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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CUBS AND BEAVERS

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I recognize Mrs. Gloria Partlo, also affectionately known as Akela.

For over 60 years, Gloria has tirelessly dedicated her time and energy to making Etobicoke a better place through her service as a leader with the Cubs and Beavers at the Mighty 4th Humber West Scout Group.

Gloria's contributions to youth in Etobicoke are boundless. She arranges fall and summer camps and organizes weekly meetings for youth in the riding. She is a role model for other leaders. She uses her amazing organizational skills to provide a great scouting experience for all.

It is the unsung heroes like Gloria who keep our communities safe and give young people wonderful opportunities to thrive and live up to the cub motto of “Doing Your Best”.

Today, I congratulate Gloria Partlo for her tireless commitment to youth and Scouts Canada.

The cub promise states, “to do a good turn for somebody every day.” This promise embodies the spirit and dedication which have defined Gloria Partlo's life. We thank Gloria for making Etobicoke Centre the superb community it is.

NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, farmers and many other Canadians are very concerned about the Conservative government's move to be the first country in the world to allow, for the convenience of trade, the low-level presence of genetically engineered food not approved for safety in Canada.

Sacrificing health and farmers' livelihoods to force an undemocratic and unnecessary food technology on the rest of the world is a reprehensible approach to food policy.

I am especially concerned for the markets of organic farmers, such as Kevin and Annamarie Klippenstein, of Cawston, B.C., this year's winners of the National Outstanding Young Farmers Award.

If the government does nothing to protect them from U.S.-approved GE alfalfa spreading its unwanted genes into our country, where it is currently illegal, they will be forced out of business.

This is not at all what Canadians have in mind in their calls for a national food strategy to help them meet the many challenges of our increasingly unpredictable world.

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ANNUAL BUSINESS AWARDS

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize a number of organizations in my riding that won awards from the Medicine Hat Chamber of Commerce's annual business awards, in conjunction with National Small Business Week.

Many category winners go on and compete at the prestigious Alberta Business Awards of Distinction hosted by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

I would like to enumerate a few of the winners today. First, congratulations to Outlaw Collision and Custom Coatings for having won the award of excellence. I also congratulate Premium Sausage for having won small business of the year, and Blue Imp Recreational Products for having won large business of the year.

The Brooks and District Chamber of Commerce also handed out its best in business annual awards. I congratulate Liberty Trucking for having won business of the year award in the category of under 20 employees. I also congratulate Brooks Industrial Metals for having won the business of the year award in the category of over 20 employees.

Statements by Members

I am very proud of the entrepreneurial spirit of the businesses in my riding, and wish them all continued success.

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CASA D'ITALIA

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 5 of this year, I had the honour of attending the annual banquet for the Casa d'Italia, the major fundraising event that enables it to finance its operations.

For the last three years, this banquet has been magnificently chaired by Angela Minicucci, who must be congratulated for raising over \$300,000 during this period.

Originally founded in 1936, this community centre was a second home to Montrealers of Italian origin. The centre welcomed thousands of people and provided a vast array of services, from reading and filling out forms to providing counselling and financial support.

With the growth of the Italian Canadian community, this jewel in the heart of Montreal's Little Italy has renewed itself. Under the leadership of executive director Pasquale Iacobacci and the co-chairmanship of Angela Minicucci and Ciro Cucciniello, the Casa d'Italia facility has undergone a major renovation. The renovation preserved its original design, and the building is considered one of the last art deco buildings in the city. It also underwent a change in mission. It has become the hub for the preservation of Italian Canadian history and culture. It promotes intergenerational and intercultural exchanges and provides a home for numerous Italian Canadian organizations.

Auguri, Casa d'Italia, on 75 years of existence.

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• (1410)

YMCA PEACE MEDALS

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two special people from my riding, Mr. Doug Bates and Ms. Rhian Catton, who recently received the adult and youth YMCA Peace Medals for Northumberland County.

Mr. Bates, who earlier this year tragically lost his seven-year-old daughter, Kaitlyn, in a traffic accident, received the award for establishing the Kaitlyn Bates Foundation. This foundation helps girls deal with self-esteem problems, an issue which Mr. Bates says Kaitlyn had already become quite passionate about.

Ms. Catton, a grade 12 student from Cobourg District Collegiate Institute, received her award for her work within the community. Ms. Catton was recognized for establishing a support group for grade nine students making the transition to high school. She also organized Halloween for Hunger, an initiative that encouraged students to trick-or-treat for canned goods that were then donated to local food banks.

I would encourage every Canadian citizen to follow the lead of Mr. Bates and Ms. Catton. Take time this holiday season to help and support those in need.

Merry Christmas to all.

[*Translation*]

NOBEL PRIZE IN MEDICINE

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, Claudia Steinman accepted the Nobel Prize in Medicine on behalf of her late husband. In an emotional gesture, she blew a kiss towards the sky.

[*English*]

Dr. Ralph Steinman, a Canadian cell biologist, was born in Montreal and studied at McGill University. In 1973, he discovered dendritic cells, an important element of our immune system.

[*Translation*]

This discovery greatly contributed to medical research. He shares the Nobel Prize with scientists Dr. Beutler and Dr. Hoffmann, who in 1990 discovered specific properties of certain proteins.

With this tribute, I would like to salute the perseverance and determination of our researchers and scientists. They remind us that curiosity and an independent spirit are signs of courage and that the dreamers of today may be the Nobel Prize winners of tomorrow.

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[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to recognize and thank Justice Robert Thompson for his notable career accomplishments and congratulate him on his new role as supernumerary justice of the Supreme Court. He is recognized and well known in Bruce and Grey counties for his firm but fair sentencing of criminals.

Justice Thompson was called to the bar of Ontario in 1974. He practised litigation at a firm in Brantford and was a federal prosecutor from 1974 to 1996. He was appointed a judge of the Ontario Court of Justice, General Division, now the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, on February 20, 1996, and continued in this role until October 2011. Justice Thompson will continue to serve as a judge with supernumerary status.

I would also like to congratulate Justice Thompson's successor, Justice Clayton Conlan, who will be sworn in at the new courthouse in Owen Sound on December 20.

In closing, I would like to wish Justice Thompson and Justice Conlan well in their future endeavours.

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[*Translation*]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is it acceptable for two members of the same party to say two completely different things about the same subject? Well, that is what the NDP is doing.

While all Canadians and Quebecers welcome reasonable measures to promote the importance of Canadian citizenship and Canadian values, when asked about the issue of veils being worn during citizenship ceremonies, the NDP immigration critic and member for Vancouver Kingsway said in English that he believes that the minister should slow down a bit and consult with people. Meanwhile, the member for Saint-Lambert was saying in French that she agrees with the measure.

This double-talk on the part of the opposition speaks volumes about the party's credibility and proves that it is not listening to Canadians.

Our government will continue to promote the importance of Canadian citizenship and Canadian values.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago today, a woman was elected to the National Assembly of Quebec for the first time. On December 14, 1961, Marie-Claire Kirkland-Casgrain was elected to represent the riding of Jacques-Cartier.

This event helped change many things for women in Quebec. Ms. Kirkland-Casgrain, who became a cabinet minister, was instrumental in the passage of Bill 16, which put an end to the legal incapacity of married women in the Civil Code.

Since 1961, 104 women have been elected to the National Assembly and 40 of them have gone on to become cabinet ministers.

This anniversary reminds us that we have come a long way in terms of the representation of women in various aspects of society. Nonetheless, women are still under-represented in politics at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

On this anniversary, let us take a moment to thank pioneers like Ms. Kirkland-Casgrain and reflect on ways to achieve better representation of women in this House.

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• (1415)
[English]

CANADIAN EXPORTS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate Canada's brilliant musicians. For the first time in history, our northern stars represent four of the five bestselling albums in the world's largest record market, the United States. Michael Bublé, Justin Bieber, Drake and Nickelback are currently showing the world that Canadian talent is a superb export.

Canadian music has always been among the best, if not the best in the world. From Joni Mitchell to Céline Dion, we have always had an unforgettable presence on the international music scene.

Canadian stars are not limited to the music business. Our manufacturers and producers have consistently strong sales in the U.S. market. Companies such as Research In Motion, the maker of the ubiquitous BlackBerry, are also stars in the open market. Our government's recent perimeter deal with the U.S. means there will be

Statements by Members

easier access for our Canadian producers to succeed as our gifted musicians have, allowing Canada to grow and prosper. That is music to our ears.

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BARBARA WALLACE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 12, at the age of 93, a community leader and local icon passed away.

Barbara Wallace was a member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia for Cowichan-Malahat from 1975 to 1986. I first met Barbara when I was running for Parliament and she grilled me on my dedication to our community. Barbara needed to know that my commitment to social democratic values matched her own before she added her support.

Throughout her life she fought for equality, peace, freedom from poverty, environmental protection, food security and social justice. She engaged with others in the political process, working to make her community better. Even after she retired from politics, she continued working in her community through the Cedar Women's Institute, an organization that fights for sustainability, ecological respect and local agricultural independence. She was a fierce local advocate, a highly respected MLA and a dedicated New Democrat. She will be missed.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the expected closure of Camp Ashraf just weeks away, Canada remains deeply concerned about the future well-being and safety of the over 3,000 men and women presently living in the camp.

Over the last number of years, Canadian officials have made numerous visits to Camp Ashraf, and we are pleased that their efforts have resulted in the safe return to Canada of nine Canadians. At the direction of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, an official from the Canadian embassy will be making another visit today to monitor the situation and to offer assistance.

Our government has raised and will continue to raise the issue of Camp Ashraf directly with the Iraqi government, both in Ottawa and in Baghdad, and we strongly encourage it to extend the closure deadline to allow remaining residents sufficient time to seek asylum. We also call on Iraq to meet its obligations under international law and to ensure that Camp Ashraf residents are not forcibly transferred to another country where they could suffer.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regardless of the revisionist history heard from the government benches in recent days, it was a Liberal government in 2005 that created Project Green, a series of regulations and programs to implement our Kyoto commitments and build a sustainable and competitive economy.

Doubting the science behind climate change, the Conservative government set about dismantling Project Green when it came to power, cancelling \$10 billion in funding that would have seen us reach 80% of our targets and, more important, would have created green sustainable jobs while fighting greenhouse gas emissions at the same time.

Since 2006, we have been on a descent from our internationally recognized position of leadership on the environment, now hitting bottom with our withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol.

The environment is not a partisan issue. It is too important for talking points. Canada needs a plan and it needs to implement it immediately. As a developed country, we must lead the way by creating green, sustainable jobs, cogent ways to combat our harmful emissions and set an example for developing countries to follow.

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● (1420)

SCARBOROUGH HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the Scarborough Historical Museum, located at the entrance of Thomson Memorial Park in my riding of Scarborough Centre.

Earlier this year, I met the museum's curator, Madelaine Callaghan, and stepped through the doors of yesteryear by way of a museum tour. I also had the opportunity to meet many of the wonderful youth who had benefited from the museum's youth diversity experience program, a program designed to integrate newcomer youth into their community through heritage and cultural projects. That is why I am very pleased to hear that, under the interaction multicultural grants and contributions program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Scarborough museum has received a \$400,000 grant to expand and enhance this program.

I congratulate Ms. Callaghan on the expansion of the youth program. I also want to recognize the Scarborough museum as an important part of our Canadian heritage.

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HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is astounding that the Conservative government plans to determine the future funding for health care based on economic growth. This comes after the government has long promised an annual 6% increase. It is an outrage that the government would consider cutting its increase in half and threaten the stability of front-line health care services.

While the government is ready to cut future funding to health care, it has still not delivered on the promises made in the 2004 accord.

This week, the Health Council of Canada reported that 23% of chronically ill Canadians cannot afford their medications. This is why the government must uphold its current commitments and fulfill the promises of 2004, including a national prescription drug coverage plan. Now is the time to act on health care, not to cut its funding.

The provinces need leadership and accountability from the federal government to sustain our public health care system. Why is it backing away from the table, signalling that Canadians' number one concern is not shared by the government?

* * *

CHRISTMAS

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is approaching and again the forces of political correctness continue with the relentless attack on the traditional traditions: judges remove Christmas trees from the court houses; school concerts are postponed to take away the Christmas theme; the lyrics of Christmas carols are changed; the distribution of candy canes is banned; and all the references to God, Christ and the Lord are removed.

Traditions are the foundation of society, culture and the faith. If we eliminate or water them down, we erode the glue that holds us together.

To embrace a diverse, secular, multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, there is no need to preclude the celebration of Christmas. Rather than diluting the traditions, they should be celebrated, whether they are Vaisakhi, Diwali, Chinese New Year, Eid, Hanukkah or Christmas.

We must proudly put the spirit of Christmas back in Christmas.

I wish everyone a merry Christmas.

ORAL QUESTIONS[*Translation*]**THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mrs. Nicole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister showed that he does not understand how serious the threat of climate change is when he said that the Kyoto targets were stupid. What is really stupid is the Conservatives' inaction on climate change. That is what is stupid.

Will the Prime Minister wake up and finally put in place some real targets to combat climate change?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that the Kyoto targets were unattainable, even when the accord was signed. That is why the government that signed the accord did not have a plan to implement it. That is also why we are working with the international community to create a protocol that will include all the major emitters in the world.

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, talking about stupid things, let us talk about the F-35 fiasco.

The Pentagon is now recommending slowing down the production. Delivery of the aircraft was expected for 2016 but it clearly will not happen. There are too many flaws, too many problems and it is too costly.

The Associate Minister of National Defence talked about a plan B last month. Israel has brought in a plan B. Japan has doubts.

Would the Prime Minister tell us what plan B is for the F-35?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know very well that every time the government provides our men and women in uniform with the equipment they need, the NDP loudly opposes that and votes against it.

We are working on the best advice of the Canadian industry, including the Quebec industry and our men and women in uniform in the air force. We will continue to move forward to ensure they have the best aircraft that are available when we need to replace the current fleet.

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 is a real quagmire, a money pit. The Prime Minister should realize this instead of continuing to sink in that quagmire. This aircraft does not work. We have learned that if, in the end, the plane does successfully get off the ground, our pilots will not even be able to train in Canada. They will have to spend 10 years in Florida. That is practical: Florida to simulate the Arctic.

Does the Prime Minister realize that the F-35 program is just a big joke?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 is an aircraft that is supported not only by aviators in the Canadian Forces but also by the aviation industry, including Quebec's aerospace industry. I note that the NDP and NDP members from Quebec regularly oppose the interests of Quebec industries. Clearly, this government supports industries throughout the country.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, respectfully, I would caution the Prime Minister against borrowing from the Associate Minister of National Defence's speaking points because just yesterday the air force commander contradicted those very speaking points. He said that F-35 training might take place in Canada at some point maybe, but not for a decade. Documents from National Defence say that there might be no training in Canada at all.

Could the Associate Minister of National Defence explain why he gave the House incorrect information? Does the Associate Minister of National Defence have any idea what he is doing on this file?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the construct of that question illustrates an absolute desperation.

Oral Questions

My response about training that I gave on November 4 was, "We are moving training to Canada". The chief of air staff stated, "My intention is to move training to Canada".

We are both right, while the member opposite is wrong.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Associate Minister of National Defence were to look beyond his speaking points and into the file, he would have read that the Pentagon has a lack of confidence in the F-35s.

A 55-page detailed technical report leaked last weekend concludes yet again that costs are through the roof, that there are major technical problems with this plane and that the delivery date will not be met.

Is the associate minister prepared to contradict the Pentagon and tell us yet again that the program is on track? Does the Pentagon have it wrong or does the associate minister have it wrong?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really amused by the quick reference to notes, while the member opposite relies heavily on them.

However, the secretary of defense, Mr. Panetta, spoke recently about the commitment that the U.S. had, along with the nine countries, to ensure the F-35 program continued. It is on track. We are part of that process and we will continue to be.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada Elections Act explicitly states that one cannot falsely publish a notice that a candidate in a constituency has retired or withdrawn. Given the fact that the Canada Elections Act says this and given your ruling yesterday about the reprehensible behaviour against the member for Mount Royal, does the Prime Minister believe the Canada Elections Act needs to be clarified and will he issue an apology to the member for Mount Royal?

• (1430)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you have ruled on this issue very clearly. It is certainly the practice of our government to respect all rulings of all Speakers of the House. That has been our practice in the past. It will continue to be our practice in the future.

Clearly the member for Mount Royal continues to take his seat in the House and we, as a government, acknowledge that.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess we are not going to get that apology.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

The intimidation tactics continue. A notice of motion was introduced before a committee to the effect that the work of committees should be done in secret, that is to say, behind closed doors so that the public and the media cannot see what is happening. When will this abuse of democracy stop? When will this Prime Minister, who has done so much preaching about openness and transparency, start to respect those principles?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is always performing in an open and accountable fashion. We did this in the last election when we made clear commitments to Canadians about what we would deliver on. We would deliver for the economy, for jobs and for economic growth. We would deliver on tackling crime. That is exactly what we have been doing in the House every day when we have been here working hard.

I know the leader of the other party decided the session ended yesterday and he has checked out, but we happen to believe we have work to do here and that is what we are doing today.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week we watched the sorry spectacle of the Minister of National Defence trying to cover up for his inappropriate use of a search and rescue helicopter.

Last month, the Associate Minister of Defence said, categorically, that training of the F-35s would be done in Canada. Yesterday the chief of air defence said that they would be trained in Florida for up to a decade. For the benefit of the associate minister, Florida is not in Canada.

For just once will the ministers honourably provide the House with all the details of the F-35 program and training?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, both the chief of air staff and I have been clear. We are planning for long-term F-35 training to take place in Canada, just as currently is done with the CF-18s.

The vast majority of Canadian F-35 pilots will be training in Canada. It is reasonable that Canadians will do initial training with those from whom we purchased the aircraft, which has always been the case.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by calling the Kyoto protocol “stupid”, the Prime Minister is neglecting future generations. It is unacceptable to see the Conservatives sabotage international efforts and cause job losses here in Canada.

Instead of talking nonsense and tarnishing Canada's image, will this government do what the rest of the world is expecting and come

up with a real plan for the environment and act like a leader in the fight against climate change?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada would have preferred a more ambitious result from the global climate change conference, but we do believe we have an agreement that builds upon Copenhagen and Cancun.

I know my hon. critic loves to quote from the pre-eminent scientific journal *Nature* when it suits her, but I would remind her that last month *Nature* wrote, “Like it or not, a dogmatic adherence to the protocol is now a political liability that threatens cooperative action to actually effect action... over climate change”.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the international community is watching us. China, France, the UN have all criticized the Conservatives for pulling out of Kyoto. Is the Prime Minister going to call them stupid as well? Is he going to acknowledge the real reason the government is withdrawing from Kyoto, which is to hide its failure and its job-killing inaction on climate?

The rest of the world is moving forward, building a new energy economy, but Canada is being left behind under the Conservatives' inaction. Why are they refusing to act?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague had been in Durban, she would have seen that Canada was among the leaders in the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1435)

The Speaker: Order, please. We can deal with this after question period.

The hon. Minister of the Environment has the floor.

Hon. Peter Kent: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague had not sent a deputy to attend in Durban, she would have seen first-hand how Canada did lead the way in contributing to the creation of the Durban platform.

Again, I would remind her and refer her to *Nature*, which says, “There is no need to kill [Kyoto]. The treaty is already weakened and will prove hard to revive”.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is gung-ho on building new pipelines and shipping value-added jobs right out of Canada.

Yesterday's report from the environment commissioner revealed that the Conservatives could not even safely manage the pipelines we have now. When a company is caught breaking the rules, over 90% of the time nothing happens and the problem is not fixed.

Before rushing forward with new pipelines, why will the government not fix the safety monitoring problems with existing pipelines?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board is a solid independent regulatory body that ensures the safety of the pipelines.

[English]

The NEB instituted corrective action that would address the recommendations. It has undertaken to review the emergency preparedness manuals that deal with the 5% that it did not already deal with, which is the lower risk portion. It has also launched an action plan that focuses on workers' safety, integrity of installations and damage prevention.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, southern Albertans have petitioned the House, calling on the government to call a halt to gas fracking on lands controlled by the federal government.

First nation women are being criminally prosecuted for attempting to block fracking trucks from entering the lands of the Kainai Blood tribe. They worry that fracking threatens their scarce surface water and groundwater reserves. A just-released USEPA study indicates these concerns may be well founded.

When will the government finally start acting on its duty to regulate the impact of industrial developments on first nation lands?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is highly concerned about protecting the environment, both on federal lands and other. I would remind my hon. colleague that shale gas is principally a responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is pathetic. Canadian families are carrying record debt loads under the Conservatives. Workers' wages have fallen by 2% over the last year, and 90,000 Canadian families had their livelihoods taken away this fall. What is this government doing? It is giving the oil companies and banks a lovely gift on January 1, while hiking EI premiums for families.

Why is this government giving Bay Street another big Christmas present? Why is it giving Canadian families a lump of coal in their stockings?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have continued to caution Canadians about overextending themselves on credit, whether it is residential mortgage credit or credit card credit.

With respect to residential mortgages, we have tightened the rules three times in the past several years, including this year. We have seen Canadians now increasing their activity in terms of paying off mortgages. However, we have low interest rates, and some Canadians are taking advantage of those to take on some larger mortgages.

Again, we need to caution Canadians not to overextend themselves, because interest rates eventually will go up.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government needs to caution itself. It plays Santa to Bay Street by giving corporate tax cuts to banks and oil companies that are awash with cash. It plays Scrooge to Canadian families by cutting public investment, cutting services that middle-class and poorer Canadian families depend on and it talks about cutting health care transfers that Canadian families need.

The Canadian economy needs public investment. Canadians need a jobs plan to pay down their record levels of debt under the government. Canadian families need their health care system.

Why act like Santa to Bay Street and like Scrooge to everyone else?

● (1440)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the economy, Canadians know the NDP does not have a clue.

Here is what the *The Province* from Vancouver had to say yesterday in an editorial:

Time and again — either through unaffordable election promises or capricious plans to hike taxes — New Democrats act as though there is a magic money fairy somewhere who sprinkles government with endless supplies of cash. It's why voters often fear giving the NDP the keys to the treasury.

I know it is Christmastime, but I am at best a mere elf. I am no magic money fairy.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are very few female judges in federal courts and the situation is not about to change. In some provinces, no women sit on the advisory committees that provide recommendations to the government about judicial appointments, yet friends of the Conservatives have no difficulty obtaining positions. In Quebec, five people appointed by the government are party insiders.

Why does this government give jobs to its friends and not do anything about gender equality?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is completely wrong. These individuals give of their time and their talent for no remuneration to help give advice on this.

With respect to the appointments, we stand behind all of them. I note, with interest, the first female chief justice of Quebec's Court of Appeal, the Hon. Justice Nicole Duval Hesler. As well, four out of the nine judges on the Supreme Court are women, as well as five out of the eleven on the Federal Court of Appeal.

Why are the NDP members now starting to attack the judiciary and all those who help in this area? I am very disappointed.

Oral Questions

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, only 20% of judicial appointees are women. This problem will not be fixed until there is more diversity on the advisory committees. The troubling truth is that two provinces, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, do not have any women on federal judiciary advisory committees.

Canadians expect their judiciary to be diverse and reflect Canada. More women than ever are pursuing careers in law. Why will the Conservative government not make gender equality a priority?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has an excellent record with respect to judicial appointments.

Those individuals who sit on judicial advisory committees give of their time and their talent. A number of them are appointed by the federal government, but they are also by the provincial governments, the Bar Association, the law societies and representatives of the judiciaries. They do an excellent job and they should be thanked by the hon. member and her party.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when Attawapiskat cried out for help, Canadians responded. Individuals, schools and churches across the country raised funds. The Red Cross arrived quickly to deliver aid that kept families from freezing. We give them our thanks.

Compare this empathy with the bumbling and confrontational response of the Conservatives, which has been condemned in the international media as an attempt to intimidate a desperately poor first nation community.

When the minister meets with Theresa Spence, will he agree to stop punishing the community, kick out the third party Indian agents and help this community get back on its feet for Christmas?

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's priority remains to be the health and safety of the residents of Attawapiskat. The third party manager is already in place and is getting results for this community as we speak. He will ensure that the programs and social services continue to be delivered.

We are looking forward to our meeting with the chief to discuss next steps. We are acting in good faith, in full transparency and we urge the chief and council to be part of that solution.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the erroneous statements of the Minister for Status of Women yesterday, it is very clear that the United Nations has decided to send experts to Canada to investigate the shocking numbers of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

The Liberals asked for a Canadian inquiry three years ago. The government refused. Will the Conservative government stop embarrassing Canada on the world stage and at least today agree to co-operate fully with the United Nations inquiry?

● (1445)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, if there is a discussion or inquiry, I can reassure the member the United Nations will let us know as well as the Province of British Columbia.

As I said, violence against aboriginal women is rooted in very deep causes, like discrimination, racism and poverty, which is why we launched the strategy to address the issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women. It addresses not only investigating these crimes very seriously but also raising the cultural sensitivities around this with community programming.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, "An act of sabotage on our future, reckless and totally irresponsible". This is just some of the reaction to this government's decision to abandon Kyoto.

In 2006 the government inherited Project Green, which experts said would meet 80% of our Kyoto targets. Instead of embracing the plan, the climate-change-denying Conservatives scrapped it and cut targets by 90%.

Why is the government so proud to shame our international reputation instead of fighting for our future?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome every opportunity to compare the record in protecting the environment by this government with the previous Liberal government. I would like to read a quote for my hon. colleague:

When it comes to protecting the environment, bold announcements are made and then often forgotten as soon as the confetti hits the ground. The federal government [the Liberal government] seems to have trouble crossing the finish line.

Who said that? No, it was not the member for Kings—Hants; it was the Environment Commissioner in 2005.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol by this government is of historical importance and represents an international breach of trust. The message sent by this decision to the world is embarrassing. Being part of the solution would have significant economic benefits.

Why is the government tarnishing our international reputation by pursuing an outdated ideology that will cost jobs and be harmful to our economy?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is pointless to look back.

[English]

It is very clear that Kyoto is in the past. Canada is now working with other countries around the world to create a successor agreement to Kyoto which will effectively engage all major emitters in both the developed and the developing world, and actually make a real, absolute reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, DFO scientists on the chopping block say the minister's reckless cuts put fish stocks in further jeopardy, but they are afraid to go public. They saw what happened to their Environment Canada colleagues who spoke out against these Conservatives.

Is strong-arming scientists part of the strategic review that the minister talked about yesterday? Why is the minister bullying DFO employees? Does he not understand it is their job to protect Canada's fish stocks?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, do I look like a bully? There has been no muzzling of our scientists. There certainly has been no attempt to muzzle our scientists. That is totally fictitious.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the answer to the minister's question is, "Yes sir, your department and you, sir, are a bully".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jim Flaherty: He looks like a bully. Kick him out.

The Speaker: Order, please. We have to spend two more days together with each other, so I would ask for a little order.

I heard something that was unparliamentary. I will ask the hon. member to rephrase his question, or withdraw, from what I heard.

The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I cannot apologize, I simply answered the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

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SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more and more Canadians are looking for work, and that means Canadians need more help getting unemployment support, not less. However, at a time when Canadians need it most, the government keeps slashing Service Canada, closing down entire offices, like the one in Sturgeon Falls that serves more than 10,000 people, and replacing live agents with automated machines. Need help for the holidays? Press 1 and hold.

Why is the government making it so hard for struggling families to get the help they need before the holidays?

• (1450)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, every year at this time there is a dramatic rise in the number of people who get laid off, and our hearts go out to them.

We are trying to get their benefits to them, the ones to which they are entitled, just as quickly as possible. That is why we are putting additional resources on at this time of year, as we usually do, to help those people get the benefits to which they are entitled.

In the meantime, we are also working overtime to upgrade and modernize our totally outdated paper-based EI system.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in November, tens of thousands of people were added to the already too-long list of the unemployed in Canada. With Christmas approaching, these families find themselves without any income and unable to find out if and when they will receive employment insurance benefits.

This heartless government is cutting the number of employees who handle claims at Service Canada.

When will the Conservatives stop turning their backs on families? Can they tell us what they intend to do to ensure that all Canadians have something to eat at Christmas?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, every year in December the ranks of the unemployed swell. That is why every year we add resources to process employment insurance claims. We are continuing this tradition this year by adding additional resources. We are also modernizing the system, which is currently paper-based, in order to make it more modern, efficient and responsive.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, consular officials all over the world provide important help for Canadians who find themselves in distress, including the case of Mr. Henk Tepper, a farmer from my riding, being held in Beirut, Lebanon. These consular cases are very challenging for everyone involved and must be about individuals and families, and should not be about petty politics.

I attended a vigil Sunday evening in Grand Falls in support of the family and would like to ask the minister of state responsible for consular affairs to please inform the House about Mr. Tepper's case.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his ongoing and caring engagement on this matter. Our government is very concerned about Mr. Tepper's case, and we know what a stressful time this has been for him and his family.

Oral Questions

The Lebanese government specifically dismisses the allegation that a simple letter would release Mr. Tepper and affirms that it must act in accordance with Lebanon's international obligations when faced with a request for extradition.

Government officials and ministers have been in active contact with senior Lebanese officials and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are once again rewarding old friends with comfortable appointments. Former RCMP commissioner Bill Elliott is the latest appointment by the Minister of Public Safety. This is the man who failed to deal with sexual harassment complaints or clean up the RCMP, but he will now be the face of Canada at Interpol.

When are Conservatives going to stop putting their friends at the front of the line with these patronage appointments?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that a Canadian was chosen by Interpol, an international organization, to participate in the very important work it does.

I am also very pleased to have announced a new commissioner for the RCMP. I believe he is an individual who exemplifies the ideals of the RCMP and has committed that he will get to the root of some of the very serious concerns that members here in the House have with respect to issues like sexual harassment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how can the minister justify such an appointment? We are talking about a salary of \$253,000 for a man who clearly was unable to properly manage the RCMP. This is the type of appointment that Canadians find unacceptable. This man will hold a key position. He will be the face of Canada for international law enforcement.

Can the government explain what type of deal it made with Mr. Elliott? Did they suggest he resign in exchange for a new, more prestigious position?

• (1455)

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised that the member would attack a public servant, a person who has been a member of the public service for almost all of his adult career.

I am very proud of the public service in Canada, both at the federal level and the provincial level, where I was a public servant for most of my career. The member should reflect very long and hard about those types of scurrilous accusations made against a member of the public service.

BORDER CROSSINGS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no greater conduit for trade between Canada and the United States than the Windsor-Detroit link. For years now, a new bridge has been in the works, but threatened legal action might thwart this important project. We now learn that the government is sitting on recommendations to shield the new bridge from any legal action.

Why did the government pretend the new Detroit-Windsor bridge was on track? When will it table its support and legislation to move the new bridge forward?

The government's preoccupation with pipelines is costing manufacturing jobs.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we remain fully committed to building the new publicly owned crossing between Windsor and Detroit. We will continue to work with the Governments of Michigan and the United States to examine options for delivering the new crossing. Already the Michigan governor, Mr. Snyder, has confirmed that this project remains a top priority for him. It is the same thing for our government.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, the Canadian Wheat Board asked the courts for an injunction to block the implementation of Bill CF-18—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pat Martin: Not CF-18.

The Speaker: Order, please. I will give the floor back to the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre and ask all hon. members to allow him to put the question.

Mr. Pat Martin: CF-18 is the other insult to the Prairies, Mr. Speaker.

The CWB may just, in fact, win this court injunction because Bill C-18 offends the rule of law.

Now, if the minister wants to stop chaos and pandemonium, and uncertainty and instability in the grain industry, why does he not just grant the vote for the future of the Wheat Board to prairie farmers, as they are guaranteed in legislation, and avoid all this mess on the Prairies?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think we will rename this bill CF-35 to get it through even faster.

Let me quote the member for Winnipeg Centre, who said, "Parliament has the right to overturn legislation put in place by previous governments. Then he goes on to say, "I don't want every piece of legislation to have a poison pill clause like this in it. I don't know of any other legislation that has such a clause".

Neither do we. That is why we are moving forward with Bill C-18, to ensure that farmers in western Canada have the clarity and certainty they need on next year's crop and every crop after that.

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SERVICE CANADA

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, leading up to Christmas, my constituency offices have been flooded with calls from people desperate to get their first EI cheque from Service Canada. I would like to bring to this House one example.

She is a single mom of three. She filed her claim November 1. The claim was not processed until 42 days later, on December 12. She and her kids were forced to move in with her parents. In tears, she wanted to know why this was happening to her.

My question for the minister is, why is this happening to her?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are endeavouring to get the cheques to people who are entitled to them just as quickly as we possibly can. Unfortunately, there is always a spike in the number of applications received in December. We put extra resources to handle it.

If the hon. member is having a specific problem, I welcome him to bring it to me. I would be happy to address it as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it were not for me, it would have been a lot more than 42 days.

For the local Service Canada employees, here is the situation. They are incredibly stressed as a result of this, not to mention the fact that they have to move. All these employees in Newfoundland, in processing, have to relocate to major centres, except the riding of the member for Labrador and the regional minister of Newfoundland and Labrador. As a matter of fact, he called, individually, each employee involved and told them their jobs were fine. He called them at home.

Will he rise in this House—no one else, just him—and confirm that he called them personally and told them their jobs were fine? Will he call the employees in my riding and do the—

• (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in tough times like these, Canadians are really having to watch their pocketbooks. They expect the government to do the same. That is why we are modernizing the EI system and how we process EI claims.

While we are trying to do this, we recognize that the processing behind the scenes is a ridiculously outdated paper-based system. We are trying to fix that so we can help Canadians.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Can the minister confirm that none of the Afghan detainees transferred by Canada are still in the hands of the national directorate of security—the NDS—an organization known for abusing detainees?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that is the case.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if nothing is done by tomorrow, a man in my riding, Jean-Bernard Devilmé, will be deported to Haiti. Mr. Devilmé has been living in Canada for 25 years. He works as a carpenter and contributes to society.

Although he committed some offences in the past, his record has been clean since 2007. What is more, many community agencies agree that this man, a father of four, must stay in the country.

I discussed this situation yesterday with the Minister of Public Safety. My question is simple: what does he intend to do to help Mr. Devilmé and his family?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the public record is clear: the person is not a permanent resident and is here illegally. He has been convicted of numerous criminal offences since coming to Canada. Numerous tribunals and courts have reviewed his status, and I am not prepared to interfere with the decisions of the judiciary in this matter.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the late 1990s, the Liberals introduced a poorly designed scheme to buy back fishing licences. Under successive Liberal fisheries ministers, the rules for the program were ill-defined and resulted in an uneven tax treatment for fishermen. This forced the federal government and fishermen into a costly legal battle that has taken more than a decade to resolve.

Could the Minister of National Revenue inform the House on the steps that our government has taken to resolve this matter?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this fall I instructed officials at the Canada Revenue Agency to create a dedicated team of officials to review each of these fishermen's requests for a reassessment. I can now inform the House that over 200 cheques have been processed, and we are hopeful that dozens more will be on their way before Christmas.

Oral Questions

We are hopeful that these actions will end an unfortunate chapter in the mismanagement of the fishery by the former Liberal government.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Naser Al-Raas, a Canadian citizen imprisoned in Bahrain for simply attending peaceful protests has been reportedly detained in solitary confinement, beaten, tortured and subjected to mock executions. Indeed, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry has itself decried the criminalization of peaceful protests and condemned such torture.

Accordingly, will the Canadian government seek the immediate release of Mr. Al-Raas and the dropping of all charges, and ensure his safe return to Canada?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada takes such allegations of mistreatment and torture very seriously, and we are seeking the Government of Bahrain's response concerning the events that transpired during Mr. Al-Raas' detention. Canada is also urging the Government of Bahrain to review the case in light of the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, as well as urging that Mr. Al-Raas' conviction be reviewed and his sentence commuted.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Henk Tepper has been in prison in Lebanon for 10 months without any charges being laid. Today, the government finally has an opportunity to correct its mistakes and its inaction.

According to Henk Tepper's lawyer, the file is on the desk of Lebanon's justice minister. All that is required to bring Mr. Tepper home is a letter from the government. Lawyers have even sent sample letters for the minister to use, but she remains reluctant and is still not doing anything.

Will she finally take action and send this letter so that Henk Tepper can finally come home and be with his family in New Brunswick?

• (1505)

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleague to listen to question period; he would already know the answer to his question. However, to repeat, the Government of Lebanon has specifically dismissed the allegation that a simple letter would bring Mr. Tepper home. It points out that it must act in accordance with Lebanon's international legal obligations when faced with a request for extradition.

We are doing everything possible to assist Mr. Tepper and will continue to do so.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Christmas spirit takes hold, the interim leader of the

third party and his elves are in Winnipeg today to deliver lumps of coal to farmers across western Canada.

The Liberals have hitched their sleigh to the monopoly forces of the Canadian Wheat Board, who are taking further court action to halt the marketing freedom for grain farmers act from taking effect. This will disrupt the markets and create economic hardship for western Canadian farmers.

Will the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food reassure the House that our government will stand up for farmers and not let these grinch steal their Christmas?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new year will be bright for western Canadian farmers. We are continuing to proceed with Bill C-18. We will move it through, and it will receive royal assent.

Farmers in western Canada, at the time of royal assent, will be able to start forward-contracting their crop. It is their property, and they will be able to move it. We will not allow the leader of the third party and his elves to steal Christmas and that great new year's present for the farmers of western of Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the announcement of the construction of the new Champlain Bridge over two months ago, families in Montreal and the south shore are still in the dark and have yet to be consulted. We still do not know what the real costs of the project will be or whether there will be any rapid and efficient public transportation on the new bridge. What is most concerning is that we still have no timeline.

Will the government finally show some transparency and give us a timeline for the new Champlain Bridge?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was an honour for me to announce a new bridge over the St. Lawrence on October 5, thanks to the work of this government and our Prime Minister.

While the official opposition is looking to shut down bridges in Montreal, we are promising to open them and to work on them. We recently met with business people, chambers of commerce and mayors from both sides of the St. Lawrence. We will continue to work with them to come up with a plan that makes sense and that will address the needs of the public.

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with Christmas fast approaching, Quebecers have nothing to celebrate considering the federal government's actions. Reducing Quebec's political weight, withdrawing from Kyoto, scrapping the data from the gun registry, imposing a costly and regressive justice model, weakening copyright and undermining our culture, abandoning the Davie workers, appointing unilingual anglophones to key positions, and even idolizing the monarchy all fly in the face of the values of Quebecers.

Given such a poor performance and so many affronts, will the Prime Minister admit that he has written off Quebec and that recognizing the Quebec nation was simply a smokescreen?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we presented an economic action plan that has had extraordinary spinoffs for the entire country. We managed to make it through the recession and fared better than most countries. Some 600,000 net new jobs have been created in Canada. That party voted against the budget we proposed in the previous Parliament. Now they are relegated to the far corner of the House. That is a clear message from the people that they want a government that can handle the economy and create jobs. That is what we did. We also resolved the matter of harmonizing the GST and QST. Those are real issues. We are delivering the goods.

[English]

The Speaker: That concludes question period for today. I know there are a couple of points of order, and we will get to them.

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• (1510)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Trevor Holder, Minister of Tourism and Parks and Minister of Wellness, Culture and Sport for New Brunswick.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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LAW CLERK AND PARLIAMENTARY COUNSEL

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of all hon. members that Mr. Rob Walsh, our Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, will be taking a well-deserved retirement early in the new year, after more than 20 years of faithful and dedicated service to the House, including 18 years as a table officer.

He has provided wise counsel to the House, its committees, the Board of Internal Economy, and many individual members over the years.

[Translation]

Mr. Walsh is sitting at the table right now and I know you will all join me in saluting his long and successful career on Parliament Hill.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Points of Order

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: There may be a couple of points of order. I see the hon. member for Papineau rising and I think I will recognize him first.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the Minister of the Environment chided the member of Parliament for Halifax for not having attended the conference in Durban after he prevented any members of the opposition from attending in Durban. Therefore, I lost my temper and used language that was most decidedly unparliamentary. For that I unreservedly apologize and I withdraw my remarks.

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too rise on a point of order. I understand that the third party, the Liberal rump, is somewhat out of sorts as this government corrects one of the biggest blunders the previous Liberal government ever made.

I am not particularly troubled by the unparliamentary language hurled at me by the member of Parliament for Papineau, but I believe he owes this House an abject apology—

The Speaker: I believe the hon. member for Papineau just did that.

The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to apologize for using a word that I have been told is unparliamentary. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans asked a question. He asked this House whether he looked like a bully. I merely answered his question. I would answer the question the same way if he asked it again.

The Speaker: I am afraid that is not an acceptable retraction, so the hon. member may have some difficulty getting recognized until he decides that he may want to respect the House.

Is the hon. member for Malpeque rising on a different point of order, or the same point?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, in response to a question, spoke about the Liberal leader checking out early. The House leader knows that we are not to talk about the absence or presence of anybody in this House. In fact, we respect full well that the Prime Minister has parliamentary duties to attend to from time to time and is not here. We do not bring that up. The fact of the matter is the Liberal leader is today doing parliamentary duties, trying to argue the point of the Canadian Wheat Board and the government's lack of respect for the rule of law.

I would ask that the House leader of the reprehensible government get up and apologize for what he said in the House with respect to the Liberal leader.

The Speaker: We will see if we can get through this one.

The hon. government House leader.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the member for Malpeque, I was not suggesting that the member was away on parliamentary duty or otherwise. I was referring to the fact that yesterday the leader of the Liberal Party held his end-of-session news conference and availability session. That is what I intended when I said that he checked out yesterday; he was summarizing the end of the session, and the session had not yet ended.

The Speaker: I see the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. I hope he rising to withdraw his comments.

• (1515)

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I apologize and withdraw the remark.

The Speaker: On a different point, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to just wish everyone a merry Christmas and peace on earth.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

EXTRACTIVE SECTOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COUNSELLOR

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the behalf of the Minister of International Trade I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second annual report on the activities of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor covering the October 2010 to October 2011 period, which was prepared by the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2011 annual report.

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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 one official language, the government's response to one petition.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to

present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly regarding its participation at the 10th fall meetings held in Croatia from October 7 to 10, 2011.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, OSCEPA, regarding its participation at the 20th annual session held in Belgrade, Serbia from July 6 to 10, 2011.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association regarding its participation at the 60th anniversary of the groupe sénatorial France-Canada, held in Paris, France, November 9, 2011.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the following three reports of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group regarding its participation at these three meetings: the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, PNWER, 20th annual summit, held in Calgary, Alberta, July 16 to 20, 2010; the National Governors Association winter meeting, held in Washington, D.C., February 26 to 28, 2011; and the 16th annual conference of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, held in Montreal, Quebec, March 24 and 25, 2011.

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[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to the 2011 pre-budget consultations.

[English]

As chair, I would like to thank all committee members for their very hard work.

On behalf of all committee members, I would also thank all the dedicated committee staff for their hard work, contribution, support and efforts in making this report possible.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the official opposition has the right to reply to the majority report of the finance committee.

● (1520)

[Translation]

I would like to start by saying that this is a tough time for Canadian families. Household debt in Canada has reached a record high. For the past year, wages have dropped by an average of 2% as a result of the Conservatives' policies. The job market is collapsing as well: 90,000 jobs were lost during the fall.

Despite all of that, in this majority report there are more tax cuts for big corporations as of January 1. There is also an austerity program for investments and there are cuts to the services that poor and middle-class families depend on.

[English]

What we on this side of the House have talked about in our minority report is public investments, a green economy, and programs that help Canadian families. We hope—

The Speaker: I will have to stop the member there.

* * *

YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-384, An Act to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act (publication of information).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London for seconding this legislation.

If an individual under the age of majority commits a crime but is tried in an adult court, the individual should not have his or her identity restricted as it would be if he or she were tried in a youth court.

The Youth Criminal Justice Act precludes the publication of information about young offenders when they are sentenced or indicted. If a crime is of such a serious nature that the young offender is tried in an adult court, there should be no prohibition on the publication of his or her identity. The bill would allow the publication of his or her identity.

Hopefully, the bill will spur debate about the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

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

* * *

URANIUM MINE OWNERSHIP ACT

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-385, An Act respecting ownership of uranium mines in Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River for seconding this legislation.

This legislation would enable foreign investors to purchase and own the entirety of Canadian uranium mines and properties. This is a policy that has been supported by not just the current government of Saskatchewan but previous NDP and Conservative governments in Saskatchewan because it would increase jobs and investment in our province and throughout the country.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I seek approval for the following travel motions:

I move:

That, in relation to its study on the Closed Containment Salmon Aquaculture, twelve members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to travel to Shepherdstown, West Virginia, United States of America and Washington D.C., United States of America in the Fall of 2011 — Winter of 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study on the Review of the Delivery of Front-Line Health and Wellbeing Services for Canadian Veterans, seven members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to Montreal, Quebec, in the Winter of 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study on the Review of the Delivery of Front-Line Health and Wellbeing Services for Canadian Veterans, seven members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to Toronto, Ontario in the Winter of 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study on Maintaining the Readiness of the Canadian Forces, twelve members of the Standing Committee on National Defence be authorized to travel to Kingston and Toronto, Ontario, in the Winter of 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1525)

PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

Routine Proceedings

That, in accordance with subsection 39(1) of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, S.C. 2005, c. 46, and pursuant to Standing Order 111.1 this House approve the appointment of Mario Dion as Public Sector Integrity Commissioner for a term of seven years.

That is Motion No. 1 on the order paper.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

FALUN GONG

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the UN special rapporteur on torture reports that 66% of the victims of alleged torture and ill treatment in China are Falun Gong practitioners and that the cruelty and brutality of these alleged acts of torture defy description.

As free and democratic nations have a responsibility to condemn crimes against humanity wherever they occur, the petitioners urgently call on the Canadian government to continue to use every possible channel to call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners, especially at meetings with top Chinese leaders and at international fora. They request that the government help rescue 12 family members of Canadian residents who are incarcerated in China for their beliefs in Falun Gong.

There are about 50 signatures of Canadians on the petition.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present three petitions on behalf of my constituents.

The first two petitions are from hundreds of Victorians who are deeply concerned with the government's direction on climate change.

While the petition was created in relation to the climate change negotiations in Durban, the petitioners continue to demand that the government do three things: first, reduce CO₂ emissions and set more ambitious targets in order to ensure that temperatures stay below a 2° Centigrade increase from pre-industrial levels; second, develop a renewable energy policy for sustainability of our economy; and third, demonstrate international responsibility in designing the green climate plan for climate change mitigation and adaptation in the developing world.

CANADA POST

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a third petition which concerns Canada Post's decision to move mail processing from Victoria and other cities on Vancouver Island to Vancouver, leading to job losses and reduced service quality on the island.

The petitioners ask that the local impact on jobs and services be studied prior to making any of those changes permanent, and that Canada Post make its long-term operational plans public.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from people from all over Ontario who are concerned about the proposed mega-quarry in Melancthon Township in Dufferin County, Ontario, which would be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 900 hectares, or 2,300 acres.

They are concerned with a number of things, one of which is that this proposed mega-quarry would threaten the headwaters of the Nottawasaga, Grand and Saugeen watershed systems and the Mad, Noisy, Pine and Boyne River sub-watersheds, consequently detrimentally and permanently affecting the aquifers in the area of the proposed mega-quarry.

The petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the Highland Companies' proposed mega-quarry development.

• (1530)

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present, similar to the one I presented yesterday and the one the day prior.

The petition is in regard to our sacred national public broadcaster, the CBC. The petitioners cherish it as a great Canadian institution, as an entity that exists both in English and French. The CBC has laid the groundwork for cultural conversation across the country for many years and will continue to do so, provided it receives the right amount of support.

The petitioners say that public broadcasting is an essential promoter and defender of Canadian culture. The CBC is a broadcaster that reflects the different needs and circumstances of each official language, English and French. The CBC requires steady funding to maintain national, regional and local programming for the CBC and Radio Canada.

This petition comes from many people. There are signatories from Calgary, Alberta and also from Eastport, Glovertown, Traytown, Newfoundland and Labrador, Gambo and finally, the beautiful little town in Newfoundland and Labrador of Happy Adventure.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to submit a petition from constituents representing the Canadian interfaith call for leadership and action on climate change.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my first petition is from Vicky Paraschak. I appreciate her work on it. It is a petition for the House of Commons on the "Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change".

The petitioners rightly call for universal action on climate change as it is currently threatening the planet, our ecosystem and the human lifestyle as it is today. They are calling for a green climate fund strategy under the United Nations governments.

CANADA POST

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is with regard to a moratorium on the closure of post offices. Hundreds of people have signed this petition. They are calling for the protection of Canadian postal services and the stopping of closures of postal offices. Constituents recently were able to fend off the closure of the one in Sandwich Towne in my riding. It was a very successful campaign.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my third petition is on stopping animal cruelty. Hundreds of petitioners are calling for a modernization of our animal cruelty laws. There have been some terrible situations of animal abuse without the proper enforcement of the law or punishment. The petitioners are calling for a modernization of the law because of the animal cruelty issues being faced by communities.

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my fourth petition is calling for automotive trade policy. We know that NAFTA killed the auto pact, and we went from being second in the world to eighth in terms of auto manufacturing. This petition calls for an auto pact.

CANADA POST

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the final petition that I am tabling is again about the closure of post offices, which I have already spoken on.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the House to present a petition from members of my constituency in Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The petition speaks to an issue that has been raised by a number of other members in petitions this afternoon. It relates to the importance of taking climate action, specifically for achieving targets that we would find referenced in the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act and the subsequent act that failed in the House in the last session.

The same targets are referenced here in what was at one time Bill C-311. It also references, importantly, the work of the national round table on the environment and the economy. I bring that to the attention of members. The climate change caucus had an excellent presentation from that organization yesterday evening. This petition speaks to its findings as well.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present. One is signed by 63 people and the other by 100 people from the region of Waterloo. They are calling on the government to withdraw Bill C-4, the preventing human smugglers from abusing Canada's immigration system act.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table in this House a petition given to me by my constituents who are members of Amnesty International.

In 1997, the Palestinian hamlets of Humsa and Hadidiya were demolished and levelled nine times. The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Foreign Affairs to mandate Canada's diplomatic representation to go to these two hamlets and to the neighbouring Israeli settlement of Ro'i to document the living conditions of Palestinians in Hadidiya and Humsa and to compare them to those of the Israeli settlers. They are demanding that the focus be put on children's access to education and the public's access to medical care.

● (1535)

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by people in Chilliwack and Abbotsford, B. C. who are concerned about the cuts to Veterans Affairs and their impact on veterans. They specifically point out that \$226 million in cuts have already been announced, that there will be further cuts as a result of the strategic operating review, that there are 500 jobs in play and, as a result of that, service to veterans will undoubtedly be impacted.

The petitioners call upon the government to restore funding to Veterans Affairs.

WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise and present a petition signed by 110 individuals mostly, but not exclusively, from Edmonton—St. Albert calling upon the House to pass Bill C-311, the private member's bill sponsored by the hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla. If passed, this bill would encourage job growth in the wine industry and support domestic wine and Canadian tourism.

* * *

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. 196 and 197 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

S. O. 52

[Text]

Question No. 196—**Hon. Ralph Goodale:**

With regard to criminal record checks and vulnerable sector checks performed by the Canadian Criminal Real Time Identification Services for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) for each year between 2006 and 2011 inclusive: (a) how many applications were processed; (b) what was the average and median processing times for all completed checks, for (i) no fingerprint screening, (ii) paper fingerprint screening when there is a match to a fingerprint holding, (iii) electronic fingerprint screening when there is a match to a fingerprint holding, (iv) paper fingerprint screening when there is no match, (v) with electronic fingerprint screening when there is no match; (c) how much funding was allocated by the government for the program; (d) how much funding was collected in user fees; (e) how much funding was used by the program; (f) what are the purposes the clearances are used for; (g) has the government studied the impacts of an increase in the processing time and, if so, what are the results of these studies; (h) what additional information, if any, was required to be collected and analysed compared to the base year of 2006; and (i) which RCMP jurisdictions have digital fingerprint scanners and which do not?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 197—**Hon. Geoff Regan:**

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of Halifax West for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (ii) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy), (iii) Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (iv) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy), (v) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (vi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (vii) Labour Market Agreements, (viii) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (ix) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (x) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xi) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment, (xii) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xiii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xiv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xv) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xvi) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xvii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xviii) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates (International Trade and Labour Program), (xix) Labour Mobility, (xx) New Horizons for Seniors, (xxi) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxii) Fire Safety Organizations, (xxiii) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxiv) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxv) Foreign Credential Recognition Program Loans (pilot project), (xxvi) Fire Prevention Canada, (xxvii) Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (xxviii) Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Initiative), (xxix) Labour-Management Partnerships Program, (xxx) Social Development Partnerships Program—Children and Families, (xxxi) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxxii) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxxiii) International Trade and Labour Program—Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxiv) International Trade and Labour Program—Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxv) International Trade and Labour Program—International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates, (xxxvi) Sector Council Program, (xxxvii) Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxxviii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program, (xxxix) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xl) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (xli) Occupational Health and Safety, (xlii) Youth Awareness, (xliii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (xliv) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xlv) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link, (xlvi) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlvii) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program, (xlix) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (l) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (li) Work-Sharing, (lii) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund)?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would you be so kind as to call Notice of Motion for the Production of Paper No. P-7.

Motion No. P-7

That an Order of the House do issue for a copy of all records regarding the Minister of National Defence being picked up in Newfoundland from a fishing lodge on the Gander River and brought to Gander by a Canadian Forces Cormorant in July 2010.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that this notice of motion for the production of papers be transferred for debate.

The Speaker: The motion is transferred for debate pursuant to Standing Order 97(1).

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I call for an emergency debate regarding Service Canada.

As I mentioned in question period earlier today, my constituency office has been inundated with calls, as have the offices of many members of Parliament from all parties, concerning the fact that the processing time at Service Canada has increased exponentially.

In my seven and a half years in Parliament, I have never seen it as bad as this. I am hearing on the ground that for the most part there is a lack of overtime being issued by the department and also a lack of term employees. For example, in my riding in Gander alone it usually gets about 20-plus employees on a term basis, but now it is getting only five this season. That gives members an idea of just how bad this is.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]*

I mentioned earlier about one lady, a single mom with three kids, who was forced to move into her parents place. She has been waiting 42 days, possibly more, for her claim to be processed.

In question period, the minister said that she was working to rectify this and that some of it has already been done. However, I think the debate is necessary to bring clarification on this. If, indeed, Service Canada is putting more resources this December into the local offices, then a debate is necessary in order to bring this out. We could then bring the message to the minister that this is a very grave situation for many people who will not get to enjoy this holiday season.

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member's concern on this file. I have no doubt that he takes this issue very seriously but I do not find that it meets the requirements and the threshold for granting an emergency debate at this time.

• (1540)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, if I may be so bold, I would like the consent of the House to have a take note debate.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to grant a take note debate?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

[Translation]

Dear colleagues, as the House will be rising soon and we will be returning to our ridings for the Christmas holidays, I would like to wish all parliamentarians, their staff and parliamentary employees a very merry Christmas and a new year filled with peace and happiness.

[English]

However, at this time I would like to draw to the attention of the House that it was on December 30, 70 years ago, when Sir Winston Churchill stood in this chamber and gave his famous, "Some chicken; some neck" speech in the midst of some of the most challenging days of the Second World War. In his address to Parliament, he summoned forth the courage of all free peoples to unite for the monumental challenge that lay before them.

We will be marking that milestone over the Christmas recess and I wanted to bring that to members' attention in advance.

[Translation]

In March, the Library of Parliament will present an exhibit about Churchill's speech to Parliament, in co-operation with the International Churchill Society. I invite members to take the time to celebrate this important historical event.

CANADA-JORDAN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

Hon. Bal Gosal (for the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway) moved that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise in the House today to begin debate on Bill C-23, the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement. Our government is committed to securing and deepening access to traditional markets, like the United States, and broadening and expanding access to more markets, like Jordan.

Trade accounts for over 60% of our annual GDP and, with one in five Canadian jobs generated by trade, it is a matter of fundamental importance to the financial security of hard-working Canadians and their families.

Our focused pursuit of new free trade agreements helps to demonstrate our government's commitment to helping Canadian workers and businesses compete in markets abroad, as well as our commitment to creating more jobs and economic growth for Canadian workers.

We continue to see fierce competition in the global marketplace, with emerging economies and global players continuing to climb the value chain and establishing themselves in a wide range of sectors.

This government will do everything it can to ensure that Canadian workers and Canadian businesses have the tools and opportunities to build the links needed to succeed in today's global economy. Our government is committed to bringing continued economic prosperity to Canadians by pursuing bilateral and regional free trade relationships. Negotiating and implementing trade agreements with our international partners will also help to level the playing field for our companies in an increasingly complex and competitive environment.

Pursuing free trade agreements sends a clear signal that protectionism is not the right way to achieve increased global stability and prosperity. In these challenging times, deeper trade ties are the best way to create jobs and economic growth. Our government will get that done. That is why we have an ambitious, job creating, pro-trade plan. The Canada-Jordan economic growth and prosperity act is a key part of this plan.

The Canada-Jordan free trade agreement also demonstrates Canada's support for an Arab state that, like Canada, supports peace and security in the Middle East.

Government Orders

We will recall that in 2007, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister joined His Majesty King Abdullah II in a commitment to take our commercial relationship to the next level. The Canada-Jordan free trade agreement, along with related agreements on labour co-operation and the environment, signed in 2009, are a direct result of this commitment.

Canada's economy is export driven. Canadian families understand that trade is a kitchen table issue that provides jobs and helps put food on the table. We know it is in our best economic interest to seek out new opportunities for our producers, workers and exporters in as many foreign markets as possible.

Moreover, negotiating free trade agreements allows for Canadian firms to specialize and increase their comparative advantage in the global marketplace. By improving access to foreign markets for Canadian workers and businesses, this government is keeping its commitment to support economic growth and create new jobs for Canadian workers.

In a number of countries, Canadian firms are at a competitive disadvantage because their foreign competitors have preferential market access under some form of a free trade agreement. The Canada-Jordan free trade agreement addresses this serious issue by leveling the playing field with key competitors who are already benefiting from free trade agreements with Jordan, namely competition from the United States and the European Union.

Through the Canada-Jordan economic growth and prosperity act, our government is ensuring that Canadian workers and firms are on equal footing to compete with firms from across the world in the Jordanian market. Opening doors to trade and investment is the right approach for creating opportunities for Canadian workers and businesses in global markets.

The Canada-Jordan free trade agreement would create new export opportunities and strengthen bilateral ties between our two countries.

The free trade agreement with Jordan would benefit both Canadians and Jordanians by giving Canadian and Jordanian exporters unprecedented access to our respective markets and eliminating tariffs on a number of key products. World leading Canadian sectors, like forestry, manufacturing and agriculture and agri-food would benefit.

● (1545)

Over the years, Canada and Jordan have built a strong, mutually beneficial relationship. This free trade agreement continues to build on that important start. It is a relationship grounded in common aspirations, like peace, stability and prosperity for our citizens. This new free trade agreement would help to move these aspirations forward.

Despite the recent economic downturn experienced by the global economy, our bilateral trade with Jordan increased to \$85.9 million in 2010 from \$82.5 million in 2009, indicating that the longer-term trend of our trade relationship is one of growth.

For example, Canada's 2010 merchandise exports to Jordan of \$66 million were more than double the \$31 million total in 2003. This free trade agreement would provide the opportunity to further enhance this trend of upward growth.

Jordan's current average applied tariff is 11%, with peaks of up to 30% applied on some Canadian exports of interest. In fact, 67% of Jordan's tariff lines, covering over 99% of Canadian exports, will be eliminated when the agreement is first implemented. This is a huge step forward in the growing economic partnership between Canada and Jordan and will help to ensure that Canadian firms remain competitive globally. Jordan's remaining tariff reductions will then take place over three or five years.

Let me give a better idea of the specific sectors that will benefit if the Canada-Jordan economic growth and prosperity act is quickly moved through the House.

Top exports in 2010 included paper and paperboard, vegetables, wood, vehicles and machinery. In 2010 Canada imported some \$20 million in goods from Jordan, including both knit and woven apparel, inorganic chemicals, precious stones, mainly jewellery, and vegetables, cucumbers.

Our trade relationship has clearly been growing, despite Jordan's most favoured nation applied average tariff of 11% and peaks of up to 30% on many key Canadian exports.

The Canada-Jordan free trade agreement aims to remedy this situation and promote continued prosperity for Canadian workers, producers and exporters. Once this agreement is brought into force, Canada will immediately benefit from duty-free access for over 99% of current Canadian exports by value.

What does this new agreement mean for individual exporters? Permit me to run through some specific examples, starting with the agricultural sector. Canadian exporters of pulses, lentils, chickpeas, beans and peas will benefit from the immediate elimination of Jordan's tariffs of 5% to 10% on these products. Of Canada's \$7 million of vegetable exports to Jordan in 2010, the majority were lentils and chickpeas, which currently face a 5% tariff, and peas that are subject to a 10% tariff, both of which go to duty-free access immediately upon implementation of the agreement.

In 2010 exports of frozen potato products to Jordan totalled some \$88,000. These exporters will benefit from the immediate elimination of a 20% Jordanian tariff and place them on a level playing field with competitors in the U.S. and the E.U., which currently benefit from duty-free access to the Jordanian market.

Canadian beef exporters will benefit from the immediate elimination of Jordanian tariffs, which range from 5% to 23% on all beef products, including fresh chilled frozen and preserved meat and offal and processed products such as sausages and jerky.

Government Orders

Jordan lifted its restrictions on Canadian beef products in February 2009, which will allow this sector to benefit from these lower tariffs.

Animal feed will also benefit from the elimination of Jordanian tariffs of up to 23% and some of these are currently subject to an additional 10% tariff that will be eliminated immediately upon implementation of the free trade agreement.

The Canada-Jordan free trade agreement is certainly more than just agricultural products. The elimination of Jordanian tariffs, ranging from 15% to 30% on certain wood products, could benefit Canadian exporters of doors, frames, joinery, shakes and shingles and other building materials.

● (1550)

Canadian exporters of paper goods, such as toilet paper, paper towels, facial tissues, envelopes, stationery, wrapping paper, boxes and corrugated cardboard, will benefit from the elimination of Jordanian tariffs ranging from 10% to 30%.

With \$9.7 million in exports in 2010, mainly light passenger vehicles, Jordan is a growing market for Canadian auto and auto parts exports. The elimination of Jordan's tariffs ranging from 10% to 30% will help Canadian exporters to further expand into this market.

Canada exports a variety of mechanical and electrical machinery to Jordan, \$9.2 million in 2010, including heavy construction and mining equipment, communications equipment, filtration or purification devices, pumps, machinery and components. The elimination of Jordanian tariffs, ranging from 10% to 30% on a variety of current and potential Canadian machinery exports, will certainly help our machinery manufacturing sector.

Canada's exports of pharmaceuticals to Jordan totalled just shy of a million dollars in 2010, of which 80% were subject to a 5% Jordanian tariff. That will be eliminated upon implementation of this free trade agreement.

Although Jordan is currently a small market for Canadian fish and seafood exports, the elimination of Jordan's 10% to 30% tariffs on fish and seafood could help Canadian exporters expand their presence in the Jordanian market.

I have to admit that I have covered a lot of numbers, but numbers matter to Canadian workers, producers and exporters. In an increasingly competitive world, lower tariff numbers can make the difference for exporters who are considering whether to expand or enter into a new market.

This growing trade relationship is just one of many reasons why our government continues to work with Canadian businesses to ensure closer commercial ties to the Jordanian marketplace. Our government's work to support Canadian firms doing business in Jordan has been recognized by the business community in Canada and has been met with support from a wide range of businesses, including the Forest Products Association of Canada, the Grain Growers of Canada, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, as well as the Canada-Arab Business Council, all of which appeared before the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Members will remember that our free trade agreement was just one of the agreements we signed with Jordan in 2009. We also signed a bilateral job-creating foreign investment protection and promotion agreement, which came into force on December 14, 2009. This job-creating investment agreement establishes clear rules for investment between our two countries.

Canadian investors are particularly excited about opportunities in Jordan's resource, extraction, nuclear energy, telecommunications, transportation, manufacturing and infrastructure sectors and this job-creating investment agreement provides Canadian and Jordanian investors with the predictability and certainty they need when investing in one another's markets.

I am sure members will agree that this free trade agreement and the 2009 job-creating foreign investment protection and promotion agreement with Jordan are no doubt complementary.

We are living in very challenging economic times and the economy remains our government's number one priority. In order to ensure that our economy continues to grow and continues to be competitive in the global marketplace, trade barriers must be broken down all across the world, through new free trade agreements.

Protectionism is never the answer. Our government believes that Canada's ability to continue to recover from the global economic downturn depends, in large part, on the global trade and investment partnerships that we pursue. That is why we are moving so ambitiously on free trade negotiations with our global partners.

Since 2006, Canada has concluded new free trade agreements with nine countries, most recently, an agreement with Honduras that was announced August 12. Canada is also in discussions with many more countries, including the European Union and India, two of the largest, most promising markets in the world.

This government is dedicated to ensuring that the Canadian economy remains strong through pursuing trade relationships that work for Canadians. This ambitious pro-trade plan is important for Canada.

Passing the Canada-Jordan economic growth and prosperity act will allow for the quick implementation of the free trade agreement with Jordan in order to help Canadian workers and Canadian businesses compete.

● (1555)

Earlier this week, the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act was debated. Unfortunately, the NDP opposed the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act. This should not come as a surprise, as its record is very clear. The NDP has opposed all trade agreements.

Unlike the NDP, our Conservative government is focused on broadening and deepening our trading relationship, as it protects and creates jobs and economic growth for Canadian workers and their families.

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I reach out to the NDP and the Liberal Party. We need their support to pass these free trade agreements in the House. They are important for the Canadian economy. They are especially important in these trying economic times. Unfortunately, every time we reach out, we hear the same things in return. The NDP continues to represent some very narrow special interest groups. It continues with its job-killing, anti-trade agenda. It continually invents any reason at all not to support free trade agreements. On Monday, at the end of the day, the NDP said that, once again, it would oppose this agreement.

While we are focused on protecting and growing Canada's economy through our job-creating, pro-trade plan, we continually have to deal with opposition parties that obstruct this. That is the last thing we need. I would urge all my colleagues in the House of Commons to give support for a quick passage of this bill so the international trade committee can begin its work.

We have seen a very clear position come down on the side of the NDP. I do not expect that to be the position of the Liberal Party, the third party in the House. We would hope we do get its support on this bill.

However, let me assure Canadian workers and their families that our Conservative government will be strongly supporting the Canada–Jordan economic growth and prosperity act to ensure we continue to create jobs and economic growth. It is now time to move ahead with the legislation.

Our government and our party will send a clear message to Canadians that continued prosperity for Canadian workers and Canadian businesses is a priority, not just for the Conservative Party but for the House of Commons. The best way to do that is through ensuring a speedy passage of Bill C-23, Canada–Jordan economic growth and prosperity act.

This is important legislation. It was before the House in the last Parliament and it is before the House again. I urge my colleagues to send this to committee as quickly as possible and then send it back to the House post-haste.

● (1600)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives have an unusual way of reaching out. It is usually with the back of their hands to our faces. That is the way they seem to approach the way to build bridges.

I am interested in the Jordan–Canada trade deal and moving this forward, but there are some serious issues with which we have to deal. One of them I will raise during my comments in this debate, and it is the issue of human rights and labour standards. The parliamentary secretary knows this happens in Jordan. Thousands of migrant workers are used in Jordan, 75% of them are women. They are in very abusive conditions.

We will support bringing this to committee and when we do, we want to find some ways, within this legislation, to monitor or improve the labour standards in Jordan, as well as other issues that are dealt with in the bill.

In the spirit of trying to move this bill forward, is the Conservative Party open to looking at whether we can get some tools that will be

effective? The United States signed its deal with Jordan and nearly 10 years later, there are still the same problems. Many of the people tried to support and get some changes in Jordan. They were done through voluntary means, as is the case with this bill, but there were no repercussions.

If the Conservative Party is interested in moving this forward, we would certainly be open to it as long as we could include some provisions to monitor the worst parts of this deal.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Madam Speaker, I welcome my colleague from Windsor West as the new trade critic for the NDP. Certainly, it is an extremely important portfolio and one that we would seek to see some substantial change in the position of the NDP.

If we see that change, then certainly our relationship and our comments will change along with that. Until we see that change, I can only consider that the hon. member for Windsor West takes the same position as the former NDP trade critic from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour who said, when the Americans were bringing in prohibitive duties through their buy America act, that would hurt Canadian businesses and trade, and therefore Canadian workers and families. He agreed with them, that they should do it.

That is not acceptable. It is not acceptable in this House or in any other house. It is not acceptable in the households across this country. The issue here is simple. No one is saying that every country in the world has the same level of protection and respect for human rights as all other countries. What we are saying is through engagement and through trade we can advance human rights, we can advance workers' rights, and we can advance environmental respect in every single country on the planet. That is why we continue to pursue free trade agreements around the globe.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the parliamentary secretary that might be a little bit off topic and it is in regard to trade.

Trade agreements have the potential to be a wonderful thing and they can be very protective of jobs and secure markets into the future. But because of the timing and because the member is the parliamentary secretary on what is a very important file in the province of Manitoba in regard to the pork industry, with the agreements now between Korea and the United States, the impact this is going to have on our plants in Brandon or the pork industry as a whole is going to be negative.

I am wondering if the member could provide some comments in regard to the pork industry in Manitoba in relation to what is happening between the U.S. and Korea, and the negative impact that is going to have on us. We do not necessarily have to have a trade agreement to be relevant—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like to give the hon. parliamentary secretary an opportunity to respond.

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•(1605)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Madam Speaker, the member's question is relevant although it does not deal with this specific piece of legislation. The pork industry will face an increased competitive threat from the Americans after they sign the free trade agreement with Korea. We recognize that. We certainly work closely with the pork industry of Canada to get access to foreign markets and we will continue to do that.

That is exactly why we continue to look at bilateral trading arrangements, whether they are with the Jordanian marketplace, or whether with Honduras, Colombia, the European Union, or with the Europe free trade agreement which included the countries of Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, and the former agreement we signed and approved with Peru.

Every time we open up a new market, it takes some of that pressure off of our producers in those specific industries where they are facing greater pressure from countries which have moved ahead of us because we were not moving quickly enough to secure free trade agreements. Now we have to race to catch up to countries like the United States who have beaten us to the point with Korea.

We recognize the challenge. We will continue to work on behalf of the pork industry, and on behalf of Canadian workers and families to secure more free trade opportunities and particularly opportunities for the pork industry.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the parliamentary secretary for his hard work on the trade file. I know it is somewhat thankless, especially when there are NDP and Liberal critics across the way who are critical of the hard work he and the minister are doing.

I am curious though. We have seen a fantastic new agreement with the Americans in relation to cross-border trade, and control of our border and security which is a great step forward.

I hear from the parliamentary secretary, especially with regard to international trade agreements, that we have actually signed in five and a half years three times the number of agreements that the previous Liberal government did in 13 years. I would like to commend the parliamentary secretary, his staff and the minister for that because obviously free trade means good trade.

In my area in B.C. as well as Quebec and Ontario there are forestry products. I understand this is going to help forestry products and paper products quite a bit and create a lot of jobs in Canada. I would like to hear the parliamentary secretary talk about that and particularly where those jobs are going to be in Quebec, Atlantic Canada and British Columbia.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Madam Speaker, the member raised two issues and they both need to be touched on.

The first issue was the border vision plan that the Prime Minister and President Obama have just signed to reduce bottlenecks at the border, to reduce the red tape, and to increase the ability of people and trade to cross the border in both directions easily. That will improve our relationship with our American friends, and help trade and Canadian families.

The other issue was specifically on forestry. We have seen a terrific downturn in the forest industry in the last decade. It has been under pressure from all sides. To get it through that, we have been assisting it to find new markets.

The fact that we have signed trade agreements with nine countries since becoming government in 2006 is commendable, but our work does not stop there. We have more to do and we will continue to do that on behalf of the forestry sector and every other sector in the Canadian economy.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, I understand the member's passion for what he does.

The member talked about the NDP's perspective being different on free trade agreements. The lens that we look through is different than the lens that member looks through. This legislation has labour protection, environment and foreign investment outside the main agreement, and that is wrong. That is one of the reasons why we have not supported particular trade agreements that have come before us. Human rights come first with our party, not last.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Madam Speaker, respectfully, human rights come first for every party, and I would include every party in this place.

It is interesting to note that the member would pick out labour protection and the fact that there is a separate labour agreement. Labour is separate from trade, so one would think it would be a separate agreement.

The thing that I find most amazing about the NDP's position on labour is that the International Labour Organization has approved this. It is in agreement with it. It supports it. It is good enough for that organization, but it is not good enough for the NDP.

•(1610)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for York South—Weston, Air and Space Museum.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on Bill C-23. I will get to this particular trade bill, but I want to address a couple of comments that have come out in recent discussions.

The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour was referenced with respect to his comments relating to buy America. As vice-chair of the Canada-U.S. Parliamentary Association, I have been to Washington many times and have met with many different congressional and state representatives, as well as senate representatives, heads of committees and so forth relating to buy America and Canada's position. Many of them have argued that Canada should have had a reciprocity clause with respect to buy America by having our own buy Canada act as part of a defence that would have negotiated the removal of buy America because we have now seen it grow even further. What the government does not understand is that there is buy America and buy American. There are two acts that actually have protectionism in them.

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Most recently we have seen it happen again where, despite the minister going down to Washington, we actually have more problems because we will see more legislation. There is another piece of legislation that has been tabled in the House that actually calls for the buy America act to be involved in the transportation sector, which it was not before. Therefore, there are more barriers coming up and they come with a series of issues.

Cross border trade was noted as well and the prosperity deal that was signed last week by the Prime Minister and President Obama. What is interesting about that deal is that it concentrates mostly on petroleum and pushing our oil in Washington, and not looking after our manufacturing sector and other trade. Our trade and manufacturing jobs have gone down to the lowest level since we have been actually taking those numbers and making them public in the 1970s. We have the lowest amount of manufacturing jobs left. That is because the government has been obsessed with oil versus that other value-added trade.

What happened today is very important with respect to the announcement last week. We learned that the Minister of Transport failed to move on legislation to protect a new border crossing in my riding at Windsor-Detroit where 40% of our trade goes to the United States every single day. It goes along a two-mile corridor. We are trying to build a brand new border crossing, a new public bridge. It has been blocked along the way by a private American citizen who has literally bought up the Michigan legislature. He has spent over \$1 million in donations and has blocked the actual construction of that bridge.

Therefore, when we are talking about trade with Jordan or with the United States, it is important to note who our number one customer is, that being the United States. The way that we have been signing deals and arrangements has actually been lowering us. We have put ourselves in a trade deficit. That is the reality. New Democrats are interested in trade. We are interested also in making sure it will be done in a fair and balanced way. There is nothing wrong with that.

There is no way a Canadian can compete here, which is what we are asking for, with sweatshops in Jordan, some of which are Canadian companies. I will give a specific example later on. These sweatshops take offshore labour, often from Sri Lanka and other developing countries, 75% of them women, house them and put them in deplorable conditions to produce clothing.

How is the textile industry in Montreal able to compete with that? Will we accept that? Should we as citizens accept to wear cheaper garments produced by people who have been put into abusive situations and who are being taken advantage of? That is well-documented.

It was interesting to hear the criticisms about us saying that the labour movement is in favour of this now and that we are offside. The United Steelworkers originally supported the 2000 agreement between the United States and Jordan with respect to a trade deal. It is one of the situations I will be looking at with respect to amendments to get that undone. The United Steelworkers went on a fact-finding mission to see what happened because it had labour and environmental agreements and a whole series of things that were included but were voluntary. It found very little change. There was

very little substance to the differences it was experiencing in the past because there was no enforcement.

This week we saw how our environmental enforcements are often not working within our own country. Therefore, we can just imagine what the rights of people in a kingdom like Jordan, which is not a democracy, can subject them to.

• (1615)

There is a responsibility and, generally, an interest for us to find some common ground and move some of those serious issues to closure. Surely we do not want the abuse and mistreatment of women fleeing Sri Lanka to increase because Canada has signed a free trade deal with Jordan. I would hope that is not the case. We want some measures in this agreement to make sure we can eliminate those issues. Perhaps there is an opportunity.

Side issues to bilateral trade, such the environment and labour, are often very much weakened because there is no regulatory enforcement, but we can build that into the legislation, and New Democrats will be looking for that. It is a carrot and stick approach. There is an offer to Jordan to improve trade and improve access to markets, theirs and ours, but at the same time we will be seeking improved humane labour standards, improvements we all think we can agree on.

Would anybody want to diminish those things? That question has to be asked. If we were to fuel further problems, would that be something we would support and be proud of as a country? We see that we have turned a blind eye to this in many respects when we look at what has happened across the world more recently with Libya and other states. We often turn a blind eye to some of these things for corporate interests. At a certain point we need to talk about global trade and all that kind of stuff, where there is no room for rights, the environment or other things; however, we need those things to be in place to improve our lifestyles and improve our planet. There has to be some balance.

Jordan may not be able to reach our standards right away. As consumers, we will demand that manufactured goods meet certain standards. When we buy a sweatshirt, a product with a zipper, or clothing, we want those products to meet certain standards, but at the same time we allow people to work for 14 hours a day, not have time off and be housed in warehouses and unclean areas. We have to address this issue. If that is the difference in getting a sweater or sweatshirt a couple of dollars cheaper, it is wrong.

We have a moral responsibility to address this issue while we can. If we take the blind eye approach, we are actually victimizing them, because we are aware of the standards we have in Canada. We do not allow child labour in Canada, so we should not be ignoring those issues with Jordan and other states.

There are issues because of a side agreement, but the conclusion in the environmental assessment that was done under the Canada-Jordan Free Trade Agreement was this:

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Even if dramatic increases in bilateral trade flows occurred as a result of the implementation of the Canada-Jordan FTA, the economic effects of this Agreement would be modest relative to Canada's overall economic activity given the relatively low levels of bilateral trade and the size of the Jordanian economy. As a consequence, related environmental impacts in Canada are not expected to be significant. Moreover, environmental impacts, if any, will be addressed and managed by the existing environmental management programs in sectors that stand to gain in the FTA such as forestry and agriculture.

What is going to happen is that there will be no new regulatory oversight or repercussions related to this deal. It is interesting because the Conservatives talk about these issues in these trade agreements as if they are going to expand increasing markets, but their own research is telling them it is going to be relatively modest. What makes it really ironic and rich is that although the Windsor-Detroit corridor has 40% of our daily trade, \$1 billion, flowing through the border, we still have a problem with securing a new site; meanwhile, the government is talking about putting this deal as a priority. It has tabled legislation for Jordan, but when the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was advised by his own department to table legislation to protect our number one trading partner and border crossing in Canada, he did not do it. The government's policies in this last session of Parliament have been to drive Canada down and apart, not build it up.

• (1620)

The government was advised specifically to take action because we are at high risk when it comes to the Windsor-Detroit crossing, since 40% of the trade crosses there, private American citizens own the bridge, and it is 80 years of age. Our manufacturing value-added system is at risk. We have watched a watershed of jobs leave from Ontario, Quebec and other places, including jobs in manufacturing across the country, and what has the government been focusing on? Panama and Jordan.

That is what the government has tabled as legislation. Our number one trading partner, our number issue, is the United States. The Prime Minister goes to the United States, signs a border agreement and talks about infrastructure. Meanwhile in Michigan, the new border crossing is languishing because the government has not passed a law. The government's own minister was advised in his briefing book to actually act on the Windsor-Detroit crossing to stop lawsuits and prevent it from being blocked. He never did it.

Instead we have this bill, and we have issues with it. It is important to note that when we have these issues, there has to be proper follow-up. We will see if that is going to happen.

I will give a good example. In 2011 Jordan signed the international convention on domestic work. It provides for some protection for workers on the international level. Jordan signed that agreement and adopted it, but has yet to ratify it. Even when Jordan has been out there in the world trying to promote improvements and saying to the world that it is going to do some things, it has yet to ratify that agreement.

How long does that take in the Jordanian system? It probably does not take long. It is a kingdom. The legislative process will not take years. That is one of the things we should be demanding. We should be asking when it will be ratified, when it will be implemented, how things are to be measured, and how Jordan will ensure that workers are going to be protected.

I want to talk a little about those workers and those conditions, because Canada is connected there. I am talking about Nygard, Dillard's, JCPenney, and Walmart, which are linked to human trafficking, abuse and the Jordanian sweatshops.

It is really important to note the United Steelworkers looked at a number of specific plants in different areas. They sent a fact-finding mission over there. What they found is that there are 1,200 foreign guest workers trapped in the IBG factory, and nothing helped when they actually signed the U.S.—Jordanian agreement.

They went back and found that they still had problems. The east factory has about 600 workers: 300 from Sri Lanka, 200 from Bangladesh, and 100 from India. That is an example from one of the factories. I have pictures here. It looks like a warehouse. It looks more like a place for agriculture warehousing or something like that.

An estimated 75% of the guest workers are women between the ages of 18 and 30. It is a young workforce, predominantly women, in conditions that are absolutely abysmal.

Why do we not take this opportunity to say to Jordan, "Fine, we are open to trading and improvement, but we do not want those goods and services provided through abusive behaviours. We do not want them. In fact, if you do not fix some of the stuff you are doing now, then we are not going to move forward on this agreement".

Alternatively, we could set benchmarks with enforcement tools or ways to peel back parts of the agreement if Jordan does not meet those benchmarks, unless the objective is to turn a blind eye and allow foreign workers to be abused so that we can get cheaper clothing.

We might as well just say that if that is the way it is going to be. If we are going to ignore the photos, ignore the visitations, ignore the pleas from the workers who have actually smuggled out a number of different tags, some from Canadian companies, at their risk, and ignore their cries for help, then we might as well just say that is what we are going to do.

These side agreements on labour and side agreements on environment are not enforceable, although there are some lofty words in some of these agreements.

• (1625)

With regard to the issues on labour, I will provide a good example. The real problem is that they have the words in there, but there is no final accountability. The side agreement is a good example. Under "corporate social responsibility", it says:

Recognizing the substantial benefits brought by international trade and investment, the Parties shall encourage voluntary best practices of corporate social responsibility by enterprises within their territories or jurisdictions, to strengthen coherence between economic and environmental objectives.

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It is so vague it does not matter, and there is no enforcement. It is not worth the paper it is printed on. It does not help the worker from Sri Lanka who is killed in one of the sweatshops. They have pictures here. It does not help the workers who are abused on a regular basis.

It is interesting, too, because when they go to Jordan, there is a process. They are processed. This is the sad and scary thing about this situation. There is a process taking place with the full consent of the Jordanian officials.

Do members know what happens? Guest workers are trafficked into Jordan, stripped of their passports and held in slave labour conditions. Workers' passports are confiscated. Their routine is 16-hour shifts, seven days a week. They work in the factory 111 hours a week. They are cheated out of half their legal wages. Workers are slapped and threatened with deportation. There are reports of sexual harassment and abuse. If, for whatever reason, a worker misses a shift, that worker is docked two days' pay and punished. They live under miserable, primitive dorm conditions lacking heat, with only sporadic access to water and infested with bedbugs. In fact, one was actually brought back to the University of Ohio to confirm that the bedbugs were actually feasting and gorging on those people in that environment. The due diligence has been done to investigate the conditions in Jordan.

Here is a routine shift they work: 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., they work two hours; 9 a.m. to 9:15 a.m., they have a 15-minute tea break; 9:15 a.m. to 1 p.m., they work for three and three-quarter hours; 1 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., they have a half-hour lunch break; 1:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., they work for six and a half hours; 8 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., they have a half-hour supper break; 8:30 p.m. to 11 p.m., they work for two and a half hours. They have 16-hour days.

We need to address these issues if we are saying to Jordan that we want it to be our partner. If we are extending our hand, it is our responsibility to say something about these issues. It is our responsibility to ensure that bilateral trade is fair. Do we want these conditions to get worse for them, or do we want them to get better? Do we want them to stay the same?

I would argue it is economically impossible for us to compete in this way anyway, because it is not fair if they are using slave labour. All those who invest in the textile industry in North America, particularly in Canada, are going to get the short end of the stick no matter what. It does not matter how much they invest or how much they train their workers. It does not matter how much they have given back to the community. It does not matter what they have done over a number of decades: they cannot compete with those standards. They cannot compete with people basically used as slaves.

What does it say to those people who are actually investing in Canada—people who actually believe in proper work hours for their staff, believe in contributing back to the community and value the people who are employed by them? We are insulting them by doing that.

We are not doing anything to be proud of as a country if we are saying those things are all acceptable so that we can get a cheap sweater or lower-cost merchandise or fill the shelves at Walmart with cheap clothes. These are the things we have to look at.

To conclude, I want to say that we are interested in trying to make this bill work, but it has to be done with responsibility. Turning a blind eye is not the ethical or right thing to do.

• (1630)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for clearly laying out the position of the NDP on this trade agreement and all others.

I have two points. The first point is the hon. member went off on a tangent on the Detroit bridge and the fact that 40% of the trade between Canada and the United States goes across it. I found it absolutely astounding, so maybe the hon. member could explain to me, that he supports his colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster who has a bill before the House to have buy Canada provisions and he stated that he supported buy Canada provisions. We know that increased protectionism was absolutely the cause of the Great Depression and it just snowballed. One country increased protectionism, then another country and then another country.

President Obama said that we should not have increased protectionism but he allowed a very dangerous precedent to happen. This is unfortunately a result of the American political system. Politics will always trump good policy in the United States in an election year. The members of Congress, the members of the senate and the members of the house of representatives we talk to tell us that politics will always trump good policy. I am hearing the same thing from my colleague in the NDP. He is talking about politics, not good policy.

It is good policy that we trade. It is good policy that we allow countries to move forward and that we encourage them to move forward with rules-based trading. That is what we are talking about.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, quite clearly this has been happening for a number of years. We have been told. I have met with many American legislators who have said, "Listen, you guys have nothing to offer in terms of reciprocity to these issues so that is the real problem". That is why we see a Chilean peach create the APHIS fee for our trucking industry. That is why we see a new entry-exit fee. When the United States negotiates a trade deal with Colombia, it ends up charging us that fee because it does not respect us. That is important.

The Conservative government has failed. It has let the Americans characterize the northern border as a security risk and it has thickened it by militarization in policies. Instead of standing up for Canada in Washington, the Conservatives said, "Yes, fine, there is a problem on our border". They could not point to where it was. There is a problem in Cornwall. However, they agreed with the southern political movement to say the northern border is a bigger risk than the southern border. The result is that we have seen more barriers and thickening of the border on a regular basis.

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That is the big failure of the government. The Conservatives did not stand up when Napolitano said that terrorists came from Canada. They did not stand up when Lieberman said it. They did not stand up when different American politicians said that the northern border is a risk. That is why we have these trade barriers today. It is unfortunate because the Conservatives just have not addressed the issue properly.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the remarks of the trade critic for the NDP and how he outlined the problems in the labour force in Jordan. Definitely, we cannot turn a blind eye to the rights of labour in Jordan. This certainly has an impact in Canada.

Does he believe that this bill needs amendments to have enforcement areas in terms of labour and environmental rights? I would ask him which way he wants to go in that area. We will be supporting this bill going to committee. We hope the government would see the common sense of allowing some amendments that would strengthen it.

Jordan is the world's 90th place economy. The government talks a lot about trade. The Conservatives blow about their having done nine trade agreements. Yet recently, we had the first deficit in merchandise trade in 30 years. I wonder if the hon. member could expand on why that is. We are holding trade talks around the world but we are losing ground with our main trading partners.

• (1635)

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I enjoy working with the member on committee.

We are going to be making specific amendments at committee. Let us look at this responsibly. If someone witnesses an individual being abused, physically, psychologically, sexually, whatever it might be, that person has a duty to act. Certain abuses are happening in Jordan. We need to benchmark where those abuses are taking place, set some expectations and find a way to deal with them. Those are the types of amendments that New Democrats will be proposing in committee. If there is some balance there with the government, we will be okay.

In terms of overall trade, the government has been pushing oil in Washington for years. I was there when it was happening. The government has left the manufacturing industry behind and that industry has now diminished.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague, a fellow member of the Standing Committee on International Trade, for his work and thank him for a very enlightening presentation.

I would like to revisit the subject of our responsibilities as Canadians, as a country and as a trading partner, with respect to labour law issues. I believe this is very important.

In a conversation with an expert specializing in international trade issues—I can no longer remember which one—the expert mentioned that human rights and other related issues are often crucial. This is especially pertinent at this juncture because these issues could be an impediment to future partnerships or garner the disapproval of Canadians, who are also consumers.

If we do not choose our partners carefully and, above all, if we do not propose fair and worthwhile agreements that make us proud to be their partner, does my colleague believe that we could suffer a backlash that definitely could be costly?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for his work in committee.

It is important that we evaluate those elements because they can work against us.

I used the textile industry as an example because Jordan is known for it. We had an incredible textile industry in this country. It was one of the best in the world. There was always the notion that it had to go higher end because that would be best for economic development, but that turned out to be untrue. Tool and dye manufacturing companies in my area had to be reinvented. Those companies are the best in the world. When a bad trade deal is signed, where people can undermine the competition or local economy through environmental or human health issues, then our companies cannot compete with those things and people basically become disposable.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to briefly come back to the labour conditions in Jordan. I would like the hon. member to elaborate on that and on the impact of this type of non-negotiated agreement on Canadian workers, foreign workers in Jordan and Canada's international reputation.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, there is a good example with IBG Jordan where women are forced to work 16 hour shifts from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week. There is also a mandatory all night 23 hour shift at least once a week from 7 a.m. straight through to 6 a.m. the following morning. The women are exhausted obviously and there have been some horrible cases. We know this has been happening. We need to make sure it stops.

Jordan needs to put a plan in place. We need some benchmarks in order to improve these types of conditions. If we can do that, then we can trade with the country. Trade is a two-way relationship. It is not just about the actual merchandise that is exchanged back and forth. It is also about the personal and social aspects. They go both ways.

This is an opportunity for us to help those workers. I hope the government sees it that way and we can work together on a solution.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been looking for an appropriate moment so as not to interrupt the proceedings too much.

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Earlier in the House a vote was passed on division on the appointment of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner. I attempted to get the Speaker's attention at that point to say no to that appointment. The House leaders had consulted, but nobody checked how my vote would have gone. I realize at this point it may be difficult to have a vote recorded, but I wish to be recorded as opposing this appointment. Unfortunately, although my voice went out as a no, the Speaker spoke to what the House leaders had decided, on division. I do not know if it is possible to have my vote recorded at this stage.

I did want to make a statement to the House on behalf of the many people who have written my office in the matter of this appointment. I want to be recorded as voting no if the other—

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her comments. Obviously, now her views are on the record. It was a vote on division which reflected the fact that there was disagreement. There were not enough people who stood up for a recorded vote. We would have required five members to rise for a recorded vote. In this case it is simply reflected as on division, meaning that not all members were in agreement.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-23. I have noted many times that the government loves to put names to acts that make them sound like they are other than they really are. The government calls this one, in the short title, the “Canada-Jordan economic growth and prosperity act”. I really think it should have a different name, more appropriate to what this agreement really is. I would call it the “trade agreement with the world's 90th place economy”. It is really not huge in terms of the prosperity that it is going to create. It is the world's 90th place economy, so let us put this particular bill in the perspective that it ought to be put in.

When this agreement was originally announced in June 2009, the Arab spring had yet to occur. The instability that has overtaken the region in the past year has been nothing short of transformative. In this climate, the FTA with Jordan is about to unfold. We are supportive of the bill in principle, as we have been of previous trade agreements. However, there are serious areas of concern. My colleague from the NDP mentioned some of those. I would agree with some of them.

These areas of concern should be carefully considered during examination of the legislation before the international trade committee. Among the areas of concern are child labour matters, which have been previously mentioned, and other labour issues. These would best be resolved through an open and transparent agreement. There are side agreements on labour and the environment, but they are really not that enforceable; they are really more of a desire. I do think we have to find ways of enforcing labour and environmental agreements.

Before looking at the agreement and the situation in Jordan, there are some general points that the House must consider with respect to trade generally and the government's actions. The government's mismanagement of Canada's trading relations around the world has resulted in trade deficits for the first time in over 30 years. Under this

government's watch, we have seen a merchandise trade deficit for the first time in 30 years.

If we were to listen to the propaganda machine of the government, which is so far from reality, it claims to have negotiated nine trade agreements. The minister flits and flies all around the world talking trade. Yet while he is talking trade around the world he is ignoring the trading relationship with countries where we already have strongly established trading arrangements. We are falling back in those particular areas.

There is no question that Canada is a trade-dependent nation. Eighty per cent of Canada's economy depends on access to foreign markets for Canadian exports. The Liberal Party supports the principle of free trade. We support initiatives that improve market access for Canadian businesses. We want to hear from stakeholders and carefully examine this agreement to ensure it is indeed in Canada's best interest.

Free trade with Jordan will help encourage economic stability in that region. I would go further. If the side agreements on labour and the environment can be engineered properly and some teeth put in them, free trade can even help improve social, labour, economic and working conditions within Jordan.

Pursuing new trade agreements is worthy of support. However, as I said a moment ago, we have to put these agreements in context. While the Conservatives have proclaimed the promotion of trade, it has been under their watch that the mismanagement of the file, in terms of trading relationships, has resulted in trade deficits for the first time in 30 years.

• (1645)

With respect to the United States, we have seen the government “surprised” by increased United States' protectionist actions, and I will list but three.

First, the government was surprised by the initial buy American provisions in the 2008 United States stimulus package, even though for months President Obama projected that he would be looking at strong buy American policies. However, the government was surprised. It was caught not watching the store.

Second, the minister was surprised in the fall of 2011 when buy American provisions returned in the Obama administration's recent job plan efforts. Again, the government was caught short and not watching the store.

Third, the minister was surprised by the announcement of the United States Federal Maritime Commission, at the instigation of U.S. senators, of an investigation into U.S.-bound container traffic being diverted to Canadian ports and whether to impose fees or tariffs as a result of that diverted trade.

Perhaps I should mention one more because this affects Canadians who are travelling by air and sea to the United States, and that is the \$5.40 entry fee. In the agreement the United States negotiated, I believe with Columbia, we lost our exception. Again, the Canadian government was caught surprised and disappointed.

My point is this. Not only do we have to look at new trade agreements around the world, which is important, but our biggest market is the United States. However, the United States continues, at every turn, to catch the government by surprise and disappointment. As a result, we see an erosion of our most important economic trading relationship. The importance of that relationship exceeds \$1.4 billion of trade on a daily basis.

In terms of the merchandise export rate, in 2010 Canada exported \$339.4 billion internationally. However, the vast majority of that trade is with but 10 countries. In descending order, they are: the United States, 74.9% of merchandise exports; the United Kingdom, 4.1%; China 3.3%; with Japan, Mexico, Germany, Korea, Netherlands and Brazil following that. We can see that it is a long way from first place to second place, with the first place trade being with the United States.

According to the International Trade Department, we are currently conducting 75% of our merchandise trade with the United States. According to its documents, by 2040, we will still be conducting 75% of our merchandise trade with the United States.

Let me be clear. While there are all these trade negotiations being talked about, and the minister is going here and there, the Conservatives are not watching the store in terms of our trading relationship with the United States. In fact, as I said the other day, on the areas of conflict with the United States, they give up certain things and get nothing in return. The Canadian Wheat Board is a prime example. It was challenged 14 times by the Americans. They could never win as a violation of a trading agreement, but the Conservatives have given it away and gets absolutely nothing in return.

On the perimeter security deal, what are we getting in return for that? Likely nothing, but we do not really know because the Conservative government, which claims to be transparent, keeps everything secret.

Canada is a trade dependent nation. We do depend on access markets for Canadian imports. However, with respect to Jordan, there are a number of issues that must be kept at the forefront, as with any trade agreement discussion and implementation.

• (1650)

The Export Development Corporation, in its recent export forecast overview, indicated that while the fallout from the Arab Spring had caused political uncertainty in the region, Jordan had managed, to be fair to it, to, “sap opposition movements of their momentum through modest political reform programs and spending promises”.

However, recent indications are that the uncertainty within Jordan had been slowly increasing. A recent *The New York Times* article referenced the issue of stability within the wider Middle East and the concern with respect to investment pointing out that:

If Middle Eastern governments want to attract foreign investors during the current period of change and uncertainty, then Arab countries need to lead the way by demonstrating faith in the long-term promise of the region's markets...

The International Monetary Fund has indicated that the situation throughout the Middle East is one of economic certainty. It states:

For many countries in the Middle East and North Africa, 2011 has not been an easy year. The region is witnessing unparalleled uncertainty and economic pressures

Government Orders

from both domestic and external sources, which have triggered a marked downturn in economic activity. While the economies of the oil-exporting countries have seen a mild pickup in growth in 2011, oil importers are experiencing a dramatic slowdown.

The IMF report of November 22 went on to state that in countries such as Jordan, high commodity prices were pushing up import bills and “uncertainty has also constrained access to international capital markets and direct investment have fallen off”.

A recent article in the *New York Review*, entitled “Jordan Starts to Shake”, raises some serious questions with respect to the Jordanian situation. The country is mired in recession and recently King Abdullah has increased the numerous state subsidies by \$1 billion. More than 21,000 security positions have been created. The birth rate has been exceeding the ability of the country to create necessary jobs and unemployment exceeds 13%. There are some major concerns within the country.

Canadian merchandise exports to Jordan totalled \$66 million in 2010, up from the \$30.8 million in 2003. Top Canadian exports to Jordan in 2010 included: paper paperboard, mainly newsprint; vehicles; wood products; pulse crops, mainly lentils and chickpeas; and machinery and electrical and electronic equipment.

Canadian merchandise imports from Jordan totalled \$19.9 million in 2010, up from the \$5.7 million in 2003. Therefore, it is clear that the trading relationship is increasing and improving.

Top imports from Jordan in 2010 include both knit and woven apparel, inorganic chemicals, precious stones and metals, namely jewellery, vegetables and pharmaceutical products.

Two-way trade between Jordan and the United States in 2009 exceeded \$1.77 billion. However, on that point, there is trade with the United States and Jordan and there is now trade between Canada and Jordan. This trade agreement should open up some opportunities.

Again, I want to come back to the government's failure in this area.

One of our most important pork markets is South Korea. The United States has negotiated a trade agreement with South Korea in which tariffs will come down. As tariffs come down, that \$1 billion pork and beef market of Canadian producers into South Korea will decrease. We will be non-competitive because the Americans will displace us in that marketplace. The Government of Canada is asleep at the switch in terms of the trade agreement with South Korea.

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●(1655)

We had started negotiations. I have to question whether the Minister of International Trade is getting slapped around a little by the Minister of Finance, who seems to be worried about the auto industry in his own backyard. Has he all the power in the cabinet? Could the government not negotiate an agreement like the United States has, which protects its auto industry and allows its pork industry to expand in South Korea as well?

I make that point because the government is talking about all the benefits of this 90th world economy and is ignoring the market we already have in South Korea for pork. The Conservatives are not negotiating or they are just not getting anything done in that area. That is what concerns me.

While I agree with the principle of negotiating with Jordan, we cannot continue to ignore those established markets that we have. Even on the CIDA agreement, where other members of the trade committee and myself spent part of last week in Brussels and in France. That too is an important market, but even if we get in that market in pork and beef, it will not make up for the loss of those pork exports to South Korea, which we are clearly losing on a daily basis because the Americans have negotiated an agreement and the Conservative government seems to be asleep at the switch.

Tariff elimination is important. There would be the elimination of all Jordanian non-agriculture tariffs, which currently average 11%. These include tariffs of 10% to 30% on many non-agriculture products of Canadian export interests, including industrial and electrical machinery, auto parts, construction equipment and forest products, such as wood building materials and paper.

There would be the elimination of the vast majority of Jordan's agricultural tariffs including: key Canadian export interests such as pulse crops; frozen french fries, which is important in my area because we make the best there is; and various prepared foods and animal feeds, which currently face high tariffs as much as 30%.

The vast majority of current Canadian exports to Jordan will benefit from immediate duty-free access to the Jordanian market upon implementation of this FTA. On implementation, Canada will also immediately eliminate all non-agricultural tariffs and imports originating in Jordan, as well as most agriculture tariffs.

As in all of its past FTAs, Canada has excluded over-quota supply managed dairy, poultry and egg products from any tariff reductions, and that is a good thing.

Ratifying this trade agreement appears to have little economic risk for Canadian industry. However, we should keep in mind that Canada's largest import from Jordan is apparel. While it seems, from what we hear and what we have questioned, the Canadian Apparel Federation does not seem to be concerned about this FTA, I think the points made by the NDP critic earlier have a lot of merit. Our apparel industry cannot compete with low-paid labour working as many as 16 hours a day under atrocious conditions. That situation must stop.

We agree with the side agreements on labour co-operation and environment. They are important. We cannot expect our businesses in Canada to be under a high cost labour regime with good safety standards, which is important and we support, to be under tougher

environmental regulations, greater costs for industry as a result of meeting those environmental regulations and businesses in Jordan not facing the same situation. In terms of this agreement, we have to find a way to try to strengthen those side agreements.

●(1700)

The bottom line is that, yes, we support this bill going to committee. We believe it needs to be discussed, we need to have witnesses in and we need to strengthen it where possible.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Malpeque for his comments and for his support of this bill going to committee. I hope we can expect the Liberal Party to support the bill coming back to the House for third reading.

The hon. member raised a number of issues, some of which I agree and some of which I respectfully disagree, but I am not trying to rewrite history or be a revisionist historian. I want to ask the hon. member about one principle. This principle underlies our efforts to establish new trading arrangements with countries around the globe, whether they happen to be the nintieth economy in the world or the first economy in the world, and that is the principle of rules based trading. The principle that goes along with rules based trading is reciprocity.

The idea that we have clear rules that dictate trade and that those rules are reciprocal for both parties is fundamental to whether we will survive as a trading nation. Canada is certainly not large enough, with 33 million people, to depend upon ourselves for trade. There is a group in the House that wants to put barriers up to trade. I have not seen that from the Liberals and I hope I do not.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, clearly we support rules based trade. We need to have rules. However, one of the problems with many of the trade agreements, the WTO sometimes, is the enforcement of those rules and having them implemented quickly enough. If a business is involved in exports and somebody undermines its product in various ways that are against the rules, and we can look at the country of origin labelling in the United States, by the time the product finally gets through the system, the business has already sustained many losses.

Government Orders

We won the country of origin labelling at the WTO but the damage is already done to our industry. It has lost \$5 billion. Many of my neighbours quit the beef industry as a result of, first, BSE and then country of origin labelling. Therefore, the enforcement side of it does not kick in early enough to take on the countries that are breaking those rules. The bottom line is that rules based trading is especially critical in terms of any trade agreement.

• (1705)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, in closing, the member for Malpeque was intending to speak about some of the side agreements. I would appreciate his comments on one particular side agreement, which is the environmental side agreement.

It is with great regret that I have to rise again. I think this is the fourth or fifth time I have had to rise in the House to point out that while the government says that it believes in sustainable development and balancing environmental protection with economic development and trade, it is going in the opposite direction. This agreement, like all the agreements the government has brought before the House, completely diminishes the original side agreement famously put forward with the NAFTA.

The Canadian and U.S. governments, after the fact, apologized and said that it really should have been incorporated and binding with the trade agreement and that maybe next time they will do that. The Canadian government has not incorporated the environmental or labour measures into the agreement. They are still side-barred unenforceable agreements. However, it has taken a worse step. There is no independent secretariat where citizens can file complaints about the failure to enforce effective laws, and the government voted against the environmental bill of rights that I tabled in the House, which would have enacted in this country the very rights it is pretending to accord and hold out to Jordan that it offered to Canadians. I am wondering if the member could speak to that.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I cannot question the member's point on the environment and the government.

It is clear, especially in recent days, that it is not only the environmental aspect of agreements that there is some concern about, with respect to the way the government is going, but we have now become the laughing stock of the world in terms of our climate change position with the minister announcing our pulling out of the Kyoto accord.

It is clear that the government, for whatever reason, is not serious about environmental issues. It does make us concerned in terms of the side agreements on labour and the environment, whether it will really put forward the kind of hard position that it needs to ensure that the environment conditions in both countries are similar,

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our party believes fundamentally in the importance of having economic agreements that can have political significance. However, we have to understand that Jordan is in a very hot part of the world these days and there is a certain political reality that we have to deal with.

I would like the hon. member to share his views on the importance of having this type of economic agreement and the role it can play in

politics. What impact would this type of agreement have on Canada's role in Middle East politics?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, Canada's role in the Middle East is an important one.

I do think that this trade agreement, if handled correctly, could improve conditions in Jordan in this instance. I firmly believe that when there is a trading relationship with a country, staying out of the trading relationship will not do anything in terms of the labour conditions of those people working in the industries in that particular country.

However, if we have a side agreement and if we find ways to make it enforceable, then we can improve the social and economic aspects within the country just by the fact that that is in the agreement. Trade will become important from Canada to Jordan and vice versa. It also gives us more sway in terms of enforcing better labour standards, better safety standards for labour and so on.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech.

I must admit that I am always surprised to see how anxious the government is to sign free trade agreements and I think the hon. member will agree.

I have a simple question for the hon. member. Does he think this is truly a matter of life and death, considering the volume of trade between Canada and Jordan?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I do not often give the government credit but it did have this bill in the previous Parliament.

Much of what we see from the government is smoke and mirrors. This is the world's 90th largest economy, so it is fairly far down the list. The government will go to great lengths to spin the nine trade agreements, while at the same time we are losing the South Korean market, we are falling back in the United States market and we have now had our first merchandise trade deficit in 30 years under the government's watch.

We need to cut through the smoke and mirrors and the spin of the government to get to what the reality really is. Yes, the trade agreement is important, but we should ensure that we secure our current markets and fight for our rights in those markets with the United States and others.

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Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand in the House and address this legislation today. It is an important trade deal, especially since Canada is an exporting nation. Canada exports over 60% of its GDP to other nations, so it is important to look for additional places to increase our market share in the world. It is important that we do this expeditiously and that we do this in a way that we can continue to protect those people in our country who are exporting jobs that are dependent on exports here in Canada.

We know that almost half of Canadian manufacturing is sold outside of Canada and that one in five jobs in Canada is linked to trade. Any time we can move a free trade agreement it is a good news story for families because it leads to employment, growth and prosperity for all Canadians.

Therefore, I move, seconded by the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's:

That this question be now put.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I have to wonder what the purpose of my colleague's speech was. After all, we must not forget that Canada's reputation is very important and we should always try to enter into agreements that are worthwhile.

Will the government give all members of the House a chance to debate the matter fully in committee, since this bill could have repercussions that go far beyond simple economic interests? This is a big concern. I think we have an opportunity here to reach an agreement that will satisfy all parties. Co-operation is crucial in this House.

On behalf of the government, can the member agree to remain open to discussing this future free trade agreement thoroughly and under optimal conditions?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that not only will there be continued debate on this issue here in the House, in committee, at third reading but in the Senate as well. I can also inform my colleague that during the last Parliament there was significant debate with regard to this bill as well. This is legislation that has been around this place for quite a length of time.

At this time of economic uncertainty in the world, it is important that we as Canadians lead the way in ensuring that there be prosperity, economic development and opportunity for all of those people who live in Canada.

It is important that at some point we finalize this trade agreement to ensure that there be jobs, opportunity and hope for all Canadians.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government never ceases to amaze me in its attempts to shut down the voices of Canadians. This is just another form of closure, another form of shutting down debate.

As our leader said at his press conference yesterday, we have never seen such dictatorial tactics by a government as it invokes closure and it puts committees in-camera so it can vote down

opposition motions to bring in witnesses and hold hearings and thoroughly look at legislation. This chamber is the voice of Canadians. This is where debate is supposed to take place in a transparent and open fashion. This is where we are supposed to get answers from the government but we do not.

I need to ask the member, who put this motion forward, a question. Why is it that the government, which came in talking about accountability and transparency, is now the least accountable government in Canadian history and the least transparent? There is no doubt that the directions are coming right out of the PMO. Why does the government not want to hear the voices of Canadians in terms of debate on very important legislation?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows that most of his question was nonsense. He has been around this place a long time and actually understands that this legislation was in this House in the last Parliament and made its way to committee. He is a member of that committee. He is fully aware of that. I know that he is not intending to mislead this House, but by the tone that he took, it seemed like he was surprised about this legislation, surprised that it had arrived here in the House, and surprised that it would be moved to committee.

As a matter of fact, I believe very strongly that good work happens in committee. He sits on that committee, I believe. I think it is important that he and his colleagues have an opportunity to actually do the good work of that committee in undertaking a review of this trade agreement.

Furthermore, I would just point out that over 50% of the GDP of his own province is export oriented and so, this is important for his province. As a matter of fact, in this trade agreement, there is a huge potential for potatoes, which is important to his province, as well.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am quite baffled and actually quite insulted by the constant reference to these bills having been in this House last year. There are 108 new members of Parliament in this House today who were not here last year, who are being denied the right to debate bill after bill after bill.

I want to ask the hon. member, why does he feel that is a fair, just and democratic process? There are 108 new MPs in this House who have not had the opportunity to debate any of these bills. Would he answer that question?

• (1720)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, I do appreciate the question. I am happy to inform the member that he may have been misinformed as to exactly what is going on in the House today.

Today, we are debating this bill, here on the floor of the House. I referenced the point that this bill has been debated by many of the hon. member's colleagues in his party, as well as in all other parties. It is just a reference to the point that it has been around for a long time and there do not seem to be any new ideas that are being brought to the floor today.

However, I will assure the hon. member that the bill will undertake significant more opportunities for debate here in this House, as well as in committee.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think listeners should be very concerned, in terms of the general direction that the government is taking inside this chamber. It thinks nothing nowadays of bringing forward issues such as time allocation. Now we see adjournments. The idea behind these tactics is to try to rush through the government agenda, and the government agenda does not necessarily reflect the interests of Canadians.

We have seen that on several pieces of legislation. Whether it was the more politicians bill that was passed by the government yesterday, whether it was killing the Wheat Board bill that was passed by the government, these are the types of things with which the current government is taken and it thinks nothing of it. It is almost as if this is the new norm for this majority government.

This majority government is starting to really scare a lot of democrats throughout this country because the government now believes that it can do anything and everything it wants, without having legitimate debate, and questions and answers. Now it is saying we cannot even move an amendment to this legislation. This particular member says that we will go into committee and move amendments. Did he not see what happened to the member for Mount Royal when we attempted to move amendments? The government closes its ears to amendments.

My question for the member is, does he not have any appreciation, in terms of the value of the House of Commons, that we see time and time again the government setting new—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member time to respond. The hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, the hon. member talks about the government's agenda, but in fact, what we are doing is moving the people's agenda forward. Canadians want a government that will stand behind them and ensure that there will be additional trade opportunities for more employment, more jobs, and more prosperity for Canadians. At a time of economic uncertainty in the world, it is important that we move forward these free trade agreements.

However, we are not limiting debate. There will be significant opportunities for debate and opportunities to bring forward amendments. However, it is important that eventually this moves through the process, to committee, and then back to the House, and that there is actually a vote in this House.

We know the Liberals' record on trade. They talk a good game, but in 13 years they only passed three minor trade agreements. We already have passed nine free trade agreements in the last six years. That is the record. We are standing up for Canadian entrepreneurs. We are standing up for Canadian small businesses. We are standing up for Canadian families that want to ensure that there be more prosperity, more opportunity, and more hope in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will continue in the same vein as the member opposite.

The purpose of debating a bill and examining it clause by clause is to avoid quickly signing nine bad deals. Perhaps, by doing so, we are settling for slightly fewer agreements, but they are worth the trouble

and protect the interests of all Canadians and everyone in the world with whom we do business. It is important to remember what the hon. member for Windsor West said earlier: as citizens and particularly as members of Parliament, we have the specific responsibility of standing up for important principles and values.

Unfortunately, it is easy to talk through our hats about international trade. Everyone agrees that free trade issues are important. On principle, the New Democratic Party can support the idea of signing free trade agreements. That is perfectly acceptable to us.

However, we always question the purpose of a possible agreement and its consequences because, clearly, those consequences go beyond simple economic issues. There are also human rights issues—as we have pointed out, environmental issues and the effects of such an agreement on Canada's reputation as a country and as a member nation of the international community. It is especially important to consider the effect on our reputation because, given how quickly things happen on the international stage, it can take a huge amount of effort to restore a reputation once it has been tarnished.

I would like to remind all members of the House that, when it comes to international trade, there are many ways to pull out and many ways to be a very effective partner and player.

First, I want to remind the House that according to our statistics on our current level of trade with Jordan, that trade has increased steadily and quickly over the past 10 years without a free trade agreement. Would a possible agreement accelerate the rate of increase of this trade? That is the type of question we need to be asking to understand the value of such an agreement.

We already have quite a lot of experience with our American and Mexican partners and with other countries around the world. It is truly worth the effort to understand whether eliminating every barrier and restriction and allowing extreme economic flexibility is worthwhile.

There are examples of countries around the world that do not have free trade agreements, but through their domestic policies find a way to be very successful players, even giants, countries that essentially end up breaking down every obstacle in front of them.

There is the example of Brazil and that of China. In the case of both countries, when we look at things truly objectively, we see that it is the will of the state and the government in place that allows these countries to be so productive and to become stronger all the time, to the extent that they are no longer just producing countries or countries that have freed themselves from the status of developing country, but they are major international players with a significant say. I noticed in London two weeks ago that they are increasingly becoming important partners in terms of international aid for developing countries.

● (1725)

This broadens their influence significantly without necessarily concluding free trade agreements with their major business partners.

Private Members' Business

Someone might remind me that Brazil is part of Mercosur. That is fine and a good arrangement for Latin America, but it does not explain everything, as I was saying, because Mercosur has been around for a very long time.

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member. He will have 14 minutes remaining the next time this bill is called for debate.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR FISHERY REBUILDING ACT

The House resumed from December 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-308, An Act respecting a Commission of Inquiry into the development and implementation of a national fishery rebuilding strategy for fish stocks off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-308 under private member's business.

Call in the members.

• (1810)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 104)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Grogulé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)

Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
May
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patry
Perreault
Quach
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
sor)
St-Denis
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
Valeriote— 115

Liu
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
McGuinity
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Pécllet
Pilon
Rafferty
Raynault
Rousseau
Savoie
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-

Stewart
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turnel

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukivski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Norlock
Moore (Fundy Royal)	O'Neill Gordon
Nicholson	Oda
O'Connor	
Obhrai	

Oliver	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 158

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

It being 6:13 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

● (1815)

[*Translation*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

The House resumed from October 27 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from LaSalle—Émard for moving this motion in the House. It is nice to know that the member understands the urgency facing our municipalities today. I know that former MPs for that riding tended to drag their feet when it came to promoting infrastructure in greater Montreal. So I congratulate my hon. colleague from LaSalle—Émard.

There is a real need for infrastructure improvements in our towns, cities and communities. Not only it is a daily issue for people, but there is also the economic factor, that is, promoting innovation, not to mention the environmental aspect and quality of life for future generations.

I would like to begin by addressing the economic aspect of the motion and the economic importance of infrastructure. We know that good quality infrastructure improves our economic performance considerably. The quality of infrastructure is something that businesses take into account when deciding where to set up shop. Businesses will locate in urban centres that have good quality infrastructure. If the infrastructure is of poor quality, businesses will move elsewhere. I am well aware of this because my riding really needs some infrastructure improvements and previous governments did not do enough in all the areas necessary to promote infrastructure.

Private Members' Business

The economy and the environment are intertwined. When we are considering infrastructure, we must think about innovation and the environment. We must combine both aspects to move forward. We can have a green economy in Canada. We can promote the most innovative technologies. One of the main points behind the motion presented by my colleague from LaSalle—Émard is that we can create a different economy. We can do things differently if we have a good plan for dealing with infrastructure.

When I read the World Economic Forum report, I noted that Canada is ranked 35th in terms of the supply of innovative technology. In the area of infrastructure, we may be able to promote innovative technology in Canada in order to create jobs. Infrastructure has very significant economic benefits.

Good quality infrastructure markedly improves people's standard of living in our communities and urban areas. We can build infrastructure for its economic impact, but we must also consider people's daily lives. We have to look at what kind of environment they live in every day because if we only examine one aspect—the transportation of goods or people's quality of life, for example—or if we separate the two aspects, we will never have the good quality infrastructure that we want.

This is part of what my colleague from LaSalle—Émard had in mind in presenting this motion and asking that we give appropriate consideration to the infrastructure of this country.

I would quickly like to mention my riding's current needs. A broad range of projects is being studied.

● (1820)

We need to think about and move forward with these projects. I know that my constituents cannot wait until 2014 to see these projects completed. If they must wait that long, my own riding's economy will be destroyed. The time to act is now. That is why I support this motion in this House. I also want to mention some current projects that need to be completed soon, otherwise the regional economy will be damaged.

On the A-20 autoroute in Vaudreuil-Dorion, the A-20 Dorion section must be transformed into an efficient urban boulevard. Money is needed for that. That is the only section of the A-20 that is not considered an autoroute. It is a section that requires a lot of repairs. A number of major highways need to be built in Vaudreuil. For example, there are the interchanges on the A-540 and the A-40. There is also the development of sound barrier walls and the ecocentres, or recycling depots, in Vaudreuil-Dorion that need a place to put their waste material. Work is needed on the exits from autoroute 540 around Montée Cadieux, in Vaudreuil-Dorion. The list is very long. I know that all the members here have projects. We must speak up about them and not wait until 2014. The government must develop a plan to act now to complete these projects.

The section of the A-20 that passes through Île-Perrot, in my riding, needs to be brought up to code. There are so many issues that stable funding is really needed from all levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal.

Private Members' Business

I am the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Transport and my party's associate transport critic. All the projects that come through my office clearly show that our whole country needs to move forward on these files. There is a real need. There are deficiencies in this country and we must take immediate action. That is why I am supporting the motion proposed by the hon. member.

There is also another issue in an area outside my riding—the Champlain Bridge. We know that the minister announced on October 5 that a new bridge would be built. However, nothing has been done for two months. The deputy minister of infrastructure does not even have a value-added analysis for the P3. No schedule has been established and no real answers have been given with regard to whether there will be public transit on the bridge. There are many questions and many people want to see the government act efficiently when it comes to these files. I hope that the government will support this motion because, to some extent, it addresses what the government needs to do for the country.

Before becoming a member of Parliament, I worked as a landscape architect. I was thus very interested in urban design. I specialized in facilities for children.

So, when the government thinks about major infrastructure, the transportation of freight and the major economic issues, it must also think about the quality of life of the less fortunate and of the people who do not have a voice, namely, the children of this country. The government really needs to create effective environments for everyone, intergenerational environments that are worthy of the 21st century and that use innovative, green, environmentally friendly technologies.

I hope that the government will support this motion.

• (1825)

[English]

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this motion introduced by the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

Part of the motion states:

—the government should: (a) recognize that the construction and maintenance of public infrastructure plays a vital role in the creation and protection of jobs, and that infrastructure is a strategic asset that supports vibrant, prosperous and sustainable communities;—

In budget 2007 our Conservative government announced the building Canada plan. This plan marked an unprecedented federal investment in Canada's infrastructure, a total of \$33 billion over seven years in the things that matter, including: roads, highways and bridges, public transit, sewer and water systems, and green energy. Building Canada remains a historic initiative in terms of its size and its provision of predictable, flexible, long-term funding to support provinces, territories and municipalities in addressing their infrastructure priorities.

The building Canada plan supports important national goals, such as a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, and better communities, while addressing local and regional infrastructure needs. Building Canada also increased the gas tax fund. This fund was doubled to \$2 billion a year beginning in 2009-10. By 2014 a total of

\$13 billion will have been provided to Canadian municipalities and first nations through the gas tax fund.

In budget 2009 our Conservative government announced Canada's economic action plan in response to the global economic recession. The economic action plan provided a total of \$15 billion in new funding for infrastructure and housing across Canada, as well as the acceleration of the delivery of funds through building Canada.

The results have been outstanding. Since January 2009 the federal government along with its partners in the provinces, territories and municipalities, have committed more than \$30 billion to incredibly valuable infrastructure projects across the country. Key economic action plan programs such as the infrastructure stimulus fund have now come to a conclusion, but this is not the end of the story. Our government understands the significant economic benefits that infrastructure investments can generate and we remain steadfast in our commitment to sustain infrastructure funding.

In October of this year the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities announced that we would proceed with a new bridge across the St. Lawrence River in Montreal to replace the existing Champlain Bridge, and recently we tabled and passed legislation in the House to make the \$2 billion a year gas tax fund a permanent measure. This is a very important measure that our municipalities asked for and our government delivered. Regrettably, the NDP chose to vote against this important long-term predictable funding for our municipalities.

Our Conservative government is also committed to consulting with our partners in the provinces and territories, as well as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other groups in the development of a new long-term plan for infrastructure that extends beyond building Canada. We formally launched this initiative on November 30, 2011. The launch attracted a very positive response from partners and stakeholders. In particular, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities applauded our government for launching this new infrastructure planning process.

As the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities indicated when he made this announcement, during the first two phases of this process we will engage with our partners and stakeholders to first take stock of our joint accomplishments and study the results of the significant investments we have made that have, in fact, been made by all orders of government. Then we will build our analytical knowledge, and identify gaps and strategic priorities. We will also engage with our partners and stakeholders, as well as experts, to conduct technical studies to inform the discussion. The lessons learned from past programs will also help form the foundation for the long-term plan going forward.

During the third and final phase, we will work with our partners and stakeholders to explore the broad principles and orientation of the plan. Our combined efforts will result in an effective plan that seeks to help meet the public infrastructure needs of Canadians and support Canada's economic growth.

It is clear that our government continues to recognize the vital role infrastructure plays in the creation and protection of jobs, in building and maintaining strong, healthy and sustainable communities, and strengthening the foundation of our long-term prosperity.

•(1830)

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that our government is committed to infrastructure. Not only are we planning the future, we are taking action now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker—

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I see the hon. member for Bourassa is rising.

[Translation]

If possible, I would like to give the floor to the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

[English]

I will give the member for Bourassa the next slot on the speaking order.

The hon. member for Bourassa is rising on a point of order.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with others speaking, but when a motion comes from one party, the government has a chance to speak, and then it is the third party that should have the chance to speak. I hope to see more fairness from the Chair.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Yes, of course. In fact, prior to the previous speaker there was an occasion for the Liberal member to speak. We will come to that slot again. However, in the first instance, a member did not rise at that time. That was several minutes ago. Nonetheless, we will ensure that the speaking slots are properly divided and will now recognize the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my full support for Motion M-270, moved by my colleague from LaSalle—Émard, who has worked tirelessly on the infrastructure file since she was elected. She has a keen sense of responsibility and she wants to ensure the safety of the public, particularly her constituents.

As was explained, Motion M-270 aims to develop a stable infrastructure funding plan with municipal, provincial, territorial, Inuit and first nations partners. In fact, the infrastructure motion contains six points, which I will go through one by one with my comments.

The first point calls on the government to recognize how important infrastructure is to Canadian communities. In the past, and not too long ago, the government received a number of demands for a new Champlain Bridge. Infrastructure is very important and is a matter of public safety.

Recently, in August 2011, a poll by Leger Marketing said that, soon after the collapse of a section of the Ville-Marie tunnel in

Private Members' Business

August 2011, nearly nine out of ten Montrealers responded that they were worried about using Montreal's roads. In the same poll, the firm found that one out of five drivers avoided certain roads because they did not have confidence in the road infrastructure.

We are talking about the importance of infrastructure because it is a matter of public safety. When I take my car or the bus and go somewhere, I expect the infrastructure to be safe. That is what we are talking about right now. We are calling on the government to take action to protect public safety.

The second point calls for immediate action to address the safety risks posed by aging infrastructure. In Montreal we know there is a lot of work that needs to be done in this regard. The Turcot interchange, which is causing unbelievable traffic problems in Montreal, is undergoing a complete reconstruction. In my riding the Saint-Pierre interchange, a major infrastructure element, is also in need of repair. However, the work cannot be done right now because we are waiting to see how much money we will receive from the government. My riding is in chaos. There is also Lachine, which is 12 km from downtown Montreal. It can sometimes take up to two hours in traffic to get there because the infrastructure is unsafe. There are really a lot of unexpected repairs, which are causing major problems for people.

Infrastructure is an incredible economic problem. We know that infrastructure brings in money and that it generates economic spinoffs for Montreal and all large cities but, right now—since we are looking at this from an economic point of view—we are losing money. Things are going rather badly.

I would like to come back to the fact that people's quality of life is at issue.

The third point calls for a long-term funding plan with partners at all levels of government.

The fourth point says that the government must co-operate with stakeholders to develop sustainable infrastructure standards. That is what we are talking about. We need sustainable infrastructure, we need public transit and we need infrastructure that will stand the test of time. I do not get the impression that the government is working on this right now.

On October 5, our Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities announced a new Champlain Bridge, but we still do not know what it will be like. It is not really clear. We do not know where the government is going with this. We do not know whether there will be light rail or whether there will be public transit. We do not know what will happen. Canada does not have a sustainable, long-term strategy. Contracts are being awarded piecemeal. We have no idea what is happening. My constituents often ask me what the Champlain Bridge will be like. Will there be a train? Will there be buses? What type of infrastructure will it be? The government is not transparent.

Private Members' Business

The motion also calls on the government to increase the existing gas tax transfer to the municipalities by one cent per litre. We are proposing this increase in the excise tax on gasoline that already goes to the municipalities in order to help them with infrastructure needs. The Conservative government decided to reduce the federal tax from 7% to 5%. This definitely affected municipal revenues for infrastructure.

• (1835)

Furthermore, although the population is increasing every year, the government has done nothing to ensure that municipalities receive more money. If the population is increasing and more and more are people using our roads, of course the roads are going to wear out faster. But the government is not providing the funds needed to fix the problem.

The sixth point calls on the government to replace the Champlain Bridge. This motion was listed on the order paper before the October 5 announcement regarding the Champlain Bridge. However, we still do not know when the project will be completed or what will happen to the existing bridge. Will it be replaced? Will they continue to repair it? It is hard to get at it. There is always traffic in Montreal and no one knows how to fix the situation. We also do not know what is planned for public transit on the bridge. It seems to me that the government is not taking this aspect very seriously at the moment.

There are many important projects waiting for funding in my riding. I spoke about the Saint-Pierre interchange. It will be next after the Turcot interchange and it will take time, but we do not know what will happen. There is the Champlain Bridge. There is also the Honoré-Mercier Bridge in my riding, a structure that is 50% federally owned. What is happening with that? One lane on the bridge is always closed, which creates problems. The Dorval traffic circle, which has been and will be under reconstruction for a very long time, is also in my riding. There are problems and it is chaos.

The list is very long. I could mention many more projects that are affecting my constituents. There are no plans at present. There is something planned for 2014, but we do not know what it is. The government is not transparent. That is the problem. Building Canada is not being transparent about the Champlain Bridge and the infrastructure to replace it. We need this infrastructure now, immediately. I do not want to have to tell my constituents that there is nothing I can do right now because the government is not telling me what tools I will have.

The motion by my colleague from LaSalle—Émard focuses particularly on green, sustainable development of future infrastructure. It serves no purpose to build all kinds of infrastructure projects and subsequently lose them. I will provide a glaring example of a project undertaken without any thought to the future: Mirabel Airport. At this airport, wonderful infrastructure was built so that it could be reached by train from downtown. It was very poorly thought out. This airport is no longer used for international travel, nor is the train station, which cost millions of dollars.

This motion calls for a long-term, tangible plan to help us choose high quality projects. At present, I do not believe that I have much to say about what the government is offering

I will quote some very interesting facts. Canada's infrastructure is more than 50% owned by municipalities. We must help the municipalities get out of this mess. They must have enough money to spend on infrastructure renewal, which is important to their taxpayers.

In 2007, the federal government launched its seven-year program for supporting infrastructure in Canada. Under the 2007-2014 building Canada plan, which is ending in two years, the federal government earmarked \$20 billion for basic funding, and \$13.2 billion for various funds for program expenditures by various federal agencies, including the PPP Canada crown corporation.

All that money was invested and I am told that some infrastructure in my riding and elsewhere is still outdated. This just proves the need to inject more money and to establish a plan that brings together the federal, provincial and municipal levels so that they can work together on resolving all these infrastructure problems once and for all.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my support for the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, who has done excellent work on this file.

• (1840)

I encourage all my colleagues to vote in favour of Motion M-270 so that we can finally work with every level of government on resolving this infrastructure problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to the motion put forward by the member for LaSalle—Émard.

Part (f) of the motion states that “the government should”:

acknowledge its exclusive financial responsibility for, and immediately announce its intention to replace, the Champlain Bridge.

I am happy to report that the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has already announced that our Conservative government is proceeding with the construction of a new bridge across the St. Lawrence River in Montreal to replace the existing Champlain Bridge.

The Champlain Bridge is the busiest bridge in Canada. Each year, approximately 11 million transit commuters and 60 million vehicles cross the bridge. It is a part of a trade corridor that is vital for both the regional and Canadian economy and especially for Canada-U.S. trade.

The economy continues to be the number one priority for our Conservative government, as it is for Canadians. Each year about \$20 billion in international goods cross the Champlain Bridge. The bridge is an important trade corridor that meets the objectives of Canada's gateway strategies.

However, any infrastructure deteriorates over time. This is why our government has decided to construct a new bridge. This new bridge will ensure the continued effectiveness of this important trade corridor. It is a key component of our new continental gateway strategy.

Private Members' Business

We did not make this decision lightly. We took time to fully examine the analysis of the current condition of the bridge and its potential for renovation, as well as to review the results of the feasibility study on options for replacing the current bridge. The analysis revealed that, because of its design, the current Champlain Bridge cannot be renovated.

The feasibility study also looked at different scenarios for the construction of a new bridge or tunnel. As a result of this study, we were able to rule out building a tunnel because the construction and operation of this kind of infrastructure would be much more costly and impose operating restrictions with respect to the transport of hazardous materials and to any changes required in the future.

Obviously the process for a new bridge will take a number of years. The Minister of Transport has already begun important discussions with stakeholders in Montreal. One of the key stakeholders in this project is obviously the Government of Quebec. Given the strategic importance of the corridor that will be served by the new bridge, we need to know how Quebec plans to integrate the bridge into its roads and infrastructure strategy. Likewise, we need to discuss the inclusion of transit into the new bridge design.

As members may know, the Champlain Bridge is an essential part of the transit system in Montreal. Approximately 30,000 transit riders use the dedicated lane of the Champlain Bridge every weekday, the same amount as those using the metro line between the Island of Montreal and Longueuil. Therefore, options must be discussed for including a modern transit system on the new bridge to link downtown Montreal with the south shore. Our discussions on the subject with the Government of Quebec, which is responsible for transit, are consequentially crucial for the future of transit in the region.

We also have a lot of work to do in order to determine governance and funding models for the new bridge. We are committed to completing this project while minimizing the financial impact. This means that we are seriously considering developing this project as a public-private partnership and financing it through tolls.

Our government will continue its work and preliminary studies over the coming years. Obviously, it will fully consider the views of stakeholders and ensure that all decisions are made in a fiscally responsible manner.

With respect to tolls, I would like to draw members' attention to a survey conducted by Leger Marketing that was released on October 17. This survey indicates that 60% of Quebecers, including those living in the Montreal area, support tolls on the new bridge. Sixty per cent also support the project's development through a public-private partnership. This is excellent news and proof that Quebecers support our position on the renewal of this important corridor's infrastructure.

Until construction of the new bridge is completed, our government will continue to ensure that the Champlain Bridge remains safe, as it has always done.

Since 2009, our government has announced significant investments totalling \$380 million to keep this important bridge safe for all who use it. This includes a major reinforcement program extending

over 10 years. We will continue to perform the work needed to preserve the structural integrity of the bridge.

● (1845)

On October 5, with the new bridge announcement, we started a project that is quite exciting for all of us and that will change the transportation network in the Montreal area for the next century. We already have the support of a number of stakeholders and we will continue our discussions with them.

I can assure members that we take the responsibilities that come with this project very seriously and that we will continue to make the right decisions for the people in the Montreal area and for all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to share some thoughts in terms of infrastructure projects and the way in which projects come into being.

However, I must say at the very onset of the discussion that as much as it is encouraging to see the resolution, after I listened to the Conservative member, I have a bias, because I recall the commercials in, I believe, 1993. Those commercials implied that the Liberal Party of Canada should not be investing in infrastructure because it was a waste of money. I remember the wheelbarrow image that the Conservatives used to try to imply that we were just throwing money into the ditch. When the Liberal Party came up with an aggressive approach to addressing infrastructure, it was very successful in that election.

Then I recall that just a few years ago, in a minority situation, the government was going full steam ahead and again not recognizing the value of infrastructure in the state of the economy. The Liberal Party, in co-operation with other parties, forced the government to address infrastructure, which has many different benefits, and ultimately we were able to see an extensive plan brought forward because of the pressure from the opposition parties, led at the time by the Liberal Party.

I believe we have been very successful, whether in government or in opposition, in presenting infrastructure. In opposition we have done so in such a way as to obligate the Conservative government to take action, and while we were in government, we put extensive infrastructure projects into place.

The member for Elmwood—Transcona made reference to the Champlain Bridge. That is a good example of the latter, in that shortly after the byelection last year, one of the top questions being asked of the government, time and time again, was with regard to the Champlain Bridge. This issue was raised by the Liberal Party on numerous occasions. The Bloc, at the time, also raised it. I suspect that the New Democrats would have raised it, too, back then.

However, the government seemed cold to the idea and virtually had to be brought into it kicking and screaming. That happened because many of my colleagues had raised the issue and demanded that the government address it. We saw how important it was to the community of Montreal and beyond as an economic mechanism that needed to be addressed. It was important, not only to the province of Quebec but indirectly to all Canadians, to address the Champlain Bridge issue and do what was necessary to get a new bridge into place.

Private Members' Business

We are glad to see that the government has come around to a Liberal way of thinking in approaching this project. We want to provide more words of encouragement. The government needs to recognize the true value of infrastructure.

Municipalities from coast to coast need infrastructure dollars. Unlike Ottawa or provincial governments, municipalities have very limited ways to generate the moneys necessary for the type of infrastructure development that is often required. Winnipeg is no exception. We would find, I suspect, that the vast majority of municipalities, big and small, are in the same situation as Winnipeg, where many streets need repair and where it has been estimated that billions of dollars would be needed to bring infrastructure up to par.

● (1850)

Whether they are city councillors or local reeves, they are very challenged to come up with the money that is necessary to get rid of the potholes that we see on streets and deal with the condition of our sidewalks. Those are projects that I would argue are absolutely essential in terms of a city being able to function properly. Every year there is a huge debate that occurs, not only in Winnipeg but in the municipalities throughout our country. We need to recognize that sort of infrastructure and how important it is that the federal government recognize that it does have a role to play in that.

There are other infrastructure projects. Some of the infrastructure in Winnipeg would not have been there if it were not for infrastructure programs, such as the one that comes to my mind with respect to Dr. Rey Pagtakhan, the former member for Winnipeg North, a wonderful individual who put a lot of emphasis on getting infrastructure dollars into projects such as the Wellness Institute at the Seven Oaks Hospital in Winnipeg's north end. By using a pot of money that has been designated for infrastructure development, we were able to see some great initiatives come out of it.

I could focus attention strictly on Winnipeg North and some of the initiatives that we were able to get done through infrastructure dollars where the federal government has played a role. It goes beyond just streets and wellness institutes, which, in essence, is a super large indoor track facility that has other types of activities that complement healthy living and participation and is there to support our Seven Oaks Hospital.

An individual, for whom I have an immense amount of respect and who I believe is one of the more prominent citizens of the province of Manitoba, is Lloyd Axworthy, the former minister of foreign affairs. He was able to accomplish so much when he was in government and in opposition. Now he happens to be the president of the University of Winnipeg. He has done so well in terms of talking about infrastructure and its importance. He led by example. As an individual, he recognized that in order to be able to accomplish many infrastructure projects that the communities have, big or small, one needs to get all the stakeholders working together. If people are successful at doing that, they will be able to accomplish so much more.

During Mr. Axworthy's term, we could talk about some of our local streets or we could go to some of the bigger pictures, such as the Forks development, what it used to be to what it is today, and how the infrastructure there has improved so dramatically. Even as a

province of 1.2 million, we have millions of people who go through our Forks.

There is a burning need for us to address infrastructure throughout our country. When I see resolutions of this nature, it is important that we look at the ledger and ensure there are some financial responsibilities. However, I really want to put in bold and highlight just how critically important infrastructure is to each community we represent and I want to emphasize how important it is that the federal government demonstrates leadership on this critical issue. It is important that we work with, not only the different levels of government but also our first nation communities and other stakeholders out there. If we invested in infrastructure in the way in which we could or should we could be doing so much better.

● (1855)

If we invested in infrastructure in the way we could or should, we could be doing so much better. I appreciate the opportunity, as usual, to add a few words.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the member for Scarborough Southwest, I will note that we will be close to the ten minutes, about nine or so, that we need to leave for the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard for her right of reply.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I start my speech, I want to touch on the earlier comments by the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona in regard to the polling done on whether Quebeckers would support a toll on the new bridge. Frankly, that kind of poll is premature, because we still do not yet know the details of whether that toll would be there just to pay off the infrastructure costs or whether it would end up padding the coffers of private enterprise for years to come, as with the reprehensible sale of the 407 highway in Ontario.

For anyone who thinks I am being an alarmist in noting that possibility, I would remind the House that the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Treasury Board were all ministers and members of the government that did that in Ontario.

I rise today to voice my support for the motion put forward by my colleague from LaSalle—Émard. This motion outlines important clauses with regard to the federal funding for infrastructure. The implementation of these clauses in this motion are integral to moving Canada forward by building a sustainable economy and integral to the future safety of Canadians.

Public infrastructure supports productivity and innovation, facilitates trade activities and promotes both local and regional development. As an example, between Windsor and Detroit, where 40% of our trade with the United States goes through, we need a new bridge crossing to protect jobs here and to ensure our continued prosperity.

Critical infrastructure systems consist not only of physical facilities such as buildings, streets and bridges, but also services such as water supply, sewage disposal, energy, transportation and communication systems.

Infrastructure also encompasses food transfer, agriculture, chemical and defence industries, and banking and finance, as well as postal and shipping services. In a digital world, infrastructure also includes high-capacity fibre optic backbones, satellites, wireless towers and all the other tools Canadians and Canadian businesses will need to succeed in the 21st century.

In three years, 40% of the federal infrastructure funding from a \$20 billion plan for 2007-2014 will come to an end. We cannot afford not to put a concrete and long-lasting sustainable plan in its place. According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, it will cost \$123 billion just to maintain Canada's infrastructure and stop its deterioration, and an additional \$115 billion to build new infrastructure for the future.

We need to act now to prepare for this, and we need to expand on past investments in order to adapt to the changing needs and demands of the 21st century.

The government needs to look at infrastructure funding as a long-term investment, rather than view it only as spending that perhaps needs to be cut. It is like biting one's nose to spite one's face.

What we invest now will be paid back through increased economic output, through taxes paid by workers who build the infrastructure, through businesses that will take advantage of that infrastructure and through increased productivity and efficiency.

It will also save us billions down the road when bridges do not fall down, sewage plants do not fail and disaster response is not needed because we failed to respond and failed our infrastructure and our citizens.

Some will balk at the cost, but the reality is that doing nothing carries a much greater cost and burden.

Investing in our future does cost money. In my riding, a large retrofit project was undertaken a few years ago on a municipal water tower. Just the scaffolding alone for the project cost over \$1 million; these are not small-scale things. However, now the project is complete, and tens of thousands of residents have a secure water supply for many years to come. I wish the same could be said for our first nations communities.

Investing in our future will create jobs for out-of-work Canadians. It will help to offset the jobs currently being shed by our economy, as well as mitigate many of the losses that we would face should we do nothing. Improved infrastructure will make the transfer of goods and services flow more efficiently, both within our borders and without.

●(1900)

We, on this side of the House, know that infrastructure investment is one of the best ways to stimulate the economy and create wealth during shaky economic times. Why? Because it will help our economy run even better when the pace picks up, and it mitigates the impact on many Canadians who have lost jobs. As an example, better health infrastructure helps to keep people healthy, and keeps workers producing, thereby lowering company costs.

Infrastructure improvements provide an excellent opportunity to expand public transit. This improves our environment and tackles business-killing gridlock, which costs our economy billions of

dollars a year in lost productivity. We can do all of this as part of a sustainable development strategy. On top of all this, infrastructure improvements create good, well-paying jobs for Canadian families. Investing in infrastructure is absolutely a no-brainer.

Private Members' Business

Our rail corridors could stand some improvement. Currently, all the level rail crossings and lack of separations in the municipalities slow freight and passenger trains down. If we were to invest in improving just the existing rail corridors we could massively improve the time it takes to get from point *a* to point *b*. That would have a great impact on the delivery of goods and services, as well as the transportation of people back and forth for work or for pleasure.

Our cities are growing and expanding rapidly. Our municipal governments rely on funding from the federal level. They need a plan from us that extends beyond 2014. We cannot let our cities shoulder the demands for infrastructure, roads, repairs and maintenance on their own.

It is estimated that our population is growing by approximately 1% per year. Funding needs to grow in proportion to population growth in order to accommodate future infrastructure needs. The government's recent announcements do not go far enough to ensure that municipalities will be able to pay for infrastructure to handle that growing population. Toronto alone, as of the 2006 census, is supporting almost 4,000 people per square kilometre. This comes with great needs, including funding.

I will leave it there as I got the cue, Mr. Speaker.

●(1905)

[*Translation*]

Ms. H el ene LeBlanc (LaSalle— mard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank my colleagues in the House of Commons, from all parties, who have spoken to this motion. I see that there is a sort of consensus on how important infrastructure is to vibrant, prosperous communities. I would also like to thank the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for expressing its full support for my infrastructure motion.

The government's recent announcements are nowhere near enough to address the problems facing our municipalities. In particular, they do not give us any assurance that our municipalities will have the means to build and repair infrastructure to serve an ever-growing population.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities said that not only do we have an infrastructure deficit of \$123 billion, but municipalities will also need \$115 billion to build bridges, roads, community centres and aqueducts to help the communities we leave our children survive and prosper.

[English]

Faced with this gaping deficit of financing for our crumbling infrastructure, the \$2 billion gas tax fund is like a compensation prize for municipalities. That is why my motion asks the government to increase the gas tax transfer to municipalities by one penny a litre. This would generate over \$400 million in extra revenue for our cities at no extra cost to the taxpayers. However, this is only a first step on the long road to compensate for decades of under-investment in our infrastructure. It is a road that will challenge us every step along the way.

[Translation]

The population of Canada could increase by between 2.5 million and 5 million people over the next 10 years. The use of our infrastructure will only increase proportionately. Municipalities will have to pick up most of the tab. The Government of Canada needs to be an active and effective partner, and it needs to see infrastructure as an investment when others see it only as a public charge. That is leadership.

That is why my motion also calls on the government to index the gas tax fund to economic and population growth. If the population of Canada experiences average growth over the next 10 years, the additional transfers from the gas tax fund will reach \$224 million a year.

• (1910)

[English]

Allow me to paraphrase the 2007 study by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, stressing the importance of infrastructure as an investment and not a public charge. This means that each dollar invested in infrastructure delivers nearly 20% of benefits for the economy and the benefits are even greater, at 40%, for every dollar invested in transportation infrastructure. These are sound investments that benefit all Canadians.

[Translation]

I would also like to mention that I am calling on the government to ensure that there is a strategic plan for infrastructure in order to recognize these investments and work with partners in every community in Canada. Infrastructure projects are not just important in large Canadian cities, but in every community in Canada.

The Conservatives have indicated that they will vote against my motion. Today, I challenge them to vote with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in favour of sustainable investments in infrastructure and to vote in favour of jobs and prosperity for Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 7:13 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

The question is on the motion. Is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 1, 2012, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1915)

[English]

CANADIAN AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, concerning the property at 65 Carl Hall Road. This building was designated a federal heritage building in 1992. It is the former home of de Havilland, where many aircraft were built for service during World War II. It is a heritage building because of the long and storied connection to our aerospace industry, including our first satellite, Alouette, and the Canadarm. Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office report states that it represents the early development of the aircraft industry in Canada, this country's contribution to the allied war effort and the impact of war on the Canadian economy. The building is especially rare in that it spans such a long period in Canada's aviation history, from pioneering days in the late 1920s, through World War II to the 1950s and 1960s as de Havilland's guided missile division and into the 1990s when it was still constructing fuselages for aircraft ordered by the U.S. army.

Adjournment Proceedings

Besides the historical value of the building, it houses an impressive collection of artifacts from Canada's long history of air and space industrial developments. The collection is called the Canadian Air and Space Museum. It houses the only full-scale replica of the Avro Arrow, which was killed by the Diefenbaker Conservative government in 1959. It houses a full-scale replica of the Alouette satellite. It houses the Lancaster bomber, which, in addition to a storied history in World War II, spent many years on a pedestal at the Canadian National Exhibition. It was being lovingly restored by volunteers, one of whom actually piloted Lancasters in the war. The museum houses many hundreds of donated artifacts from veterans from all over Canada.

Not only has the federal government declared this property a heritage site, but it is also listed by the city of Toronto as a heritage property. The museum has been a significant part of Downsview Park and forms part of the public attraction to the park. Many thousands of visitors, including tens of thousands of schoolchildren from all over Ontario, come to learn about our aviation and space history in the building where much of that history began.

On September 20, the museum, along with other tenants of 65 Carl Hall Road, were suddenly, without warning, given eviction notices. Downsview's public comments about the closure of the museum, parroted by the government, were full of inaccuracies. There were no subsidies. The museum was not 17 months in arrears. The park never consulted with the museum before serving the eviction notice. The museum did not opt to switch from profit-sharing to market rent, it was forced to do so by the park. The museum is not a private collection, but a volunteer charitable organization. The building is not in an irreparable state and no study has been undertaken to determine if the cost of any repairs needed will keep the building as a heritage site.

We are told that Parc Downsview Park, the federal crown corporation which maintains the property, agreed to terms with the developer over a year ago. Nothing was said to give any warning to the museum any time before the locks were changed. The park has never offered an alternative to house the collection. The museum was never given the opportunity to raise the funds to make the necessary repairs to 65 Carl Hall Road.

The response to my question of October 24 was that the museum was private, and it falsely accused the museum of not having paid its taxes. There was no response to the question of the destruction of a heritage building, nor to what process was used to remove the heritage designation of the building. The building was declared a heritage property many years ago. Nothing of its nature or status has changed in the interim.

As a result of investigations concerning the leasing of the land, the order-in-council from the government clearly states that 65 Carl Hall Road was being leased to Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, owners of the Maple Leafs and the Raptors. It is reported to us that the chief operating officer of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment and the vice-president for Parc Downsview Park are in fact brothers. We would therefore ask what steps were taken to ensure that their business dealings were not a conflict of interest, nor had the appearance of a conflict of interest.

We therefore ask the government to respond to the request from the city of Toronto to keep this building as a heritage building and to answer our questions as to whether the government will preserve this building as a heritage building and maintain the property for the museum.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, heritage is important to Canadians and it is important to the government. That is why in this current fiscal year we will invest over \$370 million on behalf of Canadians in support of museums in this country.

We understand that the current situation of the Canadian Air and Space Museum is of concern to Canadians. However, it is important to remember the facts in this case.

The Canadian Air and Space Museum is a non-federal non-profit organization. This organization is a private entity and should not be confused with our national museum, the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum based right here in Ottawa.

Over the years, the organization that owns and operates the Canadian Air and Space Museum has received federal funding for projects and has benefited from federal tax incentives to acquire nationally significant cultural property. However, the Government of Canada does not provide ongoing operating support for non-federal privately owned museums.

This privately owned and operated museum is a tenant in a building in Downsview Park. The park is owned by a crown corporation that depends on its revenues to operate. The crown corporation took a business decision to terminate this privately owned and operated museum's lease. This decision is the sole responsibility of that corporation.

I have been informed that the corporation is willing to provide storage space for the organization's collection elsewhere in the park and at no cost for a reasonable period of time. This will give the organization time to try to resolve its financial situation and find other premises or a new home for the artifacts in its collection.

The Department of Canadian Heritage works with Canada's national museums under the same portfolio. Discussions have been initiated by some of our national museums and the privately owned and operated Canadian Air and Space Museum to see if assistance can be provided. The government is committed to preserving Canada's important aviation history.

The government has recently invested in expanding facilities for the national Canadian Aviation and Space Museum. The national museum's collection comprises over 130 aircraft. It is recognized as the most extensive aviation collection in Canada and one which ranks among the finest in the world.

Finally, I would like to clarify that the Avro Arrow in Toronto is a replica of the actual aircraft. Our national Canadian Aviation and Space Museum has on display the nose section of an actual Avro CF-105 Arrow aircraft.

I invite all to visit the museum to see the spectacular artifacts that it has and the spectacular work that we have been doing in our national museums across the national capital region.

Adjournment Proceedings

● (1920)

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, we still have no answer to our question about the heritage property itself and how this building was undeclared as a federal heritage property and will now be destroyed by Downsview Park.

I will read a letter from one of the volunteers to the right hon. Stephen Harper:

Dear Sir,

This is a plea for help, a plea made on behalf of many thousands of young Canadians who are no longer in a position to plea for themselves. They died over Nazi Germany flying for Bomber Command during World War II, determined to deny the members of the so-called master race from achieving their stated ambition — to rule the world. Flying for that same Command I watched many of these young Canadian men — they were little more than boys — die right alongside me.

Many of the artifacts remembering their bravery and premature deaths are housed in the Canadian Air and Space Museum in Downsview Park. Their home must be one of, if not the, most famous historical structure[s] in Canada. And yet, unbelievably, this noble building has no heritage protection. As a result the present commercial body overseeing its fate has plans to bulldoze this real estate out of existence and replace it with ice rinks; plans that, unannounced to the volunteers at the museum, have been in place for two years. By carrying out this underhanded planning the powers that be in the park are making a mockery of the sacrifices of these young Canadians. By carrying these plans through they are not just humiliating the volunteers at the museum in Toronto, they are making a fool of Canada itself.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. I am sorry, but the hon. member's time has expired.

Just a general reminder that when referring to other hon. members in the House, members should use either their title or riding name. The same falls true when the name appears in a quote or in other documents.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, Downsview Park is an independent arm's-length crown corporation. It has made a decision that is in the best interest of that corporation.

We recognize there are a number of significant artifacts that are in the collection of this private museum. We hope that its fundraising efforts will be profitable and that it will work with us to find homes for some of the most important pieces in its collection as we move forward.

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

(The House adjourned at 7:25 p.m.)

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