stand up in the House and say that it is shutting down EI processing.

This is what this bill is about. This is a massive abuse of public process. It is forcing through the gutting of the environmental assessment processes, the gutting of the EI fund, the gutting of the ability of the forestry industry to get back on its feet because it is going after it with softwood tariffs, and, of course, it is gutting Canada Post.

I do not think anybody back home should be surprised because Tory times are always hard times. That is the history of the party. Whenever the Conservatives get in, they look after their buddies and abuse everyone else.

The New Democrats have brought forward amendments to call the government back to account. We are taking out the things that do not belong in this bill. We need to vote on a straight-up budget one way or the other, but we will not sit back and allow the government to abuse process. Maybe the non-existent Liberal Party, which has already left on vacation, will support them but we will not. We will continue to act as the opposition to the government which is taking Canada on such a wrong track.

• (1730)

[Translation]

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INSTRUCTION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to recommend changes to the Standing Orders and other conventions governing Oral Questions, and to consider, among other things, (i) elevating decorum and fortifying the use of discipline by the Speaker, to strengthen the dignity and authority of the House, (ii) lengthening the amount of time given for each question and each answer, (iii) examining the convention that the Minister questioned need not respond, (iv) allocating half the questions each day for Members, whose names and order of recognition would be randomly selected, (v) dedicating Wednesday exclusively for questions to the Prime Minister, (vi) dedicating Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday for questions to Ministers other than the Prime Minister in a way that would require Ministers be present two of the four days to answer questions concerning their portfolio, based on a published schedule that would rotate and that would ensure an equitable distribution of Ministers across the four days; and that the Committee report its findings to the House, with proposed changes to the Standing Orders and other conventions, within six months of the adoption of this order.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that something is not quite right with their democratic institutions. They know that something is not the way it should be. They may not know exactly what

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processes, procedures and rules need to be changed but they know their institutions need to be fixed and they want them to be reformed.

We need to respond to these concerns and we need to reform Parliament. Parliamentary reform begins with the reform of question period. If the heart of our democracy is Parliament, then the heart of Parliament is question period, the 45 minute period each day where members of Parliament ask questions of the government in order to hold it to account. Question period is televised and each day its proceedings are relayed by the national media to millions of Canadians, the people who we represent here in this place.

If one thing has been made abundantly clear to me as a member of Parliament for the last number of years and to all of us in this House, it is that ordinary Canadians are disappointed with the level of behaviour in question period and they want their parliamentarians to focus on the issues that really matter to them.

Since this motion was made public just over a month ago, I have received phone calls, letters and emails from citizens across this country. From Kingston, a proud member of the Canadian military wrote me:

I have served in the Canadian Forces for over 24 years and the lack of civility in the House of Commons has been an occasional topic of conversation throughout the years. I've often thought it extremely ironic that my elected political leaders could sometimes be so immature and exhibit such appalling behaviour when my fellow soldiers, sailors and airmen are required to uphold such high standards of deportment both in and out of uniform.

This concern has also been voiced to me by school teachers, truck drivers, grade five students and boardroom executives. In fact, teachers have told me that the level of behaviour in question period is such that they will not take their classes here anymore. This is the surest sign that question period needs to be reformed.

When more than four out of ten Canadians in the last election refused to vote, it is a sign that our Parliament is losing its legitimacy and its authority.

• (1735)

[Translation]

More than four out of ten Canadians refused to vote in the last election. This is a sign that our Parliament needs to be reformed.

[English]

Question period has become more about scoring cheap political points rather than about the issues that really matter to Canadians.

[Translation]

Question period has become more about scoring cheap political points rather than dealing with the issues that really matter to Canadians.

[English]

Question period has become a time where behaviour that is not permitted in any boardroom, dining room, or classroom regularly occurs here in the people's room. As a result, there is a growing divide between Canadians who are becoming more and more apolitical and a Parliament that is becoming more and more partisan.

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We, as members of Parliament, need to bridge that gap by reforming Parliament and regaining the respect of Canadians. That is why today I move Motion No. 517, a proposal to reform question period. It contains six specific proposals to address question period and make it focus on the issues that really matter to Canadians.

The six specific proposals call on the House affairs and procedures committee to elevate decorum and fortify the use of discipline by the Speaker; lengthen the amount of time given for each question and answer; require that ministers respond to questions directed at them; allocate half the questions each day for backbench members; dedicate Wednesday exclusively for questions to the Prime Minister; and dedicate the rest of the week to questions for ministers other than the Prime Minister.

I would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on each of the six proposals.

First, the motion calls for the elevation of decorum and the strengthening of the authority of the Speaker.

From teachers with students on class trips to boardroom executives, Canadians want behaviour in question period improved. The current behaviour is unacceptable in any social setting, let alone this country's Parliament. Pleas for better decorum are insufficient. We, as members of Parliament, need to give a mandate to the Speaker of this House to enforce the rules already in the Standing Orders and in current convention.

The second proposal is to lengthen the time given to ask a question and the time given to answer a question. Currently, 35 seconds are allocated to the questioner and 35 seconds to the answerer. It is an insufficient amount of time. As a result, we get rhetorical questions and rhetorical answers.

The lengthening of time given to ask and to answer a question is something that was done here at one point in time. The short 35-second rule is a recent introduction to this Parliament. For decades, parliamentarians had a minute to a minute and a half to ask a question, and ministers had a minute to a minute and a half to respond to questions.

Lengthening the amount of time given to ask and to answer questions will lead to more substantive questions and more substantive answers.

Writing in the *National Post*, Tasha Kheiriddin opined that:

the current 35-second format may produce tailor-made soundbites for the evening news, but hardly allows for depth or reflection.

She added that the motion:

is supported by research done on Western European Parliaments where it was found that extending the question and answer time made for more substantive exchanges.

The third proposal contained in the motion calls on the committee to re-examine the convention that a minister need not respond to the questioner. Sometimes I understand it is not possible for a minister to respond, as they are out of the country in carrying out their duties representing Canada abroad. Other times the problem is that the 35-second rule results in questions that are rhetorical and answers that become rhetorical, and the government, for good reasons, chooses to

designate a particular minister to respond to those rhetorical questions.

Thus, if we are going to overhaul question period, if we are going to have more substantive questions and more substantive answers, then we should also examine the convention that a minister need not respond.

Fourth, I am proposing in the motion to allocate half the questions per day to backbench members of Parliament. Currently, in question period, members of Parliament may only ask questions in the House if they receive the prior approval of their House leader and party whips. This, in my view, is a denial of the right of the backbench members of Parliament to represent their constituents and to ask questions of the government in relation to their constituencies.

The introduction of the approval of the House leader and the whip for a member to ask a question in question period in all parties is a recent practice. It is not something that was present here before the 1990s. In fact, I was speaking with a former parliamentarian who sat in this House for over 20 years in the 1970s and 1980s. He told me that he was shocked to find out that the Speaker no longer recognized members in the House spontaneously during question period. In fact, he told me that up until his time in Parliament, the first two or three rounds in question period went to the leaders and their designates. After that, it was backbench members of Parliament who could catch the eye of the Speaker and rise and ask questions that were of concern to their constituents. We need to go back to some sort of system like that in order to strengthen the role of this legislature.

• (1740)

Speaking on *The Sunday Edition* with Michael Enright on our nation's public broadcaster, former New Democrat leader and respected parliamentarian Ed Broadbent said, "We still have to make changes to magnify the role of individual MPs". He added, "It is up to individual MPs to assert themselves and to assert their democratic rights".

The final two proposals contained in my motion would dedicate specific days for the Prime Minister and other ministers of the Crown to attend question period. Presently, preparing for question period requires almost four hours a day per minister. There are roughly 40 ministers of the Crown in the government. Each minister spends four hours a day either in question period or preparing for it. That is not unlike what has happened in previous governments as well.

In a typical question period, only about five or six, maybe eight or nine, of those ministers actually answer questions. In other words, 30 ministers of the various ministries each spend four hours a day preparing for and sitting through question period and yet contribute nothing or provide no answers. As a result, a lot of time and resources are used unproductively.

I am suggesting that we keep the amount of time dedicated in the House for question period the same, but am arguing for a rotational schedule that would better allow the government to use its resources and time wisely, and also allow the opposition to focus on specific issues on specific days.

This motion, if adopted, would instruct the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to consider these reforms and report back the recommended changes within six months.

I was never a member of the Reform Party or a Reformer, but this motion was inspired in part by Preston Manning and the democratic Reform movement and their earnest desire to see change for the better in Canada's institutions. Mr. Manning, writing in the *Globe and Mail* recently, said:

Although Motion 517 has been moved by a government member, it is not partisan in nature and deserves support from all members who want to see Question Period made more credible.

He added:

There must be some way of making Question Period more civil, productive and newsworthy, and the sooner we find it, the better it will be for Canadian democracy.

Also writing in the *Globe and Mail*, John Ibbitson noted that this motion:

would reform Question Period, bringing greater civility to that raucous session and encouraging more sensible questions and more forthright answers.

All parties should embrace the proposal. It would be another step along the road to truly responsible, truly parliamentary, government.

What I am offering here are some viable and specific suggestions on how to improve and reform question period. They are simple and reasonable. However, at its heart, this motion is about starting the debate on how to improve Parliament.

[Translation]

But this motion is a call for debate. If this motion is adopted, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will be forced to begin a review and engage in debate on the validity of these suggestions.

[English]

If this motion is adopted and the committee is ordered to consider these changes, the committee may, in its best judgment, decide to include additional suggestions for reform or, indeed, modify some of the proposals that I have suggested in the motion. I therefore hope that members will accept and support this call to start the debate on the reform of question period and of Parliament in general.

[Translation]

The committee may, in its best judgment, decide to include additional suggestions for reform or even modify some of my suggestions.

I therefore hope that members will accept and support this call to start the debate on the reform of question period.

● (1745)

[English]

Colleagues of mine on both sides of the House have been enthusiastic about the motion. Twenty members have seconded the motion, and I want to thank them for their support, their encouragement and their input into the motion.

Canadians are hungry for change and reform, and I am optimistic that parliamentary reform can reconnect Canadians who feel disengaged from their witnessing behaviour in question period that

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would not be tolerated around the kitchen table. I am optimistic that we can reform Parliament and make it relevant to them once again.

The motion provides for some specific and viable suggestions for reform. The motion is simple and reasonable. If we cannot collectively, as members of the House, come together to achieve something as simple and reasonable and demanded by Canadians as the reform of question period, then what hope do we have of restoring Canadians' trust in their institutions and regaining their respect? What hope do we have of recapturing the legitimacy and authority of this place as central to the Canadian debate? What hope do we have to meet the challenges of our era and continue the nation-building efforts begun by our forebears?

More than four out of ten Canadians refused to vote in the last election. In doing so, they decreased the legitimacy of this institution and the authority of Parliament. As I mentioned before, Canadians may not know exactly what processes, procedures or rules need to be fixed, but they know something is wrong and they know something needs to change.

I have already mentioned the outpouring of support from Canadians who have taken it upon themselves to contact me regarding the motion, many of whom have confirmed this growing gap between their democratic institutions and themselves. A Canadian in Edmonton wrote to me and said, "Wouldn't it be great if something like this could be done? I am one of the countless Canadians who finds the whole spectacle of question period as it stands embarrassing and utterly alienating. Question period is probably more responsible for the low voter turnout than any other single thing. It would sure be nice to look in on parliament and see the MPs at least appearing to be working in a constructive way for us all".

An editorial in the *Peace Arch News* from White Rock, British Columbia makes the following comment:

A proposal by a backbench Conservative MP in Ottawa is one the general public—and MPs of all parties—should embrace.

It goes on to state:

The main point of government should be to get things done, and any reform of Question Period that would make it more than just a theatrical performance would be a big step forward.

Canadians want their Parliament reformed. They want their democratic institutions fixed and they want the level of debate elevated. This motion is a first, but important, step toward that parliamentary reform.

I want to end on a final note about the great parliamentarian, Edmund Burke, who once observed:

All government—indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, every prudent act—is founded on compromise and barter.

I am prepared to embrace the spirit of Mr. Burke's observation. I am open to friendly amendments that support the spirit of this motion in order to build a consensus, so I urge my fellow members to support this motion.

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[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate our colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills on his initiative. It concerns an issue that, for quite some time now, many people in this House have said should be addressed. I congratulate him for taking this first step.

I would like to ask him a question. He said the motion contains six proposals, but he did not think it should end there. He added that if the House were to adopt the motion, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs could decide to expand on the ideas, possibilities and measures to be studied. Does the member have any specific measures in mind?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I do not have specific measures in mind but I am not the only member of this House. Many other members surely have many ideas. If there are other ideas about improving oral question period, I could support them.

● (1750)

[English]

I do not have anything specific in mind, but there are 307 other members in this chamber and there are many good ideas from all of those members. If other good ideas come forward, I am certainly open to them.

As I said before, I am not wedded to each and every one of these proposals in my motion. I understand that other people have different ideas, but I do think that we need to change the way question period operates. We do need to elevate the behaviour during debate and during question period, and we need to make it more substantive by focusing it on the issues that Canadians really care about.

I am open to other suggestions and changes and I am sure the committee will do some great work.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is simple. It is obvious that our colleague has good intentions and is open to having discussions.

Since the arrival of minority governments, the atmosphere in the House during question period has been rather tense.

We must be careful when it comes time to change it all. The text of the motion proposes lengthening the amount of time for questions and answers, which means decreasing the number of opposition questions. I hope that our colleague's intention is not to muzzle the opposition. That is what we must look at.

He wants the members who will take part in question period to be randomly selected. That means that the Conservatives will be included in the selection and that there will be more questions from the government and less from the opposition. I hope our colleague's intention is not to muzzle the opposition. That is my question.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois makes a good point, but there is another way of looking at this. For instance, just because an hon. member has more time to ask a question does not mean he or she has to ask a lengthy question. If the Bloc wants to ask as many questions as it is entitled to ask now, then it could, but its questions have to take less than a minute.

[English]

I think there are different ways to do this, but I certainly believe that the time should remain there for questions dedicated to the opposition.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills, is open to other alternatives. I have some problems with some of the ideas being proposed. I generally certainly applaud the initiative.

I am wondering if the member has had an opportunity to look at New Zealand and Australia, and whether the procedures that they have put in place 25 years or so ago would be open to consideration by him.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, once again, I am open to all good suggestions.

As a matter of fact, I was talking to my colleague from Brandon—Souris who recently witnessed how the New Zealand legislature functions. The speaker there can compel ministers to respond to questions and to repeat those responses if he feels that the question was not adequately answered.

Therefore, there are various ideas out there that are not in the motion that I am open to.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say from the outset, on behalf of the official opposition, that the Liberal Party intends to support the motion moved by the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

We believe this is a commendable initiative. We believe it is time, once again, to look at the way oral question period is set up and its purpose.

We are quite pleased that the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills has confirmed to the House that he is open to suggestion and changes. He wants his motion to be adopted in the House and referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. He also wants members of this committee, of which I am one, to do a comprehensive study in order to improve the content and the form of question period.

● (1755)

[English]

The member for Wellington—Halton Hills was just asked if he had had an opportunity to check other jurisdictions to determine what kinds of rules they have in place for their question periods. He responded regarding New Zealand, I believe it was, where he stated that their standing orders allow the speaker to compel the minister to respond, again, to a question if the speaker deems that the minister has not properly or adequately responded to the question.

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I would just like to give a little bit of information to this House regarding Australia and the United Kingdom. It is my understanding that in the United Kingdom, the prime minister's questions take place every Wednesday when the British House of Commons is sitting for a period of 30 minutes, and that this particular practice was established in 1961. Members of Parliament wishing to ask a question must submit their names on the order paper. The names are then drawn by lottery to produce the order in which they will be called by the speaker.

The leader of the opposition is traditionally the first member of Parliament from the opposition benches to be called after the first question, and that is whether that first question comes from the government or from the opposition benches. As well, the leader of the opposition is allowed six supplementary questions in two groups of three. Finally, if the prime minister is away on official business, then a substitute answers questions. Those are just some of the procedures that exist in the British House of Commons. It is a stark difference from what we have here in Canada.

In Australia, question time is an institution in the Commonwealth, the federal Parliament and in all state Parliaments in Australia. Questions to government ministers normally alternate between government members and the opposition with the opposition going first.

The House of Representatives standing orders allow the prime minister to terminate question time by moving that further questions be placed on the notice paper. It appears that it is possible for the prime minister to prematurely terminate question time, although this is almost unheard of due to the criticism it would generate.

There is also no time limit for answers in the House of Representatives of Australia and of its members states, but a time limit applies in the Senate of Australia.

Finally, the Parliament of the State of Victoria allows for a set number of "questions without notice" to be asked of ministers, proportionately from each party represented in the House

I found the point that was raised by the hon. member from the Bloc quite interesting, which is that should this motion be adopted and sent to committee, and should the procedure and House affairs committee adopt this motion in its current state, that there would be a danger that members of the opposition might not receive the number of questions proportionate to the number of seats that they hold in this House.

I think that is a very important point, and I think that is something that definitely, and I am hopeful that this motion will be adopted and sent to PROC, as we call it, would be something that the members of PROC, and I know I will, would advocate. We should look at how to do it in a way to ensure that each opposition party would receive their proportionate numbers. There might be a lottery for the Liberals, a lottery for the Bloc, and a lottery for the NDP, and they would have the proportionate number of questions.

I also think that it would be interesting for PROC to look at the legislatures here in Canada.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

In the legislature of my province, the beautiful province of Quebec, during oral question period at the National Assembly, the time allotted for questions is much longer than the time we are entitled to in the House, as is the time allotted for answers.

I was a great fan of the National Assembly before coming to Parliament Hill and I must say that, with a few exceptions, it truly allows the opposition parties and the government to get into a topic and address it in a more detailed manner. I found that this gave those watching, including myself at the time, a better understanding of the issues. I understood the issues better and the reasons why a party adopted a position on a particular issue and why another party defended a different position. I understood better why the government had made a certain decision or adopted a certain policy. The members of the opposition had more time to ask questions and the minister had more time to answer.

I have three minutes left and I want to say that the Liberals, who represent the official opposition, will support this motion as written. We hope the House will adopt it.

[*English*]

I am sure that many of the members here in this House recognize me as someone who at times has contributed to the noise volume in the House. Yes, I have. There have been times when I have been very sorry for it and there have been times when I have risen in my seat and apologized for something that I had said. I have not needed to be forced to do so by a question of privilege or a point of order. I have done it because I have recognized on my own that my behaviour was not correct. I would hope that other members in the House would do the same. Some do; some do not. That is a personal choice.

When I was growing up, I was one of eight children. When my parents used to have friends and family and guests over, there was not enough room around the dining room table. Many members may probably know this. In the kitchen we had the big table and that was for my parents and the big kids, and then we had the small table which was for the youngest.

When my parents had friends over and they were in the dining room, it meant that there was no adult supervision. One of the games that my brothers and sisters and I created was called no manners included. The rules for no manners included created great mayhem in the kitchen and there were times where it required my parents, or one of them, to come into the kitchen and tell us to knock it off, to tone it down, or we would be sorry for the punishment that we were going to get. But it did create a great deal of amusement.

At the same time, the second part of that was manners are included, and that was a game that actually allowed my brothers and sisters and I to develop, what I have been told for many years since, wonderful table manners and a great deal of civility around the table. When I am not quite as civil as I should be in this House, I will try to remember manners are included and apologize for that.

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[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion moved by the hon. Conservative member. Earlier I asked a question of the member, who did appear open, but we must nevertheless have a closer look at the situation. Why is it that we are discussing question period here today? Recent history tells us why.

We have had a minority government since 2006. Inevitably, this government is feeling a little oppressed by opposition questions. Prior to that, we had the sponsorship scandal, and question period in the House had a significant impact on what happened in Canadian politics. If we want to change how things are done, it is very important that the opposition not lose any of its power to put questions to those who deserve them. At the time of the sponsorship scandal, Alfonso Gagliano was bombarded with questions every day. So we have to look at how the Conservative member's motion will affect this way of doing things.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with the first paragraph of the motion:

- (i) elevating decorum and fortifying the use of discipline by the Speaker, to strengthen the dignity and authority of the House,

We have already mentioned this many times in the House. Of course, we believe the Speaker has the power to elevate decorum. That is his responsibility, and he must exercise it.

The motion contains other paragraphs:

- (ii) lengthening the amount of time given for each question and each answer,

I listened to the speech given by the hon. Liberal member just before me. She mentioned the Quebec National Assembly. We must not forget that at this time, the House has two and a half times more members than the National Assembly. If the Conservatives' reforms for the House of Commons go ahead, this would add about another 30 members and the House of Commons would have three times more members than the National Assembly. So it is only natural that, during question period, the questions and answers are longer because there are fewer members.

As I mentioned earlier to the Conservative member who moved the motion, the problem is that we do not want to see the number of opposition questions decreased as the amount of time for questions and answers is lengthened. Obviously, it was not clear. What he said was that we would have to ask shorter questions. Why would the Bloc Québécois ask 30-second or 20-second questions? Because it wants to keep the same number of questions it has now. Otherwise, question period would have to be extended. But extending question period would affect committees and all kinds of other things. Things are this way for a reason.

The third paragraph states:

- (iii) examining the convention that the Minister questioned need not respond,

We have always said that this is question period, not answer period. The ministers could always claim that they answered us, and then provide unsatisfactory answers. I have to wonder about that paragraph.

- (iv) allocating half the questions each day for Members, whose names and order of recognition would be randomly selected,

Once again, if the point is to allow every member in the House to be eligible for the random selection, so just as many government members as opposition members, that means that government members would get more questions, and the opposition would get fewer. That means that we would not have been able to ask the 440 questions that were asked during the sponsorship scandal, and that the Bloc Québécois would have fewer opportunities to clean up Parliament.

- (v) dedicating Wednesday exclusively for questions to the Prime Minister,

It is similar to the paragraph that follows it:

- (vi) dedicating Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday for questions to Ministers other than the Prime Minister in a way that would require Ministers...

That would mean that if a current affair involves a minister and his day is Thursday or Tuesday of the following week, we would have to wait a week before being able to question that minister. That makes no sense. We would have to wait a week before we could ask the Prime Minister a question on Wednesday. That makes no sense. Take, for example, the effect that question period had on the sponsorship scandal. Every day it helped reveal the scope of the largest scandal involving the Canadian government in our country's history.

- (1805)

Obviously, at first glance it would be understandable to agree with the principle of this motion. We agree that decorum in the House needs to be improved and we will support any measure to that effect. But, the motion moved by the Conservative member seems to want to muzzle the opposition and we will never agree to that. I can understand that the Liberal Party, which was hit hard by the sponsorship scandal, will support the motion. However, they will understand that the Bloc Québécois, which wants increased transparency in this House, will oppose any measure that would limit the opposition's time to ask questions. Obviously, our discussions and positions will always be aimed at increasing transparency.

I realize that our Conservative colleague has reached out to us, but we have to say that it was the Conservative Party that prorogued Parliament when under a great deal of pressure about the treatment of Afghan detainees. It was this government that refused to turn over the documents, and the Speaker had to make a historic ruling to force the government to turn over those documents. And it is this government that is refusing to allow political staff to appear before committees, so we have to watch out. When I read the motion as written, I feel that the intent is to shut down and muzzle the opposition, but we will always oppose any attempt by the Conservative Party to muzzle us.

I would warn the Conservatives about minority governments. Great Britain, the mother country of many members, just elected a minority government. They will see what happens, but I feel we cannot change the way we do things just because we have a minority government and the Conservatives do not like how question period goes. We will always be in favour of greater decorum in this House. Having civilized debates is no problem.

But this would limit the number of questions the opposition can ask and the ministers of whom they can ask questions. If we have questions for the Prime Minister, we should be able to ask him questions every day. If he is at the root of all of the problems we are having now, he should have to answer questions during question period every day, just like Gagliano had to answer questions every day because he caused a problem. We would not want this motion to exempt ministers from answering any of the questions that come their way just because their turn only comes around once a week.

When ministers decide not to rise and delegate colleagues to rise in their stead, that sends a message. The Conservatives are very good at it. They decide that ministers involved in or targeted by media attacks will not rise to defend themselves. They need to know that the people and the media see what is going on. People see what they are up to.

This Parliament has always worked a certain way, and I think the results have been good. Among other things, our approach exposed the sponsorship scandal. I have a problem with the Conservatives trying once again to amend the act to prevent people from exposing scandals involving governments in power. We support the first paragraph of the motion, which says that we must elevate decorum and fortify the use of discipline by the Speaker, but we do not support any of the other paragraphs.

In the end, given that there is more disagreement than agreement, we will oppose the motion. Nevertheless, if the member's motion does not pass, we strongly encourage him to move another in which he respects the fact that the opposition has the right to ask any question. The opposition represents all those who want to know what the government is up to.

In my opinion, anything that appears to muzzle the opposition is antidemocratic, so before we proceed with any changes to parliamentary process here in Canada, I would suggest we wait and see what will happen with Great Britain's minority government.

• (1810)

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this motion presented by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills. I would like to thank the member for bringing forward the motion. It is a very genuine attempt to be thoughtful about what goes on in this place particularly around question period, and to offer some constructive proposals for us to look at and debate, and hopefully send to the procedure and House affairs committee.

The NDP will be supporting the motion. We believe it should go to committee and there should be a very thorough and detailed debate. Having said that, I do have some concerns that I will put forward.

I want to note that the NDP has long been a champion of parliamentary reform in this House. In terms of recent history, we can go back to the 1985 McGrath report, which was about 100 pages in length and dealt with parliamentary reform. Bill Blaikie, who was a New Democratic Party MP and later became the dean of the House, was very involved in the McGrath report. That report came

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forward with a number of parliamentary reforms which actually were adopted.

I have to say that since that time, very little change has taken place in the House. We have had a few changes around Standing Orders. Ironically, when the Conservatives were in opposition, we had the changes around concurrence motions, for example, which gave a little more diversity in terms of scope for debate, but beyond that, we really have not dealt with many of the things that need to be looked at.

Certainly our party has brought forward motions in the House, for example, on prorogation and the need to have limits to ensure there are not the abuses with prorogation that we have seen recently with the current government and the Prime Minister. To us this is all part of the debate about desperately needed parliamentary reform.

Even going back to 1992, our member, Dawn Black, was a member of a special advisory committee to the Speaker on decorum. I looked at that report. It was a very good report, but nothing really came out of it.

In 2006, after there had been a few incidents in the House that were just outrageous in terms of sexism, chauvinism and people being completely out of line, there was a review by the procedure and House affairs committee. Dawn Black went to that committee because she had been on the earlier committee. Again there was a big debate about decorum, but the actual report that came out of the procedure and House affairs committee, the 37th report, indicated what some members thought especially in terms of decorum, but no action was taken.

We do not have a very good record of dealing with these issues and looking at some of the substantive changes that need to be made. Nevertheless, this motion gives us the opportunity to say to the committee that we need to have a serious debate about decorum, about question period, and to look at what changes might be made.

I would like to go through a couple of the specific suggestions that are being put forward by the member.

The idea that there should be longer questions and answers is a good one in principle. One of the problems is that oral question period is confined to 45 minutes. Because there are four parties in the House, and it is all apportioned by party, the time to pose a question shrank to 35 seconds. There are a number of variables. There is the issue of making sure that people have adequate time to ask proper questions and hopefully to get adequate replies. However, unless we extended the time for oral question period, we would be very concerned that as the fourth party, or any other fourth party or even a third party, we would lose questions if there were a longer time to pose a question. We have to think about these different variables.

Long gone are the days when Tommy Douglas would stand and ask a question that was very rational and thoughtful, and maybe a couple of minutes long. There were no TV cameras then. We have to recognize that television and the media's focus on question period has really changed what takes place in this House.

Private Members' Business

I find it interesting that the member quoted some media commentators who said that they too would like to see more decorum. It is a bit ironic, because it is like the chicken and the egg. We ask these questions which are 35 seconds long. It is getting that media clip. The media are chasing it down and the more outrageous it is, the more coverage there will be. It goes around and around.

● (1815)

If we are to change that, if we are to bring back decorum, if we are to look at question period being a more serious part of the work that we do, it also means the media as well will have to change its view of the debate and its view on what takes place in this chamber. Maybe we should invite the media to the committee as well and have a discussion with it about decorum, question period and how it works. I agree that people who come to this place and sit in the visitors' gallery are pretty horrified at the behaviour.

That is one issue. It is the length of time of question period and how that in and of itself jams the amount of time we have for each question.

Then there is the idea that there might be an exclusive day for the Prime Minister. In fact, a number of the suggestions come from the U.K. model, and I have seen some of that. There are some interesting ideas to allow members to have a space where they can ask questions that are more local, or to know that a particular minister will be in the House. However, we also have to know that the main accountability of the government from the opposition has to happen every day in terms of the questions for the Prime Minister. Only having one day to do that, which is the British model, would be a very significant difference. We would have some concerns about whether we would deal with the level of accountability that we need to see.

There are probably other issues at which we could look. Most of all, from our point of view as New Democrats, in supporting this motion, there has to be a genuine discussion among the parties about how to deal with this. It has to be a non-partisan discussion and it has to look at parliamentary reform overall. I agree the public is very focused on question period because the media is focused on that, but there are other democratic reforms as well.

We had our motion in the House on prorogation, which was approved by a majority of members. We have also brought forward initiatives on proportional representation, which to us is the most fundamental element of democratic reform. It deals with the very manner in which we are elected. The way we are elected now is not representative of the votes that we get across the country. Therefore, the very makeup of this chamber is not reflective of the real standings in terms of the percentage of votes that we get through our parties.

Therefore, we are willing to look at question period. However, we also want to make a strong pitch here that this is more than about question period. This is about democratic reform and that has to include ideas around electoral reform, proportional representation and the issue of prorogation. In fact, we will be bringing forward a bill on that. These things that are immediately before us.

The member obviously has put some thought into his motion. We should encourage the committee to look at these proposals and maybe look at what goes on in other jurisdictions and look at some

reforms that could take place. On the question of decorum, if we mean it, we have to be prepared to say that changes have to take place. On idea that the Speaker has enough tools, maybe he or she does. However, all parties have to agree and we have to ensure that the decorum in this place is elevated because people are truly shocked by what they see. As the people's representatives in this place, we should not be seeing that.

We want to congratulate the member for the motion. We have specific issues that we want to look at, but in principle the motion should go to committee and it should be thoroughly discussed and debated and maybe we can arrive at some very positive changes.

● (1820)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, for introducing Motion No. 517.

I think all members in the House would agree that anyone who brings forward a motion or attempts to improve decorum in the House should be applauded. I am certainly a party to that. I know that I have many times abused the privilege given to me in acting in a manner that would reflect the decorum required in the House. I have at times had to stand voluntarily to apologize for my actions or more specifically my words.

Therefore, any time we can have a discussion, whether it be debate or just a discussion itself on methods that can improve the decorum in the House, particularly in question period, is a good thing. It is a worthwhile debate because, as has been noted by many other members, question period truly is the window to Parliament. That is the one period of time, on a daily basis, when most Canadians view parliamentarians. Quite frankly, I think, Mr. Speaker, you would agree with me, and I think all members would agree with me, that from time to time it is not a very pretty sight.

I also believe there is not one member in the House who has not been approached at least one time by a constituent complaining about the antics or the lack of decorum in question period. That alone should make all of us take pause as to our own actions.

Therefore, this motion perhaps is overdue, but also it bears careful examination. Many of the members who spoke before me this evening have suggested potential changes to the motion. The member for Wellington—Halton Hills has said that he would be open to friendly amendments because he recognizes the fact that there is no monopoly on good ideas.

The concept and the spirit of the motion is excellent, but also there can be improvements to the motion. I would like to go over two or three ideas that I would suggest for the member for Wellington—Halton Hills on things I think would strengthen and improve the motion. I would like to present them now for members in this place for their consideration as well.

The first point I would recommend that needs to be changed is a portion of the member's motion that states the procedure and House affairs committee should recommend changes to the Standing Orders regarding question period.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, probably better than anyone here, being an occupant of the chair, question period is not governed and bound by Standing Orders. It is a convention, and an informal convention at that, that has really guided question period practices over the last 100 years.

To recommend that the Standing Orders be changed to reflect what question period should look like is somewhat restrictive. Rather than saying the procedure and House affairs committee should recommend changes to the Standing Orders, it should merely recommend that a study be taken by the procedure and House affairs committee. At the end of the day, the committee may not recommend changes to the Standing Orders. It may recommend a number of other things, but it should not be restricted to looking only at Standing Orders. The phrase “to study” is far more encompassing than to recommend changes because this needs very careful study.

Also another portion of the member's motion that says we should examine the convention that ministers need not respond to questions directly asked of them, in other words, suggesting that ministers must respond directly to questions, I am not sure if that is quite what we need.

As the member for Wellington—Halton Hills pointed out, many times there is a good reason for a particular minister not to respond. To force a minister to respond to a question would be a little restrictive.

We have seen many times where, because of the complexity of files, several ministers share responsibilities. Sometimes, inadvertently I am sure, members of the opposition ask a question to a certain minister when it should have been asked to a different minister. That portion of the member's motion is a little restrictive and we should change that, if not outright delete it.

● (1825)

I would also suggest that the six month period that the member for Wellington—Halton Hills is suggesting that the procedure and house affairs utilize to conduct this study is a little too short. I will explain why.

A good example is what we have seen over the course of the last few months here in Parliament. We know that members raise questions of privilege and if there is a *prima facie* case found by the chair that there was a breach of privilege, it is referred for discussion immediately to the procedure and House affairs committee. If that happened again, I suggest that six months is not quite long enough, although it may be. I would like it to be extended to longer than that, although I will present in just a few minutes, a friendly amendment for the member for Wellington—Halton Hills and I have not in my amendment put anything longer than six months. I would think the committee should engage itself in that discussion.

I truly believe this motion bears a lot of discussion.

With your concurrence, Mr. Speaker, I would move the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by replacing the words “recommend changes to” with the word “study” and by replacing all the words after “(iii)” with “allocating half the questions each day for Members, whose names and order of recognition would be randomly selected, (iv) whether the practices of the Westminster Parliament in the United Kingdom, such as dedicating Wednesday exclusively for questions to the

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Prime Minister, and dedicating Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday for questions to ministers other than the Prime Minister in a way that would require ministers be present two of the four days to answer questions concerning their portfolio, based on a published schedule that would rotate and that would ensure an equitable distribution of ministers across the four days, are appropriate and useful in a Canadian context; (v) whether there are other practices of other parliaments based on the Westminster model that may be adopted and adapted to a Canadian context; and that the committee report its findings to the House within six months of the adoption of this order.”

● (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 93(3) no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to the motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, I am open to other suggestions. I will agree to this proposed amendment provided that there will be, as I understand it, a formal recorded division on it so other members of the House may be able to give their views on it.

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is therefore in order and when this bill next comes before the House, debate will continue. If members desire, a recorded division may happen.

[*Translation*]

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 is deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

The Deputy Speaker: Since the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine is not present in the House to raise a question during the adjournment debate, her notice is deemed to have been withdrawn.

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to follow up on a question about the government's funding cuts for victims' services and the failure of its crime agenda to meet the real needs of victims.

I asked this question in the House on April 19. The very next day, the victims' ombudsman appeared at the public safety committee and testified about what the government should do to support victims in this country.

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I want to start by recognizing that all members of Parliament are concerned about victims. The current government frequently claims that it is the only party that cares about victims. Canadians know that this is not true. In fact, this kind of divisive Conservative politics actually hurts victims of crime by diverting attention from their real needs. New Democrats want to work toward helping victims of crime and toward making our communities safer.

Of course, the truth is that all New Democrats care about victims of crime. The NDP has long been the party that has stood up for the marginalized and those whose voices are not heard. We have always recognized that most crime is directed at the poorest and most vulnerable among us. That is why we are the only party that consistently fights for policies that help to improve the economic and social conditions of Canadians. I am proud of my party's history on this issue.

I rise today to ask the government to re-evaluate its crime policy and its narrow focus on punishment and to refocus its efforts on meeting the real needs of victims.

This government's crime agenda is pushing Canada toward a U.S.-style prison system that is expensive and ineffective. It wants to lock up more Canadians for longer. Meanwhile, the government is cutting back on rehabilitation programs, and it is failing to address the crisis of widespread mental illness and addiction in our society.

Canadians know that these policies do not work. If they did, the United States would be the safest country on earth. It is not. The United States' model is expensive and it does nothing to lower the crime rate. In fact, many U.S. states are now moving in the opposite direction of this government.

The current government justifies its crime agenda by saying that it meets the needs of victims. This too is false. Do not take my word for it. Take the word of Steve Sullivan, who was appointed by the current government to serve as the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

Mr. Sullivan said:

Sentencing and the "get tougher on crime" agenda will not meet the real needs of victims of crime...

He said:

[S]entencing is important to families...But it can't be seen or sold as something that will meet their needs, because their needs are much more basic than that. Realistically, their needs won't be met by whether the offender gets five years or ten years.

The verdict is in. Longer sentences and the so-called tough-on-crime agenda are not what victims are calling for.

What then should the government be doing to meet victims' needs?

It should reconsider its refusal to fund child advocacy centres. For two years in a row, the ombudsman went to the government and asked for funding to set up these centres across the country. He asked for \$5 million for the project. Child advocacy centres provide services to child victims, such as young victims of sexual abuse.

These centres would prevent crimes. We know that untreated sexual abuse is one of the factors that leads to one becoming a sexual abuser in the future. However, this government said no.

Just as it reconsidered its decision to cut \$3 million from the victims of crime initiative—I see that the government just this week restored the funds after the NDP called exactly for that, and I commend the government for listening to us—the current government should reverse its decision to close prison farms. It should add money to addictions and mental health services both inside prisons and in our communities, and it should listen to the many experienced corrections officials who know that rehabilitation makes us far safer than does punishment.

My questions for the government are simple.

Will it refocus its crime agenda to meet the real needs of victims? Will it commit \$5 million to implement Mr. Sullivan's request for child advocacy centres for child victims of crime, and if not, why not?

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Government to the important issue of funding for victims of crime, which my colleague was just talking about. The government has made the protection of law-abiding citizens one of our very top priorities. We have always put the safety of law-abiding Canadians first and we have always believed that every victim matters.

That is why one of our first actions, upon taking office in 2006, was to introduce the Federal Victims Strategy. Since then, our Government has committed over \$50 million to this strategy.

We created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, an independent resource for victims. We passed the truth and sentencing law, eliminating the two-for-one credit that criminals get for time served in custody prior to sentencing.

We have cracked down on organized crime, including drug crime, with tougher sentences. We passed the Tackling Violent Crime Act, better protecting 14- and 16-year-olds from sexual predators for the first time.

We gave police and judges tools to deal with impaired drivers. To combat white collar crime, we are introducing new legislation to provide stronger sentences. We want violent criminals, repeat offenders and fraudsters to serve their time in prison not in their homes.

Let me remind the House that this government began its tenure in 2006 by committing additional funding of \$52 million for four years, that is \$13 million per year from 2007 to 2011, to the Federal Victims Strategy.

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When we entered office, the Department of Justice received \$5 million per year for victims programming. We raised that amount to \$13 million per year, including \$1.5 million for the federal ombudsman.

For the past four years, our actions have shown our commitment to ensuring that victims have a voice in the criminal justice system and greater access to services.

The Federal Victim Strategy included the establishment of the first Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime and a range of new initiatives within the Departments of Justice and Public Safety. The additional funding has allowed a variety of new programs and services to be implemented in the Department of Justice. For example, the Victims Fund has been enhanced to provide more resources, totalling \$7.75 million per year, for victims of crime, provincial/territorial victim services, NGOs and others working to assist victims and their families.

Specific enhancements to the fund include providing financial assistance for Canadians who are victimized abroad, expanding the financial assistance provided to victims travelling to attend National Parole Board hearings so that they may be accompanied by a support person; enhancing services for underserved victims of crime; and assisting victims with emergency costs in three territories where the Attorney General of Canada prosecutes criminal offences. The majority of the funding that the government provides to support victims and families is directed to provinces and territories, who provide the bulk of services to victims.

• (1840)

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, the government said that it created the victims' ombudsman, so I would suggest that it listen to him.

The cost of ending the two-for-one sentencing credit will be \$2 billion, and security for the summits will be \$1 billion. I think we can come up with \$5 million for advocacy centres for child victims of sexual abuse.

I want to talk about crime prevention, something the government has cut. I will quote Mr. Sullivan again. He said, "preventing crime is the best victim protection you can have".

The facts are clear: 70% of offenders never finished high school; 80% suffer from mental illness or addiction; and two out of three youth entering our justice system have a mental health issue.

Clearly, crime prevention means investing in education. It means getting tough on poverty and funding mental health and addictions treatment. It means having programs in our communities to keep kids away from gangs.

I emphasize, as Mr. Sullivan testified, that victims want to know that offenders are receiving treatment and rehabilitation in prison so that they never hurt anyone again.

Does the government agree with Mr. Sullivan that crime prevention is the best victim protection? If so, will it commit to making serious investments in crime prevention and rehabilitation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to my hon. colleague's comments.

With the funds announced in Budget 2010, this government has almost doubled the federal funding available to victims since our arrival in government. As an example, the funding for victims at the Department of Justice in 2005 was \$5 million. In 2010, the federal funds for grants and contributions to support victims and families, provincial-territorial service providers and NGO advocates is \$9.05 million each and every year. That is progress!

With regard to the assertions of the ombudsman, there should be no doubt that the government remains committed to this function. Mr. Sullivan will confirm himself that he was honoured to be the first Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. An announcement as to the next ombudsman will be made in due course.

[*English*]

VALE INCO

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 16, I raised a question in the House concerning the strike in Voisey's Bay in Labrador. There are also ongoing strikes in communities such as Sudbury and Port Colborne.

They have been on strike now for nearly 10 months. They are nearly one year out of work. I would ask members of the House how they would feel if they had limited income and very little support for 10 months. It would be a difficult time. Families are suffering. Communities are suffering. I know of individuals who are losing their homes or who are in danger of the breakup of their relationships. Strikes, by their nature, when they are prolonged, have a very detrimental effect on individuals, families, and communities.

While these people are on strike, the company in question, Vale Inco, which I understand is now known as Vale—it has taken "Inco" out of its title altogether—has been bringing in scab labour to fill these positions. With scab labour in place, we have to ask the government what the bargaining power of a union is for these workers.

Today I had the opportunity to attend a rally with the United Steelworkers and some of its locals. They are a group of determined individuals who are fighting for their equality, for some fairness, and for their rights as workers, which are basic human rights.

Every time we ask the government what it has done, what steps it is taking to defend Canada's interests and the interests of our workers, it hides behind a flawed Investment Canada Act, and it hides behind the issue of provincial jurisdiction.

Adjournment Proceedings

I ask the government what message it can send to all those workers about one concrete step, one thing the federal government has done, to defend national interests, to protect our natural resources so that they are exploited for the benefit of the people of Canada, and to protect workers' rights? What steps has it taken to ensure that this strike ends and that there will be a just settlement for the workers at all these locations? I particularly think about my workers back home in Labrador and those associated with the mine in Voisey's Bay.

I ask the hon. member that question.

• (1845)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by stating that foreign investment plays a very important role in the Canadian economy. Foreign investors bring capital, knowledge, capabilities, technology, and other resources which can increase the productivity, efficiency and competitiveness of Canadian firms. Their investments help businesses to expand and create jobs for Canadians.

It is important to note that investment flows both into and out of Canada. In the past several years Canadian firms have invested more abroad than foreign firms have invested in Canada. According to Stats Canada, foreign investments into Canada reached \$549 billion in 2009, while Canadian investments abroad reached \$593 billion.

In order to ensure that Canadian firms have access to investment opportunities abroad, it is important for Canada to maintain an investment climate which encourages the free flow of investment in both directions. Recognizing the importance of investment flows into the country, Canada has a broad framework in place to promote trade and investment while protecting its interests. This includes the Investment Canada Act, which provides the Minister of Industry with the power to review significant foreign investment proposals.

The review threshold for WTO members is currently \$299 million in book value of the assets of the Canadian business. Where a proposed investment is subject to review under the act, the investor cannot implement the investment without the approval of the minister responsible for the act.

The Minister of Industry approves an application only where he is satisfied that the transaction is likely to be of net benefit to Canada. In making his determination, the minister must consider the factors listed in section 20 of the act.

These factors include: the effect of the investment on the level and nature of economic activity in Canada; the degree and significance of participation by Canadians in the Canadian business or new Canadian business; the effect of the investment on productivity, industrial efficiency, technological development, product innovation and product variety in Canada; the effect of the investment on competition within any industry or industries in Canada; the compatibility of the investment with national industrial, economic and cultural policies; and the contribution of the investment to Canada's ability to compete in world markets.

As a part of the review process, the investment review division of Industry Canada consults with federal government departments with policy responsibility for the industrial sector involved, with the Competition Bureau, and with all provinces in which the Canadian business has substantial activities or assets.

In October 2006, the Minister of Industry at the time approved Vale's application for review of its acquisition of Inco Limited because he was satisfied that the investment was likely to be of net benefit to Canada.

The original question put forward by the member asks whether the government will stand up and tell Vale to get back to the table, negotiate in good faith, and demonstrate that Vale's investment truly represents a net benefit to Canada.

The government is surely disappointed at the lack of progress in resolving this strike at Vale; however, as has been mentioned several times in this House and as the hon. member mentioned himself, the strike is a labour dispute between Vale and its union. Labour relations are governed by a well-established legislative framework which Vale and the union must respect.

The provinces of Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador are responsible for the administration of the legislation which governs labour relations in their respective provinces.

I want to thank the Speaker for the opportunity to address my colleagues in this House. We encourage both sides to sit down together and negotiate a settlement.

• (1850)

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, I must say that the hon. parliamentary secretary must have been quite good at rote because I hear this same answer every single time.

I would say to him that we welcome foreign investment. We always have. However, when we welcome foreign investment, it must be on Canada's terms, and it must satisfy the interests of our country and the interests of our workers.

I say to the member that 3,000 people in Sudbury, hundreds in Port Colborne, and hundreds in Labrador are on strike, some now for nearly a year. How is that a net benefit to Canada? How does the government go about holding a company like Vale to account when it does not comply with the Investment Canada Act?

Can the member give us one specific concrete example of what the federal government has done to try to end these strikes, particularly in Labrador and in northern Ontario?

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the member asked in the first part and in the second part what the government has done for the workers at Vale. We have created an economic climate in this country that has resulted in the net job creation of 285,000 new jobs. That has made Canada the envy of the industrialized world.

That means that, once the company and the union are able to work together and once they have been able to resolve this dispute, the company will be operating in the strongest economic climate in the entire world. That, of course, will not only be to the benefit of the company but it will be to the great benefit of the workers at Vale as well.

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn and the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all votes under National Defence in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011.

I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

NATIONAL DEFENCE—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2010-11

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under National Defence in the main estimates, Mr. Andrew Scheer in the chair)

The Chair: Tonight's debate is a general one on all of the votes under National Defence. Each member will be allocated 15 minutes. The first round will begin with the official opposition followed by the government, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

As provided in the motion adopted on Tuesday, May 25, 2010, parties may use each 15-minute slot for speeches or for questions and answers by one or more of their members.

In the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allotted may speak one after the other. The Chair would appreciate it if the first member speaking in each slot would indicate how the time will be used, particularly if it is to be shared.

[*Translation*]

When the time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question, since this time will be counted in the time originally allotted to the party.

[*English*]

I will just make a reference to that. Sometimes questions are posed that are very short in nature and may take only five or six seconds to put. We might allow the minister a bit more time to answer, given the fact that a five-second question may elicit a longer answer. However, the Chair will do its best to ensure that the opposition's question and its time is respected.

I would remind hon. members that, according to Tuesday's motion, during this evening's debate, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be entertained.

[*Translation*]

We may now begin this evening's session.

[*English*]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Chair, all of the Liberal members will simply be asking questions and making no speeches. I have very short questions on two or three different issues. I will put them without any prefaces to make things simpler.

Which senior officials from DND, if any, received the 2006 Afghan human rights report, written by embassy officials in Kabul and delivered in either December 2006 or January 2007, which repeatedly used the word "torture" to describe the treatment of Afghan detainees?

• (1855)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, these reports, as all members would know, are received by the department. They would certainly have been seen by the deputy minister and those within the Chief of the Defence Staff's immediate circle. These are reports that reference, in general terms, the situation inside Afghan prisons. They do not, however, refer in any way specifically to Canadian-transferred prisoners.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, who from DND attended the March 2007 inter-agency meeting attended in person by Richard Colvin, where he says a CEFCOM note taker stopped taking notes with regard to Afghan detainees? Was he or she ordered to do so, and by whom?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I was not the Minister of National Defence during that particular time and I was certainly not present at that meeting. I would not be able to say who stopped taking notes or how that particular scenario unfolded.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, in cases where the minister is unable to give me the information, I would ask that he look for that information, and if he finds it, forward it to me at his earliest convenience.

Richard Colvin mentions that according to good sources, at least three Canadian-transferred detainees were sent to NDS black sites.

Will the government confirm this? How often did Canada transfer detainees to these sites, where human rights monitors are not permitted?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, again, I am not aware of the so-called black sites as referred to by the hon. member. If any information is available within the department, it will be provided.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, why did the government not accept the proposal of Canadian embassy officials to have all detainees flown to Kabul for transfer to prisons where they could be properly monitored? Was it only because the detainees took up significant space on military aircraft?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, when we took office and shortly thereafter, we put in place a new transfer arrangement that improved upon the arrangement that was clearly inadequate, the arrangement that was put in place by the hon. member's government, that he, quite frankly, seemed to endorse.

Business of Supply

Upon putting this new arrangement in place, it gave us a much greater ability to have eyes on within the prison system. It allowed us, of course, to inject a greater degree of accountability. We then embarked upon further efforts to improve the prison system with the individuals who were working there, by way of mentoring them, making investments within the infrastructure itself, and improving generally upon the overall human rights situation in Afghanistan. That is what we were there to do.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, the minister has been quoted in November 2009 as saying:

When Afghans are not living up to their expectations, we pause transfers. When they started to allow that access again, the transfers then began again.

There were multiple occasions before 2009, when Afghan authorities were not living up to their obligations, for instance. There were at least eight different complaints of abuse mentioned in the Federal Court decision of Anne Mactavish in February 2009. There were complaints between May 3 and November 5, 2007, at least eight complaints, that were before the court in terms of evidence.

Why were transfers only stopped in the three instances?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, since May of 2007, the supplementary transfer arrangement was, as members know, then implemented. Canada has temporarily paused transferring detainees once in November 2007, and on three occasions in 2009.

The first two pauses in 2009 were related to allegations of mistreatment. The last pause was related to access to facilities. Transfers resumed when the commander on the ground felt confident that transfers could be made in accordance with their obligations under international law.

That is in fact how the process works. It is the commander's decision on the ground. It is taken in consultation with other departments, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs. It is also often done in consultation with other agencies, including the Afghanistan government.

We continue to make improvements in this regard. The level of communication and consultation that goes into these decisions remains very rigorous. With the new transfer arrangement in place, I would suggest we have a much greater information source to make that judgment call.

• (1900)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, was there any particular reason why there was no public acknowledgement of the halting or the stoppage of the transfers at those times, at least the three times that the minister has mentioned?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, as with much of what occurs in Afghanistan, as I have already indicated, the commander on the ground made a judgment call based on available information. Very often information such as this is based on operational detail. For a variety of reasons, on occasions, if operational detail might in any way imperil troops on the ground, might in any way impinge on our operations or those of our allies, then that information is held closed.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, I have a very general question for the minister about the detainee and torture issue. When did the minister first become aware of the general allegations of torture and abuse in Afghan prisons? When did he first become specifically

aware of any Canadian transferred detainees being tortured, or at least a complaint being made in that regard?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I am not aware of any confirmed evidence that a Canadian transferred detainee was in fact abused. This is an allegation that the hon. member has made repeatedly.

With respect to information available to me, I would refer him to the testimony of the hon. Bill Graham who held both the post of foreign minister as well as minister of National Defence, my predecessor in this regard, and who was in fact, as was the hon. member, a member of the previous government when the mission began and when the inadequate transfer arrangement was put in place.

With respect to information made known to me, his colleague, Mr. Graham, said, "My experience as a minister was that in two ministries—".

He was referring to National Defence and Foreign Affairs.

—that had very large, very competent people, there was always a diversity of views. Within that group of officials, one works out what is the appropriate approach. That's worked out at the level of those officials. As a minister, you get the result of that. You don't go downstairs to the bottom of the foreign affairs department and walk around the halls and knock on doors and say, "What do you think about this?" You have a deputy minister who comes to you and says, "This is the view of the department."

I relied on the advice of both military and civilian officials—

The Chair: I am going to stop the minister there to try to keep the responses in about the same length of time as the questions.

The hon. member for Vancouver South.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, I do not believe that was a response to my question. I asked when the minister first became aware of the general allegations of torture and abuse in Afghan jails and when was any complaint relating to Canadians being tortured brought to his attention.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, how this works is that he asks the questions and I answer them. He does not get to tell me what my answers are. However, I will quote him. The Liberal defence critic, in speaking to this issue, said, "we need to continue to make sure our forces in Afghanistan have the best available equipment until they leave, and that we have appropriate plans for a significant role in Afghanistan afterwards".

I agree with him. What I continue to do is ensure that we are working in unison in the department to support the men and women who are there at this very moment carrying out this important task. When information comes to my attention, which very often comes through the chain of command, or through the deputy minister and officials within the department, we make decisions based on that important information.

With respect to general allegations, general references to abuse of Taliban prisoners, that information has been available for some time. We express concern and when we get specific information we act. That is how it works.

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• (1905)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, obviously the minister quoted Bill Graham favourably. Bill Graham also indicated to the media that there ought to be a public inquiry. Perhaps that should be considered.

My questions will now move to post-2011 and they will be very short and specific questions. I know there is lack of clarity on this issue. The government has at some point said that we would engage in military and other training at other times. The Prime Minister and others have said that Canada would not have any troops in Afghanistan other than perhaps what might be stationed at the embassy itself.

First, will Canada have any Canadian Forces military personnel in the country following the end of the combat mission in 2011, other than those who might be attached to the embassy?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, we have been very clear in stating that the Government of Canada will respect the parliamentary motion that was passed in this chamber. This motion states very clearly that Canada's combat mission will end in July 2011 and that troops will leave Kandahar province in December of that same year.

I think everyone understands that we are in Afghanistan doing many things, one of them being fighting for democracy and another being helping to establish the ongoing stability there, but we cannot be in Afghanistan espousing and promoting democracy and not respect our own. So we will respect the parliamentary motion of which the hon. member I believe supported.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, that really does not tell me whether there would be any troops in areas other than Kandahar and the minister specifically referred to Kandahar in terms of the answer.

The question that I really have is this. Will any of our military personnel be participating in the training of Afghan national army personnel after 2011?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the short answer is that it is to be determined but we have indicated very clearly that we will respect and work within the parameters of the parliamentary motion.

The Prime Minister has been even more crystal clear in his response and indicated that we will be out of Afghanistan. So that is on the record, the hon. member I am sure is aware. However, if he is proposing something different we would like to hear it.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, the last time I checked, the minister is a minister in the government. We are just the opposition. The question I have concerns the lack of clarity on this issue. The minister has said certain things and the Prime Minister has said certain other things. The minister just now opened the door to the presence of troops in Afghanistan and indicated that it is to be determined whether we will engage in training of the military personnel. Why are we not sharing that information with Canadians and the opposition and having a dialogue? Are we sharing any of that information with our allies as to our future plans?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, while the hon. member sounds very reasonable in his questioning here, every opportunity that we have taken at committee, I am reminded by the parliamentary secretary to defence, to discuss the mission, which is why the special committee was set up, has been blocked by the member opposite and

the members of the opposition, focusing solely on the subject of Taliban prisoners.

The government has on numerous occasions tried to raise the subject of an open and inclusive dialogue on the subject of the future of the Afghanistan mission and it has been rebuffed at every occasion.

I want to come back. The Prime Minister has been clear and I have been crystal clear again. We will respect the parliamentary motion and that will see our soldiers leave Afghanistan in 2011.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: This concludes the first 15 minutes. The hon. Minister of National Defence.

• (1910)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, as per the instructions of the Chair, I want to indicate that I will be taking my 10 minutes and that the member for Medicine Hat and the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley will be using the final 5 minutes for questions.

I am pleased to be here tonight and I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for choosing the Department of National Defence to allow us this important platform to discuss a number of important issues as they relate to the Department of National Defence and to speak as a minister directly to the values, the virtues and the valour of the men and women of the Canadian Forces, those who provide such incredible service to our country and who are so capable and committed in what they do for Canada and, I would add to that, their families who support them.

Members will see from the main estimates that our government's focus remains the security of Canada, conducting operations and implementing the Canada first defence strategy.

As the Minister of National Defence, I have had the pleasure and the privilege of seeing the Canadian Forces up close and personal. One word describes our men and women in uniform and that is magnificent. It makes one feel very proud to be Canadian when one sees the work that they do. One could not be prouder when one sees how they approach their work with such professionalism and patriotism.

Six weeks ago, I was in Afghanistan and I was humbled by the courage and accomplishments of our troops. A few days after that, I had the opportunity, along with the Chief of the Defence Staff, Walt Natynczyk, who is here with us, to travel to Canadian Forces Station Alert in the Canadian Arctic. I witnessed those same values that served the Joint Task Force (North) that took part in Operation Nunavut and were participating with a special group within the Canadian Forces and those are our Canadian Rangers.

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At the beginning of this month, as the navy commences its 100th centennial serving Canadians, I joined with others at Saint John's Harbour as the HMCS *Fredericton* returned for refueling on its way back to its home port. She was pulling into Saint John's Harbour and it was reminiscent of the many times in our history when Canadian naval vessels returned to home port. To be there and to see the faces of the awaiting families looking for their loved one on the deck of that ship was truly heartwarming. The *Fredericton* was returning after completing its sixth month counterpiracy and counterterrorism deployment in the Gulf of Aden, as did the HMCS *Winnipeg* in ville de Québec before her, and many other Canadian ships that have served around the world.

As a Canadian, I am very proud of what our men and women in uniform do every day, whether here at home in guarding our massive coastline and land mass, training for deployments on 17 missions, including Afghanistan, or participating in international missions, whether they be NATO or closer to home with NORAD. At home and away, person for person, our Canadian Forces are second to none.

I am proud of the work that our government is doing with our Canadian Forces. I am proud to be part of a government that supports and stands behind their efforts.

Two years ago, the Prime Minister and I announced the Canada first defence strategy in Halifax and it carved out an important path for the future of the Canadian Forces. Outside this chamber, carved on the Peace Tower is the historic words "Where there is no vision, the people perish". I would suggest, with the Canadian Forces, where there is no plan the forces falter. The Canada first defence strategy is that plan. It is a very visionary, long-reaching plan and one that will ensure the success of future operations and the continued success of the Canadian Forces.

As proof of that and how our government's plans and investments are paying off, these can very much be seen in the actions and the capabilities of the men and women in uniform and what they are doing. As an example of what they have done over the last six months, almost 4,000 military personnel worked with the RCMP and other partners to provide security at the Vancouver Olympic Games, a hugely successful event that demonstrated our country's best and, as part of that, our best in the Canadian Forces doing their important work.

At the very same time, 2,000 members of Joint Task Force were deployed within 24 hours to the crisis and the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti. Canada was among the first of those countries that responded to have boots on the ground. The HMCS *Halifax* and *Athabaskan* pulled in Jacmel and Leogane and within hours much needed supplies of equipment and, most of all, humanitarian aid was being made available to the people in Haiti.

• (1915)

During all of this we had almost 3,000 troops serving in Afghanistan and another 3,000 preparing to deploy. As always, at our bases, in our training regiment and throughout the communities of Canada we have incredibly dedicated people serving our country and serving the larger international community to the best of their ability. And we are not done yet.

2010 will be a decisive and challenging year for the Canadian Forces. With the resources of the International Security Assistance Force focusing around Kandahar, our Canadian Forces are better placed than ever before to deliver real and lasting improvements to the people of Afghanistan. I expect that we will have a chance to discuss this mission in more detail tonight.

The Canadian Forces do their jobs superbly well. They are recognized and respected around the world.

[*Translation*]

Next month, Canada is hosting international leaders during the G8 and G20 summits. As they were for the Vancouver Olympics, the Canadian Forces have been called upon to support the RCMP in providing security for these events.

I am proud of the confidence with which we can invite the world to our doorstep—due in part to the confidence Canadians—and the world—have in the Canadian Forces' abilities.

Our capabilities, our flexibility, our influence in the global community comes as a result of the hard work of the military and civilian personnel who strive every day to ensure the safety and security of Canadians. And it is also the result of our government's determination to end years of neglect and to make systematic and prudent investment in Canadian Forces to build the capability and capacity they need to do the work we, and Canadians, expect of them.

[*English*]

Implementing the Canada first defence strategy is a big undertaking, and one of our key priorities of course has always been investment in personnel. We are committed through the Canada first defence strategy to increasing the size of the forces to 70,000 regular and 30,000 reserve force personnel, but like most other employers that are trying to recruit the best workers in a sometimes competitive environment, we are also facing demographic pressures. A lot of people will retire over the next 10 years and that attrition factor very much factors into our plan.

Despite this, I am happy to report that we have seen a 6,500 regular force recruit increase take enrollment each year over the last three years. That is to say we have exceeded our expectations with respect to recruiting numbers and we continue to have great success. The regular force now numbers 68,000 men and women, and we are confident we will hit our 70,000 mark well ahead of time. I can suggest as well that the reserve force is also on pace.

The government also believes in taking care, most importantly, of our men and women in uniform and their families. Over the last year we have implemented 19 integrated personnel support centres across the country, where we coordinate services for ill and injured Canadian Forces members, veterans and their families here in Canada. There is a great obligation felt by those in the force that we continue to improve upon these services.

There was also the launch of the “Be The Difference” campaign led by the chief of the defence staff. We are working hard to build a culture of understanding for our military that mental health is as important as physical health. Taking care of our personnel and their families is something we always are going to try to strive to do better.

Hon. members will note that the main estimates include an increase over the last year of almost \$600 million to supplement the ongoing procurement projects. This money will help support key acquisitions like the purchase of new land combat vehicles and Chinook helicopters. It will improve our equipment across the board and purchase new modern generation Hercules transport planes to replace our current fleet. This will complement the C-17 fleet that we now have in operation.

The Speech from the Throne reiterated the strategic importance of a strong domestic shipbuilding industry, which we will be launching in the very near future. I will speak to infrastructure in greater detail.

In conclusion, I would suggest this has been a tremendous year for the Canadian Forces, a difference in defence of this nation is being made by these dedicated individuals. Today we will be discussing the investments to ensure their ongoing safety and support throughout the country so that the Canadian Forces can continue to carry out the missions that we expect of them, and Canadians can continue to be proud of the work that they do abroad.

• (1920)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Chair, while Canadian Olympians and Paralympians were setting new records during the Vancouver 2010 Winter Games, some 4,500 Canadian Forces personnel were quietly working behind the scenes in support of civilian agencies to ensure the security of all those who flocked to beautiful British Columbia to be part of the extraordinary games.

I understand the scale and complexity of the Canadian Forces' contribution to Olympic security, Operation Podium, was unprecedented. It involved maritime, land and air forces, which together monitored the 10,000 square kilometres joint operational area and helped secure specific venues. In short, the Canadian Forces helped to ensure that the Olympics would be remembered as an incredibly successful sporting event.

Could the minister give us a sense of how the various parts of Operation Podium came together to secure the games so successfully?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Medicine Hat for his very generous and informed comments and, particularly as an Albertan, his reference to British Columbia.

As he suggested and as I said earlier, the military was part of an interoperational exercise that involved a number of different departments. Over 4,000 members of the Canadian Forces were set up at various venues and kept a very low profile. Their main role was in support of the RCMP, and also municipal police who were there and various agencies who were working together to meet the security requirements of the Olympic Games.

Canadian Forces have very unique capabilities, which he also referenced. Those capabilities included a maritime component which incorporated the naval personnel from both coasts and of 24 naval

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reserve divisions. The navy conducted maritime surveillance, port security, dive operations and underwater sweeps. One Halifax class frigate, two Kingston class maritime coastal defence vessels, three Orca class patrol vessels, which are wonderful little ships, and many rigid-hulled inflatable vessels were part of the operation. We had land components, air components, Griffons, Sea Kings, as well as Hornets in the air. All of this was overseen as a Joint Task Force support element, regular and reserve force.

Due to the close proximity of the U.S. border, we worked with our American partners as well.

It was a very successful Olympic Games in no small part because of the important security provided by the men and women in uniform. Many people who took part in that operation left with a great sense of pride. And I would ask where were you when Sidney scored?

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Chair, as Canadians, we owe our men and women in uniform a great deal. The sacrifices they make on a daily basis help keep Canada safe and secure. Indeed, I think I speak for everyone in this House when I say that people are the Canadian Forces' most precious resource. It is therefore vital that we do everything we can to support our military personnel. It is particularly important to formally recognize their sacrifices and achievements.

Would the minister please tell us about some of the government's recent initiatives to ensure our courageous sailors, soldiers, airmen and airwomen get the recognition they so richly deserve?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley comes from a part of the world that I am familiar with and which also was the constituency held by a previous defence minister, Robert Coates.

His question is an extremely important one in terms of what we are doing to support the men and women in uniform and their families.

We continue to make investments in that regard, with respect to pay and benefits, with respect to the treatment of the ill and injured, and also in terms of tangible recognition through various awards and medals. For example, we recently announced changes to the South-West Asia Service Medal, the General Campaign Star and the General Service Medal. One of the primary objectives of these changes is to recognize those who serve on multiple rotations and allow the Government of Canada to acknowledge the individual experience of men and women who deploy on operations with the recognition they so richly deserve.

This being the 100th anniversary of the navy, we made a number of changes to the Canadian naval uniform, as well as the Sea Service Insignia, which also is intended to recognize the uniqueness of maritime service.

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We will continue to examine ways in which we can properly recognize and acknowledge men and women in uniform through tangible and, in some cases, intangible means. They notice. They see it in restaurants. They see it on the street. Do not walk by a soldier, sailor, airman or airwoman without shaking his or her hand and thanking him or her.

● (1925)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, I want to let you know that the three slots allocated to the Bloc Québécois will be taken by three members of our party and will be used mainly for questions.

My first question for the minister concerns the reopening of the Royal Military College Saint-Jean. The minister came, I believe with the former minister of public works, to announce the partial reopening of the military college, which the Liberal government had closed in 1995. By partial reopening, I mean that the Royal Military College does not have the same status it had when it was closed. Allow me to explain. When the facility was closed, it had university status, but the two ministers came to announce that it would have college status.

Second—and this is something we have repeatedly talked about with the minister—the college used to have a budget of about \$25 million, but its current budget is about \$12 million. I am sure the minister knows that last weekend, there was the first partial reopening parade of cadets in the preparatory year and first year. I sensed that people were proud, even very proud, to see soldiers on the parade ground again. I think that when we talk about pride, there are no half measures. The college needs to regain its former pride with full status as a university military college and with its former budget.

Moreover, I am told, and perhaps the minister can confirm this, that work is about to start in Kingston. Space will be needed for the soldiers, and Saint-Jean might provide that space. Many senior military people also say that the time has come to reopen the military college. I would add that the number of francophone officer cadets in the Canadian Forces has peaked and is declining.

My question for the minister is this: is it not time to reopen the military college with full university status and with its former budget?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I extend special thanks to my dear colleague for asking this question. I realize that he has a great interest in this issue. I have had the pleasure of attending convocation ceremonies with him in the past.

It is a question of needs and capacity. As my colleague knows, Canadian Forces recruitment is on the upswing at this time.

[*English*]

We have another facility which the member has referenced, the Royal Military College, which also has language training. In both institutions we have a great history and, as he has indicated, a tremendous amount of pride, pride of participant and family, and the pride within the Canadian Forces broadly. There are many graduates from both institutions, as was the case with Royal Roads.

With respect to the university status, Royal Military College Saint-Jean was in fact reopened by the Conservative government in 2007, something of which we are very proud. In fact, it has seen enrolment grow. It has enhanced our capabilities, without a doubt. Saint-Jean also delivers two main fully bilingual programs for officer cadets, including a two-year Quebec CEGEP program that greatly enhances our capability.

The department is very much aware of the interest to the province of Quebec and many of those who live in the area of Saint-Jean to have that capability expanded. We are not ruling anything out is the short answer.

The reality is that we have the capability right now with the service provided by both of these formidable institutions, RMC Saint-Jean and RMC Kingston. As part of our commitment to expanding the Canadian Forces, we have made a number of important investments when it comes to the area of official languages, not just at these two institutions but across the Canadian Forces more broadly. Offering college and university level courses at both RMC Saint-Jean and RMC Kingston contributes to our ability to offer training to our personnel in the language of their choice.

We will continue to make those decisions based on all of the information, but most importantly, based on the need, based on the capability and based on budget. Those are considerations that I know the hon. member would agree with.

● (1930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would like to move on to another topic, fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft. As the hon. minister knows, we have been waiting for several years for a call for tenders on this kind of aircraft. Although the aircraft are operated by the military, the service is offered to all Canadians and Quebeckers. Also, I think this is the only service provided to Canadians and Quebeckers when they are in situations of serious distress. I would like to know where this matter stands.

We have seen one delay after another and I believe this is a \$3 billion program. This money has already been set aside, waiting for a decision on how to proceed. I know there was a bit of a conflict between the minister and his colleague from Industry Canada—perhaps the minister could tell us about that—which led the government to ask the National Research Council of Canada to do an independent study.

Once again, the government seems to want to keep this study under wraps. It says it is not confidential, but neither is it public. Besides, some journalists already have copies of it. As members, we went to a lot of trouble regarding censored documents. Now we cannot understand why the government does not want to give us a document that we have asked for.

Does the minister know about this study? Does he plan to provide it to the Standing Committee on National Defence, which will use it to determine its position on search and rescue activities and on its study on the Arctic? It is an important aspect of the study we are conducting on Arctic sovereignty.

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Can the minister provide us with that study? Are we seeing these delays as a result of the conflict or misunderstanding he is having with his colleague from Industry Canada?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, first, there is no conflict or battle between me and another minister. As far as the report is concerned, knowing the Bloc members as I do, they always deal with things in both official languages. Accordingly, this report needs to be translated. The answer is yes, we intend to produce this report in both official languages.

[*English*]

As soon as the translation is done, we will ensure that it is made available to him.

With respect to our fixed wing search and rescue project, this is very much a priority within the Canada first defence strategy. It is very much a priority of this government. We fully intend to proceed with this project post haste.

It does have a long history. We have received a great deal of information from various sources. In fact the National Research Council report the member referred to allowed for an independent view and independent input from a number of sources giving us a statement of requirement.

Therefore, we will take this report and are reviewing its findings in our department and in other departments, including the industry department and public works. We are completing a review that will allow us to make a very informed decision.

I know that industry itself anxiously awaits the opportunity to embark upon a process that will allow it to demonstrate to the Government of Canada that it can meet our needs.

Those needs of course are great. We have a country that is enormous. When it comes to the stress and strain on our SAR techs, they have perhaps one of the most difficult jobs in the Canadian Forces. They are like Olympians in terms of their regimented training. Their daily heroics should never go unnoticed. They are covering a country like ours that has over 200,000 kilometres of coastline. There are 35,000 kilometres of coastline in a country like France.

Our country is massive in size. Our weather systems are challenging; our geography is also challenging. Those SAR techs need the best equipment possible. We are going to provide it to them, but we are going to do it through a transparent and inclusive process. We now have the path forward. We have the information required and we going to proceed in a way that will see us purchase new fixed wing aircraft in the very near future.

• (1935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, on the same subject, can the minister confirm whether, based on current specifications, the Air Force prefers the Alenia? Does the minister share the same vision as the generals of the Air Force? Is that not the problem?

When does he intend to issue a fair, equitable and transparent call for tenders? Will it be soon? Does he have a preference among the

range of equipment currently being considered in this military contract?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, of course I have a preference. I want to see the best aircraft at the best price with the best industrial benefits, as do the air force, the chief of the defence staff and the deputy minister. We all want to see those SAR techs that I referred to earlier with the best possible equipment to help them save lives. They save 12,000 lives annually on average. That is the rigour. That is the expectation in this massive country.

They need specialized equipment. We are currently operating a fleet of Buffalo aircraft that are well maintained and capable of doing the job, but they are aging and they need to be replaced, not unlike our Sea Kings. But we supplement them with Hercules aircraft. We also have Cormorants, and we continue to provide an incredible service because of that dedicated professionalism of our SAR techs.

We are gathering all the information from numerous sources, both independent ones and within the departments, to make the best informed decision on the type of aircraft that meets the needs of our SAR techs and our air force.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would like to address the issue of industrial defence policy. In my opinion, we are entitled to have a clearer position. I always give the same example of the aerospace industry. My first question is for the minister. It is very short.

In addition to being the Minister of National Defence, is the minister still responsible for the economic diversification of the Atlantic provinces?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I just want to correct myself. I misspoke and said 12,000 lives. Of course, I meant 1,200. That figure accumulates greatly when one considers how long our SAR techs have been performing this incredible service.

With respect to the CADSI consultation, I and other ministers had the opportunity recently to meet with the CADSI leadership. We had a chance at that point to discuss some of the recommendations they had made in their report. We will continue to consult with them and with industry to get their feedback to see how we can improve procurement and streamline the process.

CADSI delivered a report called "Canada's Defence Industry: A Vital Partner Supporting Canada's Economic and National Interests". It does provide valuable feedback. It does provide us with the type of information that we need.

Thus ministers and departments are working closely with each other, with industry, and with the Canadian Forces directly and the Defence Industry Advisory Council, all of whom want to see the best equipment procured to the maximum benefit to taxpayers, but, of course, also to the maximum utility of the men and women in uniform.

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[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would like the minister to explain to me why Quebec is not getting its fair share of all the military aerospace contracts we see before us when 55% of the Canadian aerospace industry is in Quebec. For the C-17s, Quebec has only 30% of the contracts while Ontario has 20%, the west has 20% and Atlantic Canada has 7%. That is far from the critical mass of Quebec's aerospace industry. The same goes for the Chinook contracts that, so far, have brought \$127 million to Atlantic Canada, \$127 million to Quebec and \$234 million to Ontario.

Are the two ministers from Ontario, the Minister of Industry and the Minister of National Defence, not helping themselves at the expense of Quebec, which has to settle for such a small sum?

• (1940)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the answer is no. It is a matter of competition and abilities.

[English]

Clearly, what we want to see is industrial regional benefits felt across the country, but it very much has to do with each contract. For example, a contract was awarded very recently to the province of Quebec with respect to flight simulators. Whether it is shipbuilding, the aerospace industry or our land combat vehicles, it very much depends on the competition that is out there.

We do not measure to a nicety each and every contract. We look at the longer term. We look at the ability to provide the best protective, capable equipment for the Canadian Forces. There are industrial regional benefits that factor into those decisions, but I do not know where the member opposite is getting these figures.

What I can tell him is that we have a fair, open, inclusive and competitive bidding process that very much gives Quebec the opportunity, like other provinces, to present its case and to make a bid. At the end of the day, we want to wind up with the best and most capable equipment.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Chair, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this committee of the whole to study the National Defence estimates.

First of all, let me reiterate what the minister said when he last spoke during his allotted time and on which I do not think there is any disagreement in the House. I think we would unanimity in this House in the support for the valour, sacrifice and commitment of our troops and personnel who are making the sacrifice, in some cases the ultimate sacrifice, in acting on behalf of their country in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

On that note, the minister talked about a number of new awards and medals that have been determined, and I think we all support that. In fact, I was present at the first awarding of the new Sacrifice Medal, which honours the sacrifice of those who are killed or injured in the line of duty, starting on, I believe, January 2001. The ceremony was very moving, with the Governor General, the chief of the defence staff and the Prime Minister there as well. These ceremonies have been held across the country ever since.

I have heard from a number of people, though, a request that such medals actually be backdated. As the historian, Jack Granatstein,

told the defence committee a little while ago, there are maybe over 100 people who lost their lives in peacekeeping activities for the Government of Canada over the last large number of years.

Is there some consideration being given, and would the minister give consideration, to extending that Sacrifice Medal back in time so that those who were injured or killed in the line of duty on behalf of their country during so-called peacekeeping efforts over the last 30 or 40 years could also be recognized? It obviously would be posthumous, including for some of those who did serve and were wounded and who have perhaps died since then, but this suggestion is something that has been brought to my attention by a number of people.

Would the minister consider backdating that medal or coming up with a similar medal?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, first, I want to thank my friend for his questions, his attendance here and his ongoing interest in the Canadian Forces. In particular, of course, I know he takes great pride in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. I know he attended the Beaumont-Hamel memorial. He and I have discussed having an appropriate designation or monument built at Gallipoli to also honour our soldiers from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and others who gave their lives there.

The member's question is about extending back a particular award that was designated in this instance for the Afghanistan mission, and perhaps applying it to other peacekeeping missions, as he referred to them. The short answer is that it not entirely within the purview of the Department of National Defence, and this is not a bureaucratic answer on my part. This is simply to say that awards and recognition medals are done at Rideau Hall, with the overall decision being made in consultation with, but ultimately by, the Governor General.

The member's suggestion that we would extend it further back in time would go against previous practice, which is normally to go back five years. In this instance, we already went outside that time limit, because of the length of the Afghanistan mission, which as we know goes back to 2001.

With regard to that, we always want to recognize the valour, the sacrifice, the contribution of those who served. We attempt to do so appropriately. There have been rare exceptions where we have revisited issues. I know that another contentious one that we have examined is bomber command where, again, we are looking at going back a significant period of time in that case.

These are very sensitive issues, of course, for families and those who sacrificed greatly. We always want to honour them. We always want to look for ways to do so appropriately, and so I know that those involved in this discussion will take his question to heart.

• (1945)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for his answer. I know the Governor General plays an honorary role, but I do think it would surprise many Canadians that the government had no say in this, and I think the minister is slightly disingenuous in not recognizing that. We look forward to hearing from him and his government on future recognition of Canadian sacrifices.

Business of Supply

In speaking of Afghanistan, since we are in the estimates committee and there has been some debate about this and different figures have been going around, can the minister provide the House with the full and incremental costs of the Afghanistan mission from 2001 to the present, and provide us with an indication of the expected full and incremental costs of Task Force Afghanistan until the withdrawal in 2011?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I do not want to belabour the point, but it is in fact a chancellery and it does have input from a number of sources. He is factually incorrect to suggest that it is solely the purview of the Department of National Defence that makes these decisions around medals.

With respect to his question, the all-up costs for the mission are well-known. They have been published. They have been discussed, even in this chamber. The answer is \$9.4 billion. That is of course incremental costs. That is the expense that would not have incurred but for the Afghanistan mission. That is in addition to the regular budget that is allotted for the Department of National Defence.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, what are the expected incremental costs until 2011, until the end of the mission?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, that is until the end of the mission.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, in terms of the estimates themselves, up until a few years ago I understand the practice was that votes 1 to 5 would be broken down in terms of the various line items for the maritime air and land components of the Canadian Forces.

Is it possible for the minister to provide a breakdown of votes 1 to 5 of the main estimates to indicate what the amounts for each command would be? I see there are breakdowns by program, for example on page 18-7. It does deal with land readiness and maritime readiness.

In terms of votes 1 to 5, I see them all lumped together. I understand that has not been the practice until the last couple of years.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I certainly will provide that information to the member.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for his undertaking in that regard.

With respect to the navy, we have had a recent kerfuffle where the Chief of the Defence Staff announced on May 14 that a previous order of Vice-Admiral McFadden's would be reversed. This order would have affected the operations of about half of the fleet of the navy.

The question is whether Vice-Admiral McFadden did indeed issue the order and what led to the order being issued. Afterwards, when the directive hit the media, the minister said that these operational decisions had not been taken.

Could the minister explain to the House the discrepancy with what the Chief of the Defence Staff said later that same day?

• (1950)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, we are all on the same page. The navy will not be taking ships out of commission or mothballing them

or tying them up. There was a lot of miscommunication that went on around this issue.

The reality is the Canadian navy will receive more money this year. In fact, it will receive in excess of \$200 million more in this fiscal year. It has seen an increase of its budget since we took office, since 2005, where the expenditures were somewhere in the range of \$1 billion. They have now gone to \$1.5 billion. This year its expenditures with respect to maintenance will see an increase of \$209 million.

The navy has the money necessary to operate, to do what we expect of it, which is an extremely important job. It is able to operate in all three oceans. Vice-Admiral McFadden, the Chief of the Defence Staff and I are all on the same page. The orders are clear. We know the navy will continue to do exceptional work and we will give it the necessary resources.

There are always challenges with respect to having the necessary personnel aboard the ships. We also have challenges with refits that are taking place with regard to the Halifax frigates and the submarines that are in repair. That requires a great deal of coordination for ships that are under repair, ships that are at sea, ongoing missions and expectations both at home and abroad.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, let me get this straight. Is the minister now saying that there never was an order by Vice-Admiral McFadden although it was rescinded by the Chief of the Defence Staff?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I think there was a direction given, but it has been clarified.

Clearly there was information that did not accurately reflect what was to take place. We now have clarification. We now know that those particular vessels will continue operations. There was a lot of misinformation and a lot of attempts to fan the flames of what was really a made-up scandal or what the Chief of the Defence Staff quite rightly called a tempest in a teapot, or a tempest in a tugboat, perhaps, in this case.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, that is sort of strange, because General Natynczyk is quoted in the *Globe and Mail* as praising Vice-Admiral McFadden and defending his balancing of priorities. In other words, he supported the fact that Vice-Admiral McFadden was making decisions based on the budget allocation, although he countermanded the order.

This misinformation does not seem to be coming from the CDS. Could the minister say that he did not know anything about this until the CDS clarified it, as he called it?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I know the hon. member likes to dig, but the reality is it is clear sailing. We have ships on both coasts, ships that work in the Arctic, ships, as I mentioned earlier, that take part in international exercises.

What is important is that the Canadian Forces and the Canadian navy have sufficient resources to do their job, and that is my job to see that they have the necessary resources.

Business of Supply

The Canadian navy will receive more money in its budget this year than it has ever had in its 100 year history, so that is a pretty strong commitment from the Government of Canada. That will allow it to do its important work. It will allow it to continue to shine, to continue to receive the accolades that it so richly deserve.

I know the hon. member will want to join me in praising the navy and supporting it.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I guess it was all mirage, the decision of the vice-admiral to balance the priorities.

As I understand, the priorities in this letter were that the Victoria class submarines and the frigates were a priority over and above the coastal patrol vessels. However, if the minister's view is that it was all a mirage, that nothing happened, that the decision was not made, then we either have to accept him at his word or continue to wonder what goes on behind the scenes.

Speaking of mirages, let us go to the F-18 fighters jets. We just finished in March of this year a significant upgrade and modernization of our F-18 fleet. There were two phases to that modernization and upgrade. I think the last 80, or 79 jets, have been delivered from that program in March of this year. Yet we continue to hear rumours of an immediate plan to replace those jets.

Could the minister tell us what the expected useful life of the F-18s that we have just finished refurbishing and modernizing would be? What would that be from here on in?

•(1955)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the current F-18 jets will be in operation until 2017, is the short answer.

I want to come back to the mirage, though, because the mirage here is the hon. member's vote. His vote was not there when it came to the increases for the navy and increases for the Canadian Forces generally on a whole range of issues. There is the mirage. Let us be clear on that fact.

With respect to the ongoing maintenance, this contract is a huge success story, as is the case with so much of what the Canadian Forces do these days. This contract was completed on budget and ahead of schedule. We now have 80 planes that are able to perform that important work.

There is an entire modernization program that was phased over eight years at a cost \$2.6 billion. The total of 80 CF-18 Hornet aircraft went through what is called a mid-life upgrade. I know my colleague from Edmonton has flown those aircraft, so he knows of what he speaks.

We are also now well down the road on a replacement program. The joint strike fighter program, of which Canada has already made significant investments, will see the next generation fighter capability, will see Canada participate in that program and avail itself of an aircraft that will exceed the current capability. This has been a magnificent aircraft. This next generation fighter, again, will be an open, competitive, transparent process that will see us receive the best capability, to provide that capability to the best pilots in the world. We have some participating right now in operation Maple Flag, which is a great chance for Canada to showcase its fighter capability.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am happy to discuss the main estimates for the Department of National Defence and speak about a group of people that I respect and admire greatly.

I will be sharing the last five minutes of my time with the hon. members for Kitchener—Conestoga and Edmonton—Leduc.

Much of today's discussion will revolve around dollar figures, funding levels, programs and initiatives, but these figures are meaningless without understanding how they support the serious, dangerous and courageous work being done by the Canadian Forces every day.

For 46 years, in and out of uniform, I have got to know our service men and women. They are extraordinary at what they do. They are passionate and committed about what they do. They are consummate professionals. They are the very embodiment of what Canada is and what it wishes to be: a force for good in the world.

Our Canadian Forces are deployed in 16 diverse and dangerous missions around the world and for this they need their country's support.

However, let me speak about Afghanistan. Most of our roughly 2,800 troops there are in Kandahar, the heart of southern Afghanistan, the heart of the fight and a turbulent area that is in need of our help, a place that, had our thin khaki line not been present, would have fallen to the Taliban years ago.

Every cent of Canadian tax dollars are being put to good use and making progress in Afghanistan. The lives of Afghans are getting better after decades of war. Villages that did not know what electricity, roads, fresh water and irrigation were now have them. Villages once threatened by disease are now free from it. However, it is a long and laborious process, with no shortcuts to rebuilding a war-ravaged society that ranked near the bottom of the UN development index, especially when it is still plagued by heinous insurgency, one that kills Afghans and Canadians without remorse and throws acid in the faces of little girls simply because they wanted to go to school.

I have talked to hundreds of soldiers, I have shaken their hands as they have arrived from or departed to Afghanistan. I have visited them in theatre a number of times, as have others. I have seen first-hand how passionate they are about their mission, following through on what we in the House of Commons asked them to do two years ago.

They talk of their accomplishments alongside compatriots, DFAIT, CIDA, Correctional Service Canada and the RCMP, all working together to improve the lives of Afghans. The soldiers on the provincial reconstruction team have taken me along as they have worked on projects, like helping build and supply schools. I have met Afghan soldiers and police officers being trained by our operational mentor and liaison teams. I have seen Afghans' enthusiasm for learning and applying new skills and their progress to now leading operations, to deliver security to their own countrymen in their own country. The latest quarterly report on Afghanistan shows that since I was last there at Christmas another Afghan national army kandak, or battalion, in Kandahar has become able to operate with almost complete autonomy.

Business of Supply

The men and women of the Canadian Forces and their families are remarkable people, who are members of our communities and dynamic society. They are on the front line carrying out a mandate given to them by the House in support of the UN and alongside our 45 NATO allies and partners to help the people and government of Afghanistan rebuild their country. There is a long way to go, but there is absolutely no question that we are seeing the signs of success.

As mandated by the House, our Canadian Forces will leave their combat mission in 2011, but there is a lot of work to be done in the next year and a half. We need to stay focused. We need to remember that the mission is not only about Canada's role, as significant and as important as our role may be. The United States continues to dramatically increase its presence in Afghanistan, with an urgency driven by the understanding that the international community does not have forever to get things right.

This is not just about additional military forces, as necessary as they are for security. The United States is spending billions each month training Afghan security forces and on governance, reconstruction and development. However, the U.S., with all its will and resources, cannot accomplish this alone.

The new government of the United Kingdom has recommitted itself to this international effort. Our other major allies, such as Germany, Poland and Australia and smaller partners such as New Zealand, Denmark and Estonia, are all committed to this challenging but vital task.

I wish we had more time to talk about the mission, its purpose and the progress being made, but in Ottawa we are distracted from the complex and compelling situation in Afghanistan by the debate about prisoners. I have been deeply troubled by allegations, innuendo and unsubstantiated accusations, allegations that cast aspersions on the character of those who conduct themselves with dignity and the highest ethical standards every day and who serve their country with pride at the risk of their own lives.

The narrative has been driven by hindsight, suggesting that five years ago there were clear warnings when in fact the overwhelming body of testimony demonstrated this was simply not the case. As Gavin Buchan, the political director of the PRT in 2006 and 2007, has said, "Burying an observation in paragraph 12 of a report and without making a recommendation is no way to raise a flag". He goes on to say:

I saw nothing in the record through March 2007 that indicated Canadian-transferred detainees were being abused, nothing that changed the baseline understanding from 2005, when the original arrangement was put in place...

● (2000)

The facts surrounding this debate are straightforward and I will lay them out again. I will begin by quoting Mr. Paul Chapin in the *Ottawa Citizen* on May 8:

Regrettably for the inquisitors, no evidence has yet been uncovered: no mutilated bodies, maimed survivors, photographs, first-hand accounts, or authoritative reports documenting specific cases with names, dates and places. Not a single individual appearing before the committee has yet provided any such evidence, beginning with the first one.

In late 2005, Canada signed an arrangement with the government of Afghanistan to allow the transfer to Afghan authorities of

individuals detained by Canadian troops. The hon. Bill Graham, former minister of foreign affairs and minister of national defence, told a special committee recently that the government of the day, given what it knew at the time, genuinely believed that the arrangement contained the highest level of protection for any possible prisoners.

When allegations surfaced in April 2007, the Government of Canada immediately raised the issue with the highest Afghan authorities and negotiated a supplementary prisoner transfer arrangement. This arrangement set up additional monitoring provisions to help Afghans meet their obligations as the sovereign government responsible for the treatment of prisoners.

These provisions gave Canada itself the ability to monitor Canadian-transferred prisoners in Afghan detention facilities. Combined with the capacity-building work of Correctional Service Canada, this new approach gave our whole-of-government team greater confidence through verification that transferred prisoners would be treated humanely.

Under the new arrangement, we have consistently been monitoring the condition of CF-transferred prisoners, building the capacity of the Afghan correctional system and justice system in responding to all credible allegations of mistreatment. We have made 230 visits so far. Prisoners are only transferred to Afghan authorities when the Canadian commander on the ground is satisfied that the conditions are right and that Canada's international obligations are met.

This fully meets Canada's obligations under international law. It accords with the practice of NATO and our allies, and is consistent with Afghanistan's responsibilities as a sovereign country.

Simple facts have been presented again and again by reputable men and women, most recently by three recent heads of mission: David Sproule, Arif Lalani and Ron Hoffman; by retired Major General Tim Grant, a former commander of Joint Task Force Afghanistan, and by Gavin Buchan, a former political director of the Kandahar PRT; and before them, by three of our most respected and decorated senior officers: General Rick Hillier, Lieutenant General Michel Gauthier and Major General David Fraser; and by dedicated public servants such as Linda Garwood-Filbert, who worked for two years as the Correctional Service coordinator for Afghan prison reform, who visited prisons and other correctional facilities nearly 50 times over the course of a single year in 2007.

Let me add that these visits were undertaken at great personal risk. Afghan prisons are constantly targeted by insurgents for terrorist attacks. She travelled hundreds of kilometres along potentially IED-laced roads in convoys protected by Canadian soldiers both ways, all this to ensure that our transfer arrangement was implemented, and that the human rights and dignity of prisoners were respected.

Business of Supply

These facts have been reiterated and restated by a dozen witnesses, all of whom have felt that their integrity was impugned by the accusations they have faced. These highly respected individuals and others have stressed the commitment of all Canadian officials, military and civilian, to Canada's international obligations in their own code of ethical behaviour. That includes rigorous adherence to international law and to the provisions of the Geneva conventions.

Despite all this, the debate continues. Allegations and accusations continue to be made on the flimsiest of grounds.

We have responsibilities as parliamentarians to understand and to question, but I believe we also have a duty to promote the valuable contributions that members of the Canadian Forces are making in our name so far away, a duty to recall that sometimes they come home physically or mentally changed, and that on so many occasions, 146 to date for Canadian Forces personnel, they do not come home at all.

This government has worked hard and made careful investments to give them the tools they need to carry out their challenging responsibilities: Chinook helicopters, Leopard 2 tanks, unmanned aerial vehicles, M777 Howitzers and C17 strategic airlifters.

The government has also made provision for extensive pre-deployment training, from individual soldiering skills at home to Exercise Maple Guardian, a large-scale, month-long training scenario designed to replicate situations our soldiers might encounter in Afghanistan.

We have arranged for their personal needs, making sure they get time out of theatre during their tour for rest and relaxation, and making sure they have the support they need and their families need once they come home.

The Canadian Forces could not do it without this kind of equipment, training and care. The main estimates for consideration today include a request for \$822 million for our mission in Afghanistan, so our troops can be safe and operationally effective.

I ask members to remember them throughout this debate, consider the good they have done for both the people in need as well as Canada's image and reputation, and give them the support they need to continue to perform their selfless work overseas and at home.

• (2005)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, the mission in Afghanistan has operated for almost a decade. In that time, the Canadian Forces and whole-of-government effort has had challenges and many successes.

One of the challenges that the Canadian Forces and ISAF have faced is the continuing threat of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. IEDs are cheap to produce and easy to use. They require few material resources, but they have been deadly tools for Taliban insurgents who wish to kill our troops.

This government remains committed to protecting the lives and effectiveness of our Canadian Forces. As part of that commitment, the Prime Minister established the Manley panel several years ago to make recommended changes to going forward in Afghanistan and the extension of the mission. One of those suggested changes was

the acquisition of medium lift helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, in Afghanistan.

As the Manley report stated:

To better ensure the safety and effectiveness of the Canadian contingent, the Government should also secure medium helicopter lift capacity and high-performance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance before February 2009.

I am proud to say that our government kept that commitment. It is also clear that Chinook helicopters, UAVs and Leopard tanks have saved lives in Afghanistan: the lives of our troops, our allies, our diplomats and Afghan civilians.

Could the minister provide to the House some additional information on how the government's actions have aided our troops and made a difference in our operational capability and capacity in Afghanistan, and how the utility of Chinook helicopters in Afghanistan has shown what a valuable asset they will be to Canada in the future?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, my friend from Kitchener makes a very relevant point in terms of the equipment needs. In particular, the Chinook aircraft have literally been a lifesaving investment. They have provided incredible utility in Afghanistan to Canadian Forces, all of our allies and Afghans as well.

These helicopters were acquired on recommendation of the independent committee that provided a number of very useful insights and information that was considered by the Canadian government and from the Canadian Forces perspective. These D-model Chinooks, that we were able to purchase from the American army, were immediately put into use.

They were in Afghanistan and available to us. From January 2009 until April 2010, these D-model Chinooks have currently flown over 3,300 hours. They have carried over 38,000 passengers and transported over 2.5 million pounds of cargo. That is just to give an idea of just how much use these aircraft have been.

My friend from Edmonton also referenced the use of UAVs, these unmanned aerial vehicles that provide eyes on in Afghanistan. They have an incredible intelligence-gathering capability that is also saving lives in our efforts to prevent the scourge of IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, that have taken lives and injured so many in that country.

As well, we are making very good use of the C-17 aircraft to bring equipment in and individuals from the Canadian Forces on various rotations in and out of Afghanistan. We know as well that the tanks have provided incredible protection to the men and women in uniform who are patrolling roads, who are out in these very difficult parts of the country in southern Afghanistan and particularly in Kandahar province, where we have the bulk of our mission.

Business of Supply

We will continue to make the necessary investments in this protective and preventative equipment. The less time that Canadian Forces find themselves on the ground, the more lives are saved and the more able they are to travel throughout that country. That is why these investments were made. That is why we will continue to look for ways to bolster our capability there and provide them with the necessary equipment. That is what these investments are all about in terms of the main estimates.

● (2010)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to ask about properly equipping our men and women in uniform. Re-equipping the Canadian Forces has been a priority of our government's Canada first defence strategy. We have shown results with the purchase of strategic lift and tactical lift Chinook helicopters, UAVs and tanks, all of which have made a tremendous difference to Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

Could the minister inform the House of some of the successes and challenges the government has had in the procurement process?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, all successes, and I thank the member for Edmonton—Leduc. We are fully committed as I mentioned earlier to getting the best equipment at the best possible price with benefits to Canadian industry. That protective equipment is so important to what we are doing over there. We will continue to work diligently to deliver.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to participate tonight. My late father was in the Canadian Forces in the second world war as a member of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. His landing craft was blown up on Juno Beach on June 6. He was patched up. He went back to fight the battle of the Falaise Gap, Caen, and the liberation of Holland. So I have always had a very strong view that anything we could do for our forces, anything we can do for our veterans, and anything we can do for their families is absolutely most important.

I want to ask the minister a series of questions and I would like to refer back to the defence committee report of last June entitled "Doing Well and Doing Better: Health Services Provided to Canadian Forces Personnel with an Emphasis on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder".

To the minister, has DND established a formal process for working with Veterans Affairs to ensure gaps in health care services are properly identified and addressed? Have any additional gaps been discovered over the past 12 months? That was our recommendation number six.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I agree that we cannot do enough particularly when it comes to individuals who have sacrificed so much. I would be certainly proud, as he is, of the previous contributions that have been made including from his illustrious ancestor. That is so indicative of so many Canadians who have done so much including the recent generation.

With respect to post-traumatic stress disorder, every country, including ours, is still in a learning mode, but we have come a long way. We have stood up 19 joint personnel support centres across the country where there are, in essence, numerous officers made available to members of the Canadian Forces, their families and

veterans. We have recognized that the issue around post-traumatic stress disorder is a genuine injury that must be treated.

We have also invested greatly in skilled mental health professionals and are working toward doubling those number of mental health professionals available to the military and their families. We have today over 370 full-time mental health professionals. We are working to hire more. We will continue to reach out to get the best care for patient to caregiver ratio.

We do work very closely with Veterans Affairs, as he has enquired, to ensure that the current generation and the former generation of military personnel will receive continuing care and that necessary care as we work with them. Currently, 646 Canadian Forces personnel suffer from PTSD, so we recognize that the challenges remain.

● (2015)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, in terms of maximizing existing programs to the fullest extent to attract and retain health care professionals, what specific steps have we taken in terms of the concerns of soldiers who are returning from Afghanistan? If they are not able to find sufficient medical and mental health care upon their return due to shortage of personnel, what are we doing to address that issue?

If that is the case, what specific types of health professionals can the minister tell us are in short supply? Does the department have any estimates as to how many additional personnel are required? Finally, on that topic, does the government have a plan to make up the shortfall and can the minister announce any type of timeline for us?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, as I said, it is an ongoing plan. Of course there is a plan, that is one thing I think we have all come to understand very clearly about the Canadian Forces. There are always plans, there are always contingencies, and there is always a need in a high tempo period which we are experiencing.

With respect to previous comments I made about full-time mental health professionals, we have 378 and we are hiring more. When we compare to our NATO allies just as a benchmark, Canadian Forces have the greatest ratio of mental health care workers to soldiers. The establishment for mental health care workers in the Canadian Forces will allow us to hire more of those individuals, more social workers, more psychiatrists, more psychologists, and more mental health nurses. All of these trained professionals will help to address those needs.

We also have programs that the hon. member may be aware of, the "Be the difference campaign", which encourages awareness, which encourages fellow soldiers to support one another. The Chief of the Defence Staff has been a very outspoken advocate for this approach. He was recognized nationally by the Canadian Mental Health Society for that work. Operational stress disorder is a major issue in the Canadian Forces. We have suicide prevention campaigns, a speakers bureau to ensure that there is greater public awareness. So yes, we will continue to work with all—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Richmond Hill.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, I want to echo the comments of the minister with regard to the Chief of the Defence Staff. There is no question about his leadership. In World War II, General McNaughton was a soldier's soldier. I have to salute the work that the CDS does.

I will now deal with the main estimates 2010-11. I note on page 11 that over \$3 billion have been listed for equipment acquisition and disposal. What particular pieces of equipment does this refer to? How much is designated for acquisition and how much is designated for disposal? What will be done with worn out equipment in Afghanistan? Will it be disposed of there before the 2011 withdrawal or will it be brought back to Canada and then disposed of here?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, to answer the member's last question first, we are still developing a plan. Much of the equipment that we are using in Afghanistan today, particularly the armoured vehicles, have a lot of wear and tear and the intention is to bring the vast majority, if not all, of that equipment back. We have received requests, as we expected, from the Afghan national army. It would like to inherit, if I can use that word, much of this equipment. However, there is still some operational life in much of this equipment that can be used to train and used for future deployments.

With respect to the specifics of the \$3 billion and the breakdown, I will certainly undertake to provide my colleague with those specific details given the amount of time that I would have to respond.

As far as acquisition, under this particular vote we have heavy lift helicopter projects, tactical airlift capability, Maritime helicopter projects, tank replacement projects and land combat vehicle projects, all of which are covered in various forms and amounts. We will ensure that those details are made available to the member.

● (2020)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, with regard to the issue of personnel shortages and reservists cuts, there have been reports that there is a shortage of project managers. How many project managers do we currently have, how many do we need and have they been prioritized by the minister? How many are set to retire in the next 10 years? What kind of impact will this especially have in the long-term for the forces? What kind of strategy or plan does the minister have to fill in these anticipated gaps?

Hon. Peter MacKay: In the interest of time, Mr. Chair, I will undertake to bring those specific answers and they will be noted in the record.

The short answer is that there is greater flexibility than we have ever seen in the Canadian Forces today in terms of an individual's ability to make career choices, to move from reserve to regular force and, in some cases, back to reserve. There are incredible opportunities within the Canadian Forces today and many challenges to fill some of the trades that provide incredible capability for service within the Canadian Forces and for other applications within the job market.

When it comes to project managers and individual decisions around personnel, all of these decisions are taken in consultation with the senior leadership, including the CDS and our chief of personnel. We continue to work very closely to see that all of the needs, both at home and abroad, are being met through our personnel.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, since there is a shortage of time, of course we try to get as many questions out as possible. Again, I thank the minister for the follow-up that he will be doing.

I would like to ask about reservists. There have been reports that training operations have stopped for reservists in the navy, the army and the air force and further reports of budget adjustments and reallocation. It has been reported that the air force is expected to adjust \$59 million, while the navy is expected to adjust \$52 million and the army \$80 million.

Could the minister confirm these adjustments and elaborate on what these adjustments or reallocations mean? Is this accurate? Where is the money going? What impact will it have in the long term?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I will begin by properly recognizing and praising the work of our reservists. They, in many instances, as is the case in Afghanistan today, do remarkable work in supporting our overall missions. In the case of Afghanistan, they sometimes make up between 20% and 25% of a rotation. They are very much an important part of the overall Canadian Forces contribution.

However, as is often the case, we experience various levels of operational tempo, which determines the priorities of the Canadian Forces, priority missions like Afghanistan which is an incredibly complex mission that calls on reservists and regular forces through various rotations. Approximately \$80 million of the army's budget were reallocated for the operational priorities.

With respect to army reserves, budgets remain very much on track with appropriate levels of funding for individual and collective training. In normal times for the department, we always re-examine our budgets based on various times of year, based on quarterly reports and based on the needs, both equipment and personnel. We continue to do that.

With respect to reserves, we are appreciative of the fact that they are—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. I appreciate that this is moving quickly back and forth but we want to get the maximum of questions.

The hon. member for Richmond Hill still has four minutes remaining in his time.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, I will continue in that vein. There have been reports that the army is looking to chop 5,000 reservists, especially class B contracts.

How much has been cut out of the reservist budget this year and, if so, can the minister give me a breakdown of the areas that are cut? There also have been reports that recruiting classes in some units will be cut more than one-half. How will this affect the recruitment which has been a priority for the government?

Hon. Peter MacKay: To come to that question directly, Mr. Chair, for clarification, the reserves were at 5,000 and they are actually up to 8,000 now because of the operational tempo. We are above and beyond what would be considered a normal or stable state for class B reservists. As the operational tempo in the future will change post-2011, we will see that normalize.

Business of Supply

This is not an issue of chopping or cutting. This is an issue of adjusting to the circumstances in which we find ourselves in the Canadian Forces based on operational tempo and based on need. We constantly do that, as the House would expect. We re-evaluate. It is a credit to those men and women that we have that flexibility to be able to accommodate the type of mission, particularly the high tempo mission that we are seeing in Afghanistan.

● (2025)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, with regard to the navy, there have been reports again that it is understaffed by about 1,000 at the present time.

Could the minister respond to that in light of the comments that my friend made earlier concerning the confusion about whether there will be a downing of some of the ships in question? There seems to be an indication, at least from the minister, that was never contemplated.

I would like to know, though, about the issue of personnel.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I am pleased to report, Mr. Chair, that the navy has achieved 97% of its recruiting goals. Furthermore, attrition rates were lower this year, 2010, than in previous years. Therefore, that allows us to meet those requirements. Within the navy, because of some of the technical trades themselves and the highly competitive job market, there are certain trades that do have openings.

I would take this opportunity to invite those who may be listening at home to look at the navy as a career. This is an unprecedented time in terms of the opportunity that exists and the educational opportunities that are there. The army, navy and air force will pick up the tab for their education. The army, navy and air force have an incredible opportunity to travel and see the world and to participate at an exciting time of growth and regeneration within the Canadian Forces. The navy is—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Richmond Hill has time for one more short question.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, the government has reported what is needed in terms of existing additional integrated personnel support centres across the country. With regard to that, has the government completed this survey with regard to those support centres? What were the results and other plans to create new centres? Are there plans to expand the joint personnel support unit or to provide the unit with additional funding?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, as is often the case, we are constantly in a state of consultation to determine the needs and then respond appropriately.

These joint personnel support units, as I mentioned earlier, comprise 19 different units now based around the country. These are a very diverse approach to being inclusive, to allowing greater access to use the perhaps crude phrase of one stop shopping and to allow for Canadian Forces personnel veterans and their families to go in. They are located in Vancouver, Esquimalt, Calgary, Edmonton, Wainwright, Winnipeg, Shilo, Toronto, Kingston and right across the country. They are there to improve the quality of care and service provided to ill and injured. They are there to ensure the personnel have the same level across the country of a high standard of care and support.

These units are an investment that we have made as a government that have proved to be extremely valuable.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Wetaskiwin, as well as the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

I am very pleased to stand in this place tonight to take part in the debate and to speak to what our government is doing to equip the Canadian Forces.

Making the investments necessary to modernize the Canadian Forces has been one of this government's strong priorities. That has been obvious since the Conservative government has come to power. When we take a look at the 2010-11 main estimates for National Defence, as well as our budget planning for the years ahead, it reflects that this commitment is well into the future.

The men and women of our military are simply the best that Canada has to offer. They help protect Canadians at home and promote our interests abroad on the world stage. Their job is difficult and, in many cases, very dangerous. The men and women of the Canadian Forces patrol our skies at 40,000 feet above the ground. They exercise sovereignty over the cold and harsh territories of the north. They rescue individuals in distress off our shores. They face ruthless insurgents in Kandahar. They provide essential care to those crying for help in devastated lands.

Again, Canadians all across the country are proud of the work that our forces have done in Haiti and other countries. They are working to build security and confidence between Israelis and Palestinians in support of the Middle East peace agreement. They ensure the security of seaways by deterring and disrupting piracy off the coast of Somalia or by countering drug trafficking in the Caribbean.

The government understands that one of our main responsibilities is to provide our military personnel with the capabilities they need to do their important work. This means equipment that will keep our men and women as safe as possible when they carry out their crucial operations. It also means equipment that will help them be as effective as possible in the pursuit of the mission that our country sets for them.

As the last Speech from the Throne stressed, the government is making the investments necessary to rebuild Canada's military. We are acquiring much required capabilities and carefully planning for future purchases. We are transforming military procurement so that we are able to deliver equipment more rapidly at a lesser cost.

From the moment this government took office, we showed resolve and acted quickly and decisively: first, to meet the urgent equipment requirements, including those for our mission in Afghanistan; second, to develop a long-term plan for equipment acquisition as part of the Canada first defence strategy; and third, to streamline the government's military procurement process.

Not only are our investments providing essential support to the Canadian Forces, they are also stimulating economic activity in communities all across the country.

Business of Supply

The government is leading one of the most significant military re-equipping efforts in the history of our nation. This is an overdue and very necessary endeavour for the men and women in uniform so that they can do their job and for Canada as a whole so that we can depend on them.

In June 2006, we announced our intention to renew our military's airlift capability by acquiring new strategic and tactical transport aircraft. A little more than a year later, we deployed the first of our four new C-17s to Jamaica to help relieve the victims of hurricane Dean. The C-17 provides Canadian Forces with the capability and capacity to move critical capabilities on our own terms. Gone are the days when the military had to rely solely on our allies and private contractors to transport our heavy equipment over long distances.

As for tactical airlift, the Canadian Forces recently announced that they would welcome their first of 17 new CC-130J Hercules aircraft into service in June 2010, on budget and well ahead of the original schedule.

• (2030)

Over the past few years, the government also acquired crucial equipment to support our troops in Afghanistan. We leased 20 Leopard C2 tanks from Germany for short-term requirements, and we acquired 100 from the Netherlands to build a longer-term capability. They have saved lives by offering increased protection from mines and improvised explosive devices. They have also provided essential firepower and improved mobility in Kandahar's difficult and dangerous terrain.

In response to recommendations from the independent panel on the mission in Afghanistan, we also purchased six model D Chinook helicopters from the U.S. government as well as tactical unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs. The government has taken timely decisions to ensure that the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces have access to the right mix of equipment. In the meantime, we have also put great effort into defining the requirements of the Canadian Forces for tomorrow, and we have launched projects on several fronts to make sure that our military operates state-of-the-art equipment well into the future.

Two years ago, the Prime Minister approved the Canada first defence strategy, the government's long-term plan to modernize the Canadian Forces. The strategy calls for balanced investment across the four pillars of personnel, infrastructure, readiness, and equipment.

Through the Canada first defence strategy, the government committed to renewing the Canadian Forces' core equipment platforms. These include destroyers and frigates, fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft, fighter aircraft, maritime patrol aircraft, and land combat systems and vehicles.

Renewing these core platforms is absolutely crucial. Some of our military's equipment fleets are nearing the end of their operational lives. Now is the time to act if we want to be in a position to replace this equipment when it is needed.

The government is making significant progress down this path. A year ago, the Minister of National Defence announced a \$5 billion investment to purchase new and upgrade existing Canadian Forces'

land combat systems and vehicles, a core Canada first defence strategy investment.

The investment includes first, the acquisition of three new fleets of land combat vehicles, and second, the upgrade of the Canadian army's current fleet of LAV IIIs. The procurement process is well under way for the three new fleets of vehicles: the close-combat vehicles, the tactical armoured patrol vehicles, and the armoured engineered vehicles. We are defining the work required for the LAV III upgrade project.

We made another crucial announcement last summer, when the government awarded a contract to Boeing for the procurement of a new fleet of Chinook helicopters, which should be delivered within the next four years.

We are looking to further invest in the Canadian navy. As articulated in the last Speech from the Throne, the government recognizes the strategic importance of a strong domestic shipbuilding industry. We therefore continue to support the industry's sustainable development through a long-term approach to the renewal of the Government of Canada's fleet.

We are exploring options to invest tens of billions of dollars to build a significant number of large vessels, including for the Canadian navy. This will allow us to move forward with a core Canada first defence strategy investment: the replacement of destroyers and frigates. It will also provide a framework that will facilitate the procurement of the joint support ship and the Arctic offshore patrol ship and other key components of Canada's future navy.

Acquiring military equipment is a complex process that involves many actors from government and industry. Making sure that the stakeholders participating in the procurement of military capability are on the same page often requires time.

I would like to say this evening that the investments in our military bring jobs. They bring benefits to Canadian industry, benefits in key sectors of our economy, and high-skill, high-paying jobs for Canadians. Our Canadian Forces need the right capabilities to defend our country, to defend North American co-operation with our U.S. friends, to contribute to international peace and security, and to be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow's security environment.

• (2035)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Chair, we all know that the CC-130 Hercules is the workhorse of the Canadian Forces' fleet of transport aircraft. It provides support to domestic and humanitarian aid operations and flies daily missions in Afghanistan. These aircraft have been called the lifeline of deployed forces, as they transport equipment, troops, and supplies to, from, and around theatres of operations.

For example, in Haiti, these aircraft carried much needed equipment, humanitarian relief supplies, and military and civilian personnel into the devastated country. They were also used to transport Canadian citizens back to Canada in the first few weeks following the earthquake.

Business of Supply

In Afghanistan, CC-130 Hercules are a vital part of our military task force, and they continue to be a mainstay of the NATO airlift in Afghanistan.

Renewing the tactical airlift fleet is an important element of the Canada first defence strategy and of the commitment to rebuild the Canadian Forces into a first-class modern military. Could the minister please provide us with an update on how this project is progressing?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Wetaskiwin, whom I know is a strong supporter of the Canadian Forces.

He is absolutely right. The refurbishment, or the replacement and renewal, of our tactical air fleet is a big priority for our government. We have made important investments. In fact, a contract valued at approximately \$1.4 billion for 17 new Hercules aircraft was awarded to Lockheed Martin. That included the acquisition of the aircraft and the initial set-up. The funds allocated for the capital program itself are just over \$3 billion.

With respect to receipt of these aircraft, I am pleased to report on the delivery schedule. The aircraft are expected to begin delivery as soon as the next few weeks. This will be ahead of schedule. We are working very closely with industry on many fronts to see that this is the case. These aircraft are needed. The aircraft in the previous fleet have been the workhorses, as he has described quite accurately, of the Canadian Forces when it comes to tactical lift. These, in conjunction with the C-17 aircraft, make the Canadian air force a very capable, quickly deployable force, as we saw in Haiti and as we have seen in other missions when have been able to get there, have boots on the ground, and have a strategic effect. This type of aircraft is so critically important.

This contract, as others, required a lot of input from a lot of departments. There is incredible coordination that goes on in contracts such as this, but I am pleased to report that this contract has gone extremely well. We will take receipt of those new aircraft at CFB Trenton very soon.

• (2040)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Chair, I proudly served in our Canadian Forces for 20 years in the branch of the electrical mechanical engineers, also known as EME. If there is one subject I know and understand, it is combat vehicles. The technicians I was responsible for were responsible for fixing and repairing all the army's equipment and also for purchasing new equipment.

Last summer, the minister made an announcement that the government would spend roughly \$5 billion to support our army in the acquisition of a new generation of land combat vehicles. I would like to ask the minister if he could update the House on these projects, particularly given that our role in Afghanistan will be changing next year.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I would be pleased to do so, and I want to begin by thanking the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his service as a member of Parliament and for his service in uniform. He is one of a number of members of this House who have provided that service to the Canadian Forces.

The Canada first defence strategy has been referred to a number of times this evening already. This very much includes a plan to acquire a new family of combat vehicles and systems. Last summer, we announced plans to produce the next generation of land combat vehicles. In part, this will include the current fleet of LAV IIIs that will be upgraded. We, in fact, have three new fleets of combat vehicles to be acquired: close combat, or CCVs, tactical armoured patrol vehicles, or TAPVs, and the force mobility enhancement, or FME, vehicles.

One of the lessons we have seen in Afghanistan is that this type of vehicle, these highly protective combat vehicles, are so important to ensure that our troops are able to have the right mix of equipment to patrol in these very volatile, very dangerous areas. We have seen the effects, the sad impact IEDs have had on human lives throughout Afghanistan. One of the proud things we are doing, in addition to equipping our soldiers, is a lot of demining, something that Canada is well known for around the world.

We continue to ensure that we have the proper equipment and the proper mix. We continue to invest to ensure that we have the proper protective gear for our men and women in uniform. Certainly light armoured vehicles, the LAV IIIs, have been one of the workhorses in the fleet. The close combat vehicles and the new tactical patrol vehicles, as well, will form part of that fleet, as will the force mobility enhancement project. All of those are well under way. All of those we will be delivering in the future for the Canadian armed forces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Chair, the Bloc Québécois was opposed to extending the mission until 2009. So we are just as firmly opposed to the Government of Canada extending the current mission past 2011.

We believe that Canada has done its part, and that it is up to the other NATO countries to take over. Canada must inform the other NATO countries as quickly as possible that it will withdraw its military troops when the mission comes to an end in 2011, as the House has called for, so that they can take over.

I have three questions for the minister. The government confirmed that Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will end in July 2010.

What preparations are being made for the withdrawal of Canadian troops?

Has the minister made it clear to his NATO counterparts that Canada will withdraw after July 2010?

And when the military mission comes to an end in July 2010, does the minister plan on leaving a small contingent of officers and soldiers to help train the Afghan national army?

• (2045)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I guess I will begin by saying that the hon. member is wrong.

We have consistently spoken in terms that are reflective of the parliamentary motion. He has quite rightly indicated that he voted against the extension of the mission. He has voted against the expansion of the budget for the Canadian Forces.

Business of Supply

That very much reflects his view and the view of his party. That is unfortunate, quite frankly. He and his party do not support the mission. Clearly, by their actions and votes, they really do not support the Canadian Forces, do not want them to succeed, and do not want the country to succeed. I guess that is consistent with the philosophy of the Bloc Québécois.

We, on the other hand, continue to make important investments in the Canadian Forces, particularly in personnel, particularly to enable and empower them to do the important work our country expects and asks of them.

Therefore, we will certainly respect the parliamentary motion, but we, as a government, this Conservative government, has every intention of continuing to invest and to bring our Canadian Forces budget to historic levels in terms of their support.

This is why we have the Canada first defence strategy. We are making important strategic investments in equipment and personnel across the board to see the Canadian Forces continue to shine and do this important work for which much respect has been garnered throughout the world.

The Canadian Forces, in my view, are one of the reasons our country today enjoys such a stellar reputation internationally.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Chair, I disagree with the minister. The fact that we oppose extending the mission in Afghanistan does not mean that we do not support our soldiers. Quite the opposite, in fact.

I would like to ask the minister another question. As a result of Canada's involvement in the conflict in Afghanistan, the number of operational stress injury victims is rising steadily, as the minister knows. Post-traumatic stress disorder, which is linked to psychological trauma resulting from military service, appears in a large number of deployed soldiers. According to some of the witnesses who appeared before the Committee on Veterans Affairs, about one in six soldiers is afflicted with post-traumatic stress. Some experts believe that percentage may be even much higher.

I think that we need to work harder at solving this problem. We need to do more for our soldiers because this issue can have a major impact on families, on husbands, wives and children if we do not do a better job of screening soldiers for post-traumatic stress. As the minister knows, people dealing with post-traumatic stress may be very difficult to identify because once they return from a mission, it can take months or even years for post-traumatic syndrome to develop.

What does the Department of National Defence plan to do about this? What does the minister plan to do to ensure better screening practices and better treatment for people afflicted with post-traumatic stress? We also heard witnesses talk about how the husbands and wives of soldiers struggling with post-traumatic stress received very little support or information about the situation, which led to a high rate of separation and divorce among soldiers.

I would like the minister to tell us whether the government really wants to work harder to reduce the number of soldiers afflicted with post-traumatic stress and whether he can implement measures to respond to this phenomenon that is, sadly, on the rise.

● (2050)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the reality is that we have learned some very hard lessons over a number of years, going back to the very earliest times in which Canadian soldiers found themselves in combat and in more recent generations, whether it be in Bosnia, Rwanda, and other peacekeeping missions around the world, and certainly in Korea, from which there have been Canadian soldiers who have taken those wars home with them, with psychological injuries. There are those who have suffered that type of post traumatic stress upon return, which sometimes does not show up for years. It is very much an affliction that brings itself forward in many different forms.

Having said that, as a country I am proud to say that those working within the field, psychologists and mental health professionals, have become world leaders with respect to the treatment of post traumatic stress. In fact, there are some very talented people who have made major breakthroughs in treatment and also in terms of an aspect that I think sometimes we do not talk enough about, that is, addressing the stigma attached to mental health.

Again, I applaud the chief of the defence staff for the steps he has taken in raising awareness and speaking in a very direct and personal way to our soldiers about the need to self-notify and to work with each other. In particular, we have to support the families who are very often the first to notice the change or effect upon a soldier's return from deployment.

Today the Canadian Forces, as I mentioned earlier, when I do not believe my friend was here, we have over 370 full-time mental health care professionals working full time on these issues. We are creating the best caregiver-to-patient ratio within NATO circles, and we will continue to improve our ability to recognize and treat those afflicted with post traumatic stress.

What it needs is greater public awareness, greater participation from those in the profession itself to bring to bear their experience. We are making tremendous strides, but what is needed always is the injection of budgets. The hon. member continues to vote against budgets that increase national defence and allow us to hire more officials. He has voted against the mission. He has voted against the Canadian Forces on every occasion.

It is actions that matter. It is about standing in this place, which we have the opportunity to do when budgets and budget allocations are brought forward. He has not demonstrated by his actions that he supports those necessary injections of budgetary allocations to help address this important issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Chair, I will refrain from commenting on the minister's remarks, but I thank him for his response concerning people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, because that is an important phenomenon that must be given as much attention as recruiting new soldiers for combat.

Business of Supply

The government is increasing military spending dramatically. In fact, Department of National Defence expenditures reached \$21.3 billion in 2009-10, which puts Canada in 13th place globally. The government's \$490 billion expenditure over 20 years is unique, since no other sector receives such guarantees for the future. Consider instead all the cuts we are seeing in other departments. They also show where the federal government's priorities are, since DND expenditures are 20 times higher than those of Environment Canada. We recognize the government's approach to the environment and its priorities in that regard.

We must also criticize the fact that the Conservative government continues to increase its defence budgets while it is limiting funding for international aid. Despite the fact that environmental needs are much greater and Canada is having a hard time fulfilling its international commitments regarding international aid, DND's budget is the only one that will continue to increase in coming years.

Are we to understand that the government sees armaments as far more important than international development?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, to touch very briefly on the previous subject, I do want to assure the hon. member that we will continue to make important investments when it comes to supporting our men and women in uniform on the subject of post-traumatic stress and any psychological injury. These should be treated as an injury, and that is very much the approach we take. There is also awareness within the Canadian Forces of de-stigmatizing these types of afflictions.

With respect to the budget itself, I believe the member may have misspoken, because under the Canada first defence strategy, the Conservative government has actually committed over \$490 billion over the next 20 years. We are seeing this take effect already, including a \$7.7 billion increase over the budget year. This is in addition to specific resource allocations for specific equipment. Half of that budget, I will be quick to add, goes to the salaries and employment of those both in and out of uniform who work at the Department of National Defence.

This strategy in the budget for 2010 will allow us to continue these important measures, these important investments that enable and support the fundamental tenets of the Canadian Forces. While the budget of national defence continues to go up, we are seeing a continued number of individuals who are interested in having a career within the Canadian Forces. Many Canadians will have seen the recruiting ads that talk about the great capabilities and great career opportunities that exist within the Canadian Forces.

This strategic review we are undertaking right now will ensure that we are making the right investments and that we are doing so efficiently, as other departments are as well. We will continue to ensure that the Department of National Defence budget rises every year. I hope the hon. member will support those increases and demonstrate perhaps a more open mind when it comes to the work that is done by the—

• (2055)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé, a quick question please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister again for his answer, but he just gave a shopping list of future military spending without having presented a real foreign and defence policy in the House.

In the absence of such a policy—and we have not seen one in the House—I feel it is irresponsible to proceed with such major purchases when the House has not had the opportunity to examine their repercussions. I feel it is not right for the government to keep on reinvesting such huge sums in the armed forces without setting clear parameters for military spending by targeting needs that reflect current geopolitical issues.

Does the minister not feel that any purchase over \$100 million should be studied in the House to ensure that such purchases are thoroughly checked and examined and that they meet identified needs?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, on the contrary. There is a great deal of detail. The Canada first defence strategy is very detailed. The member should read it. I would be very pleased to give him a chance to do so.

[*English*]

Perhaps I will have my colleague walk him over a copy of the Canada first defence strategy and he can inform himself. We have obviously put forward in the Canada first defence strategy a very detailed analysis of the needs.

Clearly this is going to be a live document, a living tree, if you will, Mr. Chair, but the money is there and is locked in. The strategy talks about rebuilding the four pillars of the Canadian Forces: our personnel, our equipment, our infrastructure, and our readiness. It is laid out in sufficient detail for industry, for Canadians, for our allies, for all to see.

This is an unprecedented period of visionary leadership within the Canadian Forces. We are working very hard to keep up all of those commitments and to stand on the shoulders of those great generations in the Canadian Forces who went before those who are currently serving.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing the last five minutes of my speech with the member for Newmarket—Aurora as well as the member for Barrie.

I would like first of all to recognize the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and the member for Edmonton Centre who have taken on the leadership role and served our country in uniform and continue to serve our country in the House of Commons. Also, on behalf of my constituents and the men and women of the Canadian Forces whom I represent, I would like to thank the Minister of National Defence for his leadership and the excellent work he has done on behalf of our communities.

It is an honour for me to be able to say a few words about the men and women of the Canadian Forces. As the member of Parliament for Westlock—St. Paul, one of the greatest honours I have had has been to represent the men and women of CFB Edmonton as well as the men and women of CFB Cold Lake.

Business of Supply

The people, the sailors, soldiers, airmen and airwomen, are the Canadian Forces' most important resources. They are what our military is all about. They are the reason the Canadian Forces make all Canadians so proud. They are the reason the Canadian Forces have earned so much respect from our allies and friends, so much gratitude from Canadians in distress at home and so much appreciation from the likes of the Dutch, the Afghans, the Haitians and many more.

What the Canadian Forces accomplish on our behalf in the name of Canada is simply remarkable. They face situations that most of us can barely imagine. They do it with professionalism, dedication and courage going beyond what is expected. They get the job done and they do it for us.

They put their country and compatriots before self so that we Canadians can be as safe as possible from the many threats of a volatile and unpredictable world.

From the moment this government took office, the Canadian Forces have been one of our highest priorities. Through the Canada first defence strategy we committed to deliver a strengthened and combat capable military, but this commitment is first and foremost a commitment to the men and women of the Canadian Forces. That is why the government is investing the resources needed to expand the size of our military and provide the necessary care for our men and women in uniform.

Despite demographic and retention challenges, the Canadian Forces are growing. Our military's recruitment efforts are delivering very impressive results with recruitment targets having been regularly met for the past few years.

This is in large part a testament to the amazing work that our military accomplishes for Canada. Young men and women from across the country are inspired by the Canadian Forces. They are wondering what it would be like to put on a uniform and represent their country. They are curious to explore the possibilities offered by a military career and are coming through the doors of recruitment centres.

Even some veterans who bring valuable experience with them are coming back to service with a new enthusiasm. The Canadian Forces have enrolled over 6,500 new regular force recruits each of the last three years, and recruitment efforts are on track to achieve our recruiting target once again this year.

During the last fiscal year the regular forces grew by 2,200 personnel, the highest net increase we have seen in several years. Over the past four years the regular force has grown by over 5,000 to reach over 68,000 men and women, close to the 70,000 objective set by this government.

This is great news. The government also remains committed to increasing the size of the reserve force, which is an essential component to the Canadians Forces. The government recognizes the remarkable contribution of reservists. That is why we passed legislation two years ago to protect the civilian jobs of reservists who are called upon to deploy on a Canadian Forces mission.

Reservists currently account for approximately 20% of the Canadian Forces personnel serving in Afghanistan. That is correct,

20%. These men and women take time away from their jobs to participate in this mission. Their contribution is crucial to augment the contingent of regular force personnel that are deployed.

With the Afghanistan mission winding down next year and with the total reserve force steadily growing, the number of active reservists will be drawn down slightly. Vacancies that have been filled by reservists these past years due to the shortage of regular force personnel are now being staffed by regulars again. That is only because of the amazing success of recruiting by the regular force.

Still, as effective as it may be, recruitment is only part of the equation. To expand and strengthen the Canadian Forces also requires efforts to retain the skilled and experienced personnel who are currently serving and efforts to attract the right personnel to fill military occupations that are under stress.

• (2100)

Our military includes an increasing number of personnel eligible for their pension, and recruitment and training for technical trades demands constant attention. That said, the Canadian Forces attrition rates remain relatively stable, lower than what is seen in our allies' militaries and, in fact, even in the Canadian private sector.

Moreover, our military has developed a comprehensive retention strategy that targets both new and long-serving members of our military. Action has been taken to reduce the number of voluntary releases during early stages of new military careers. The Canadian Forces has also prioritized the number of trades to fill. Several occupations in the Canadian Forces are currently under stress for a number of reasons, including competition with the civilian sector, long training periods and perception of the occupation among potential recruits. Many of these occupations need to be filled by well-trained individuals with highly specialized skills. We are talking about trades that are absolutely essential to the functioning of a modern military, trades like aerospace control operator, medical technician or naval communicator.

The Canadian Forces is targeting a number of occupations and implementing measures to help attract personnel, such as subsidized education and adjustments to pay levels. A targeted campaign has been developed to advertise military trades under stress. This campaign has garnered impressive results by generating an impact that is beyond expectations.

In addition, information campaigns across the country are targeting occupation shortfalls in the Canadian Forces. The Canadian navy, for example, recently sent three new display buses on the road. They contain interactive presentations demonstrating some of the navy's employment opportunities, including engineering and naval electronics.

Combined, these measures have already helped address shortfalls in many Canadian Forces' occupations, including physicians, engineers and pilots.

While I am speaking about these crucial trade shortfalls, let me make my own recruiting drive. I ask members to take this message back to their young constituents who are looking for an exciting way to make a living. Let them know that their military offers not only immense tradition but also adventure and unlimited career opportunities.

Business of Supply

Having the right mix of people in the Canadian Forces also means taking care of our men and women in uniform and their families. The government recognizes that this is one of the core responsibilities. Our serving men and women and their families have particular needs that require thoughtful attention. They face many challenges resulting from the regular deployments and postings. On average, personnel who remain in the Canadian Forces for 20 years will move approximately five times over the course of their career. They will have to find a school. They will have to find daycare for their children. Many of their spouses will be continually looking for new employment. They are also confronted with unique health care needs related to injuries suffered in operations.

The least our country can do is to make sure the Canadian Forces personnel and their families receive appropriate support and care. This is a moral obligation for our society.

Over the past year, several measures have been taken to improve support provided to our men and women in uniform, including health care.

Last year, for example, the Minister of National Defence announced the establishment of the joint personnel support unit. The unit encompasses a network of integrated personnel support centres located across the country. The centres coordinate a range of services and case management programs for ill and injured Canadian Forces personnel, former personnel, their families, and the families of the deceased. They contribute to reducing the gaps and overlaps in the service so that no Canadian Forces member is left by the wayside.

The Canadian Forces has also initiated a series of programs and measures to help enhance how it identifies, prevents and treats mental health problems, such as operational stress injuries. It has launched a \$52 million five-year plan that provides the funding required to hire mental health professionals and to implement a number of initiatives related to mental health. The Canadian Forces now has over 370 full-time mental health professionals and is working to hire more. In fact, when compared to our NATO allies, our military has the greatest ratio of mental health care workers to armed forces personnel.

The chief of the defence staff, General Natynczyk, launched “Be the Difference”, a mental health awareness campaign aimed at building a culture of understanding within the Canadian Forces and encouraging a strong community of support. The campaign is led by two non-clinical Canadian Forces mental health initiatives: the mental health and operational stress injury joint speakers bureau and the operational stress injury social support network.

In fact, Canada has become a world leader in fighting the stigmatization and rising awareness of operational stress injuries. These initiatives clearly demonstrate that mental health is a priority for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. This is essential to the readiness of the Canadian Forces. Mental health is just as important as physical health, not only for the well-being of our men and women in uniform, but also for the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces.

● (2105)

Last month the government took another important step in improving health care for our military. The Minister of National Defence, as well as his parliamentary secretary, announced an agreement with the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton for the installation of a \$1 million computer assisted rehabilitation environment, or CAREN virtual reality system. This is the second system in Canada funded by the Canadian Forces dedicated to clinical patient care, specifically in rehabilitating Canadian military personnel with both physical and mental injuries. Another will be installed this fall at the Ottawa Hospital Rehabilitation Centre.

As we continue our efforts to expand the Canadian Forces, we will continue to take good care of our military men and women. This will remain a core priority for our government, because our country asks so much of them.

Members of the Canadian Forces embody the best our country has to offer. Their commitment is unequalled and their work is praised around the world. Day after day they are defending and protecting Canadians. They are standing on guard at home and abroad. It is crucial that they be supported by their government and the very Canadians they are protecting.

● (2110)

The Chair: There is about four minutes left in this time slot, so the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora will have two minutes and her colleague will have two minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a real honour to be the member of Parliament for Newmarket—Aurora. Aurora is the home of one of Canada's oldest military organizations, the Queen's York Rangers.

The brave men and women of the Canadian Forces put themselves on the line every day to protect Canadians and their interests. We know all too well that the vital work carried out by our sailors, soldiers, airmen and airwomen is often very dangerous. Many times when we send members of the Canadian Forces into harm's way, they do not always come back unscathed.

The history of this issue has been long and difficult. During the 1990s, cuts to the Canadian Forces budget left many soldiers neglected and without care. As well, taboos surrounding the topic of mental health existed strongly, even only 10 years ago. However, we have clearly made strides.

The effects of trauma on the human mind are well documented and can be traced to such injuries as anxiety, major depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and even death. Yet despite the severity of these injuries, the stigma of mental illness is sometimes so strong that Canadian Forces members, like many Canadians, are often unwilling to admit that they are injured. This has increasingly led to unfortunate effects on members' lives. We owe it to our military personnel to ensure they get the care and support they need.

The government has done a great deal to improve the quality of care and support our men and women in uniform—

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The Chair: I will have to stop the member there because the minister has to have a chance to respond. The hon. minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I wish to thank the member for Newmarket—Aurora and I share her pride in the local regiment.

We have outlined a number of the important investments that we have made with respect to mental health care providers. We have committed to double the number available through the joint personnel support units. We have talked about some of the programs that exist in terms of the difference made by the leadership of General Natynczyk and others who are spending a great deal of time dealing with the practical problems that are faced, but as well dealing with such things as the stigma that has to be overcome. Bringing all of those efforts together will certainly make a difference for those men and women.

There are specific pieces of equipment that we have purchased as well. In particular, I would reference the important investment that was made at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital as well as the hospital here in Ottawa to purchase the computer assisted rehabilitation environment system, known as the CAREN system. This \$1.5 million investment was championed by the member for Edmonton Centre. It has—

The Chair: I have to stop the minister there. The hon. member for Barrie has about a minute and a half.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will try to speak very quickly. I thank the member for Westlock—St. Paul, who is well known for his dedication to the Canadian Forces.

The government has done a great deal to improve the quality of care and support for our men and women in uniform, including the new mental health facilities at CFB Esquimalt and a series of new integrated personnel support centres, including the one recently opened here in Ottawa.

I also understand about the innovative partnership with Alberta Health Services, which the Minister of National Defence touched upon, to buy a new state of the art virtual reality rehabilitation system for the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton. I realize the minister was cut off, so maybe he could have an opportunity to expand on how this new project will benefit the Canadian Forces.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the member for Barrie and the previous speaker, as well as the member for Westlock—St. Paul have a real passion. The member from Edmonton as well offered great support in bringing about this important investment in this cutting-edge equipment that is used to help rehabilitate and reorient members who may be suffering as a result of their service.

The Canadian Forces health services are collaborating with the Alberta Health Service on this important issue, as is happening here in Ottawa as well. There is also an international component. We are working with the Netherlands and Israel to ensure that we have the right computer generated programs that are used in this CAREN system. We are pleased to provide the Canadian military personnel with access to this new technology that has tremendous application. The system will enhance rehabilitation treatment for a wide range of patients, including amputees, those with spinal cord injuries and those suffering from PTSD.

• (2115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Brossard—La Prairie, and I intend to ask the minister questions.

First of all, I want to make something clear. The Liberal Party of Canada and I, as the member for Hull—Aylmer, have a great deal of respect and love, if I can put it that way, for the members of our armed forces. I am very happy to see that Mr. Natynczyk and military experts are here with the minister and his parliamentary secretary this evening.

In answer to a question from my colleague from Vancouver South about Canada's mission in Afghanistan after 2011, the minister said that the short answer was “to be determined”. That is unacceptable.

And I do not want to hear him say that they will respect the 2008 motion.

Contrary to what he says, it is not clear to me. So I am going to ask him the question, and I expect a straight answer. Will there be Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan to help train Afghan military personnel after 2011?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, we have been clear. I have been clear every time. I have been clear tonight. I have been clear on hundreds of answers I have given to this question. We will respect the motion put forward in this Parliament that will see the Canadian Forces finish the mission in 2011, end combat in July 2011 and the mission itself will be complete in December 2011.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, I wanted a very clear answer and that has not been clear in this sense. Will there be military personnel left in Afghanistan after 2011 to train military Afghan personnel, yes, or no?

Hon. Peter MacKay: We have been clear, Mr. Chair. I do not know what part of clear the hon. member does not understand. We will respect the mission. We have trainers there now. We have a full range mission taking place in Afghanistan from combat, to reconstruction and development. We are working with a number of other departments from foreign affairs to CIDA. With respect to the mission, as defined in the parliamentary motion, and I invite the member to take the time to read it again so that he does have it clear, we will respect the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, I would like to point out that we have not yet got a clear response, as he said.

The minister is aware that his government was very generous in its promises concerning the Quebec City armoury, but it has yet to do anything on the ground. The minister responsible for the Quebec City region even said that the work could begin in the fall of 2009, but we still do not know the Conservatives' plan.

Why is the government still giving us platitudes instead of giving us the numbers?

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[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I would invite the hon. member to stay tuned, but I do want to come back to clarity. Just because the hon. member does not get it, or chooses not to get it, or calls it unclear, let me be clear. We will respect the motion with respect to the military mission in Afghanistan. That is crystal clear, as have been the Prime Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence and those on this side of the House.

I would encourage the hon. member to spend time with his leader. If his leader or members of his party want to talk about the parliamentary motion, there is a perfect forum to do so. It is called the Afghanistan committee. We have repeatedly tried to have members from his party and members of the opposition engage in a discussion about the future of the mission and they have blocked—

The Chair: The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, I will speak more simply. Can the minister inform us about the government's plans for the reconstruction of the Quebec City armoury? It cannot be any simpler than that, and it is my turn to say that I cannot be more clear.

• (2120)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, to clarify, we have made a lot of progress. We have committed \$2 million and we have made a plan for the future reconstruction of the armoury.

[English]

I would ask the member to hold on to his hat as there is more coming. In fact, the minister from Quebec for that region will have more to say in the coming days. I am not going to pre-empt that. However, I can assure everyone, as the Prime Minister has in this very chamber, we are committed to seeing that this historic armoury, which was built in 1884 I believe and has housed the Voltigeurs, the most senior French-speaking infantry unit in the country, is respected and that the building is restored.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, may I remind the hon. member that the answers are supposed to be no longer than the questions?

[Translation]

The minister said that \$2 million has been committed. Do we at least know how much the project will cost?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the project is still in a definition phase, but I have heard estimates as high as \$125 million. Is that short enough?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, do we at least know which project the government will undertake?

[English]

I appreciate it when he respects the rules.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I just said two seconds ago that it is in project definition phase. Clearly, we are seeking advice from those who will be involved in the rebuilding of this historic centrepiece, this landmark in Quebec City. This is the type of

building that is well over 100 years old. It is going to require a great deal of engineering to restore it to—

The Chair: The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, I would like to remind the minister that in March the minister responsible for the Quebec City region said that the government was preparing the tendering process. How is that possible if he is not able to tell us what the project is?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I remind the hon. member that it is May. We are still preparing it.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us what stage the decision making process has reached and who is making the decisions? The Conservatives are passing the ball around like a hot potato from the minister to the minister for the Quebec City region. Who is responsible for the deliverable and who is calling the shots internally?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, that would be the cabinet.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I gather there is no plan.

I would like to move on to the reservists. The minister certainly knows that the Canadian Forces is relying more and more on reservists to fill positions in the regular forces. But does the minister know that the entire reservist system is under threat because so many reservists have been plucked from the system? Is he aware of that?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, nothing could be further from the truth. We have people signing up in record numbers. We have a high operational tempo. We have new flexibility injected into the capacity of the Canadian Forces to have members move from reserve to regular force and back again. Depending on the operational tempo, we make decisions on how to best meet the needs, whether they result in an increase in class B reservists, which we have seen during our time in Afghanistan, where we are at record numbers. As we draw down, as we leave Afghanistan, those numbers will obviously change.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, between November and now there was prorogation and the minister may have forgotten a few things. The Conservatives were saying that there were fewer reservists because we are in a time of war, but that the situation would stabilize after the Afghan mission. Does the government still feel that way?

• (2125)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, members move from regular force to reserves. They are hired full time to fill specific tasks. Their contracts are generally entered into on a short-term basis. That is the nature of how the reserves work.

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The hon. member would know as well that because of the tempo in Afghanistan, we have staffed up. We have in fact relied heavily on reserves during this period of our military history.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to keep asking the minister questions about the cuts to the Navy's budget. First, when did the minister find out that General Natynczyk was going to reverse Vice-Admiral McFadden's order?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, there has been no reduction in navy personnel. In fact, we are in a period of growth in all of the environments. We currently have about 1,800 new sailors who are in the pipeline, if I can put it that way, and are on course to join our ranks.

We currently have a shortage of about 1,000 in terms of the need. There are certain trades in particular where we are recruiting. We are in a period of growth. It is not shortage. It is trying to fill all of these positions, which is exactly what we intend to do.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Chair, let me try again because I may not have been clear. I was talking about the Navy's budget, not its personnel. My question is: when did the minister find out that General Natynczyk was going to reverse Vice-Admiral McFadden's order?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, he knew there needed to be clarification after he spoke to me. That is how it works. I work very closely with the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Chief of the Maritime Staff. We make decisions in consultation. We have regular briefings.

The good news is the navy has more money in its budget this year than in its entire history of 100 years. It is in its centennial. We are seeing a \$209 million increase in the navy's operating budget this year. They are at historic levels.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Chair, during his press conference, General Natynczyk said that it was his duty to ensure that the minister is not caught off guard. Did the minister order General Natynczyk to reverse the vice-admiral's order? Did the general act of his own volition or did the minister and the general consult with one another ahead of time?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I just answered this question. We make these decisions in consultation with one another. I respond to requests from all of the environments on the advice of the Chief of the Defence Staff. As I mentioned, the navy has the money. It has the money in the budget to do the job that we expect of it: to patrol the three oceans that we have responsibility for in North America.

We continue to make tremendous contributions internationally. We just had the HMCS *Fredericton* return from the Gulf of Aden. The navy has historic levels of funding that will enable it to do the job that we expect of it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Chair, I will ask my question again. Since there is a hierarchy, can he simply tell us where the directive came from that reversed the order of the vice-admiral? Who gave that order?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, there was a need to clarify, which is exactly what we did. As Minister of National Defence, I make decisions in consultation with the deputy minister, assistant deputy minister and officials at the department, but most important from the chain of command. After speaking with General Natynczyk, we issued a clarification because there was misinformation, which I know the hon. member would not want to perpetrate here tonight.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Chair, why, then, was the order not reversed internally? Why was the vice-admiral's order reversed publicly?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, we did both.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Chair, did the minister order the general to turn his back on the vice-admiral? Is that what happened? The minister said that he did not agree with the vice-admiral's order after it was made public, and he then forced the general to reverse the vice-admiral's order. Is that what happened?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the hon. member can ask this question as many times and as many different ways as she likes. What I have said to her consistently is that we make informed decisions based on the advice of the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Chief of the Maritime Staff, the army and the air force. We make decisions.

The Canadian Forces budget has increased overall, which will give them even greater capability to do the terrific work that they continue to do.

● (2130)

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Chair, it is not clear at all, and that is the problem. The minister is saying one thing, but what actually happened is quite different.

When the order was given and then publicly criticized, the minister commanded the general to reverse the vice-admiral's order. The minister turned on the general, forcing him to turn his back on his vice-admiral. Is that what the minister is saying?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I know for certain that the hon. member does not want to misinform Canadians or make allegations that she cannot support. I know she does not want to do that.

I will reiterate once again that there are clear decisions and directives given with respect to budgets and allocations on the advice of the Chief of the Defence Staff. We are constantly—

The Chair: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Chair, I will share my five minutes with the member for Northumberland—Quinte West and the member for Calgary Centre.

I am pleased to take part in today's discussion, and will use this opportunity to expand on the minister's remarks regarding defence infrastructure renewal.

To begin, I would ask you to think about the tremendous demands on our Canadian Forces, at home, on the continent and abroad. At home—surveillance, sovereignty patrols, search and rescue, and support to security partners at special events and in response to natural disasters. On the continent—working with American partners to keep the skies of North America safe and provide a clear picture of maritime security threats. Overseas—contributing to international security through deployed operations and delivering humanitarian aid.

What does it take to ensure that the Canadian Forces can carry out all we ask of them, safely and effectively? The right people, well-trained, of course. And the right equipment, well-maintained. But there is also defence infrastructure. The hangars, roads, landing strips, docking facilities, accommodations, medical, training and recreational facilities—and much more. These are absolutely essential to the effectiveness of our military.

The right infrastructure—up to date and properly maintained—ensures that the Canadian Forces personnel and civilians on our bases and wings across Canada have the safe and healthy work environment they expect and deserve. It ensures they have suitable facilities for their accommodation, and for fitness and training. And it ensures they can house and maintain their equipment under the right conditions.

With stations, bases and wings stretching from Haida Gwaii to Alert to St. John's, National Defence infrastructure holdings are as extensive as they are varied: some 35,000 buildings and works assets serviced by 3,000 km of water, storm and sewer pipes; 2.25 million hectares of land—that is four times the size of P.E.I.; and 5,500 km of roads—enough to stretch from here to Whitehorse. These are impressive numbers.

However, much of this inventory is aging and in need of pressing upgrades or replacement. As well, DND must build or enhance infrastructure associated with the introduction of new capabilities. With good reason, defence infrastructure is one of the four essential pillars of the Canada first defence strategy.

This strategy calls for the replacement of 25% of the existing infrastructure over 10 years and 50% over 20 years. Let me give you an idea of some of the projects underway.

On the west coast, at CFB Esquimalt, a new facility is being built that will allow for the safe receiving, processing, storage and transportation of hazardous material and waste such as poisons,

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corrosive agents and flammable substances. Heading inland to CFB Wainwright, a water treatment plant is being upgraded to ensure safe and reliable drinking water to both the base and the town of Wainwright. Continuing eastward, a number of upgrades are being made to the airfield at 8 Wing Trenton, including the important work being done to accommodate the C-17 Globemasters.

As you might imagine, the huge Globemasters need infrastructure to match. DND will be reconstructing a part of 8 Wing Trenton's airfield so that it can support their massive weight. These aircraft have been hard at work for the Canadian Forces from their first operation in support of Jamaica, within a week of the first Canadian Globemaster touching down in Trenton, to their most recent operation, in Haiti.

Because the Globemasters are not the only new acquisitions that National Defence has to accommodate, Trenton will also get a new air mobility training centre to house the equipment and personnel required to train operators and maintainers of the C-130J aircraft. That is also supporting a real need. The aging Hercules that the C-130Js will replace have been in steady use for Afghanistan and Canadian Forces relief missions, and they have also been invaluable to operations at home, including search and rescue.

● (2135)

Communities in Quebec are benefiting from infrastructure renewal as well, with a variety of projects under way, including new facilities at Valcartier and Montreal for the LAV III, a versatile vehicle that has been serving our soldiers faithfully in Afghanistan. The LAV III facility at Valcartier will be used for day-to-day operations, maintenance and preparations for deployment of the vehicles. The Montreal buildings will be used for full maintenance, including repairs to battle-damaged machinery, LAV III mission preparation and vehicle decontamination. These new facilities will ensure that the LAV III continues to play a vital role in the future of our land forces for many years to come.

Atlantic Canada is also benefiting from infrastructure renewal under the Canada first defence strategy. 14 Wing Greenwood will get a new fire hall and a new health services centre in addition to four other projects, while 9 Wing Gander will get a new headquarters facility for 19 Airfield Engineering Flight and a new multi-purpose facility.

These and other improvements, completed or under way, are already making a difference for the men and women of the Canadian Forces and for civilians working at defence installations, adding to their safety, readiness and effectiveness.

The new and upgraded storage and maintenance facilities are helping to ensure the required equipment is available where and when it is needed. But the benefits of defence infrastructure renewal extend beyond the Canadian Forces' bases and wings.

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Investments in National Defence infrastructure are helping us meet the targets of Canada's economic action plan. Our renewal efforts complement the plan by bringing economic activity to local communities through the creation of thousands of jobs across the country. For example, in addition to the 8 Wing projects I just mentioned, there were five other Trenton projects that the minister announced last September. The seven projects represent an investment of more than \$340 million and will bring significant economic activity—an estimated 1,800 or more direct employment opportunities—to Trenton and its surrounding communities over the course of the work.

Overall, the cross-Canada defence infrastructure projects announced in the 2009-10 fiscal year alone have a total value of \$1.8 billion and will sustain an estimated 4,320 jobs over the course of these projects. This is a very important consideration of the benefits of defence infrastructure renewal. It is also important to remember that there is more to managing infrastructure than updating and construction.

Maintaining assets in good condition, disposing of aging or surplus assets, managing heritage sites and exercising environmental stewardship are all part of the process. DND and the Canadian Forces demonstrate due regard for the environmental health of the lands with which they are entrusted. They practice pollution prevention in their everyday activities by reducing resource consumption and waste generation. And while keeping in mind the primacy of operations, they incorporate environmental considerations into their decision making. For instance, they use the latest assessment tools to integrate green building concepts into the design process of construction plans.

In conclusion, defence infrastructure renewal supports the delivery of defence operations by supporting our people, our equipment and our operational readiness. It also helps to ensure we have a first class, modern military, ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century.

• (2140)

[English]

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Chair, as the minister knows, I have the great honour to represent the men and women who work so hard at one of Canada's busiest air wings in the country and that is CFB Trenton 8 Wing.

The Canada first defence strategy outlines infrastructure as one of its pillars. We know that National Defence is one of the largest landowners across Canada and the budget cuts of the 1990s under the previous Liberal government significantly impacted on the defence infrastructure across the country.

This Conservative government has begun the crucial task of re-equipping our forces. For example, the C-17s that our government bought and now fly out of Trenton are a vital link to our supply of material to Afghanistan. They were a crucial and integral part of our government's response to the earthquake in Haiti.

Alas, a lot of our military infrastructure is old and not designed for today's equipment.

Could the minister tell us what this Conservative government is doing to ensure that the airmen and airwomen at CFB Trenton and

CFB members on other bases are getting the infrastructure they need to do the vital jobs we ask of them? Could the minister also explain to members of the committee what he is doing to ensure proper accountability and spending of taxpayers' money?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question and also for his unwavering support of the men and women in uniform, particularly at CFB Trenton, of which he has said he is extremely proud. I have seen him there on a number of occasions.

He is absolutely right. We have an enormous amount of property, both real property and infrastructure, that includes some 21,000 buildings, and 800 parcels of land that cover 2.25 million hectares of land.

In line with our Canada first defence strategy, much of the investment that we are making over the next 20 years very much involves the refurbishment and investment in infrastructure spending. In fact, over the past 12 months, we have announced over \$2.5 billion in construction projects, which illustrate our government's ongoing commitment to fulfill that contract that we have between government and the Canadian Forces in a Canada first defence strategy.

Just to give the members a taste of that, in response to this question, at CFB Trenton, in the member's riding, we have announced six projects, an investment of approximately \$334 million in infrastructure at 8 Wing Trenton. They include the construction of maintenance hangars for the new C-17s that he spoke of, the Globemaster aircraft, that are so useful in allowing Canada to reach out and touch places like Haiti; the construction of a new air mobility and training centre there; the construction of a new electrical/mechanical engineering and transportation garage; a new refurbished facility for aerospace and telecommunications engineering support squadron; a new training accommodation centre; new material distribution; and the list goes on and on.

We are making these investments right across the country.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am from Calgary where we have always had a pretty strong pride in and support of our men and women in uniform, and are particularly proud of them these days. It is great to be here.

We no longer have a base in Calgary. Some years ago it was moved to Edmonton by the Liberals. People think it was because of the national energy program for some reason, but we do not like Liberals because they moved our base away from Calgary.

We do support the troops. A couple of years back, we took 100 cowboys and cowgirls from Calgary to the Quebec winter carnival to put on a barbecue and western entertainment for 4,000 of the families of troops at Valcartier, the Van Doos, who had just been deployed to Afghanistan. It was a moving time.

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I wanted to ask the minister about that. While we were at Valcartier entertaining those troops with our Calgary hospitality, I learned about Defence Research and Development Canada, the DRDC Valcartier, with its 400 employees and rich network of partners, and world leading expertise in defence-related information, protection and combat systems.

The research activities carried out at this facility help ensure that Canadian Forces are equipped with cutting-edge technology and directly impact their operations at home and abroad.

I understand that concrete steps have been taken to ensure that DRDC Valcartier maintains its world-class expertise and continues to attract the best scientists, and partners in the defence and security field to Quebec by investing in a major infrastructure upgrade at the facility.

Could the minister please fill us in on the particulars of that important project?

• (2145)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I know the member for Calgary Centre has been a long-time supporter of the Canadian Forces and is famous for his hospitality.

The work that we are doing at CFB Valcartier was announced back in February of this year. It includes new offices, laboratories, support space, and represents a total investment of \$170 million. This project, as has been mentioned in previous discussions, will employ a large number of local people. There is almost 1,000 job opportunities on this project alone.

Following the design phase, which begins this year and which is valued at approximately \$13 million, the project is expected to be rolled out in three phases. First, there will be a prepping of the site for the DRDC Valcartier north site. It will then involve some of the infrastructure investments that will be placed in the ground: sewage pipes, water and electricity. This phase is valued at \$37 million and will begin in 2012.

The second phase will constitute the construction of the actual—

The Chair: I will have to stop the minister there. The time is up for that slot.

We will move now to the hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I am glad to have a second opportunity to ask some questions. Fifteen minutes go pretty fast.

I will pick up where I left off on the F-18 fighter program. First of all, the minister said that we just finished, in March of this year, a mid-life refurbishment and upgrading of the existing jets, but yet they only seem to last for another seven years. I wonder if the minister could explain that, since we have had these going back to 1980.

The other question is, are we still looking at the replacement of 65 new jets? That number has been bandied around before. Is that still the number we are talking about?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the reason we are extending the life of the F-18s is obviously so they can continue in service until we get a new plane. We spoke earlier about the modernization and how it will see us replace much of the onboard equipment and some of

the other important things, such as landing gear. Stem to stern, these aircraft are being upgraded and modernized so they will continue to serve such a useful purpose until 2017. That will also allow us then to continue down the road of procuring new fighter aircraft. There is eye-watering technology now available, and a fifth generation fighter aircraft will be brought to Canada after the year 2017. We are part of a global program and a global supply chain that will create many opportunities for those who are in the Canadian aerospace industry. There is tremendous excitement in industry as we embark on this important replacement.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, how many are there?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, there are currently 80 in operation. We intend to come back with a fleet of 65.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, did I take the minister's earlier comments in my last round of questions to mean that the government has already decided to purchase planes from the joint strike group fighter program?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the hon. member is mistaken. None whatsoever. I should have referred to this with the more generic term that this is the "next generation" of aircraft. The joint strike fighter is one of the two aircraft, and there may be others. But I think those are the two main contenders that we are looking at. Obviously we want to get the best value, the best aircraft, and we have already embarked upon investments to ensure that happens.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, there has been a significant investment already by the Government of Canada in the joint strike fighter program and I understood the minister to say that it was from that program we would acquire our new jets. Perhaps we have to go over the transcript, but I take the minister's comments at face value that there will be a tendering process taking place.

The member for Richmond Hill asked questions about PTSD and, of course, the defence committee did a major study on that, as urged by my predecessor, Dawn Black, who I understand is watching these proceedings tonight. I want to ask some questions about it, because some significant progress has been made. There is no doubt about that, although we are not there yet. I had one constituent complain that it took 10 years for him to get recognized as having a 100% disability with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder. So we are getting there, but we are not there yet.

Earlier this week we had a report from the CBC that the military special advisor on mental health injuries, Stéphane Grenier, was concerned about the entry criteria for the PTSD treatment program at Ste. Anne's Hospital. He said that the program criteria were such that almost no soldier could meet the test for admission, that soldiers with anger problems or substance abuse problems, or who were managing medications, were among those excluded. He said that what we are doing right now is that we are excluding those people from care for these types of reasons. He thinks it's neither responsible nor appropriate nor acceptable.

Business of Supply

I share those concerns. These are the facts, and given that anger and substance abuse are often among the difficulties faced by those living with PTSD, we have some serious concerns.

Can the minister respond to these concerns? If that is in fact what is happening at Ste. Anne's or at other places across the country, will he do something to fix that? We do know that PTSD is a multifaceted disease and syndrome and that these other aspects come into play and must be recognized as part of the symptoms that need treatment.

Can he assure us that he can do that?

● (2150)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I will come back to that in an instant. I just want to be very clear on the record that the reference to the next generation of fighter aircraft does not preclude a competition, and an open and transparent one. In fact, the joint strike fighter program thus far has provided Canadian industry with access to high technology industry opportunities. Since 2003, 80 Canadian firms have already secured contracts with a total estimated value of over \$325 million.

Mr. Chair, I would suggest to the hon. member that regardless of what aircraft we choose, Canadian aerospace has already been a beneficiary of participating in this program.

To come back to the member's question about post-traumatic stress, I certainly agree that we as a government and all governments, as this syndrome is happening around the world, need to do more to address these very real afflictions and illnesses. I mentioned earlier that this is a genuine injury.

Canada has been a leader in this regard. The mental health professionals whom we have working on these files and working directly with the individuals who have been afflicted are making major breakthroughs.

We are of course very cognizant of the other implications that my hon. friend referenced, including things such as substance abuse. Suicide or suicide prevention is obviously something we are continually concerned about and looking to address. We have committed to doubling the number of mental health care professionals who will help treat those who are suffering from post-traumatic stress and other mental illnesses.

We are very concerned, and I know the hon. member's question on this is sincere, but I can assure him that we are taking proper steps to address all of the practical implications and the stigmatization that is still there, both inside and outside the Canadian Forces. We need to do more in that regard. The Chief of the Defence Staff has been a leader himself in addressing this in a very open and frank way and encouraging greater dialogue. Encouraging greater mental health awareness, period, is something that we are all tasked with.

We had a colleague here in the House of Commons, Mr. Chair, whom I know you were very close to. This is something that we have to be very diligent about and very vigilant in addressing each and every day, and I thank the member for his question.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the generalities and the support and sentiments expressed.

However, I want to ask the minister, can he undertake to see that these criteria for treatment complained about by Stéphane Grenier are in fact fixed? Can he ensure that the people who present PTSD symptoms get access to treatment? This is the problem that has been recognized. Will he undertake to seek a solution?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Let me respond with some specifics, Mr. Chair, because I do not want to denigrate his question at all.

We currently have 646 Canadian Forces personnel who are suffering from post-traumatic stress. In response to that, we now have over 370 full time mental health professionals who are working. We are going to hire more.

We have challenges, of course, given the vastness of this country and the availability of mental health care professionals. In many communities, it remains a challenge.

However, with regard to the member's specific question on any undertaking that I could give, this falls under Veterans Affairs Canada, not under the Department of National Defence. I will certainly make my colleague at Veterans Affairs aware of the hon. member's question and ensure that he has a transcript of it.

● (2155)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, of course, these post-traumatic stress disorder treatment centres are also part of the joint project of DND and Veterans Affairs, so the minister obviously has some influence on that as well.

With respect to some specifics on budget dollars, we had talked generally about reservists earlier and we know there are always adjustments made during the year. Nonetheless, can the minister give us the budget allocation for reserves and break it down by services, the navy and army, et cetera, for the last year and what the budgeted amounts in the estimates were versus what the actual budget turned out to be, so that we can see whether there has been a decrease in expenditures based on the estimates. Then, what is the budget for this year?

The minister may not be able to do that now, but if he cannot do it, can he undertake to provide that to me in the future?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I will provide the member with some of that information now, Mr. Chair.

The overall adjustments I can tell him are up for the army, air force and navy. They are up for the air force by \$400 million; they have gone up this year for the army by \$1.6 billion; and by \$209 million for the navy.

With respect to the overall budget for reservists with the individual breakdown or more specific information, I will undertake to provide the member with that.

However, the member is absolutely right. There are ongoing changes based on need. This is a particularly high tempo period for the Canadian Forces. We have a lot of reservists who have been part of the rotations that have gone into Afghanistan, and sometimes they amount to in excess of 20% of the overall force.

Business of Supply

I was reminded by a reservist that when they are there serving, there is no hat badge. They are all treated the same. Regular forces and reservists are absolutely treated the same while serving on a mission.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, it may be difficult to separate it out. Perhaps the minister can advise me on this, but I believe that when reservists are serving overseas with the regular forces, they are still part of the reserves' budget. Or do they become part of the regular forces' budget at that point in time?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, these are overall budget numbers, to be clear. As I said, I will undertake to get him the specific allocation for reservists each year. He wants, I believe, the allocations for the past year and the current year. The figures that I gave refer to the overall budget allocations for reserve and regular force this year. They are up in all three forces: the army, navy, and air force.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I am looking at the budget numbers directly here. In particular, on page 18-8 of the main estimates document, I see that the contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the NATO military budget, is up by nearly 50% to \$126 million.

Is there a particular reason for that increase of about \$40 million on an \$87 million budget?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, part of it again is because we are more active in NATO operations than we have been in the past. We have taken certain allocations that were requested of us by NATO with respect to a certain commitment that we made to support a system called the AGS. This is a particularly expensive piece of equipment that we have committed to support. It is the type of equipment that allows greater information gathering. It is also something that we feel is very important to support as part of Canada's overall commitment to NATO.

There were moneys allocated this year that were transferred as payment variance from the 2009-10 budget as part of the main estimates. This \$40 million increase the member refers to is a contribution to the overall NATO military budget, and—

• (2200)

The Chair: I will have to stop the member there to respect the balance of time.

The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I see on the next page, on the other hand, a projected contribution of \$2.6 million in last year's main estimates to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre contribution program. These items are indicated as "Items not required". In other words, I assume that the money was not spent. Some of the other items are indicated as being ones for which authority will be sought for the renewal of the transfer payment programs in 2010. However, that one item does not seem to be on that list.

Can the minister explain why that is?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I think there is some confusion. I would just simply indicate to the member that the first transfer payment variance that we spoke of, the \$40 million increase, is a contribution to the NATO military budget, and there is a swap, if you will. The transfer is explained by the renewal of terms and conditions

for the NATO contribution program, which was approved in October of 2009, to better reflect the current reality of the operations and the management of the airborne warning and control system, or AWACS as it is known, and it is effective 2010-11. This operating portion of the AWACS program was transferred from one budget to the military budget. Hence, there is a difference or a discrepancy that he has identified.

I would indicate that—

The Chair: I will have to stop the member there before he finishes that thought.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for York West and the member for Labrador.

I, too, want to join the rest in this House and the people of Guelph to express my deepest appreciation for the courage and sacrifices of all of our troops and their families wherever they may be.

Mr. Chair, through you, I thank the minister for appearing tonight.

In December 2009, church leaders from the Canadian Council of Churches, which represents 85% of Christians in Canada, wrote the Prime Minister and called for Canada to invest substantial new resources in diplomatic efforts to negotiate an end to the war and to support the people of Afghanistan through diplomacy and reconciliation efforts at local and regional levels.

The Canadian Council of Churches requested that we ask the minister the following questions.

Will this government commit to taking a leading role with and among its NATO and ISAF allies in a diplomatic surge to end the war in Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I also thank the hon. member for his preamble and assure him that the families are listening. The families do appreciate the expressions of support, particularly, I would add, the family of Trooper Larry Rudd, who was received at CFB Trenton today. His mother, Helen, his grandmother and many of his friends were on hand to see him repatriated and we are all very much in awe and very much full of respect, love and admiration for Trooper Rudd and his family.

With respect to his specific question, I can assure him that the Canadian Forces are very much a part of the effort when it comes to efforts made to reconcile and efforts made to pursue our diplomatic efforts. We have in fact a surge of civilians as part of our effort in Afghanistan and it is one of the six priorities identified by the Canadian government in Afghanistan. So it is an Afghan lead and something we very much support.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Mr. Chair, as Canada takes steps toward a civilian mission post-2011, what new financial commitments will the Government of Canada be making and what planning efforts are under way to support the reconciliation of which the minister speaks through local peace-building and governance initiatives?

Business of Supply

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, much of that is determined by the Afghan government, as the member I know would understand. This is something in which we are in a supportive capacity. We give advice to various government departments in Afghanistan. We are obviously very committed to working with them. Efforts to reconcile, efforts to bring about fruitful discussions by the Afghanistan government are extremely important and part of Canada's overall commitment and one of our six priorities.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Mr. Chair, will the government now commit Canada to investing in the negotiation of sustainable peace with all stakeholders in and outside of Afghanistan with the same vigour committed to our combat role in Afghanistan?

• (2205)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, there is great rigour and vigour being demonstrated by our civilians, our diplomats and our aid workers working shoulder to shoulder with the Canadian Forces. This is a whole of government approach, as the hon. member knows, but the lead and the point to these efforts in reconciliation, in discussion and dialogue with those on the other side, who are very often difficult to identify, I am quick to add, that priority rests with the Afghanistan government and the Afghan people.

Mr. Francis Valeriote: Mr. Chair, since the Conservative government took power in 2006, our ranking in the world on contributions of military personnel to UN peacekeeping missions has gone from 16th to 56th place, with only 57 troops deployed in UN peacekeeping missions.

We cannot blame this on our commitments in Afghanistan because we were there in 2006. Italy has 2,600 troops deployed in UN peacekeeping missions. It is in Afghanistan. Similarly, Spain, which is in Afghanistan, has 1,100 troops deployed in UN peacekeeping missions. France, which is also in Afghanistan, has 2,000 troops in UN peacekeeping missions.

How and when will the government change these numbers and increase our contributions to troop deployment on UN missions?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, let us set the record straight here. Afghanistan is a UN mission. It has a Security Council resolution. Without going into specifics of the other countries he has mentioned, I can assure him that Canada is one of a small number when it comes to the high tempo of military combat activity. There are a lot of NATO countries and non-NATO countries that are present in Afghanistan, both in smaller and in some cases larger numbers, but they are not performing the full range of uncauevated military combat that the Canadian Forces are.

We are involved in 16 different UN missions around the globe. Afghanistan—

The Chair: I will have to stop the minister there. The hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will start by asking the minister about the tragic story of Agent Orange at CFB Gagetown, which I know is an issue that he is well aware of.

Could the minister assure all of those veterans and their families who have been affected by the spraying of Agent Orange that the government will pursue giving full compensation to all those affected by the Agent Orange contamination at CFB Gagetown, and

that all those left out by the deadlines imposed by the government will still have an opportunity to get their compensation and not be discriminated against?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, this is an issue with which I am familiar and, more important, I am very proud that it was our government, under the leadership of the hon. Greg Thompson, the former Minister of Veterans Affairs and a serving member from New Brunswick, who announced that we were offering a one-time, tax-free, ex gratia payment of \$20,000 related to the testing of unregistered U.S. military herbicide, which, as she said, is known as agent orange. It was used on the base at CFB Gagetown from 1966 to 1967.

I had the honour to meet a number of these veterans and I know what an impact it had on their lives, their health and their well-being. We believe our government has been fair in compensating the request and the response to these long-standing concerns and we are very proud of this program that has—

The Chair: I will stop the minister there. The hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, will the minister not agree that the deadlines imposed by his government are unjust, that they discriminate against many of these veterans and their families simply on the basis of when they might die? Picking a date as to the day that the government came into power does not seem to be a just way to pick a date.

The application deadline of last year did not allow adequate time for all of those who were eligible to apply for compensation. The window of opportunity was very narrow and very small. Why not allow all of those affected to have a fair shot and get the compensation? It does not replace the loved one that they have lost and who has died. \$20,000 is only \$20,000. What about all of those who did not qualify and have already died? What about the widows on the warpath who have continually coming to the House looking for compensation?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I want to set the record straight on this. The deadline to file applications was April 1, 2009. As of May 21, 2010, approximately 2,800 applicants have already received this tax-free, ex gratia payment and more than \$79 million were paid out to veterans and their families.

I do not at all doubt the sincerity of the hon. member's question but I do remind her that she was a member of a government for 13 years that did nothing on this file. It did not answer the concerns of veterans and their families. I would put the question back to her. Why did she not express the same empathy and the same sincere conviction that she expresses today to members of her own government and her prime minister who did nothing on this file?

Business of Supply

• (2210)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I join with my colleagues tonight in honouring the loss of our many soldiers. I certainly applaud their service and sacrifice, as well as those who are currently serving our country, many of whom are from Labrador.

I want to thank the minister for being here tonight. I have a couple of questions that are specific to 5 Wing Goose Bay. I wonder if the minister could enlighten the House and give us the update on the NATO exercise Ramstein rover. Could he confirm tonight whether that particular exercise will go forward at CFB Goose Bay in 2011?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I can tell him that it was a NATO decision with respect to its budget allocations. It chose not to have the NATO exercise held in Labrador at the Goose Bay facility. It chose to go elsewhere. We will, of course, continue to advocate the advantages of carrying out that exercise in Goose Bay but that is a NATO decision.

I can tell the member that we have invested in CFB Goose Bay and we continue to do so. It is an important strategic asset, as I know he would agree. I certainly understand his advocating on behalf of the Goose Bay base. It will figure prominently in the future with respect to Canadian Forces plans.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, regarding the 444 Squadron at CFB Goose Bay, many of the troops have been deployed overseas but are now in something called a pause position. They can no longer provide secondary search and rescue capability. They also have a lack of capability in terms of supporting low level flight training.

Could the minister confirm when or if the 444 Squadron will be back to its full compliment after our mission ends in Afghanistan in 2011?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I will elucidate for the hon. member. SAR capability is absolutely available at 444 Goose Bay. In fact, SAR activity is going on right now as we speak. A C-130 Hercules aircraft deployed out of Goose Bay is involved in a SAR incident.

We are down in terms of some of our equipment and personnel by virtue of our mission in Afghanistan. We have very capable people, including the commanding officer at 444 Combat Support Squadron, but it is not a primary search and rescue squadron. It has secondary capability, although that secondary capability was diminished to some degree, but it does still have capability. It is a squadron that is very much an active one. It is not dedicated for search and rescue. It does, however, have capability and I can assure the hon. member that the region remains—

The Chair: The hon. member for Labrador.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, I am well aware of the search and rescue that is happening. Indeed, one of the people who went down in that plane is a very good friend of mine. We hope and pray that they all will be found safe. There is no doubt about that.

With regard to the program expenditure review, the President of the Treasury Board said that nothing would be spared in the ongoing program expenditure review. DND is looking at cuts. Could the minister promise us unequivocally that Goose Bay is not on the chopping block?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Let me begin, Mr. Chair, by expressing my support for what the hon. member just said. Obviously, whenever there is an incident, our SAR techs and military personnel who engage in these searches do their level best and perform brilliantly. We do hope that everyone will be located safe and sound, including the hon. member's friend.

With respect to a strategic review or program review, this is always a work in progress. It is aimed to identify efficiencies and ensure value for dollar. All departments are going through it. I would expect that he and members opposite would support that exercise to ensure efficiencies within every department, including the Department of National Defence.

I am confident in the value that this department provides to Canada. I can assure the member that Goose Bay is an important strategic asset for the Canadian—

• (2215)

The Chair: I will have to stop the minister there to respect the balance of time. The hon. member for Labrador.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Chair, on April 30, the minister told the media in St. John's, in speaking of Goose Bay, "We've had NATO contracts that will be honoured in the future". Could the minister provide details of those contracts?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I do not sign on behalf of NATO but I can assure the hon. member that we will continue to advocate on behalf of Goose Bay. We know there is particular interest in the types of flights that can occur there because of the terrain, of which the hon. member is familiar, and we have a very formidable runway at that particular location. I am proud to say that our government invested over \$20 million in resurfacing that runway at Goose Bay and this new runway will also enhance the marketability in the future for NATO and for other interested allies who want to use it.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Chair, when the secretary general came to Ottawa two weeks ago, he expressed concern about Canada's waning contribution to the kind of UN peacekeeping missions it once pioneered. In response, the minister said that the criticism was unfair and boasted that we were in 16 different missions right now. The minister repeated that tonight.

I do not mean to be indignant, but we only have 57 troops deployed on 7 UN peacekeeping missions and 34 others deployed on 9 non-UN missions. How can he say that this is a robust commitment to peacekeeping?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I can say it because I firmly believe it. The Afghanistan mission is all about bringing peace and security to one of the most wartorn, poverty-afflicted countries on the planet and our commitment there is beyond reproach.

Our commitment in other parts of the world, including the Congo, places in Africa and in the Middle East, is also providing great value. However, our primary focus, as is that of our neighbour to the south, the United States, and Great Britain and all of our NATO and non-NATO, is on our current efforts in Afghanistan. We have almost 3,000 soldiers participating in that mission and they are performing brilliantly.

Business of Supply

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be speaking for 10 minutes and then splitting my time with the member for Edmonton—Leduc and the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont.

I am the long-time representative from the riding of Vancouver Island North, which includes CFB Comox, and I am pleased to take part in this examination of the estimates for 2010-11 for the Department of National Defence.

It is great to be here with our very competent minister and with General Natynczyk. The last time we met was at CFB Comox last year. I think the general will probably remember that.

This is a crucial debate because we are discussing one of the most important federal institutions responsible for protecting Canada, defending its sovereignty and securing our population. Our men and women in uniform serve with incredible professionalism, dedication and courage. These expenditures can literally make the difference between life and death for Canadians, for our continental partners and for people in distress around the world.

When the Canadian Forces are called to serve, our men and women in uniform cannot fail. They put their lives on the line and we cannot fail them. Whether it is supporting provincial or municipal authorities in the case of a forest fire, flood or catastrophic storm within our borders, undertaking Arctic patrols in our north, or a search and rescue helicopter winching somebody to safety on the Pacific coast or the frigid North Atlantic, Canadians expect a lot from our military and the Canadian Forces have never let us down.

This year has shown, and continues to highlight, why we need our forces now as much as ever. Our military is exceptionally busy, delivering excellence at home in the defence of Canada and continuing to be a strong and reliable partner in the defence of North America. In addition to 16 deployed operations around the world, the Canadian Forces are defending our country and citizens right here in Canada.

As part of tonight's discussion I want to focus on our home game. I believe no debate on the Department of National Defence and our Canadian Forces is complete without considering what our military is doing at home.

Defending Canada is an integral part of the defence mission and is at the heart of this government's Canada first defence policy. This strategy includes many initiatives aimed at strengthening the security of Canadians. This means being aware, providing surveillance of our territory in air and maritime approaches, deterring threats before they reach our shores and responding anywhere in the country. Our men and women in uniform are ready to do just that. They excel in a variety of situations.

What better example did we have than the recent Olympic Winter Games? In February people from around the world watched the amazing accomplishments of top athletes at the Vancouver Winter Olympics, but what most people did not see was what happened behind the scenes.

After several years of preparation, over 4,000 military personnel helped support the RCMP provide a secure environment for the

games. They monitored and kept secure 10,000 square kilometres of the most challenging geography in Canada.

The navy contributed personnel from the east and west coasts and all 24 naval reserve divisions along with a frigate, two maritime coastal defence vessels, three patrol vessels and several rigid hull inflatables.

Sailors from the navy's clearance diving unit swam through the storm drains under Vancouver. Soldiers patrolled the back country on Cypress and Whistler Mountains. Airmen and airwomen flew Griffin and Sea King helicopters and Twin Otter and Aurora fixed-wing aircraft to conduct surveillance patrols while moving specialized police units around the region.

We have another good example next month with the G8 and G20 summits when Canada will once again be in the spotlight. As with the Olympics, we know we can rely on the more than 2,800 forces personnel to once more work in support of the RCMP and our other partners to provide first-class security.

• (2220)

In addition to all of this, we have major domestic security operations when natural disasters strike. This happened in 2003 when forest fires raged in British Columbia. There were 2,600 troops deployed alongside emergency personnel. When we had the floods in southern Manitoba, there was major deployment at that time. When the ice storm struck in 1998, more than 15,000 military personnel were deployed in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. In all these cases, the forces were ready if disaster struck, and they will continue to be ready to help in years to come.

The forces are also defending our skies and monitoring our maritime approaches through the binational North American Aerospace Defence Command, or NORAD. It is the cornerstone of our bilateral defence relationship with the U.S. NORAD no longer just monitors aircraft coming into North America, in the post-September 11 world, it also tracks civilian aircraft within Canada and American airspace.

Through NORAD, we can respond to any air sovereignty threat in a matter of minutes, as demonstrated by the May 15 incident, when NORAD Canadian assets were rapidly deployed to respond to a bomb threat on a civilian airliner. I just happened to be at home and watched those two CF-18s from Cold Lake stationed in Comox fly overhead at my home on their return landing.

Canadian Forces personnel are serving alongside their American counterparts aboard the airborne warning and control aircraft and operate CF-18 Hornet fighter aircraft on continuous alert. We have hundreds of Canadian Forces members permanently deployed to NORAD headquarters in Colorado Springs.

Business of Supply

We have a very high visibility search and rescue capability in Canada. I relate to it as 442 Squadron at CFB Comox. What happens if Canadians are in distress? The Canadian Forces search and rescue system is ready to respond 24/7, 365 days of the year. Critical and usually dangerous tasks take our SAR techs, our search and rescue technicians, to every corner of our nation and the surrounding ocean, covering 15 million square kilometres of land and sea, an area equivalent to that of continental Europe.

Last year the Canadian Forces responded to over 1,100 search and rescue calls, the vast majority of which had happy outcomes. Canadians can be confident that their search and rescue system is second to none and that our crews are ready to respond whenever and wherever needed.

The Canadian Forces are prepared to operate from coast to coast to coast. It is this defining feature of our great country that prompted the government to introduce the northern strategy. We are an Arctic nation. As part of our Canada first defence strategy, the Canadian Forces have stepped up their training exercises and patrols. This year's high Arctic operation witnessed the first ever landing of one of our purchases, the C-17 Globemaster strategic lift aircraft on the ice-impregnated gravelled runway at Canadian Forces Station Alert, the northernmost permanently inhabited settlement in the world.

The Arctic Response Company Group and the Canadian Rangers conducted their patrols further north than ever before, and the combined dive team accomplished its first underwater dive in the high Arctic, as well its longest every sustained ice dive.

Our Forces are always ready to respond with little notice in difficult and diverse environments.

As members can see, defending Canada and protecting Canadians is at the heart of the Canada first defence strategy and the Canadian Forces mission.

• (2225)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Chair, we have spoken a lot tonight about the Canadian Forces role in Afghanistan, and it was certainly appropriate to do so.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development just spoke about the role of our Forces in the Vancouver Olympics. However, before those games, tragedy, as we all know, struck the people of Haiti on January 12. Canada was among the first to respond and we responded in a very big way.

Could the Minister of National Defence provide an outline of the contributions of our men and women in responding in such a quick way in Haiti and also discuss the challenges of conducting two or more major operations at one time?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Edmonton—Leduc and the previous speaker as well who talked about the diversity and the spectrum of capabilities offered by the modern Canadian Forces.

It is very much a challenge when there are simultaneous events such as the Olympics and the preparation for the G8 and G20, which will bring a lot of that knowhow and lessons learned to bear during that important summit. We have of the ongoing mission in Afghanistan, as well as other UN missions to which we are

committed such as Haiti, or Op Hestia as it became known, which happened very suddenly in the aftermath of the earthquake that occurred off the coast of that island country.

As the hon. member would know, this resulted in a very quick response from the Canadian Forces. Two ships, the *Halifax* as well as the *Athabaskan* were deployed. The *Athabaskan* is in New York taking part in the American Fleet Week. I had the pleasure to be there with the captain and crew of that vessel, as did the Secretary-General of the UN who dropped by to pay his respects.

To respond to the question in terms of the challenge that was faced, we received the call and the Canadian Forces made the decision to deploy. As a result, the Canadian Forces, working in conjunction using our DART team and with other departments, were able to evacuate 4,620 Canadians. They treated medically over 22,000 patients, distributed over 2.6 million litres of water, supplied millions of meals. This was an unprecedented effort, resulting in lifesaving, life enhancing during our time in Haiti, something that is truly a proud moment for all Canadians.

• (2230)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is well understood that the Canadian Forces have a significant role to play in exercising control over and defending Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic. New economic, recreational and other opportunities are emerging across the region. While these opportunities are exciting, they also bring new challenges. The Canadian Forces must therefore be prepared to respond to safety and security challenges in Canada's vast Arctic territory.

As stated in the Canada first defence strategy:

As activity in northern lands and waters accelerates, the military will play an increasingly vital role in demonstrating a visible Canadian presence in this potentially resourcerich region, and in helping other government agencies such as the Coast Guard respond to any threats that may arise.

I understand a number of Canadian Forces firsts were recently achieved during Operation Nunavut, one of the Canadian Forces annual Arctic sovereignty operations, the first ever landing of a CC-177 Globemaster at Canadian Forces Station Alert and concurrent training between the Arctic Response Company Group and the Canadian Rangers, who conducted their patrols further north than ever before.

Could the minister, as a first-hand witness, provide the committee with an overview of this highly successful operation?

Business of Supply

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I had the unique opportunity, with the Chief of the Defence Staff, members of the Canadian Forces, the Rangers, to be in the high Arctic near Canadian Forces Station Alert. Operation Nunaliut 2010 took place between April 6 to 26 and it was conducted around the most northern tip of Ellesmere Island. As the member described, it was a multifaceted effort that involved a number of firsts, including the landing of the C-17 in the Arctic tundra. We were there working incidentally with the Canadian Arctic Rangers, a very unique capability and an important part of our team, where we instill many of the incredibly important bits of knowledge that have been garnered literally over generations by our members of the Arctic Rangers.

In fact, this year's operation had a number of firsts, as referenced, the longest sustained under ice dive in Canada Forces history. We established an ice camp some 90 kilometres north of Alert by one Canadian Ranger patrol, the farthest north the Canadian Forces have ever operated. A number of—

The Chair: I will have to stop the minister there as he has run out of time.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Chicoutimi—le Fjord.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to address the minister directly. Minister, I would like to tell you in advance that I am grateful for the interest and the attention you will give my questions. Before I get to them, I would like to tell you that it is difficult, for an MP such as myself, to obtain information from your department, the Department of National Defence, even through access to information. I hope and expect to receive official answers from you.

I would like to know what is happening with the Conservative government's 2006 promise to form, by 2015, the air expeditionary support squadron in Bagotville, a squadron of 550 military members and 100 civilians? I believe that the government is not committed to this project. For your information, of the 250 promised for 2010, only 39 military have been hired to date and most of the positions were filled by people already working at the Bagotville base.

Can the minister explain why the government is dragging its feet on this project?

• (2235)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, it is clear, and I think the member understands most Canadians would understand, that the toll the Afghanistan mission has taken on the Canadian Forces, in terms of our commitments of both equipment and personnel, has required, in many cases, and we spoke just a moment ago about the base that we have in Labrador, Goose Bay, that we deploy equipment from various bases and personnel from right across the country to provide that necessary capability and support for the mission in Afghanistan.

With respect to the Air Expeditionary Wing, there is progress that has been made. Plans to acquire the necessary equipment are, of course, part of that overall plan. We have reassigned, in some cases, certain personnel to the base in Bagotville. I know the hon. member has a long-standing interest in that base, and understandably so.

Concurrently, the defence force structure review, the strategic review, will work with the hon. member and with all those interested to determine the balance that is required for the needs of the Canadian Forces today.

We, of course, are working against the backdrop of a constantly challenging operational tempo in Afghanistan. That remains our number one priority.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, with regard to infrastructure for establishing the air expeditionary squadron, there is no construction, no announcement, no plans or estimates, no tenders. The 2010-15 five-year plan for Bagotville makes no mention of the expeditionary squadron even though \$300 million in investments was announced.

Can the minister tell me why the infrastructure work required to form an expeditionary squadron does not figure in National Defence planning?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the member does not have his facts right. There is a great deal of construction, investment and infrastructure required to rebuild the Bagotville base.

[English]

Let me just list a few. I do not know where the hon. member has been, but in this past year alone, 2009, we announced an investment of approximately \$28 million to construct a transport and vehicle maintenance facility at Bagotville. The buildings will be used for garage mechanical work. Various land vehicles will be housed there.

We have also invested \$17 million in resurfacing the airstrip.

[Translation]

It is obvious that the airstrip is important to the Bagotville base.

[English]

We have other projects where project managers have now received authorization to proceed with the design phase and construction at the base. We will see projects realized in the year 2012, that include the construction of a new facility that is now under evaluation. It is evaluated at over \$42 million. Construction is expected to begin this summer.

There are a number of options to proceed with projects at CFB Bagotville, as there are with many projects around the country in terms of infrastructure. We make decisions based on the need. In some cases there is more immediate infrastructure that has to be addressed. Obviously, some of the basics, in terms of water, sewer and electricity in some of these aging facilities have to be addressed on an as needed basis, as the hon. member would know. It is just like maintaining a house. If the roof is leaking, that is what we deal with first.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I asked a question about the expeditionary squadron.

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It seems clear that certain military bases are given preferential treatment. The Trenton base in particular seems to be a favourite, as it has hit the jackpot with investments of close to \$1 billion from now through 2015. It is just one announcement after another in Trenton. Contracts are awarded with lightning speed. The same cannot be said for infrastructure upgrade projects in Bagotville, which keep getting delayed indefinitely.

That is what has happened with the health clinic and hangars 2 and 3, which have come to the end of their useful life. The department is simply applying band-aid solutions, which is very costly for the department and its Bagotville infrastructure.

Can the minister tell me why the investments in Bagotville are being neglected this way, at the risk of endangering the health and safety of staff and military personnel.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the feigned indignation and outrage, but I could simply point to the fact that the hon. member, and the record will show, has voted against every single budgetary increase that we have made, including budgetary allocations for the base that we are talking about here, Bagotville, and the numerous investments that I have already recited, millions of dollars for new facilities, for the runway improvement.

There is no preferential treatment. It is done on as needed basis. We constantly re-prioritize, in many instances, because of operational tempo and because of the needs on the base that are identified. It is all part of a very complex, inclusive and consultative process that happens at the department based on information that is received from base commanders on their priorities.

We are going to continue to work within the budgets that we have, with the allocations that are there.

Bagotville is a very important base. It is not receiving short shrift.

CFB Trenton, of course, is home to the largest component part of the expeditionary force and it receives—

• (2240)

The Chair: The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, the defence department's five year investment plan for 2010 to 2015 commits to building a health clinic in Bagotville that would be worth approximately \$22 million. No team has been formed to work on the project. There has been no concrete action. However, given the state of the health infrastructure, it is necessary to build and renovate it in the short term.

Why the delays in constructing a health clinic?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, we take all of our commitments, all of our construction needs, particularly those needs that relate to health care within the Canadian Forces, very seriously.

However, I would encourage the hon. member to do more than just talk about these things. I would encourage him to literally stand behind these initiatives by standing in the House of Commons and voting for the money that we put into these initiatives, the ones of which he speaks of, because he has not done that.

The record will show that he has consistently voted against increases in budgetary needs for the Canadian Forces. He has voted against moneys that are specifically allocated for Bagotville. I do not know how he can reconcile his words today with his actions on those opportunities to stand up and vote for support for Bagotville.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, the member for Saint-Jean and I recently wrote to the minister to request a debriefing about an F-18 engine maintenance contract that may be awarded to General Electric.

Can the minister instruct one of his officers to make sure this meeting happens?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, we routinely provide briefings at the Department of National Defence. I know that the hon. member and others have expressed interest in contracts. We have a very open, transparent and inclusive process of procurement. Much of the detail of actual procurements is not handled by the Department of National Defence. Some might be surprised to hear that. It is actually done by the Department of Public Works. That is done in consultation with the Department of Industry.

What the Department of National Defence does consistently is outline our operational requirements and needs. We work in close consult with those other departments. However, if there is information that is readily available, we will be happy to share it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I wrote a letter to the minister asking him to consider using wood in the construction of Hangar 2 in Bagotville. I have not received a response. Given that the design process for the new building has begun, I would bet that the materials have already been chosen.

Will Hangar 2 in Bagotville be rebuilt using wood, and when will the minister send out the request for proposals?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I agree with the member.

[*Translation*]

Wood is very important. It is an essential resource for our country. My family is involved in the industry. It is clear that we used very effective materials for every project.

[*English*]

It is clear that we obviously go about these projects in a way in which we utilize the best possible equipment and the best possible material. We do it in the safest possible way to achieve the optimum result.

• (2245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I would like to turn briefly to the expeditionary squadron. In the 2009-2014 five-year plan, \$180 million was allocated, and \$120 million is budgeted for Horizon 2.

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But the 2010-15 five-year plan includes no allocation for the expeditionary squadron. I would like to know why.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the member has partly answered his own question, that moneys have already been spent. Moneys are identified. We clearly respond to our needs at the base level; that is, at all our bases across the country, but operational requirements and readiness take precedent in some cases.

When it comes to what is happening in Afghanistan today, we had clearly identified needs that had to be addressed first on a priority basis. The Canada first defence strategy, good news, is a long-term strategy that will involve considerable investments, \$490 billion of investments, across the four pillars of the Canadian Forces.

Therefore, I would urge the hon. member, as he has failed to do on previous occasions, to stand up and vote for this budget, to stand up and vote for the allocations that will help places like Bagotville.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Chair, I was talking to the minister about the expeditionary squadron.

In 2009, the minister authorized the construction of Hangar 2 at a cost of \$28 million in 2012. The current condition of the building is jeopardizing soldiers' health and safety. To date, no funds have been allocated to undertake the project.

Will the minister make a formal commitment to obtain funds to undertake the construction of Hangar 2 in 2012 as he announced?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, again let me just clarify. There is a hangar, Hangar 2 which he refers to, which is currently housing some of the transport and vehicle maintenance capabilities.

We spoke earlier of a new facility. That new facility will provide some of that same capability. Within the entire inventory of buildings at CFB Bagotville, the commander there gives us advice as to his operational needs. Relocating some of that equipment to the newly constructed transport and vehicle maintenance facility will provide that capability. It is correct to say that Hangar 2 will be replaced by the new transport vehicle maintenance facility that I referenced earlier, and with the completion of that facility, then Hangar 2 will be demolished.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time this evening with the member for Oak Ridges—Markham and the member for Edmonton Centre. Mr. Chair, I thank you and the members of the committee for allowing me to contribute to the Department of National Defence expenditures discussion.

Allow me a minute to recognize with thanks the NFTC program that is alive and well at 15 Wing Moose Jaw and also recognize the reserve units that are very well placed in Moose Jaw and Regina. We thank them for all that they are and for all that they do.

I would like to use this time to talk about the Canadian Forces' international operations.

The good work of our forces extends far beyond Canada's borders, with more than 3,700 Canadian soldiers, sailors and air force personnel currently deployed on international operations. On any

given day, about 8,000 Canadian Forces members, one-third of our deployable force, are preparing for, engaging in, or returning from an overseas mission.

We have committed our military because we know that security in Canada begins with stability abroad and because it is within our capabilities to make positive changes in the world. This is why our Canadian Forces continue to work with our national and international partners to find peaceful solutions to decades-old conflicts and disputes and to fight where we need to fight. The Canadian Forces are currently involved in 16 operations around the world, from the Balkans to the Congo and from the Middle East to Darfur.

Today, their largest operation and Canada's highest international priority is the mission in Afghanistan. Under a United Nations Security Council mandate and alongside ISAF, our forces have been engaged in Afghanistan for more than eight years. From operations in the rugged terrain of Kandahar to training the Afghan national army and police, Canadian men and women are working alongside Afghans to combat terrorism and to build a country better governed, more peaceful and more secure.

As important as Afghanistan is, however, this is only one of many missions where our forces are engaged or have recently been engaged in operations and indeed are making a difference.

For example, the Canadian Forces have 55 personnel deployed in the Middle East where our forces have had a presence since the Suez crisis of 1956. They are engaged in a number of different operations in the region working with multinational and binational partners to bring stability and to build the security so badly needed for peace to take hold.

Canada contributes to the multinational force and observers in the Sinai Peninsula through Operation Calumet, a mission that oversees the implementation of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Canada is also present in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights, which supervises the ceasefire between Israel and Syria, and in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, which observes and maintains the ceasefire between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. It is a lot of work for very few people.

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Also in the Middle East, Canadian Forces are doing some extraordinary work in support of U.S. efforts to build peace and security for Israel and for the Palestine folks. Through Operation Proteus, 17 members of the Canadian Forces and two Canadian civilians are working side by side with American, British and Turkish military personnel as part of the United States security coordinator's mission. This mission works to build the foundations of a modern and professional security and justice system in the West Bank.

These efforts, responding directly to the needs of the Palestinians and Israelis, have already borne significant fruit and are a key element to building the trust necessary to revive peace efforts.

Our Canadian Forces are also making a difference in Africa, with over 50 personnel currently deployed in that area. Operation Safari is Canada's participation in the United Nations missions in Sudan. It is the military component of the Canadian whole of government engagement in southern Sudan.

The 30 CF personnel involved in Operation Safari are working to support implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement. They are also facilitating humanitarian assistance while working to protect and promote human rights. In Operation Saturn, Canadian Forces personnel participate in the African Union/UN hybrid operation in Darfur. In Operation Crocodile, our soldiers—

• (2250)

The Chair: I regret to interrupt my colleague from Saskatchewan, but it being 10:53 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), all votes are deemed reported and the committee will rise, and I will now leave the chair.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 10:54 p.m.)

APPENDIX

Address

of

His Excellency Felipe Calderón Hinojosa

President of the United Mexican States

to both Houses of Parliament

in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa

on

Thursday, May 27, 2010

His Excellency Felipe Calderón Hinojosa and First Lady of Mexico, Margarita Zavala, were welcomed by the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, by the Honourable Noël Kinsella, Speaker of the Senate, and by the Honourable Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons.

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[English]

Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons): I call upon the right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister): Your Excellency Mr. President, hon. Speaker of the Senate, hon. Speaker of the House of Commons, hon. colleagues, distinguished guests, dear friends, it is my great honour and pleasure to welcome and introduce today a man I have come to know and to admire greatly since we both came to our respective offices in 2006, His Excellency Felipe Calderón, President of the United Mexican States.

[Translation]

President Calderón and I have attended a number of summits together, including the G20, APEC, the Summit of the Americas and the North American Leaders' Summit.

This is the president's second visit to Canada. I have also visited his magnificent country on three occasions.

[English]

It is always a pleasure to see President Calderón, as well as the First Lady of Mexico, former congresswoman Margarita Zavala, who I am delighted to report is also with us today. I, of course, am very grateful, as we all are, that the President accepted our invitation to address the Parliament of Canada.

[Translation]

We are fortunate to host a leader with such a sense for politics, legal affairs and the economy, a leader who shares our commitment to freedom, democracy and justice. President Calderón has shown remarkable courage in fighting the merciless drug cartels which spread violence and misery throughout our hemisphere. He leads a country that we love, a neighbouring country, a country that is one of Canada's major trading partners.

[English]

Over the last 16 years, the North American Free Trade Agreement has brought Mexico and Canada closer together than ever before. It has increased trade, travel, investment and raised living standards for both of our peoples.

Thousands of Canadian companies are now doing business in Mexico and its glorious beaches provide warm and hospitable winter relief for tens of thousands of snowbirds.

Educational and cultural exchanges are flourishing and our seasonal agricultural workers program is widely recognized as a model for international labour mobility arrangements.

We are working closely to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, including through the anti-crime capacity building program our government announced last year.

The Canada-Mexico partnership has fostered public and private sector co-operation across a wide range of economic sectors. Our governments also routinely co-operate on international issues as diverse as reform of international institutions, trade liberalization and hemispheric security.

[Translation]

Of course, no relationship, no partnership is perfect. False refugee claims have affected our friendly relations with some countries, including Mexico. But as I have said before, that has nothing to do with the Mexican government.

Colleagues, this is a problem with our system. And our two countries are working together to remedy the situation.

Last month, we took a major step toward resolving this problem by introducing a special visa program for Mexican business travellers.

[English]

On the fundamental, timeless principles that underpin free societies and successful economies, Canada and Mexico are as one. Here I would like to quote President Calderón, speaking at the World Economic Forum in 2007, where he strongly defended our shared principles. He said:

Many countries in Latin America have chosen a move toward the past, and among their most harmful decisions are seeking nationalizations, expropriations, state control of the economy and authoritarianism...

He said that Mexicans had chosen a different, better way. He said, "We have decided to look to the future and to strengthen democracy, markets and investment".

Colleagues, that is precisely the message that Canada has advocated throughout the Americas and around the world, especially during the economic turmoil of the past two years.

[Translation]

Like Canada, Mexico was hard hit by the global recession. And like Canada, Mexico was brought into a crisis that was not of its making. In the years preceding the recession, we made the wise decision to pay down our debt. And that is why today we are not caught in the spiral that is jeopardizing the economy of so many other countries.

Canada and Mexico have also fought against protectionism, and our two countries have advocated for a strengthened global financial regulatory system.

[English]

Clearly, Canada and Mexico share these priorities and many more as we head into the G20 summit in Toronto next month. With a fragile global economy hanging in the balance, it is crucial that we build consensus at the summit on reform of the financial sector, control of sovereign debt and the framework for strong, sustainable and balanced economic growth over the long term.

Mr. Speaker, fellow parliamentarians, please join me in welcoming a great friend and partner of Canada.

[The Prime Minister spoke in Spanish, interpreted as follows:]

Mr. President, welcome. Our house is your house.

[Applause]

H.E. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (President of the United Mexican States): [President Calderón Hinojosa spoke in Spanish, interpreted as follows:]

The Right Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, distinguished Madam Harper, Mr. Noël Kinsella, Speaker of the Senate, Mr. Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons, members of this honourable Parliament, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour for me to address this Parliament, an essential institution in a nation that has been able to make plurality its greatest strength.

My visit reflects the high priority that our relationship with Canada, a country with which we are bound by a long history of friendship, has for the people of Mexico. Please allow me to highlight one fact that symbolizes the natural ties between our countries.

Every year, at the start of winter, monarch butterflies depart southern Canada on a journey of 5,000 kilometres to my state of Michoacán in Mexico. There they spend the winter in the conifer forests and they return to Canada when spring arrives. This fantastic journey spans the lives of several generations of butterflies, which have their homes and their destinations in Mexico and Canada.

The fact is that we have much in common and Canadians and Mexicans share much more than belonging, proudly, to the same North American legion. For decades, Mexico and Canada have been working under the same democratic principles with a vocation of humanism and solidarity. We established diplomatic relations 66 years ago.

That relationship of friendship and collaboration was strengthened 16 years ago through the North American Free Trade Agreement. Since then, the volume of our trade has grown more than fivefold, from slightly over \$4 billion in 1993 to almost \$22 billion in 2009. Today, there are close to 2,500 Canadian enterprises in Mexico. We have a long history of partnership and association. Today, we have many different co-operation mechanisms, such as the Canada-Mexico partnership.

However, in an increasingly global and interconnected world, I am convinced that Canadians and Mexicans must mutually avail ourselves of the advantages that we offer and plan and build a higher level of integration. Mexico is doing its part in promoting closer and better integration among countries in North America.

Mexico is transforming itself into a modern nation, one that is safer, more competitive, more equitable and more sustainable.

One of the most important transformations is the effort to uphold the rule of law in Mexico. I firmly believe that progress and sustainable development, human development, can only be brought about in a country of laws. For that reason, we have deployed the full force of the state to meet the threat of organized crime and to guarantee a new security of the entire population.

This struggle is neither exclusively nor chiefly intended to halt drug trafficking. The primordial goal is to ensure peace and tranquility for Mexican families and for those who visit or invest in our country. It is a struggle against criminal organizations, transnational organizations that, as in other parts of the world, seek to secure control over peoples and communities and directly affect the well-being of the citizenry. That is why combatting those criminals with resolve and determination was an urgent task that could not be delayed.

As I explained to the Mexican people on the first day of my government, the struggle for public security is a battle that will take time, that will take money and, unfortunately, it will also require human lives. But it is a battle that must be undertaken and, as I said to them, we, the people of Mexico, together are going to win.

To put a halt to those criminals and their activities, we are not only meeting the criminals in combat, driving them back and seizing record amounts of weapons, illegal funds and drugs that threaten the youth and the young people of the entire hemisphere, but fundamentally we are also rebuilding our law enforcement agencies, our justice administration and our security forces, particularly at the federal level.

Since the start of my administration, we have tripled the budget allocated to the federal police and we have increased its officer numbers. We are recruiting young, honest, upright women and men who are better trained, better paid and better equipped.

I would like to thank Canada for the co-operation and assistance it has provided through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in this struggle for the security of Mexico and of our entire region. In addition, we are transforming our judicial system into one that uses open oral trials, which will make it more transparent and more efficient.

In combatting organized crime, we are also protecting human rights, which face the greatest threat. It is the criminal groups that through violence undermine the freedoms of the Mexican people.

Today, Mexico has consolidated itself as a full democracy with a system of strong parties and an active and plural political life. Above and beyond their differences, our parties have agreed on electoral reforms that seek to strengthen our democracy. The legislative branch is currently studying an initiative for political reform that will give citizens greater power and ensure that the mandate they confer is translated into public policies that benefit them.

At the same time, we are transforming our economy to make it more competitive and to increase its capacity to create jobs. Toward that goal, we have undertaken a series of structural reforms that had been neglected for decades in Mexico: a reform of the pension system that will safeguard the retirement of civil servants and yield public finance savings equal to 30 points of GDP at net present value; a tax reform that reduced the public deficit and our dependence on oil income; a reform of energy policy that enables Pemex, the state-owned oil company, the possibility of entering into flexible contracts with the world's leading specialized companies. With this, Pemex will have access to cutting edge technology, greater investment flows and, above all, increased operating capacity. Through this, we are helping to ensure the energy independence of Mexico and of the region.

In addition, we have raised our investment in infrastructure from three to five percentage points of GDP every year in order to build the roads, ports, airports and power plants, the facilities for telecommunications that we need to become modern. This is the largest infrastructure investment in decades and it will make Mexico a privileged logistical platform for trade and investment in the global economy.

These projects, my friends, make Mexico a stronger, more modern and more competitive country, an important focus for investment and a strategic partner for Canada. All these reforms and actions are preparing us for a better future and at the same time they are enabling us to overcome the terrible economic crisis that Mexico, along with other nations, experienced last year.

In 2009, Mexico was confronted by a perfect storm. Our economy suffered its worse contraction in modern times. At the same time, we faced an unprecedented public health contingency with the emergence of a new strain of the human influenza virus, H1N1. We suffered the second worst drought in 70 years and the largest drop in oil output in our history.

Today, one by one, we are overcoming those challenges, any of which would have derailed a weaker country than Mexico. Addressing those developments enabled us, once again, to corroborate our great strength as a nation.

We are now beginning to reap the fruits of our efforts. The economy grew by 4.3% in the first quarter of this year and similar growth is expected for the year as a whole for all of 2010. Mexican exports are expanding at a rate of 40% yearly and so far this year, 400,000 new jobs in net terms have been created. That is the highest number of jobs created over a four month period in the history of our country.

At the same time, we are working to ensure equal opportunities for all Mexicans. To achieve that, we have trebled the budget of the popular insurance program which provides the country's poorest families with medical services. We have also built or refitted more than 1,700 hospitals and clinics in the country, more than one per day over the past three and a half years. This will enable us in 2012 to reach a target for which Canada has set the global standard: universal health care coverage. In other words, doctors, medicines and treatment for every Mexican who may need them.

We are also promoting equality of opportunities through more and better education. More than six million children of all ages now receive federal government grants to ensure they do not drop out of school for financial reasons. We have increased university coverage and today almost 90,000 students graduate with engineering degrees or technical qualifications every year.

At the same time, we have stepped up our programs to fight poverty with the opportunities program which has served as an example to many developing nations. We have provided a direct source of income for more than six million of Mexico's poorest families, accounting for one out of every four Mexicans, provided that the parents take their children to school and to regular medical checkups. With this program, Mexico has succeeded in reducing its poor from 35 million people to 14 million people living in extreme poverty in only 10 years time.

Today, despite the crisis, we have increased the budget by 50% for the opportunities program.

My government has also set itself the task of protecting the natural heritage of the Mexican people of today and of tomorrow, and that is why we have adopted an active policy for caring for the environment. For Mexico, Canada has been one of the planet's leaders in environmental protection.

One of the exemplar experiences of humanity in dealing with a threat similar to that of climate change, the depletion of the ozone layer, was the Montreal protocol, which, under the leadership of Canada, is enabling us to successfully resolve that enormous challenge.

Today, with humanity once again facing a severe, scientifically corroborated challenge, that of global warming, we need that same determination and that same Canadian leadership to help us all find safe ways to bring about a better shared future. On our part, Mexico was the first developing country to implement a national climate change strategy and the first to unilaterally establish specific targets for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

In our view, tackling global warming is not a task solely for the developed nations, for one nation or any other, not only developed nations but all nations under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It is incumbent upon us all. We are promoting payment programs for environmental services for that reason, so as to preserve the country's forests, and, at the same time, to benefit the poor indigenous and rural communities that live in the woods and rain forests. With this, we have learned that climate change can indeed be combated and, at the same time, that poverty in our communities can be fought.

At the end of this year, Mexico will host the 16th conference of the states parties to the United Nations convention on climate change. My country is working to build consensus and to serve as a bridge between the economies of the developed countries and those of developing nations.

As you can see, my friends, Mexico is a country in transformation. That makes us a more valuable neighbour and a strategic partner for the future of North America's prosperity.

As I said previously, the world grows more globalized day by day and is divided into large, increasingly integrated economic regions. Some regions in Asia and the European Union have succeeded in combining their potential, unconvinced that those regions that can maximize their comparative advantages will be assured of success in this age of unprecedented interconnections. Therein lies the importance of Canada and Mexico working together.

We need more integration, not isolation nor protectionism, and we have agreed with Canada on that point in the G20 and other forums. Integration is key to restoring strong, sustained growth in North America. For that reason, our future and, in particular, our economic prosperity and that which we want depend on strengthening our financial labour and commercial markets.

Our economies are complementary and they must work together to raise a regional competitiveness and foster the economic growth of the region. That will translate into more jobs, increased wealth and greater well-being for both Canadians and Mexicans.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Parliament, dear friends, Canada has always been an example of how to create prosperity by encouraging the economic and cultural integration of migrants. On that topic, our countries also share common ground. Over its history, Mexico has also received asylum seekers and refugees from different parts of the world.

My country recognizes the generous Canadian tradition of providing a refuge to those escaping persecution, discrimination or widespread violence. However, I also know that there have been some who, abusing the generosity of the Canadian people, have perverted the noble aims of the asylum system to their own ends, which led the Canadian government to require visas for those travelling between our countries, visas that were not required previously.

The people of Mexico are good friends to Canada. Mexicans visit this great, beautiful country for many reasons and it enriches our societies. Hundreds of thousands of tourists used to visit Canada every year and those numbers have dropped by almost 40% over the past 12 months.

We thoroughly respect Canada's right to make decisions regarding its immigration system. I cannot, however, fail to convey to you our regret at that series of incidents and those decisions. We sincerely hope that the solution this Parliament is studying through comprehensive amendments to the refugee law will also serve as a bridge that will enable us to renew the exchanges of our visitors. At the same time I reiterate to you our full willingness to work with the Canadian government so that this temporary measure can be put behind us.

Our complementarity also arises from our different demographic structures. Mexico's young, hard-working and increasingly well-trained population contributes to the productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural sector and certain other areas of the Canadian economy. We have demonstrated this over the past 36 years with a temporary employment program that is an example for the world: first, Mexican workers contribute to Canada's economy; and second, the program assures their return to their country of origin, to their homes and their families. The program can be expanded if we are

able to broaden our horizons and avail ourselves of the opportunities offered by our economic complementarity.

Greater integration is what will make North America a more competitive economy and we must redouble our efforts in that undertaking. I invite you to work with Mexico and alongside our common neighbour to forge closer economic ties, and in consolidating North America as the world's most competitive and prosperous region of the world. Together we can make that a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government of Mexico has every interest, full willingness and an all-out commitment to work with the Canadian government and society on the topics of our common interest. Our peoples and governments, which love peace, freedom and democracy, work hard to bolster a friendship that assures us a promising future, a future of unity and prosperity.

Today Mexico is undergoing deep changes. It is a stronger and more determined nation to meet the future head-on and take its proper place in the world. Let us continue to work together to strengthen our economic, educational, cultural, scientific and technological exchanges, and to strengthen tourism, security, and mutual understanding between Canadians and Mexicans. Let us continue to improve and cultivate our relations. We are partner countries, we are neighbours, but above all, we are friends.

Long live Canada. Long live Mexico. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Hon. Noël A. Kinsella (Speaker of the Senate): [*Speaker Kinsella spoke in Spanish, interpreted as follows:*]

Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister, hon. senators, hon. members of the House of Commons, Your Excellency Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of all those assembled here today, I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to you, Mr. President, for addressing our Parliament. Your thoughtful comments reflected and underscore the strong friendship between our two countries.

[English]

This friendship is bolstered by a continuing dialogue and is enhanced by regular exchanges between Canada and Mexico. Mr. President, your visit today is one example, and it has been my pleasure to visit your country as well. It was a singular honour to be present at your inauguration in 2006, and last year I had the honour to lead a parliamentary delegation to Mexico to discuss details of the forthcoming interparliamentary meetings. While there, I had the opportunity to visit La Heroica Escuela Naval Militar in Veracruz and to pay respect to fallen Mexican heroes in the Hall of Honour.

One of the many dynamic aspects of the bilateral relationship between our two countries is parliamentary co-operation. The very successful interparliamentary meetings permit Canadian and Mexican parliamentarians to engage in discussions on a range of issues concerning both of our countries.

[Translation]

The 16th Interparliamentary Meeting was held in Canada last November, and I had the honour of hosting the Mexican delegation in Ottawa, and also in my home province of New Brunswick. We shared our views on national security, trade, investment and the economy, the environment and clean energy, and international co-operation.

Canada and Mexico also work together through multilateral parliamentary forums, such as the Interparliamentary Forum of the Americas, FIPA, and the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, GOPAC. The Canadian delegates are looking forward to discussions at the seventh plenary meeting of the Interparliamentary Forum of the Americas, which will be held in Mexico this November.

[English]

[Speaker Kinsella spoke in Spanish, interpreted as follows:]

Your Excellency, the ties that have been forged between our nations are many and varied, and they are strengthened through regular dialogue. Mr. President, thank you once again for expressing your country's deep commitment to our bilateral relations and to our shared values.

On behalf of all present today, I would like to congratulate you and wish you an enjoyable and productive visit to Canada.

[English]

Thank you, merci, *gracias*.

[Applause]

Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons): President Calderón, Mrs. Zavala, Prime Minister, Mrs. Harper, Speaker Kinsella, hon. senators, hon. members, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of all parliamentarians, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having addressed us here today.

This chamber has welcomed many distinguished guests in the past, but as the leader of Mexico, one of Canada's closest allies and friends, you occupy not only a place of honour, but really a seat at the family table.

[Translation]

[Speaker Milliken spoke in Spanish as follows:]

Señor presidente, esta es su casa.

[Translation]

Time does not permit me to list the many close ties between our two countries: bilateral, regional, commercial, cultural, academic, and others as well. Trade between our countries is growing by the day, and our friendship continues to deepen.

[English]

Such different countries, such different histories, and yet Mexicans and Canadians now work together, play together, learn

together and build together. Two hundred thousand Mexicans come to Canada every year and we return the favour five times over, though strangely, not at the same time of year.

As Speaker of the House of Commons, I have been gratified to see the deepening parliamentary relations between Mexico and Canada. Indeed, in the more than 60 years since our two nations established diplomatic relations, the strength of those parliamentary bonds have only grown in intensity.

For many years now, the annual interparliamentary meetings have been held between both Canada and Mexico, during which high-level parliamentary representatives, including the Speakers from both countries, come together to discuss a number of issues of common concern and set out the mechanisms for closer collaboration in the future. I myself have had the pleasure of leading several of these delegations to Mexico and of hosting the meetings here in Ottawa, along with my colleague, the Speaker of the Senate.

In recognition of this increased co-operation, 10 years ago our embassy in Mexico created a congressional relations unit in order to work more closely with the Mexican congress and support intensified parliamentary co-operation between Canada and Mexico, yet another tie that binds our two nations.

A few years ago, a Mexican friend told me that the first people to land on the shores of this nation hundreds of years ago were actually from Mexico, but they took a look at the white, snow-covered lands, shook their heads and said "*acá nada*", which means "over there, nothing", and so we were named Canada. Needless to say, I corrected his story.

[Translation]

Mr. President, I know that you come from the magnificent city of Morelia in the state of Michoacán. This colonial city was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its beautiful historic buildings. That is yet another thing that Canada and Mexico share.

I hope that you will be able to see the Rideau Canal, not too far from here, on your visit. It is the oldest operating canal system in North America, and it links the City of Ottawa to the City of Kingston, my hometown and my riding.

[English]

Mr. President, it has been a pleasure to welcome you in the House of Commons. Occasions such as this one are all too rare and they are precious because they offer us, the people of Canada, the opportunity to hear from you about how our Mexican friends and neighbours are doing, the challenges they face, the strides they are making, the goals they have set for themselves and for their country and the ways in which perhaps we can help each other. That is, after all, what friends are for.

Muchas gracias, señor presidente.

[Applause]

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