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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

BOWLING

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this coming weekend, I have the great honour of coaching four exceptionally talented young girls from British Columbia at the national youth bowling five-pin championships.

Portia Eldaun, Macenzi Lukkar, Kally Campbell and Janaya White, all from Sparwood, will represent British Columbia in the bantam girls division.

[*Translation*]

These four young girls between the ages of 8 and 10 have worked hard to get to where they are and to be able to participate in a national competition.

[*English*]

The national championships are being hosted by the great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I encourage anyone who will be out in the St. John's area on May 5, 6 and 7 to come out to the local five-pin bowling centres and watch the best youth bowlers in Canada compete for national titles.

I wish all the competitors and coaches good luck.

[*Translation*]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one year after the majority Conservative government came to power, the Quebec nation's worst fears are coming true.

This government is bulldozing its way through its legislative agenda with military efficiency. Its model of justice and democratic reform has led to a litigious relationship with Quebec.

The Conservative government is pursuing an all-Canadian economic policy that supports the industries it likes, while turning its back on Aveos, Electrolux, Mabe, RockTenn and others. It is ripping up the Kyoto agreement and once again preparing to centralize the regulation of financial markets in Toronto.

The other federalist parties are also complicit in Canada's management. Blithely appointing a Supreme Court judge and an Auditor General who are not bilingual, celebrating the failure to award contracts to the Davie shipyard, and increasing the number of bills that intrude into Quebec's jurisdiction show once again that Quebec is being neglected.

The Bloc Québécois is going back to work, with heart and soul, to plan a Quebec that is the master of its own destiny and to share that vision.

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JEAN-GUY MOREAU

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the man of a thousand voices left us yesterday. Jean-Guy Moreau gave his last show one Friday in April 2012 at the Théâtre de la Ville, in Longueuil, not far from where I live.

The predecessor of today's great impersonators, Jean-Guy Moreau liked to think of himself as an impressionist, and he had an uncanny talent for assuming the personality of his subjects, whom he impersonated to a tee by capturing their very essence.

A great catalyst for the evolution of Quebec society, from the Quiet Revolution to present times, Jean-Guy Moreau accompanied us to the end. I would like to quote his friend, Robert Charlebois: "An entire chapter of Quebec's history has left us."

He was a true gem of Quebec culture. We will never forget his masterful parody of the great classic by his friend Robert Charlebois, when he took on the mannerisms and personality of René Lévesque and sang, "Chu rien qu'un gars ben ordinaire", "I'm just an ordinary guy".

Statements by Members

Our thoughts are with his children, Véronique, Antoine and Sophie. His daughter Sophie recently published a biography of her father entitled *Jean-Guy Moreau 50 ans, 1 000 visages*.

All that remains to be said is “Thank you, Jean-Guy Moreau. You were anything but ordinary.”

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one year ago Canadians elected a strong, stable, national majority government. That government offered Canadians a responsible fiscal plan, economic leadership and a track record of keeping our great country afloat during turbulent economic times.

Instead of raising taxes on everything with a job-destroying carbon tax or adding regulations, Canadians chose lower taxes to stimulate jobs and growth.

Thanks to the policies of our government, Canada has become one of the freest economies in the world, as rated by the Fraser Institute. As a result, we are one of the best countries in the world to open a business and create jobs.

We want to cut the tax burden, not raise taxes and cut opportunity. We want to lower the tax rates on all families, all the way up the income ladder, so each of us will have a greater incentive to work harder, climb higher and help Canada grow.

I am proud to sit as a government member and I look forward to implementing our low-tax, low-debt agenda to ensure Canada remains the envy of the world and a creator of wealth and opportunity for all Canadians.

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[Translation]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, the Liberal Party is becoming the most open party in the history of Canadian politics by bringing all Liberal supporters into the fold.

During our biennial convention in January, Liberal delegates voted in favour of making historic changes to the structure of the party by creating a new category of Liberal supporter, thereby giving all Canadians the chance to express their support for the Liberal Party and to choose its next leader.

The launch of this initiative marks the beginning of a new phase in the rebuilding of our party. In the coming days, Liberals across the country will be motivating and recruiting Liberal supporters.

Supporters will be part of a new generation of Liberals who will help modernize and develop our party, as we look towards the 2015 election, by promoting change and developing a progressive policy platform that reflects the wishes of Canadians.

We encourage all Canadians who value growth, hope and equal opportunity to join us in building the Liberal movement and a better Canada.

●(1410)

[English]

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has done more than any other federal government to ensure a vibrant auto sector in Canada, with historic R and D funding for lighter, fuel-efficient, safer vehicles; a major investment in Ford's Essex engine plant and a new third shift of high-paying jobs; major border funding for expanded trade and just-in-time delivery; a Canada-U.S. beyond-the-border pact to further harmonize regulations and secure long-term speedy access for car makers and suppliers; and low taxes that fuel reinvestment in technology and products to keep auto workers on the job.

Most important, when the global recession sideswiped our economy, our government stood by auto workers, their families and communities by helping Chrysler and GM restructure.

However, the NDP, with so many CAW bosses on its front bench, voted against every measure to support auto workers.

Our government is getting the job done for the auto sector.

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[Translation]

50TH QUEBEC GAMES

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to show my support for Drummondville's bid to host the 50th Quebec Games in 2015.

The city would be proud to host the Quebec Games, and an enthusiastic, dynamic bid committee has been created. I would point out that the 50th edition of the Quebec Games would be held during celebrations to mark the 200th anniversary of the founding of Drummondville.

In honour of this historic celebration, the bid committee has decided to bring the city's founding father, Frederick George Heriot, back to life by creating Fred the mascot. I am proudly wearing my Fred toggle here today to show my support for Drummondville's bid.

Through various activities to promote an initiation into sports, recreation, competition and high-level performance, the programming of the Quebec Games encourages young people to engage in sports and supports them as they strive for excellence.

I am committed to supporting initiatives that encourage sports as part of a healthy lifestyle.

[English]

TENORE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian musician Jill Siemens the founder of the famous Canadian Tenors, has done it again. She has created another group of three world-class tenors known as Tenore.

Most Canadians have not heard of Tenore yet, but, like the Canadian Tenors, their music will soon be enjoyed around the world.

I heard Tenore sing last Saturday night in Ottawa. Their rendition of *The Lord's Prayer* was the best I have ever heard, and it brought people to tears. It was absolutely incredible.

One of the Tenores is Shane Wiebe from *Canadian Idol*.

Wow, those men can sing!

Yesterday, Tenore thrilled those attending Canada's National Prayer Breakfast. They sing again tonight in Toronto and then head west to continue their Canadian tour in beautiful British Columbia.

I encourage everyone to check out and enjoy the inspiring music of Tenore. It sounds Italian. It is tenor plus an "e".

* * *

LEONARD BRAITHWAITE

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just over a month ago, Canada lost a great patriot. Mr. Leonard Braithwaite, Canada's first black parliamentarian, died at 88 years of age.

First elected to the Ontario legislature in 1963, Mr. Braithwaite pushed to end the segregation of black children in Ontario schools, which then education minister, Bill Davis, acted upon. Later he became the first black bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada and was appointed both to the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada.

Born to West Indian parents and raised in Toronto, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1943, serving with No. 6 Bomber Command in Yorkshire, England during World War II. After the war, he returned to Canada and graduated from the University of Toronto, Harvard Business School and Osgoode Hall Law School.

Mr. Braithwaite was a great Canadian who blazed a trail for future generations. He leaves behind a remarkable legacy for his home province and for Canada.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I pay tribute to Mary Simon, president of ITK.

Mary addressed key issues that affect Inuit, such as youth suicide, violence against women, obesity, diabetes, TB rates, housing conditions and the Inuits' struggle to maintain their traditions and language.

Mary held several leadership positions, including president of the Northern Quebec Inuit Association, president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Canada's ambassador for circumpolar affairs and chair

Statements by Members

of the Arctic Council. She headed the Makivik Corporation responsible for implementing the James Bay and northern Quebec agreement, and was policy co-director of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

She was one of the Inuit negotiators during the constitutional discussions that led to the recognition of aboriginal rights in the Constitution Act of 1982.

Mary Simon has been an environmental advocate for "The Right to be Cold" campaign that highlights the rapidly changing ecology of the Arctic. This campaign calls for the protection of the environment and the Inuit way of life.

I thank Mary Simon for the remarkable work she has done over the past 40 years. She has devoted her life to achieving social justice for Inuit.

May she enjoy a well-deserved break. She will be missed.

* * *

● (1415)

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Ted Oritz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a year ago today Canadians endorsed our government with a majority. We were given a strong mandate to secure Canadians' prosperity. Only the Conservative Party put forward a serious, workable plan, one now seen in economic action plan 2012. Canadians understood that and sent our government back to Ottawa in greater numbers to turn those promises into a new Canadian reality.

We remain focused on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for Canadian families. Economic action plan 2012 keeps taxes low, cuts direct program expenses and carries us toward a balanced budget. Canada's economic performance vindicates our approach. Our low-tax, low-debt plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity is working. Since the depths of the recession, nearly 700,000 jobs have been created. More Canadians are working now than ever before. Our Conservative government made a promise to Canadians to ensure their prosperity. We kept that promise and we will continue to do so.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, May 5, communities across Canada and throughout the world will celebrate the International Day of the Midwife. I rise in the House today to acknowledge the role midwives play as key partners in efforts to tackle maternal, newborn and infant mortality, worldwide and here at home.

Canada and the world need midwives now more than ever. They provide close-to-home primary care during pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period. Midwives provide a safe, effective and low-cost solution to the challenges still faced by women in rural and remote communities across Canada, particularly aboriginal communities

Statements by Members

In the lead-up to the International Day of the Midwife, I join women and their families in recognizing the contributions of midwives to building healthy communities and celebrate the potential to build on this success for all women across Canada.

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CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one year ago today Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to focus on what matters most to them: jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity. An important part of this focus is our plan for responsible resource development, which has benefits right across this country.

For example, in my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West, one of the largest private sector employers is Cameco, which refines uranium mined in Saskatchewan. Our plan will ensure a streamlined and timely regulatory process for major resource projects, including projects at the Cameco facility in Port Hope. Responsible resource development will bring billions of dollars in new investment to Canada and create enormous potential for job growth in all regions of this country. Our plan for responsible resource development will ensure major resource projects continue to create good, skilled, well-paying jobs for Canadians while at the same time protecting the environment.

That is why my constituents and Canadians from all regions are behind our plan.

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LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the Liberal Party became the most open party in Canadian political history with the launch of the new Liberal supporter category.

At our January biennial convention, Liberal delegates voted to make historic changes to the party's structure by creating a new Liberal supporter category that gives every single Canadian the chance to register support for the Liberal Party and choose our next leader. With this launch, the next phase of our rebuilding begins. In the coming days, Liberals across the country will be engaging and recruiting Liberal supporters.

Liberal supporters will be part of a new generation of Liberals who will help our party modernize and grow, driving change and helping us to craft a progressive policy platform that will speak to Canadians as we move toward the next election. We encourage all Canadians who share our belief in hope and equality of opportunity to join with us and the Liberal movement and build a better Canada. Canadians may go to www.liberal.ca today and sign up now to choose the next prime minister of Canada.

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[*Translation*]

BURMA

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Aung San Suu Kyi fought tirelessly for over two decades in the name of freedom, peace, democracy and human rights for the people of Burma.

Even now, as a member of Parliament, she is working to make Burma a better country. In these times of change, the people, their elected representatives and their government must support democratic co-operation.

I know that our government and all Canadians are ready to support the Burmese people, who are working to build a peaceful, democratic society.

* * *

● (1420)

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago today, Canadians changed the face of Canadian politics forever. Of course there was the NDP's unprecedented rise to official opposition status, but there was also a change in mentality that was even more impressive.

Millions of Canadians decided to turn their backs on cynicism and the old way of doing politics. They did what they needed to do to make their voices heard. They said yes to hope and optimism.

A year ago today, millions of new voices flooded into the political landscape, voices that will resonate for decades to come, voices that are younger and more representative of the diversity of our regions, our cities, our provinces and our country.

I wish everyone a happy anniversary. Just three years to go before we replace this tired government.

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[*English*]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, S&P has now downgraded government debt for nine euro currency countries. Greek and Portuguese debt is now rated at junk status. Even the EU bailout fund has been downgraded. Soon the bailout fund will need a bailout, yet amazingly, the NDP leader said on Monday that the EU countries are not borrowing and spending enough.

It shows that here at home the NDP would bury us in taxes, smother us in debt and, in the spirit of egalitarianism, evenly redistribute misery to all.

The Conservatives choose the Canada way, a low-tax, low-debt, pro-trade plan for jobs and growth.

The NDP leader should listen to Tommy Douglas, who said, "The trouble with socialists is that they let their bleeding hearts go to their bloody heads."

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after one year in power, the Conservatives' record shows that their friends and powerful people take priority over everyone else, even though they campaigned on a promise of accountability.

Their latest exploit? Thousands of people follow the rules and wait their turn to be allowed into Canada, yet the Conservative government gave preferential treatment to Conrad Black, a British criminal rotting in an American jail. This is an important matter that the Prime Minister must take seriously.

Why do the friends of those in power not have to follow the same rules as everyone else?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has made it clear that this decision was made by departmental officials in accordance with the law.

[English]

The leader of the NDP yesterday and again today is suggesting that public servants are taking decisions in these matters that are biased, prejudiced and even racist. He is making these intemperate allegations without any evidence whatsoever. It is entirely inappropriate.

Public servants administer the law, and we respect the law.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Just so, Mr. Speaker. The very foundation of our society is the rule of law, that all of us are equal under the law. Conrad Black is a British citizen. He is still in a U.S. jail. He was convicted of serious crimes in the United States. Why is he being given special treatment?

The fact of the matter is that no one else has ever been in the situation of being still in jail, having his dossier marched around all the offices of the minister, and getting his approval before even getting out of the slammer. The only exceptional circumstance in this case is he is a friend of the Conservatives.

Why is the Prime Minister affording special treatment to his insider friends? Why is he not tough on crime when it comes to his Conservative cronies?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again aspersions are being cast on public servants without any evidence. The leader of the NDP owes them an apology. There has been no involvement of anyone on the political side of government in this. It would be just as easy for us if Mr. Black were not allowed to come to Canada, but that is not the judgment of those who administer the law.

If the leader of the NDP is suggesting the law should be changed, I would be delighted to see what those changes would be. We on the government side have to administer, and have to let our public servants administer, the law as it is and not apply political criteria to admissibility or non-admissibility.

● (1425)

*[Translation]***MINISTERIAL EXPENDITURES**

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this matter is symptomatic of a government that is burnt out and tired. Their golden rule is friends first. A \$16 glass of orange juice, an army helicopter used as a personal taxi to go fishing, partisan appointments—it is one scandal after another, just like in the good old Mulroney days. The Conservatives have been caught with both hands in the cookie jar.

Most recently, they have wasted \$600,000 on overtime for their limousines. At a time when they are cutting services, when they are telling everyone else to tighten their belts, they cannot even manage their own limousines.

When will the government members finally realize that the party is over?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that our government was re-elected because the Canadian economy is the envy of the world. That was true last year and it is true now more than ever. There is no doubt that our economy is performing so well thanks to the hard work of our ministers, who are protecting the interests of hard-working, law-abiding Canadian families. Our government will continue to do so.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the life of Conservative cabinet ministers. They get to live like royalty and they only ever have to apologize once they have been caught.

What is with this predilection for limousines? The government is cutting border services and food inspection, it is shortchanging seniors, but cabinet ministers are not cutting back on limousines. They spent over \$600,000 in standby in just one year.

How do the Conservatives have the nerve to tell Canadians that the cupboard is bare while ministers on the front benches are stuffing themselves on perks and entitlements?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that we are always looking for reasonable ways to make sure that government lives within its means and that we are reasonable to taxpayers. The hon. member and his party should know that we are living by the rules. We have collective agreements with workers and we apply those collective agreements, including overtime.

In this case our ministers are working long hours for the economy, long hours for jobs, long hours for the people of Canada. Sometimes that means a bit of overtime by the drivers.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians work long hours, but they do not expect to get personal chauffeurs. However, they do expect that cabinet ministers will treat their taxpayer dollars with respect. The Muskoka minister himself had a driver on standby for 360 days. How is that reasonable?

Oral Questions

When is the government going to reign in this outrageous sense of entitlement, because, for crying out loud, even Batman drives his own car?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is mixing apples with oranges. My driver was not paid for 360 days of overtime. I can assure the House of that.

What we are doing is looking at the picture of drivers and their cars and ensuring that we can have a reasonable approach to this. If the hon. member has a suggestion, which would apply to his leader as well, I might add, and I am sure we would have no disagreement on that, then we would be prepared to look at it.

However, the hon. member time and again drags us through the mud. The last time he threw allegations at me, you, Mr. Speaker, found no cause for that. I am still waiting for his apology for that.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Public Works have all stated, as well as the government House leader, that they accept not only the recommendations of the Auditor General with respect to the fighter jet program, but they also accept the conclusions, his findings.

Could the Prime Minister comment on this? How does he expect us to take this seriously when his deputy minister yesterday testified that he thought the Auditor General had “got it wrong”? How do those two things compare and compute?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they do not, which is why the deputy minister did not say any such thing. The deputy minister was very clear in his overall comments that, like the government, he accepts the conclusions of the report. The government is moving forward on that basis.

The leader of the Liberal party knows full well he is taking what the deputy minister said, on a very small matter, completely out of context.

• (1430)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us understand what the conclusions of the Auditor General were. In paragraph 2.76 he says that the replacement aircraft were not accounted for, upgrades were not accounted for, cost of weapons were not accounted for, the true cost of annual maintenance was not accounted for. In paragraphs 2.80 and 2.81 he says that the National Defence did not exercise due diligence, which National Defence objected to and which it would appear still objects to, with respect to the findings of the Auditor General.

You are now creating a new process. How can Canadians trust the integrity of the process when your own deputies and your own departments are not following—

The Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the hon. member for Toronto Centre to address his questions through the Chair.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General made some very clear findings with regard to this matter. He took submissions on this matter from the various departments involved. The Auditor General issued his report. The government and the departments in question have accepted the conclusions of that report. We have been very clear, in some detail, how we are moving forward on that.

We will ensure that the Canadian air force has the best equipment available and that our aviation industry continues to participate in the development of world-class aircraft.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Prime Minister can tell us quite simply whether the government accepts the Auditor General's findings.

Who in the government will take responsibility for the fact that the Canadian public and Parliament were misled by their own government? It is the Prime Minister's government that is refusing to take any responsibility whatsoever for the problems that have been so clearly described by the Auditor General.

Who, across the way, is truly responsible?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we know, the Auditor General called into question some of the Department of National Defence's numbers, and this government has made a commitment to re-examine these issues, establish the facts and share the results of this review with Parliament. That is what we are going to do, as promised.

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MINISTERIAL EXPENDITURES

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the princely lifestyle of Conservative ministers is shocking and in sharp contrast to the savage cuts to the public service.

While cuts are being made to food safety, air safety and old age security, the Conservatives are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep their limo drivers on standby. The minister responsible for the G8 slush fund even kept his driver on standby for 360 days.

Has the Conservative aristocracy decided to take full advantage of their perks at taxpayers' expense because it realizes that this will be its last term of office? When will the Conservatives put a stop to their brazen wastefulness?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I already said, we are constantly looking for ways to manage government at a reasonable cost to taxpayers. We are studying this matter, as I already mentioned.

Nevertheless, the salaries and overtime of drivers, who are public servants, are based on collective agreements negotiated with the unions. I imagine that the NDP supports this principle.

Oral Questions

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, only a Conservative minister would be happy about wasting just a little bit less of taxpayers' money than the Liberals did. It is almost as though the members opposite are holding a contest where the winner is the one that wastes the most money.

The Minister of Public Works and Government Services wasted over \$40,000 by having her driver sit and twiddle his thumbs while he waited for her. The drivers are waiting and, meanwhile, the ministers are hiding and not answering questions. Why are the drivers waiting? Is it so that the ministers can make a faster getaway?

Before slashing essential services for Canadians, could the members of cabinet stop behaving like royalty?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we must look into this situation. We are examining all situations so that government can operate at a reasonable cost.

If the members opposite, including the Leader of the Opposition and his driver, have suggestions, we will take them into consideration provided they are reasonable and fair.

* * *

• (1435)

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the first anniversary of the greatest electoral fraud in Canadian history. I would like to congratulate the members opposite.

The Conservatives still claim that one single person orchestrated the whole thing, yet one of the architects of a similar fraud in the United States is in awe of how it was done. He says that the American-inspired strategy requires plenty of money and coordination.

Will the Conservatives acknowledge the extent of the fraud that happened on May 2 and give Elections Canada the necessary powers to investigate?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I saw the hon. member rise to talk about this issue, I thought he was going to apologize on behalf of his party. His hon. NDP colleague from Winnipeg Centre has already had to apologize for making false allegations about these things, allegations that his party repeated over and over again.

Now, I hope that the NDP members will stand up and do the honourable thing by apologizing as the member for Winnipeg Centre did.

[English]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the same old answers, the same old tactics.

The guy who literally wrote the book on how to rig an election in the U.S. said that these tactics were likely imported from the Republican's playbook. He said, "The thing that stands out most egregiously is the number of ridings involved" and called Canadian

voter suppression "a systematic and sophisticated operation". He said that this would have taken a lot of money and a lot of coordination.

When will the government come clean about the role of Conservative operatives in this U.S.-style election suppression scheme?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought perhaps he was changing official languages so he could make his apology in English. Sadly, instead of apologizing for past false statements, he made new ones.

I encourage the next New Democrat who rises in this place to acknowledge what the member from Winnipeg in the New Democratic Party has already been forced to acknowledge, and that is the NDP is making false and baseless allegations without any evidence whatsoever.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Conservative majority is rolling the clock back on women's rights. A year ago the Conservatives promised not to reopen the abortion debate, yet last week we debated a Conservative motion that did just that. The Conservatives even chose an anti-abortion group to help them hand out Diamond Jubilee Medals. They have made promises such as addressing the violence experienced by aboriginal women: so many words, but no action.

Why will the government not live up to its promises to Canadian women?

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is concerned about women and we have increased funding for women to its highest level ever. Since 2007, we have approved more than \$42 million in projects designed to help end violence against women and girls.

[Translation]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, repetition of the Conservatives' official talking points is no substitute for reality.

In addition to reopening the abortion debate, the Conservatives are also regressing when it comes to pay equity. Government contracts will no longer be subject to employment equity rules. Here is another example: while 75% of seniors living in poverty are women, the government is slashing old age security.

When will this government start tackling the issues that matter to Canadian women, rather than attacking Canadian women?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working hard with Canadians across the country to promote greater economic prosperity for women and girls. Since 2007, we have approved more than \$42 million in projects designed to help end violence against women and girls. Our government has increased funding for women to its highest level ever.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were shocked to learn that while others had to wait in line, unrepentant, convicted British citizen Conrad Black was allowed to waltz right back into Canada. Conservatives have double standards: one set of rules for their friends and another for everyone else.

Conrad Black gets fast-tracked into Canada, while British gadfly, George Galloway, has the door slammed in his face simply because Conservatives disagree with his politics.

Is this the fairness Conservatives run on: special treatment for their friends?

• (1440)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of public record that Mr. Galloway received a preliminary assessment of inadmissibility from the immigration program manager in London, based primarily on his having given tens of thousands of dollars in cash to Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the banned prescribed illegal anti-Semitic terrorist organization called Hamas.

With respect to Mr. Black, as I made clear yesterday, I indicated to the department that if there was a pending application, there should be no communication with myself or my office to ensure it would be considered in the same fair and independent fashion that our public servants do with over 10,000 temporary resident permits that they admit every year.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government sure has not hesitated to keep out people with whom it disagrees. However, the policy is clear: exemptions require exceptional circumstances.

A 22-year-old American, wanting to come to Canada to visit his girlfriend, was denied entry because of a DUI conviction he got while he was a teenager.

Why does unrepentant, convicted criminal Conrad Black get in while so many others are being denied? Why this special treatment for a criminal?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should know that the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act permits foreign nationals who are inadmissible to Canada for reasons of criminality to apply for a temporary resident permit to overcome their criminality.

Every year department officials receive applications for such TRPs. Last year they issued some 11,000. About 7,000 of those were

for foreign nationals with criminal records, about 900 people with serious criminal records.

Every foreign national who is inadmissible can make an application. Foreign nationals are all considered based on the same legal criteria by our highly trained, independent public servants.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are tired of this double standard. There is one set of rules for Canadians and a different set of rules for the Conservatives and their friends.

Canada refused entry to Ann Wright and Medea Benjamin, two activists from the group Code Pink. Their crime? They tried to submit a petition on peace to the United Nations. What a threat to our national security.

Why are progressive activists being banished by the Conservatives, while the notorious British criminal Conrad Black is welcomed with open arms?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, decisions regarding foreign nationals' entry into Canada are made independently by public servants based on well-established legal criteria. I therefore do not understand the NDP's position.

Is the NDP suggesting that we should adopt a policy whereby elected officials—politicians—make decisions regarding temporary residence applications, or is it their position that only those who receive NDP approval should be given permits? We uphold the law when it comes to considering applications—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Malpeque.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a year in, the government is showing how tired and corrupt it really is: the CIDA minister who believes taxpayers are there only to support her lavish lifestyle; the Minister of Industry who believes industrial development is keeping the Ethics Commissioner's office at work, investigating himself three times; a Treasury Board minister, of gazebo fame; and the Minister of National Defence who has helicopters as his personal limousine, and of course the \$9-billion fib.

How can the Prime Minister condone such a crew of tainted ministers? How can he condone that?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a member of Parliament from the party of the sponsorship scandal, the party that spent far more on hospitality and travel than its successors in this Conservative government. It takes some courage for him to rise and even pose a question like that.

The fact is, this is a government that has held high standards and delivered high results for Canadians. It delivered economic success and prosperity at a time when countries all around the world, similar developed economies, have had real challenges. We are the only economy that has recovered at the rate that we have. Of all the jobs lost during the economic downturn, some 700,000 net new jobs were created during that downturn. We will continue to stay focused on the economy. That is what Canadians want.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the real success of this government is to have eliminated ethics and ministerial accountability.

What can we say about the Minister of National Defence, who uses a Cormorant as a personal taxi and hides the real costs of the F-35s from Canadians?

What about the Minister of Industry, who is at the top of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's most wanted list?

What about the Minister of International Cooperation, who had no intention of paying for her \$16 orange juice before she was caught by the media?

Why does this Prime Minister set the bar so low?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal record on these matters of ethics and standards is very, very clear. It is one of the reasons why Canadians elected a Conservative government. It is one of the reasons that Canadians a year ago gave a majority mandate to this Conservative government.

This Conservative government has understood that what Canadians want to see are lower taxes and those tax dollars treated with respect, a focus on the economy, a focus on their jobs, their prosperity and the strength of their futures. That is what we see in the most recent budget: a focus again on the long-term economic prosperity and future opportunities for Canadians and subsequent generations of Canadians, their children and their children's children. That is what we are delivering.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is tainted by the largest electoral fraud scandal in our country's history. Canadians are realizing they cannot trust the government.

The government did not have the courage to campaign on gutting environmental regulations. It did not tell Canadians it would cut legislation that puts their health and safety at risk.

Can the minister please explain why he is killing 50 years of safeguards, and does he have the conviction to hivel off environmental gutting from the budget?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question was all over the yard, but I can assure my hon. colleague that while the previous Liberal government paid mere lip

service to the environment, this government is getting things done. We are spending more money on water quality, on water monitoring, working with our international partners to reduce greenhouse gas—

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. John's East.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Deputy Minister of National Defence told the public accounts committee that the cabinet was provided with the full \$25 billion projected cost of the F-35 jets.

Will the minister now confirm that it was the cabinet that indeed had both figures, the full \$25 billion figure and the \$14.7 billion figure, and that it decided to use the smaller figure for public consumption, hiding \$10 billion from Canadians? Are these the two sets of books that the Parliamentary Budget Officer was talking about?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, let me say that this member is becoming quite adept at putting inaccurate information before the House of Commons. He does so quite regularly.

It should come as no surprise to him that the cabinet and the government have oversight and approval over major capital projects for the Department of National Defence, and in fact for the entire government. We have, as a principle, put in place a comprehensive response to the Auditor General's concerns that were raised over this procurement. This will have the oversight of independent individuals in the secretariat which will be overseen by the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

We are proceeding with a very important project that will see our Canadian skies and coastlines protected by the Canadian Forces for many years to come.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we do not know how many books there were, but we know there were at least two columns, one for internal use and one for public consumption.

According to Deputy Minister Fonberg, the left-hand column was for decision-making, and the right-hand column was reported to the public.

Conservatives knew long before the last election what the real figures were, but they decided to keep them hidden from Canadians. When will this minister finally accept the entire report of the Auditor General on the F-35s and admit that they misled both Parliament and the public?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have, of course, been very clear throughout. We accept the recommendation of the Auditor General. We accept that report. We have responded to it in a very precise way with a plan forward to improve accountability and to improve transparency.

The reality is that these figures have been before the Canadian public. We have acquisition costs which are clear, maintenance costs, and of course operating costs. We have followed previous practices to ensure that those numbers were brought forward. We will continue to act upon the recommendations of the Auditor General.

Oral Questions

•(1450)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, either they accept the findings of the Auditor General or they accept the findings of the Associate Minister of National Defence, but they cannot accept both.

The Conservatives lost control over the F-35 file a long time ago. They keep making things up as they go along. The Conservatives would have us believe that all the options are on the table for replacing the CF-18s, but the chief of the air staff has confirmed that the F-35 is still the government's choice.

Why are the Conservatives still being so duplicitous about the F-35s?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered that question. Our government has clearly accepted the Auditor General's recommendation.

[*English*]

We continue to act on those recommendations. There is now a study being done by the public accounts committee. We have a secretariat in place that will provide oversight over this project in the future, greater transparency, and independent insights into this issue.

We continue to act upon that single recommendation as well as ensuring that the Canadian Forces have the proper equipment and investments, as we continue to provide this important protection for our country.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only thing coming clear here is that the government has our civil service caught up in its web of contradictions.

In 2010, DND wrote to Public Works saying that the F-35 is the only option. Public Works agreed. Yet, both departments came before committee yesterday saying that they were still analyzing their options. No decision has been made yet. However, the chief of the air staff contradicted both departments. He is fixed on the F-35.

Is the government misleading the chief of the air staff, or is it misleading Canadians?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is a shock for the member opposite. The Department of National Defence obviously receives recommendations from both members of the armed forces, in this case the chief of the air staff, as well as working very closely with our deputy minister and the civilian side of the department.

With respect to the replacement of the CF-18, we have received a very specific recommendation from the Auditor General. We have responded with a comprehensive response that goes beyond that recommendation.

This will provide the transparency, accountability and confidence that Canadians need.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has been delivering for Canadians.

We have kept our word on our election promises and have always acted in the best interest of Canadian families, seniors and all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

It was one year ago today that Canadians acknowledged the tireless effort of our government by giving us a strong mandate and a strong majority government.

Can the Minister of Finance please highlight some of the economic accomplishments we have experienced over the past year?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the first anniversary of this Conservative majority government, Canada has the best fiscal position in the G7, the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7, the strongest job creation record in the G7, the best financial system in the world. It is the best place for business to invest, grow and create jobs, and has the highest credit rating in the world.

We will remain focused on jobs, the economy and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL PARKS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in last year's election campaign, the Conservatives did not announce a planned attack on our national parks.

Yesterday, they eliminated 1,600 jobs at Parks Canada. Today, we learned that they want to sell some parks and privatize the hot springs in Banff, Jasper and Radium. The discovery of these hot springs more than a century ago led to the creation of our first national park.

Why does the minister want to squander our national heritage?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, my hon. colleague has the numbers entirely wrong. They are exaggerated, and that will be corrected in coming days.

What Parks Canada is doing is ensuring cost-effective delivery of world-class services and visitor experience.

With regard to the Canadian Rockies hot springs, we have announced we will invite proposals to operate these hot springs because the private sector does it better. Parks Canada is not responsible for operating hotels, golf courses or swimming pools.

•(1455)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the campaign the Conservatives actually promised that the cuts would happen through attrition, and a year later they are chopping up jobs and selling off our parks.

Oral Questions

Canada's national parks were founded on the principle that the public should have access to public spaces and our heritage sites, but Parks Canada, as we know, confirmed that a new private operator will determine access for Canadians, when we own it.

This is the same minister who also green-lighted the privatization of Jasper National Park.

First our glaciers, and now our hot springs. Which of our national treasures will the minister put up for sale next?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is going from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Parks Canada is in the business of protecting our natural spaces. In national parks where we have facilities like golf courses, swimming pools or hotels, these services are much better provided by the private sector and we will continue to operate exactly that way.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives never campaigned on gutting environmental protection, but that is exactly what they are doing.

I will read a quote:

This is a covert attempt to gut the Fisheries Act...it's appalling [to] be attempting to do this under the radar.

Who said that? It was former Conservative fisheries minister Tom Siddon.

He also said:

The minister...is the one remaining...person in Canada to protect this marvellous, historically important resource...our fishery. That's his job.

The question is, why will this minister not do his job?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is, of course, inaccurate as usual.

There are massive improvements to the act that the opposition is blatantly ignoring. In fact, our government's changes will improve several areas of the act, provide tools that will identify ecologically sensitive areas that require enhanced protection, make the Fisheries Act conditions enforceable and allow higher maximum penalties for rule breakers. It will also allow the creation of new, clear and accessible guidelines for Canadians to follow for projects in or near the water.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government will not listen to former ministers, fisherman or Canadians. It will not even listen to its own commission.

The Prime Minister created the Cohen Commission to study the most dramatic collapse in the wild salmon fishery in British Columbia's history. It has spent two years and \$26 million hearing evidence on the importance of protecting salmon and salmon habitat.

Why is the government throwing away the work of the commission and gutting protections for our wild salmon fishery?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, this is not the case and the question as posed is entirely inaccurate.

We support the work of the Cohen Commission. We recognize the importance of this issue in British Columbia, not only to the people of British Columbia and the economy of British Columbia but also to Canadians in general who are anxiously awaiting the Cohen report. We have supported it fully and we expect that report this fall.

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41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government no doubt enjoyed the endorsement it got today from a U.S. Republican ex-convict who was jailed for illegal voter suppression. His fellow operatives worked with Canadian Conservatives. This ex-convict praised the Conservative robocall scam as systematic and sophisticated, all driven off the central Conservative database known as CIMS.

Has the government ever used that partisan database for government business? Has CIMS ever been checked about an access to information request, grant application or immigration matter? How far does Big Brother reach?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think he reaches about four rows behind the hon. member, to his colleague from Guelph who was first caught and then had to admit that he sent out false autodial to his constituents with fake phone numbers and fake identifications. After he was caught, he then had to apologize.

We all know that all of these controversies originated in his riding and that the calls went to Liberal supporters; perhaps he should look five rows back to get the answers he seeks.

* * *

● (1500)

PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as each day passes it becomes more apparent that the Conservatives are a government stained by election fraud. Canadians now know that the government deceived them by promising not to cut the old age security pensions, and then, once the votes were cast, low-income seniors and baby boomers became the target.

Experts agree that the Conservative OAS cuts are not grounded in economic necessity but are instead Conservative choices. When did the Prime Minister know he was going to break his promise to seniors—before or after the election?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. What the hon. member has just said is absolutely wrong. There are no reductions to seniors' pensions. Anyone who is currently collecting OAS and anyone who is 55 years old or older will not see any change. Any change that is going to happen will take place gradually and only start being introduced in 2023. We are doing this so that we will have old age security not only for today's seniors but also for future generations.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians feel betrayed by the Conservatives' decision to increase the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. Canadians themselves are saying so, not just the opposition.

The Prime Minister's Office is being inundated with complaints from unhappy people, and they have good reason to be unhappy. Even though the PMO may have already gotten rid of this embarrassing correspondence, it does not change the fact that the announced changes to old age security will affect the most vulnerable members of our society.

Why are the Conservatives targeting people who are unable to save for a comfortable retirement?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our country's seniors can rest assured that the old age security system will be there for them. If they are 55 or older, they will not see any change. We are going to increase the age of eligibility from 65 to 67, but this change will be made gradually and will only start being introduced in 2023.

We need to do this so that we have old age security for today's seniors and for future generations.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are right to feel cheated by this Prime Minister. Exactly a year ago they voted, yet not once during the election did the Prime Minister say that a key priority for him would be to attack seniors' retirement income. Now we see why. Canadians are upset and are telling the Prime Minister directly in letters and emails that they are angry about changes to OAS. Still, the Conservative government ignores them. Will the government listen to Canadians and reverse course on its attack on OAS?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are protecting OAS by ensuring it is there. There will be no reduction in OAS payments to any seniors who are receiving OAS today. Anyone who is 55 or older will see no reduction. We will be raising the age gradually from 65 to 67, starting in 2023. We want to ensure seniors do have a secure retirement.

Why does the NDP keep voting against every single item on the long list of things we do to help seniors?

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's entrepreneurs create jobs and drive growth, all across the country. Thanks to their efforts and their work, the Canadian economy is improving.

Can the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism tell the House about our government's initiatives to help small businesses in Canada?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his exceptional work for entrepreneurs in his region and for our government.

As we promised during the election campaign, we have extended the hiring tax credit for small businesses. We will cut red tape and the administrative burden so that entrepreneurs can focus their attention elsewhere.

However, the most important thing is that we will not do what the opposition has been calling for for months: increase taxes on small businesses. No means no.

We will continue to fight for Canadian families and business people by cutting their taxes once we have balanced the budget.

* * *

[English]

ATLANTIC CANADA

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know what the Prime Minister's attitude toward Atlantic Canada is, and it is with disgust and anger that I give the one-year report card of what the Conservatives have done in Cape Breton.

Last fall, there was no money for our northern Cape Breton rink and 100 jobs were cut from Service Canada. This spring, we have 185 Parks Canada jobs affected and 10 Veterans Affairs jobs gone. This is on top of pickpocketing our seniors.

There is nothing left for the Conservatives to plunder. Should we hide our fiddles before they take our music?

● (1505)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the member is way off tune.

We have made numerous investments in Atlantic Canada, not the least of which is the historic investment to build ships in Atlantic Canada for the Royal Canadian Navy. It will bring about massive opportunity and employment, coupled with other important investments we have made in communities throughout Atlantic Canada, Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. I am extremely proud of the one-year anniversary of our majority government and just how much time, effort and money we have put into the needs of the people of Nova Scotia.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are 6,500 disabled veterans who are not very proud of the Conservative government.

Yesterday a Federal Court judge ruled unequivocally, after five years of legal wrangling, that the SISIP payment for pain and suffering should not be deducted as income, yet the Conservative government continues to take them to court.

Now the government can do the right thing. It can stop the legal challenge and stop wasting hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on lawyers. It can stand up, meet with Dennis Manuge and his legal team, reach a settlement and give these heroes of our country, those 6,500 disabled veterans, the money they so rightly deserve.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of the inaccuracies in the member's statement come as no surprise to me. This is a member whom we have seen consistently, throughout his entire career, vote against every single measure that has been taken by this government and previous governments to make the lives of veterans, members of the forces and their families better. I merely point to the fact that he has voted against providing funding to assist five new operational stress clinics, the creation of the Veterans Ombudsman and the \$282 million to expand the veterans independence program.

We have made great strides in helping veterans and we will continue to do so.

* * *

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one year after our strong, stable, national majority government victory, we are proud of how much work we have done to support families. In the last election, we made specific promises to support families. Would the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development please provide an update to the House with some of the promises for families that the government has delivered in the last year?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a long list, so I will just keep it to the highlights.

We committed to supporting the families of murdered and missing children—

The Speaker: I hate to cut off the hon. member, but there seem to be some side conversations going on. I would ask members to hold their conversations until question period is over.

The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has the floor.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, as members know, we also increased accessibility and funding for the Canada student loan program. We launched the children's art tax credit and the family caregiver tax credit. We also provided the largest increase in the guaranteed income supplement for Canada's lowest-income seniors that has been seen in over a decade. We are proud to have delivered so many things for Canadian families. It is a shame that the opposition did not support any of those things.

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are breaking their election promises and making decisions that harm the economy of the regions.

In my riding, for the past ten years, the Economic Development Agency of Canada has funded the youth employment program for the Centre d'aide aux entreprises de Montmagny-L'Islet, which has had some of the best results in Quebec. One hundred entrepreneurial projects have been supported by the program.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities had promised, one day before the last election, to keep the program going for another two years. However, one year later, he cut the program. Why did he break his promise?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2011-12, we signed an agreement with the Centre d'aide aux entreprises de Montmagny-L'Islet, which clearly stated that the agreement would be in effect for one year.

In March 2011, we entered into a \$154 million comprehensive five-year agreement with the Sociétés d'aide au développement des collectivités and the Centre d'aide aux entreprises du Québec to support economic development in Quebec's regions. Under this agreement, the Sociétés d'aide au développement des collectivités are the only organizations involved in delivering the youth employment strategy program. No Centre d'aide aux entreprises receives funding for that program.

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● (1510)

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the legal action taken by the Government of Quebec to save the data in the Canadian firearms registry, to force Air Canada to respect its obligations and to prevent changes to the Senate, now the Conservatives are provoking another dispute with Quebec by trying to exempt their friends, the banks, from consumer protection legislation.

Why has the Minister of Finance not responded to the Quebec Justice Minister's letter of April 19, confirming to him in black and white that the banks will continue to be subject to the Quebec consumer protection laws?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is odd to hear this type of question, particularly when we know that two historic issues were resolved over the past year: that of Old Harry, the offshore oil reserve, and that of sales tax harmonization, which was dragging on for 10 years.

Routine Proceedings

It is also odd to hear the Bloc Québécois ask a question about the Senate, when we are proposing to reform this obsolete institution. We are proposing the option of elected senators and Senate term limits because we know that a senator could be in office for 45 years. Most Quebeckers do not agree with that and want us to reform the Senate.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 23 petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

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 reports of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group respecting its participation in the following two meetings: First, the 51st annual meeting of the Regional Policy Forum of the Eastern Regional Conference that was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, August 7 to 10, 2011; and second, the 66th annual meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments that was held in Indianapolis, Indiana, United States, July 17 to 20, 2011.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources in relation to its study of the current and future state of oil and gas pipelines and refining capacity in Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we strongly criticized the report that comes from the majority of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources because we believe the report simply echoes the government's unbalanced oil extraction policy that does not take into consideration the damage to Canada's environment and to its economy. We say that the majority in the report wants to fast track pipelines and strip away environmental protections with no regard for the consequences to our environment or our economy.

As members know, we have lost thousands of jobs in the refinery capacity. Dozens of refineries have closed as well. There is hope. The NDP has filed a dissenting opinion. It emphasizes the need for a Canadian energy strategy, focuses on protecting high-quality, long-term jobs in the refining sector, and the need to ensure sustainable

and responsible resource development through a robust environmental assessment process. We hope the public will look at our dissenting opinion.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the Standing Orders I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 21st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in relation to the question of privilege relating to threats to the member for Provencher.

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PETITIONS

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by concerned constituents from my riding of Oakville. It asks the House to amend section 223 of our Criminal Code to recognize human beings in a manner commensurate with 21st century medical evidence.

I am happy to present this petition for response from our government.

• (1515)

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present two petitions. The first one relates to many hundreds of citizens in my riding who want the government to strengthen the Criminal Code provisions to prevent animal cruelty.

There was a very severe incident back in my riding a month ago where a dog was shot twice in the head by its owner and survived. There has been a big rallying cry in my community about the prevention of animal cruelty.

The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Justice to use legislation to increase penalties for animal cruelty under the new section of the Criminal Code.

INTERNET ACCESS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is also signed by many members in my community and is in relation to broadband access across Canada.

The petitioners are asking the government to adopt a national rural and northern broadband Internet strategy that guarantees equitable broadband Internet access to Canadians residing in rural and remote areas in all regions of Canada.

PENSIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of Canadians, and not just people from Newfoundland and Labrador, although this petition represents the southern part of my riding in the towns of Lawn and St. Lawrence.

The petitioners object to the Prime Minister's decision to raise the age of eligibility for OAS from 65 to 67. They are saying that it is totally unfair, that it should never have been considered in the first place and that even though it will not impact on our seniors of today it will impact their children and their grandchildren. They are saying that it is totally unfair, especially for those who work in those physically demanding environments.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition from approximately 125 of my constituents who are asking Parliament to look at amending section 223 of the Criminal Code.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present three petitions. The first petition concerns Bill C-31 on refugee reform.

The petitioners point out that there are serious concerns about the measures to curb human smuggling and that it would punish refugees, including mandatory detention for certain refugee claimants, along with unchecked ministerial powers to designate countries of origin, eliminating provisions for advice from independent experts.

The petitioners call for the legislation to be replaced with legislation that is fair, independent and in compliance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Canada's international obligations.

CANADA-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from concerned citizens in Toronto. It was circulated by Women in Solidarity with Palestine and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network.

The petitioners point out that Canada has intensified bilateral agreements with Israel, including policing, security, military, political and economic links and expanded the Canada-Israel free trade agreement. They point out that Canada is partnering with Israel in security and surveillance technology through the Canada-Israel public security agreement and that they believe that Canada has failed to condemn Israel's clear violations of international law.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to immediately change its position—

The Speaker: Order, please. I am going to stop the member there. There are many members who wish to present petitions. So, if she does have one more, if she could very succinctly explain what it is, then we could move on.

Ms. Libby Davies: —the Government of Canada to uphold international and humanitarian law.

PENSIONS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is signed by over 1,000 people from Vancouver East who want to reject the changes in eligibility for old age security, who want to see an increase to OAS and GIS to end seniors' poverty and ensure that retirement benefits are indexed to the real cost of living.

Routine Proceedings

CHILD AND YOUTH NUTRITION PROGRAM

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to present this petition regarding access to healthy food, which is critically important for a child's development but is often limited for Canadian children who live in poverty. Child and youth nutrition programs are a cost-effective way to encourage the development of lifelong healthy eating habits, support Canadian farmers and food producers in the development of local markets and reduce future health care costs.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to provide national leadership and support for child and youth nutrition programs through the ministries of health and agriculture, to develop a national child and youth nutrition strategy in consultation with stakeholders across the country and to develop partnerships with farmers and food producers to stimulate economic development.

• (1520)

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I was at the Shell station in Fergus, I was asked by a constituent to present a petition. I have two petitions here to present containing some 250 signatures regarding section 223 of the Criminal Code.

The petitioners ask that Parliament amend that section to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

I so present these two petitions on their behalf.

POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions and I will be brief.

The first petition is calling on the government to support private member's bill, Bill C-233, An Act to eliminate poverty in Canada.

E&N RAILWAY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I have is from members of Nanaimo—Cowichan who are calling upon the government to provide the funding for E&N Railway by matching the funds put forward by the Province of British Columbia. Of course, that money has now been announced but with many caveats.

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the final petition calls on the Canadian Coast Guard to maintain its marine communications and traffic services rather than closing down the coordination centres in Quebec City and St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The petitioners are calling attention to the fact that this would increase the risk of accidents involving passengers and so on and that the closures of these centres is a risk to francophone fishers and mariners who may not be understood by staff in anglophone centres in situations of distress.

Routine Proceedings

THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this petition comes from the Canadian Interfaith and it calls for leadership and action on climate change. These are constituents of mine from the town of Bishop's Falls.

The petitioners are calling for concrete action in reducing greenhouse emissions that are affecting the entire planet when it comes to climate change. In particular, they are calling for a constructive role in the design of the green climate fund under United Nations' governance and by contributing public funds to help mitigate climate change in areas and jurisdictions around the world.

I want to thank Sister Mary Ryan and others at Bishop's Falls for putting this together.

[*Translation*]

PENSIONS

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to present a petition that was given to me by the Ahuntsic-Cartierville Association québécoise de défense des droits des personnes retraitées et préretraitées.

Essentially, this petition calls for improvements to the guaranteed income supplement and the survivor's allowance. The petition urges the government to: introduce automatic registration for the guaranteed income supplement, the spouse's allowance and the survivor's allowance; increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$110 per month for people living alone and increase the survivor's allowance by \$199 per month; provide full retroactivity with no strings attached; and extend the guaranteed income supplement by six months.

[*English*]

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have only one petition and I will make it brief.

I am pleased to present a petition in support of my constituents. The petitioners ask the House of Commons to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law by amending section 223 of the Criminal Code in support of Bill C-312.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present hundreds of petitions from Canadians from coast to coast to coast who support a national transit strategy.

They came together last Friday to say that it was time that the government took a leadership role and partner with local municipalities and provinces so there will be good, rapid, accessible and affordable public transit for all. They also note that there is an \$18 billion gap in public transit infrastructures needs.

Therefore, the petitioners want the government to adopt a wonderful private member's bill submitted by myself that calls for a national public transit strategy.

AIR CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I bring forward a petition from individuals who

are concerned in regard to the Aveos jobs, the thousands of jobs that have been lost across the country, the three major centres being Winnipeg, Mississauga and Montreal.

The petitioners calling upon the government and the Prime Minister to hold Air Canada accountable to the Air Canada Public Participation Act by enforcing the law. They are asking the government ultimately to get tough on corporate crime.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions.

The first petition is primarily from residents of Kootenay Bay, British Columbia, who are calling on the government to ensure that we have stable, predictable funding for the Canadian national broadcaster, the CBC, as one of the ways in which this country is bound together from coast to coast to coast.

● (1525)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, from Brentwood Bay in particular, from Salt Spring Island, as well as from Vancouver. These residents of British Columbia are impassioned in their call for a reasonable, full and thorough investigation, and not the rush to judgment to promote a risky tanker scheme on the coast of British Columbia.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions today.

The first petition calls on the House of Commons to amend section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to recognize 21st century medical evidence.

HEALTH

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from the good people of Simcoe—Grey who are calling upon the government to clarify food labels for food products that are peanut-free, tree nut-free, only peanut-free and only tree nut-free, so that there is a national standard for labels and symbols that indicate whether or not a product contains these life-threatening allergens.

ABORTION

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the petitioners say that Canada is the only nation in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, without laws restricting abortion, and that since Canada's Supreme Court said that Parliament has the responsibility to enact abortion legislation, they call on us to do so.

Government Orders

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the NDP critic for senior citizens, I have the honour to present a petition signed by people from Beauport—Limoilou who are concerned about recently announced changes to old age security.

Old age security is an important program. Experts agree that it is sustainable and that there is no need to cut back or change the program. That is why the people who have signed this petition are urging the government to maintain funding at current levels and not make changes to old age security. They also want the government to increase the guaranteed income supplement so that the people who rely on these pensions can live above the poverty line.

[English]

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise on behalf of numerous constituents in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country to table two petitions specifically in reference to the 400-year-old definition of human being.

The petitioners would like Parliament to amend section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way to better reflect 21st century medical evidence.

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to present to the House a petition that was signed by dozens of constituents in my riding.

They want to do more than just criticize. They are engaging in tangible political involvement by signing a petition and calling on this government to reverse its policy on funding old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

JOBS, GROWTH AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It appears that Bill C-38, as tabled in the House, may not be the correct version.

MPs have been given at least two different versions of Bill C-38 in preparation for today's debate. One version has 421 numbered pages of legislative text, and that was the version that was given to opposition MPs in the opposition lobby immediately after the legislation was tabled in the House. Another version has 425 numbered pages of legislative text, and that is the version that has been distributed to MPs through Parliament's postal and distribution service and online through the Parliament of Canada website. It appears that either the opposition MPs were given the wrong copy of the bill when the bill was tabled in the House, or the wrong copy is being more widely distributed to MPs and the public in advance of today's debate.

Is there text that appears in one copy but is missing from the other? We do not know. We are relying on hard copies of legislation that are over 400 pages in length, so it is virtually impossible to verify the source of each discrepancy.

How can everyone follow the debate on Bill C-38 when what is on page 310 in one version is clearly nowhere to be found on page 310 in the other?

It is also not clear which version of the bill we should use to propose amendments or prepare for clause-by-clause at committee.

On page 728 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, it states:

In the past, the Speaker has directed that the order for second reading of certain bills be discharged, when it was discovered that they were not in their final form and were therefore not ready to be introduced.

The fact is that MPs have been preparing for today's debate with two different versions of Bill C-38. That will certainly impede our ability to properly debate the bill. We are told by the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the government has kept two different sets of books on F-35 costs, but it is a little much when the government presents two versions of its own budget implementation legislation.

Government Orders

If the government tabled one bill at first reading and then printed another version for members of Parliament, the debate cannot be allowed to continue at this time. I ask that this matter be clarified and corrected before the debate on Bill C-38 is allowed to proceed.

● (1530)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the process for the introduction of a bill is that the bill is provided to the Journals branch of the House of Commons, which then distributes it as the official bill when it is introduced, and it is available through Journals to all members of Parliament. As for any other copies that may have been circulating, I cannot comment on that.

This is the official bill that has been introduced, and that is the bill we intend to have debated. There should be no confusion, unless some error has been made by Journals in what has been distributed, but I cannot imagine that this is the case.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague across the way for the explanation of the discrepancy, if in fact there is a discrepancy that has been pointed out by my other colleague.

There is a certain amount of “trust us” in this, that the bills are in fact the same. For something as critical as this, I am not sure what powers you, Mr. Speaker, actually have to answer the request made by my friend down the way.

It seems to be a very important one, particularly if we are essentially meant to take the government at its word that there is no difference between the bills that we saw in the House and the bill that has been distributed to Canadians and MPs outside of the House, also through official channels. I suppose that is my point. It is meant to be the same source.

I know you will take some reference on this, Mr. Speaker, but we will be very curious for your ruling if there is an ability for us to pause debate for a moment while the government rectifies this. Is there more important legislation than the budget implement act? It is hard to say.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I will make one further brief submission. I do not believe there is any difference in the content of the two bills that are circulating.

I am told that one of them has a table of contents and that accounts for the difference in the page numbers. I expect that none of this should result in a delay of the debate or an impeding of the debate of the bill. I would be happy to examine, if there is in fact a difference, exactly what the difference is between the bill that he has and the official bill that we will debate, which is the one that has been circulated through Journals and introduced into Parliament.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has not clarified and confirmed whether in fact opposition members were given the wrong copy. There are two choices. Either opposition MPs were given the wrong copy or the current copy now being distributed by the government is wrong.

This is material. This is not a trivial matter. In terms of the proposal of amendments and the discussion, it is important that we have the identical copy.

I suggest we cannot proceed with debate until you, Mr. Speaker, have had the opportunity to rule on this.

● (1535)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I understand the one that was tabled with Journals is the one that has the table of contents. There may be another that is circulating for people if they wish, which was the old form in which these bills were done in the past.

This one was done with the table of contents. That is what was introduced and that is what we are here to debate. There is no reason why we cannot proceed with that debate. In terms of every clause, the table of contents not being part of the clauses of the bill, the working copy he has versus the one that was introduced are identical.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the sake of clarity here, when the clerk, a few moments ago, called the title of the bill in response to your indication that we were now at orders of the day in our agenda for today, the clerk rose in response to that, as is traditional, and called Bill C-38, reading the title of it.

Could the table indicate to us which version of the bill was before the clerk when the clerk called that item for discussion today, so we know exactly what we are debating from here on forward?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to table the two different versions that have discrepancies between pages, for example, page 310 in one version is different from page 310 in another, to help aid you in your deliberations, if that is helpful.

The Speaker: I can inform the House that the version of the bill called Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, has 425 numbered pages. The short title is “Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity Act”. This was the version of the bill that was tabled in the House. This was the version of the bill that was before the clerk when the clerk called orders of the day. With that, I am prepared to let debate proceed.

In terms of what was distributed, we can look into that and find out from Journals. If there was an error, we can come back to the House on that. In terms of what is before the House, the version that was called today is the same version that was tabled in the House.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, these are not versions on websites or any such thing. One version is the version that was handed out on the day the bill was introduced and this is a second bill that the government handed out the day after, and they are different. I am looking at the very first page and in the section about part 1 the order is different. There is a clause 3 in here and it does not appear until the second page of a different version of the same bill.

Government Orders

This is difficult because we are now looking through the two bills to see if there are any fundamental substantial discrepancies and the assurance from the government is that there are none, that is exactly the same two pieces of legislation. The page numbering and the order may be different, but there are no different clauses. Otherwise, in a sense, it is impossible to have a debate if there are substantive alterations in the bill.

This is not an attempt to drill the government's agenda or calendar. It is difficult for us as parliamentarians to know with assurance in a 400-page bill that everything is accurate if we have seen differences on page 1 of what was handed out on the day the bill was introduced by the government and what was handed out later by the government. We need that assurance and I am not sure how to actually rectify this. I have never seen this on a budget implementation act before. It is obviously critical legislation.

●(1540)

The Speaker: I think I can shed some light on where we are. When the bill is brought to the House, it is printed first by whichever department is introducing it, which in this case was the Department of Justice. Standing Order 70 says, "All bills shall be printed before the second reading in the English and French languages". I have been told it is a question of pagination based on the different software that is used when the department prints its version. Then it is transmitted to the law clerk's office, at which point it is then printed for distribution to members. I am prepared to allow debate to proceed. The pagination that is being used for the debate has 425 pages and it is properly before the House in that respect.

If there is any further confusion, I can come back with a more thorough explanation of how that happens, but the bills are identical. It is simply a matter that when they are printed by the House of Commons, the slightly different software results in a different pagination.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, this is perhaps an unprecedented situation that the House has never had to deal with before. If it takes some time to proceed through the two books to determine they are in fact substantively identical, could the government undertake, with whatever assistance is required from the table or the officers of the House, to report back to the House before the end of this day that in fact the two versions have been examined and they are substantively identical? There is nothing more important than the debate about budget legislation and it is absolutely fundamental that the House be assured there is no discrepancy in the material that we will discuss.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, none of us have any doubt in your perspicacity and being an erudite member and Speaker, but I think you, the Clerk and the staff need more time. It is a 425-page document. I read pretty fast, but if you, the Clerk and the team were able to, in the last 10 minutes, read all 425 pages of one document, compare them to the 421 pages of another and, as such, can assure the House that there is absolutely no difference, that is commendable. However, if in fact you have not had the time to read through both documents and confirm absolutely unequivocally there is no difference, then I believe the member for Wascana is absolutely right. We have to pause until we are absolutely certain of this because members of Parliament were given one copy and that was the copy we used to prepare for this debate.

●(1545)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I very much regret what appears to be an effort to unnecessarily delay the work of the House by the Liberal Party members, but I am not surprised.

The fact is the bill before this House is the bill that was printed by this House, subject to an order of the House on first reading. The copy they had before first reading is of course the preprinted version. The actual bill is the one that says on the front, not "C blank", but the one that says "C-38". That is Bill C-38. All members of this House have that through Journals Branch. All members of this House had ample time to prepare for that. It was printed by Journals Branch some time ago. Their failure to examine the bill as printed, as ordered by the House, should not be an occasion at this point in time for delay of this debate.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the government provided opposition members of Parliament with a copy that, according to the minister or the House leader, was wrong. I guess it has come to be readily accepted by this Parliament that when the government provides a document we cannot always believe it. However, is the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons saying that in fact every time we are given a document by the government we automatically have to question whether it is the correct one, the one upon which we ought to be working and developing our debate and amendments? He is saying that we have somehow erred. I think he owes the House an apology for having provided to opposition members of Parliament a document that was the wrong one.

It is not the opposition parties that are either delaying this debate unnecessarily or acting inappropriately. It is the government that has made an error in this case and has provided a document to the House that it now says was the wrong document.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member for Kings—Hants has been absent for the entirety of the discussion. The document that he refers to that says "C blank" is the copy before it was introduced into the House. After it was introduced into the House, there was an order that it be printed. The Speaker has already addressed the question of Journals Branch printing it and having a different pagination, it being identical.

I am disappointed that he considers that to mean one copy being the wrong bill and one copy being the right bill. It is a fact that this is the practice for every bill, that it is thus introduced. The member has been in this House for many years. I would expect that he would by now be familiar with that.

The explanation from you, Mr. Speaker, is amply clear. I do not think we are achieving anything more through this debate other than his objective, which is further delay. If he wishes, we can give him further assurance that the two documents, in substance, are identical. We are happy to do that. However, at this point he is simply wasting the time of the House and misleading the House by referring to one document as wrong and one document as correct. The fact is that one is what was submitted to Journals Branch and the other is what Journals Branch then subsequently printed which is, of course, the official bill before the House.

Government Orders

The Speaker: I have explained how the difference in pagination has come about. I assure the hon. member for Kings—Hants that I cannot read 425 pages of financial terms in about eight minutes but I can assure him that, when the bill is received by the law clerk's office, the proofreading is done at that point. The version that is printed by the House matches what was provided by the department. So in this case we have a difference in pagination that has resulted from the two different systems apparently. The bill is properly before the House. It is the bill that was printed and is available from Journals Branch.

At this point, I am prepared to let debate proceed. I can come back to the House with a further explanation. I understand the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has assured the House it is the same version so I think we can at this point proceed with the debate.

The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Edmonton—Leduc.

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

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this second reading of the debate of the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act. This legislation would help bolster economic growth and ensure that Canada's economic and public finances remain sustainable over the long term. Today, I would like to focus on our government's plan for responsible resource development, a critical part of the economic action plan. It is a forward-looking piece of legislation that would help ensure that all Canadians benefit from our natural resource heritage.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Our abundant natural resources have always been the foundation of Canada's economy. They are at the very heart of what we have been and what we are as a country. They have fostered the development of entire communities and regions. They have contributed to carving out the character and identity of our people, and they have been a source of great national pride, from the birth of our country to the present. The global economy presents both opportunities and problems and we must make the right choices to ensure the prosperity and security of Canadians for generations to come.

[*English*]

There is a tremendous new global opportunity for Canada to capitalize on its resource development potential to stimulate jobs and growth in a period of global economic uncertainty. We have a country with an enormous amount of natural resources. We are an energy superpower. We are first in the production of potash, second in the production of uranium, third in the production of hydroelectricity and natural gas, and sixth in the production of oil. We have the third largest reserves in the world. We are a mining giant.

Canada is one of the leading mining nations in the world, producing more than 60 minerals and metals. In 2009, more than 220 principal producing mines, more than 3,000 stone quarries and sand gravel pits, and more than 50 non-ferrous smelters and refiners and steel mills were operating in Canada.

Canada is well positioned to benefit from the growing global demand for energy, especially oil. Our oil sands are the third largest proven reserve in the world. As conventional oil supplies are depleted, the International Energy Agency predicts that the world will become increasingly dependent on so-called unconventional sources of oil like that of Canada's oil sands.

As the International Energy Agency has told us time and again, traditional energy sources, oil and gas, will continue to be the dominant energy source for many years to come. In 25 years from now, even under the most promising scenarios for development of alternative energy technologies, fossil fuels will still be providing well over 60% of the world's energy. The demand for oil will be almost 15% higher than today. More and more, the growing demand for oil and gas will come from emerging economies where the appetite for other resources needed to fuel a growing economy is also rising.

Increasing demand for oil and gas and the opening of new markets for minerals and metals represent significant opportunities for jobs and prosperity for Canadians. The good news is that the demand in the world for the kinds of resources that we have in abundance continues to increase day after day, month after month, year after year. As global economic weight continues to shift towards fast-growing emerging economies in Asia and elsewhere, we must act to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities. To do that, we must diversify our markets.

Currently, almost all of our crude oil exports go to the U.S. The U.S. is a great and valued customer, but that oil is being sold at a substantial discount because, quite simply, it has nowhere else to go. It is a buyer's market.

North American crude prices are some \$20 a barrel below the world price and even lower for Canadian heavy crude. When we are exporting about 2 million barrels a day, it adds up to some serious lost revenue, over \$40 million a day at current price differences. This lost opportunity represents lower revenue for producers. According to a recent analysis by CIBC, this price discount could cost Canadian producers \$18 billion of lost revenue this year alone.

Government Orders

This also represents forgone tax and royalty revenue for governments, so less money to provide essential social services for Canadians. This is the impact of having our crude oil resources locked in by lack of transportation capacity. We have no way to deliver our oil to markets other than the U.S., so we are forced to take just about whatever American refineries are willing to pay. We simply cannot afford to take these kinds of losses year after year. It is costing us billions of dollars in economic activity and thousands upon thousands of jobs. That is why it is so critical for Canada to develop the infrastructure we need to diversify and deliver our oil and gas to new and growing markets, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. In the interests of Canada and Canadians, we need to act and we need to act quickly. Major projects such as pipeline infrastructure must not be subject to unnecessary delay.

The situation is getting even more serious than lower prices. It is estimated that without new export-oriented pipeline capacity, western Canadian producers will have to start putting limits on investment and job creation plans because there will be no way to get any more oil to the market.

We run the very real risk of missing out. With over \$500 billion in potential resource projects over the next 10 years, we have a tremendous opportunity to create jobs and economic growth right across the country. These jobs will be in every sector of the economy, from manufacturing, mining, science and technology, to the services sector. However, this opportunity is not guaranteed. Canada is competing for capital with countries around the world. Fortunately, Canada has a lot to offer: attractive investment opportunities, a competitive tax regime and policies that do not discriminate against foreign companies. I saw the recognition of that opportunity in my trips to China and Japan this year.

Unfortunately, our inefficient, duplicative and unpredictable regulatory system is an impediment. It is complex, slow-moving and wasteful. It subjects major projects to unpredictable and potentially endless delays.

What our country needs is a 21st century regulatory system that protects the environment and is efficient, effective and expeditious. That is why this bill proposes a system-wide approach. With responsible resource development legislation we will focus our efforts in four areas: first, making reviews for major resource projects more predictable and timely; second, reducing duplication in the review process; third, strengthening environmental protection; and, fourth, enhancing consultations with aboriginal peoples.

Allow me to speak briefly about each of these areas.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

The bill contains a number of measures to make the regulatory system more predictable and timely and to facilitate decision-making with regard to investments and planning.

That means, among other things, implementing reasonable and realistic schedules for reviewing major projects, consolidating the responsibility for environmental assessments to three agencies instead of 40, and focusing our efforts on major projects.

After consulting experts, we believe that the timelines for conducting an independent, objective, exhaustive, scientific study are adequate.

• (1600)

[*English*]

We have consulted with experts, including Gaétan Caron, the chairman of the National Energy Board, so we are comfortable that the delays, the timelines, are in fact adequate. We are also ensuring that our regulatory system has the resources needed to meet these timelines. We have reinvested \$54 million into the major projects management office initiative to enhance the capacity of key regulatory departments and agencies to enable them to focus their efforts on major projects.

Furthermore, while the opposition likes to spread misinformation that the funding for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, or CEAA, has been cut, that is not true. We have renewed its base funding and increased its funding to more effectively carry out aboriginal consultations and environmental reviews on an independent, objective and scientific basis.

We are also ensuring that there is clear accountability in the system. The federal cabinet will make the go, no-go decisions on all major pipeline projects, informed by the recommendations of the National Energy Board. This is already the case for the vast majority of decisions across government, including under CEAA.

We believe that for major projects that could have a significant economic and environmental impact, the ultimate decision-making should rest with elected members who are accountable to the people rather than with unelected officials. Canadians will know who made the decision, why the decision was made and whom to hold accountable.

The bill also proposes measures to reduce duplication and regulatory burden. It would allow provincial environmental assessments that meet the substantive requirements of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act to be substituted for the federal government assessment. In some cases, the provincial process may be deemed equivalent to the federal process. However, these provisions will only be put into effect if the province can demonstrate it can meet federal requirements.

[*Translation*]

Even though we are making many changes to ensure that the process is efficient, we also want to make the environmental protection more effective. An expedited review is not synonymous with easier approval. We are not choosing between the two. By simplifying the process we are not compromising environmental protection.

*Government Orders**[English]*

The bill will ensure that we stop reviewing projects that have little to no environmental effect and focus resources on those projects that have the potential for significant environmental and economic impact. This means we will be getting out of reviewing projects like blueberry washing facilities, parking lots, or hockey rinks. Frankly, we should not inconvenience people and waste government resources on paper-pushing exercises.

As a safeguard, the minister of the environment will retain the authority to order environmental assessments on projects he deems need them. Importantly, the bill will introduce administrative monetary penalties from \$100,000 to \$400,000 for non-compliance by proponents with conditions imposed by the regulator.

Budget 2012 also introduced important maritime safety measures. Tankers will be double-hulled. There will be mandatory pilotage, mandatory aerial surveillance and improved navigation tools. We will also be increasing annual pipeline inspections from 100 to 150 and doubling annual comprehensive audits from three to six to identify issues before problems occur.

These measures will significantly increase the safety of major projects on the environment while ensuring the system is efficient.

The last pillar of our responsible resources development strategy is to enhance consultations with aboriginal peoples. The Prime Minister made it clear during the Crown-First Nations Gathering in January that our government takes seriously its duty to consult and accommodate. Our plan for responsible resource development contains several steps to move this agenda forward.

•(1605)

[Translation]

For example, consultation of aboriginal Canadians will be an integral part of the environmental assessment and regulation processes. One department or organization will be designated as the sole crown consultation coordinator for the review of specific projects.

The plan also calls for the use of memorandums of understanding and agreements with aboriginal groups and provincial governments in order to clarify expectations for the consultations with regard to project reviews. In addition, our plan helps achieve these objectives by encouraging positive long-term partnerships with aboriginal communities, in order for their members to secure more direct and indirect benefits from new major projects.

[English]

Over the last few years, our government has taken several key initiatives to put Canada ahead of the curve in today's highly competitive global economy. We reduced personal and corporate taxes. We invested in science and technology, alternative energy and environmental protection. We negotiated free trade agreements, reduced red tape and the regulatory burden and tackled government waste.

Our government's agenda is all about long-term growth, employment, prosperity and security for Canadians across the country. Responsible resource development is at the heart of that agenda. To

capture the promise of jobs, growth and prosperity from our immense natural resources, the time to act is now.

Taken together, these system-wide measures will ensure our regulatory system is more accountable, efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of all Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we go to questions and comments, I wanted to bring to the attention of the House that arising from the point of order brought forward by the hon. member for Kings—Hants and with subsequent interventions by the government House leader, the opposition House leader and the hon. member for Wascana, I am pleased to report to the House that the office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel responsible for the printing of bills can confirm that the text included in the version of Bill C-38 tabled in the House on April 26, 2012, is identical to the text found in the copy printed after first reading of the said bill, as distributed to all members of the House.

The version of the bill distributed to members on April 26 was a photocopy of the secret copy of the bill prepared by the Department of Justice. The version distributed to members after first reading is produced by the House administration—in particular, the office of the Law Clerk—and the difference in text and number of pages is due to the electronic preparation of the bill in House software.

The text is identical and has been reviewed by legislative editors working in the Law Clerk's office. Except for a few pagination differences, it is identical in all respects.

I thank hon. members for their interventions on this matter.

We will now go to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bill is quite remarkable because although it is ostensibly the budget implementation act, about one-third of the bill is focused on gutting our environmental protections.

Just as the previous speaker indicated, the hon. minister's priority is about getting oil out of the ground and getting it out of the country as quickly as possible.

If the minister's goal is simply to hasten the approval of pipelines and to make sure that his colleagues in the oil and gas sector advance their businesses as quickly as possible, regardless of the wishes of local communities, why did he not recommend excluding the environmental provisions from the bill and putting them in a separate bill, so that we could properly debate and adequately scrutinize them and make a proper decision on behalf of Canadian interests to protect our environment?

Government Orders

●(1610)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, the bill would do a great deal to protect the environment. Some \$165 million will be devoted to that. More money will be going to the major project management office, which oversees the large projects, and a substantial amount of money, over \$35 million, will be going to maritime security.

As I mentioned in my remarks, tankers will have to be double-hulled, there will be mandatory pilotage, there will be enhanced navigation, there will be aerial surveillance, and additional measures will be taken when necessary in particular cases.

In terms of pipelines, over \$13 million will be invested in improving pipeline safety. Pipelines are the safest form of transporting oil and gas, but we will make it even safer through additional inspections.

As well, this government has devoted a great deal of money to improving safety overall. Billions of dollars have been devoted to alternative energy, to improving energy efficiency, and to improving the safety of conventional sources of energy and reducing the environmental impact, but this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. Our time is limited. Many hon. members may wish to pose questions.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this being a budget implementation bill, it is curious that the Minister of Natural Resources is leading the debate here today.

Therein lies my question. The minister, in his opening salvo, referred to the importance of accountability and of elected representatives being responsible and accountable for decisions made. The logical corollary is that if the minister and the government are serious about that level of accountability and responsibility, why is the minister not insisting that this be a separate piece of legislation to be debated by members at the natural resources committee or the environment committee?

The minister said that the reason for these regulatory changes is to enhance parliamentary and government accountability. If he is serious about that, then why, for goodness' sake, is he not introducing a separate piece of legislation with himself as the lead minister, because this is a natural resource bill? This should not be a finance bill.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, the bill is part of the budget package because it relates to a significant degree to economic development and growth, which is part of economic action plan 2012. Nevertheless, there will be an opportunity for members opposite to participate in debate. There will be a separate finance committee that will provide an opportunity for the public and the opposition to ask questions, to participate in the debate and to make their views known. It will not be a stultifying debate in any way.

There was an allusion to my comment about government decision-making. We are determined to make sure that for large projects that can have a significant regional or national impact on the environment and the economy, the decisions should ultimately be made by elected officials, not appointed officials.

●(1615)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of the natural resources delegation, I accompanied the Minister of Natural Resources to Asia, where I saw him effectively represent Canadian interests.

My question relates to the megaquarry, which he is aware of. A number of us are concerned about this proposed major open-pit mine in southern Ontario. Many of my constituents have voiced the desire to see a federal environmental assessment done for that proposed 2,500-acre quarry, which has the potential to be a 7,000-acre open-pit mine in southern Ontario.

Could the minister reassure my constituents that the changes proposed in the bill would strengthen environmental oversight protection for similar major projects in places like southern Ontario?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, the whole point of this exercise is to ensure that we have a robust environmental review of major projects. Now that particular project falls under the aegis of the Canadian Environmental Protection Agency.

There will be a list indicating the types of projects that will be reviewed. Major projects will normally be reviewed by CEPA. There will be an opportunity for substitution by the province but only if the particular province in question has the capacity and the willingness to conduct an identical level review. That will be up to the Minister of the Environment to oversee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, where we studied the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

Why does my colleague not want us to study proposed changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act? As members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, it is our job to study proposed changes to these bills. This act is very important and includes many environmental and human health protection measures.

What is my colleague afraid of? Why does he not want the committee to analyze this act? It is the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development's job to study changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, all members are allowed to participate in deciding who makes up the Standing Committee on Finance.

Each party is responsible for deciding which member will represent it during debates. If his party wants him to speak, he will have the chance to speak, to ask questions and to participate in the debates.

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister is on the matter of uranium mining and nuclear safety issues.

Government Orders

In dealing with these matters from a government or a regulatory point of view, there are two connected dimensions. One is the administrative function of actually carrying out the regulatory oversight and the other, of course, is the legal liability if something goes wrong.

I wonder if the minister would clarify in this legislation, since there is an attempt here to devolve responsibility from the federal level to the provincial level in respect of uranium mining in particular, whether he is devolving to the provinces simply the administrative responsibility for conducting the necessary environmental reviews and examinations or whether he is devolving the legal liability issue to the provincial jurisdiction involved.

Is it purely an administrative transfer or is also carrying with it the legal liability that would previously rest at the federal level?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission has responsibility for the oversight of uranium. We do not intend, nor does the bill contemplate, any transfer of liability, if that is the specific question asked.

•(1620)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today deeply concerned about the bill at hand and about the direction in which the government is taking this country.

Bill C-38 is a massive 425-page omnibus bill that goes far beyond the measures in the budget. It includes many previously unannounced changes.

This is the Conservatives' first post-election majority budget and their true colours are showing through.

[*Translation*]

During the election, the Conservatives did not tell Canadians that they planned to raise the age of eligibility for old age security. Canadians had to hear it all the way from Davos, Switzerland, months after the election. And yet, Bill C-38 raises the age of eligibility for OAS.

During the election, the Conservatives did not tell Canadians that they planned to do away with protecting our environment and fighting climate change. In fact, the Conservative platform claimed that they recognized that a healthy environment and a strong economy go hand in hand.

The Conservative platform also promised to conserve and protect our environment and to take action on climate change. They promised new investments to improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including an extension of the eco-energy retrofit homes program.

And yet, a full one-third of Bill C-38 is dedicated to the gutting of environmental regulation and protection. It repeals the Kyoto Implementation Act. And that extension of the eco-energy program? It never happened. In fact, the Conservatives abandoned the program early, despite its economic success.

[*English*]

During the election, the Conservatives promised open and accountable government. Their platform claimed that they were here for integrity and accountability, and that they were committed to

providing the principled, accountable government that our great country deserves. This was in the Conservative platform and yet Bill C-38 includes a series of previously unannounced measures that will contribute to a more secretive environment here in Ottawa by rolling back government transparency and accountability.

During the election, the Conservatives presented Canadians with one plan, but now that the elections are over, they are moving in the opposite direction as quickly as they can. Yes, the Conservatives' true colours are showing and I am deeply concerned and all Canadians should be deeply concerned.

My New Democratic colleagues and I strongly oppose the bill on both content and process grounds. Bill C-38 includes most of the major proposals announced in budget 2012, which we have vigorously opposed and to which I will return shortly. We also take issue with the undemocratic omnibus nature of the bill, which goes far beyond the budget. The tabling of such a large and wide-ranging bill in such a short time frame undermines Parliament by denying individual MPs the ability to fully inform themselves as to its content and implications.

Back in 1994, a young MP from Calgary took offence to the omnibus nature of the Liberal's budget implementation bill. This MP stood in the House and said:

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that you should rule it out of order and it should not be considered by the House in the form in which it has been presented.

...I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.

...in the interest of democracy I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

The bill contains many distinct proposals and principles and asking members to provide simple answers to such complex questions is in contradiction to the conventions and practices of the House.

That was said on March 25, 1990. Who said that? It was the young MP who is the current Prime Minister of Canada. His objection to the Liberal omnibus budget bill can and should be applied to the bill at hand.

•(1625)

In 1994, the Prime Minister argued that the Liberals' omnibus bill did not fulfill the required level of relevancy, that is that the items in the bill were too diverse and could not be reasonably grouped together in a coherent manner.

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Let us see how this bill stacks up on this point. Among other things, Bill C-38 raises the age of eligibility for OAS-GIS, guts the environmental assessment regime, eliminates the Auditor General oversight on a number of agencies, repeals the Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act, changes the rules for registered charities, amends the Seeds Act to potentially allow private contractors to perform food inspection and it changes the rules on foreign ownership of wireless telecommunications companies.

This is the definition of an omnibus bill and, applying the Prime Minister's own arguments, this bill should be ruled out of order. The measures in the bill are too wide-ranging to fulfill the relevancy requirement, and we agree that asking members to vote in a block on such diverse subject matters does not allow them to represent their constituents as our democracy requires.

However, once again the Conservatives are trying to ram legislation through Parliament without allowing Canadians and their MPs to thoroughly examine it. To make matters worse, they are trying to sneak through changes that will further restrict transparency and democracy in the future.

Bill C-38 would enact numerous changes that will limit the ability of Canadians and MPs to hold government accountable, with a broad attack on government transparency that was not present in budget 2012. These changes include weakening the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and undermining the authority of the National Energy Board, increasing cabinet discretion and ministerial power over a range of issues from immigration to food safety to approving pipelines, eliminating Auditor General oversight for many agencies, eliminating the position of the Inspector General for CSIS, and reducing reporting requirements to Parliament.

When did the Conservatives become so afraid of accountability? On this side of the House, we believe in a respectful and open Parliament and government.

[*Translation*]

We believe it is wrong to try and sneak measures past Canadians and to ram them through Parliament as quickly as possible, particularly legislation that will only make government less transparent.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said repeatedly that MPs are not getting the information they need in order to reasonably be able to exercise their power of oversight.

And while other Westminster parliaments around the world are working to improve fiscal transparency, this Conservative government is focused on reducing government accountability as quickly as possible.

New Democrats are focused on addressing the real priorities of Canadian families, such as creating good quality jobs, strengthening our health care system, ensuring a secure retirement for all and protecting our environment.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives are too busy focusing on gutting environmental protection and slashing vital services.

[*English*]

In the fall, the New Democrats tabled a motion that called on the government to take immediate action to grow our economy and create jobs. The Conservatives supported this motion with their votes but they have yet to turn these votes into action.

The Conservatives claim that this budget is all about job creation but the budget contains nine times more in cuts than in job creation measures and actually plans for unemployment to rise. There are already 1.4 million Canadians out of work. The current unemployment rate of 7.2% remains well above its pre-recession level of about 6%. For our young people, the future of our economy, the situation is even worse. Youth unemployment remains at nearly 14%.

Now the Conservatives say that they are creating jobs but, with the growth in the labour force, there is a net increase in the unemployment rate. In fact, since the Conservatives took office in February 2006, we have lost 365,000 manufacturing jobs.

● (1630)

In his appearance at the finance committee last week, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that the Conservatives' austerity budget would mean a further loss of 43,000 jobs and would slow Canada's economic recovery. Furthermore, he confirmed that when, combined with prior cuts, there would be a total of 103,000 jobs lost in the public and private sectors, a significant drag on our economy.

The government will claim these numbers are hypothetical, but Canadians know differently. They are dealing with the fallout. After all, when an industrial plant with 1,000 people closes, the impact is not isolated to those jobs only but also affects suppliers and small businesses in the community. It is the same when we lose over 19,000 public sector jobs. In fact, if the Conservatives were more focused on creating jobs for Canadians, why would they focus their efforts on paying consultants to review government spending at \$90,000 a day. That is where their priorities seem to lie.

New Democrats support the ongoing review of government spending to ensure that our tax dollars are well-spent, but we believe in reviewing all government expenditures, including tax expenditures.

As Glen Hodgson of the Conference Board of Canada told the finance committee last fall, "value for money applies on the tax expenditure side as much as on the spending side". We believe in policy based on evidence.

[*Translation*]

The evidence shows that the Conservatives' massive corporate tax breaks have failed to create good quality, family-supporting jobs. The Minister of Finance recognizes that infrastructure investment has more than five times the economic impact of corporate income tax cuts, as he indicated in the appendix of budget 2009.

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And yet, despite the evidence, this government is determined to continue on with its agenda of corporate tax cuts, while slashing jobs and services and planning for unemployment to rise.

[*English*]

Evidence shows as well that the OAS and GIS program is sustainable.

Pension and retirement expert Professor Tom Klassen of York University notes:

I haven't heard any academic argue that there's a crisis with OAS, which is why I was surprised a few days ago when the Prime Minister seemed to say there was a crisis...there's got to be...more evidence that there's a problem...I don't see that evidence.

Numerous experts, including the Parliamentary Budget Officer, have confirmed that the OAS, the old age security, is sustainable in its existing form. Even the government's own latest actuarial report on OAS indicates that the OAS/GIS will account for 2.37% of GDP in 2011, 3.16% in 2030 and then will fall below today's level to 2.35% in 2060.

The cost of the government's proposed changes will throw tens of thousands of seniors into poverty. In fact, without OAS/GIS for two years, almost 100,000 recently retired Canadian seniors would be made poor today. In particular, the poverty rate for single senior females would rise from 17% to 48%, almost tripling.

Despite this evidence, the government is using the budget bill to balance the books on the backs of our seniors.

The evidence shows that good environmental policy is also good economic policy. Policy-makers in Germany have long understood this and today Germans are reaping the benefits of their foresight in the form of cutting edge innovation, superior global competitiveness and hundreds of thousands of quality jobs.

Unfortunately, under the Conservative government, Canada is near the bottom of the global heap in terms of investments in green initiatives and our economy is suffering for Conservative inaction. Under the Conservatives, Canada's environmental ranking has plummeted to among the worst in the world. In fact, the 2011 Climate Change Performance Index ranks Canada 57 out of 60 nations surveyed, well behind G8 countries like the U.K., France and Germany that all scored in the top 10.

●(1635)

Despite this evidence that they are heading on the wrong course, the Conservatives are determined to use Bill C-38 to gut environmental assessment, reduce Canada's accountability on the world stage by repealing the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act and reduce the independent scientific advice available to guide policy making by shutting down the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

The Conservatives claim to be focused on efficiency and a review of government expenditures, but the evidence points to the contrary. With this bill, the Conservatives are leading the country down the wrong path. Just as effective government policy relies on evidence and effective review of government activities relies on government transparency, government spending reflects government priorities. Accurate, timely information about how much the government is

spending and on what is crucial for Canadians to be able to evaluate if the values of their elected representatives are in line with their own.

Not only is the government not in the business of providing answers, with Bill C-38 it is deliberately dismantling requirements for government transparency and accountability. The opening of the 2011 Conservative platform characterized the election last May as a choice between principled leadership and opportunism. I wholeheartedly agree. This Conservative bill is highly opportunistic. Instead of telling Canadians their plans during the election, the Conservatives have waited until the campaign is done to show Canadians what they are really about. On this side of the House, we believe in principled leadership.

[*Translation*]

We believe it is wrong for the government to claim that it is focused on job creation, while cutting jobs and planning for unemployment to rise.

We believe it is wrong for the government to cut a seniors' benefit program and throw tens of thousands of seniors into poverty.

We believe it is wrong for the government to gut measures that have been put in place to protect our environment and to turn its back on international action on climate change.

Finally, we believe it is wrong for the government to try to sneak legislation past Canadians and their MPs in a massive omnibus bill, especially when these measures deliberately seek to impede government transparency and accountability in the future.

[*English*]

I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, because it:

a) weakens Canadians' confidence in the work of parliament, decreases transparency and erodes fundamental democratic institutions by systematically over-concentrating power in the hands of government ministers;

b) shields the government from criticism on extremely controversial non-budgetary issues by bundling them into one enormous piece of legislation masquerading as a budgetary bill;

c) undermines the critical role played by such trusted oversight bodies as the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, the CSIS Inspector General and the National Energy Board, amongst many others, thereby silencing institutional checks and balances to the government's ideological agenda;

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d) raises the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement from 65 to 67 years in a reckless effort to balance the government's misguided spending on prisons, incompetent military procurement and inappropriate Ministerial expenses;

e) includes provisions to gut the federal environmental assessment regime and to overhaul fish habitat protection that will adversely affect fragile ecosystems and Canada's environmental sustainability for generations to come;

f) calls into question Canada's food inspection and public health regime by removing critical oversight powers of the Auditor General in relation to the Canada Food Inspection Agency all while providing an avenue and paving the way for opportunities to privatize a number of essential inspection functions; and

g) does nothing to provide a solution for the growing number of Canadians looking for employment in Canada's challenging job market and instead fuels further job loss, which according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer will amount to a total loss of 43,000 jobs in 2014.

• (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The amendment is admissible.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for York Centre.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. One year ago today, the Canadian people sent us here. They elected a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government. They gave us a strong mandate to create jobs and long-term prosperity.

I am really curious. In listening to the member's remarks that would make the drafters of the Waffle Manifesto blush with pride, I wonder if she had an opportunity to speak to her seatmate, the member for Hamilton Centre. His experiment was tried in Ontario with high taxes, low unemployment, reckless government spending where the Ontario credit rating was downgraded a number of times. This is what she wants to bring to Canada.

Did she have an opportunity to speak to her seatmate about how Ontario was damaged and hurt by such policies of the NDP government at that time, and how the province of Ontario still has not recovered from that period?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, it is incredibly telling that with a budget implementation act of 425 pages that throws in everything, including the kitchen sink, the hon. member opposite cannot think of one question or one way to challenge anything I have just said that challenges the legitimacy, the transparency and the democratic approach of this bill. He cannot think of one question to ask on that. Therefore, what he has to do is resort back to a boilerplate talking point from some distant past in some Conservative ideological fantasyland. It is funny, but it is shocking.

• (1645)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has done a masterful job of showing the deficiencies in the bill.

When the bill kills the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, the Kyoto protocol and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, it is doing irreparable harm. That is clear.

We know what it is about. We know it is about building pipelines to the United States and China and rushing little-processed bitumen off our land.

My question to the hon. member is, would she and her party support the building of a much better pipeline to eastern Canada to

ensure energy self-sufficiency for Canada; more affordable oil products in the east; more job creation; and the creation, not the closing, of refineries across Canada?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, obviously we all understand the need for an energy security policy in Canada. What approach that will take remains to be seen because there is a vacuum on the other side of the House in terms of what that would look like.

I will tell the hon. member and I will tell the House what I am in favour of. I am in favour of a rigorous environmental assessment that makes sure we are balancing our economic needs with the needs for future generations to have a sustainable environment so we are protecting our wilderness areas, our coastal water areas, the air we breathe, the food we eat, so that not just Canadians today but future generations are protected. That is what is undermined by the changes, the one-third of the bill that is being proposed by the government.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Parkdale—High Park for very ably outlining the NDP concerns with the government bill.

The member did touch on the fact that this omnibus bill has all kinds of repercussions for Canadians. I think one of the real repercussions for Canadians is undermining the strength of our democracy.

I would like to ask the member to comment on what she feels this does to the role of parliamentarians, to the role of MPs, not only here in the House to be able fully debate every aspect of a complex piece of legislation, but also what it does to the committee structure in the country. Why would Canadians trust a government that has misused the public confidence with regard to the F-35s and with regard to prorogation?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, that really gets to the heart of the issue. I think it is fair for the Minister of Natural Resources to say there are changes the government would like to make in the area of building pipelines and that there are things Canadians should examine. These should be proposed in a proper separate bill, a bill that puts forward the government's goals in the area of energy and natural resources and the environment.

We have parliamentarians who have been elected to represent their constituents, the people of Canada, in their critic area. When we have a bill of 425 pages, a third of which is gutting environmental protections, that will go to the finance committee instead of the environment committee then we have to ask ourselves the questions: what are they hiding, how are Canadians served by this, and what is happening to our democracy?

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always find it exciting to see the NDP members stand up to talk about protecting Canadian families and Canadian jobs. This is the same party that sent members down to the United States to protest Canadian jobs, to protest against Canadian families earning a living. They should be ashamed of themselves for that.

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I am curious. They talk about how they stand up for Canadians, how they stand up for jobs, except I am wondering why they voted against the economic action plan, not once but twice? They voted against real jobs, against roads and bridges, against hockey rinks being built from small town Alberta to small town Quebec. Right across the country, they voted against training Canadians to take Canadian jobs. Why did they vote against those plans? It was the largest infrastructure investment in Canada's history and they voted against it.

They should be ashamed of themselves. Not only do they not stand up for Canadians when they have the chance, but they stand against them with foreign powers. They stand all the time against Canadians and Canadian jobs. I want to know why they would do that.

•(1650)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, it is a little sad that we could not get some legitimate questions about the comments that were made so we could actually have a reasonable debate.

If the hon. member wants to talk about job creation, I raised in my speech that it was the Conservatives who paid consultants \$90,000 a day to tell them where they should cut programs and services in the public sector, and guess what? They will not tell Canadians where those cuts will come from, so we do not even have the proper ability to defend Canadian services, to defend the programs Canadians want, because they are not coming clean with the Canadian people.

I think that is very telling. They are using stale talking points rather than dealing with this massive budget at hand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the finance critic, for her excellent analysis of the budget. We are both members of the Standing Committee on Finance, and I would also like to commend her on her work.

I would like to ask her a question and hear what she has to say about the process that is being used. She spoke a bit about the fact that we have a 425-page budget implementation bill that throws in everything but the kitchen sink. We know that a third of this bill pertains to environmental issues, yet this bill will be examined only by the Standing Committee on Finance.

I would like to know whether the hon. member read Andrew Coyne's very eloquent *Postmedia News* column that unequivocally condemned the fact that the government was including all these issues in one bill.

What does she think is the committee's role? Does she think that the committee will be able to effectively examine this 425-page bill?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that very good question.

Indeed, this is supposedly a budget implementation bill, but in fact, it is a mishmash of things. One-third of this bill has to do with changes that would eliminate environmental protection measures.

This bill undermines democracy and the ability of members of Parliament and Canadians to review its content properly. That is why we are asking that the bill be divided so that the clauses on the

environment can be reviewed by the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development and the rest by the other committees with interests in this bill.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That is all for questions and comments on this round. Before we resume debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for St. Paul's, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, National Defence; and the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung, Pensions.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-38, the government's budget implementation bill.

I would like to use my time to address four themes: namely how the Conservatives are, one, hiding the full impact of their spending cuts; two, breaking their election promise to protect old age security; three, using budget 2012 to ram through important changes to Canada that are unrelated to budgets; and four, failing to create good-paying jobs and recognize the important issue of growing income inequality in Canada.

Later on in this debate, my colleague from the riding of Etobicoke North, the Liberal critic for the environment, will speak on how the Conservatives are using this budget bill to completely rewrite Canada's environmental laws. We understand that streamlining environmental laws and protection can be a meritorious objective and approach, but there is a difference between streamlining and gutting.

The approach of the government to use an omnibus bill, the kitchen sink bill, to put all of these measures in the same legislation is to deny Parliament and committees the opportunity to subject this legislation to suitable scrutiny and enable us, as parliamentarians, to be both responsible and accountable.

I will first speak about the full impact of the government's spending cuts. The Conservatives are trying to hide the full impact of their cuts from Canadians by only talking about half of them. Allow me to illustrate that with a couple of examples.

We know the Conservative cuts will ramp up over four years until they reach \$10.8 billion in ongoing cuts to the annual budget. However, budget 2012 only provides details on \$5 billion of the \$10.8 billion in ongoing cuts.

As we try to make sense of this budget, we must be mindful that the information the government released in budget 2012 applies to just under half of the overall cuts. That goes for the 19,200 federal public servants who will be laid off. Those positions that are being eliminated stem from just half of the cuts.

Government Orders

We hear about the ongoing cuts of \$688 million to Public Safety, \$153 million to Transport, \$310 million to Agriculture and Agri-food and \$378 million to international aid. Once again, those cuts are the result of just half of the overall cuts that are projected by the federal government. For the other half of the cuts we have precious few details.

From budget 2010, we know there will be an ongoing cut of \$1 billion to National Defence and an ongoing cut of more than \$1.8 billion to international aid. I do not know how the government can afford \$16 orange juice, six star hotels, and several thousand dollars in limousine bills in that context, but that is another story. The only other person I know of who has stayed at The Savoy is Conrad Black, but that too is another story.

We read in the newspaper that Canada's foreign aid is being cut by \$378 million, but that is not even close to the full story. When we add the cuts announced in 2010, we know the ongoing annual cut to foreign aid is at least \$2.2 billion, which is roughly 50% of Canada's foreign aid budget.

We know the ongoing annual cut to National Defence is at least \$2.1 billion, not the \$1.1 billion introduced in budget 2012.

We know the ongoing annual cuts to the Government of Canada will be \$10.8 billion, not the \$5.2 billion announced in budget 2012.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

What we do not know is the impact that these additional cuts will have on the programs and services offered to Canadians. We do not know how the other departments and agencies will be affected.

[*English*]

We do not know how many federal public servants will be cut in addition to 19,200 positions that were announced in budget 2012.

[*Translation*]

The government cannot cut an additional \$5.6 billion without cutting programs and services.

[*English*]

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimates that in addition to the 19,200 positions being eliminated in budget 2012, there will be a further 6,300 jobs cut as a result of the government's previous strategic reviews that have yet to be implemented, and a further 9,000 cuts as a result of the government's budget operating freeze. That creates a total of 34,500 federal public service job cuts.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer agrees that the 19,200 public service jobs that are being cut do not represent the full number. In his words, "Additional job losses will be required.... we're actually talking about cuts on top of cuts." How many more federal jobs will be eliminated? The government is not telling Canadians or the public service the truth.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

We do not know why the Conservatives are hiding the real figures. We do not know why they are not explaining to Canadians the cuts that are going to affect them. We do not know why the Conservatives

refuse to give Canadians and Parliament all the information they need to have an informed debate.

[*English*]

As Liberals, we recognize the government is about choices and some spending cuts are necessary, even in good times. It was in that context that we, as a government—and I remember when the member for Wascana was minister of finance and the member for Markham—Unionville was the minister responsible for the expenditure review committee of cabinet. I served on the expenditure review committee of cabinet at that time. It is important to realize, to put this in context, that we were actually in surplus at that time.

It is important to also recognize that we agree, in principle, with reviewing government expenditures on an ongoing basis in surplus or deficit to ensure best value for taxpayers, to ensure that programs and services reflect actual need, not need that may have lapsed in the past.

It is also important to realize and to recognize the context of the surplus that the Liberal governments were delivering. The Liberal government had inherited a \$43 billion deficit that was left behind by the previous government. Under the Liberal watch, Canada went from a \$43 billion deficit to nine consecutive years of budgetary surplus that paid over \$100 billion down on the national debt. And it was during those good times, during surplus, that we did expenditure review, but we did very differently from the way the government is doing it now.

In fact, we also cut Canadian taxes while maintaining a balanced budget and we introduced the largest personal income tax cut in the history of Canada. We also cut corporate taxes when we could afford to when we were in surplus. We cut payroll taxes.

However—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Thirteen consecutive times.

Hon. Scott Brison: Thirteen consecutive times, I am reminded by one of the greatest finance ministers we have ever had, the member for Wascana.

However, in terms of the way we conducted expenditure review, we identified savings very differently from the way the Conservatives are doing it. We were careful to provide detailed information to Canadians long before the cuts were implemented.

Government Orders

In fact, we can get all that information. It is still available on the Internet, at www.expenditurereview.gc.ca. I do not know how much longer the Conservatives will leave that up. But if we go to that website, we see, line by line, a description of which programs were being cut, where, when they were being cut, why it was being done and by how much. That was provided before the cuts were implemented. That is the level of detail that Canadians expect from their government in a functioning democracy.

It is important to keep in mind that was almost seven years ago. The level of transparency, in terms of information for Canadians that is demanded by the public today, has actually increased. The Liberal government that I was proud to be part of and the expenditure review committee that I was proud to serve on that identified billions of dollars of savings for Canadians, was more open and transparent then, seven years ago, than the Conservative government is today.

I will add that our decisions were made by ministers working in concert with public servants. We did not have to pay a consulting company \$90,000 a day. We did not have to outsource our decision-making on those difficult decisions at the time. However, it is important that that level of detail be provided to Canadians today.

Unfortunately, now the Conservatives routinely hide even the most basic information from Canadians and members of Parliament. They are not just hiding this information from the opposition in a partisan sense, they are also hiding it from their own members on that side of the House. Members elected in the Conservative Party have the same fiduciary constitutional responsibility as part of their jobs to hold their government to account and to demand the information that members on this side of the House have.

Last year, the Conservatives were found in contempt of Parliament for hiding the cost of legislation that was before the House. They hid the cost of their crime bills and the cost of their F-35s. They refused to provide the information that Canadians needed in order to make informed decisions. They refused to provide that information to parliamentarians representing Canadian citizens. By hiding that information, they were attacking the very democratic foundation of our country. For that, they were the first government in the history of the Westminster system to be found in contempt of Parliament.

The Auditor General has since eviscerated the government for keeping two sets of books on the F-35s: a real set that was kept hidden from Canadians and the Parliament of Canada, and a phony set the Conservatives used during the last election.

Now the Conservatives are at it again. On Monday, the government held a briefing for MPs and senators on this budget bill. The legislation would implement changes, for instance, to old age security and raise the age from 65 to 67. Government representatives were asked how much these changes to old age security would change the cost of the program for Canadians. The government refused to answer. Worse, it said that we would find this information out after the bill was passed and when the chief actuarial officer updates his report.

The Conservatives would not tell us this information prior to the vote on the bill. They insist that these changes to OAS are necessary in order to save money. They say that the system is not sustainable. In reality, as we have heard from several reports, including Finance

reports, reports from the Parliamentary Budget Officer and OECD reports, that is absolutely false. In Canada's case, old age security is sustainable as is.

As well, the Conservatives will not tell us how much these changes will save the treasury. They will not provide this basic information that we, as parliamentarians, need to make an informed decision. Is the real reason because these numbers would show Parliament the truth, that in fact OAS is sustainable? That we do not have to make these draconian changes that would punish our most vulnerable citizens? These regressive changes would hurt, in many cases, the poorest of the poor.

We do know that the Prime Minister is breaking his election promise to Canadians by raising the age of OAS from 65 to 67. He promised he would not cut Canadian pensions. This is a cut on Canadian pensions and an attack on low-income seniors.

We also know that the Prime Minister is ignoring the advice of the OECD, Canada's chief actuarial officer and the Parliamentary Budget Officer who all agree that these changes are not necessary. We know that the Prime Minister is ignoring his own experts on this matter. The experts agree that it is sustainable. Even if OAS were not sustainable, if changes had to be made, there are changes that could be made that would be progressive. For instance, we could adjust the clawback threshold. There are areas we could look at.

Let us look at who gets OAS. Some 40% of Canadians who receive OAS make less than \$20,000 per year and 53% of those who receive OAS make less than \$25,000 per year. Older single women living in poverty are disproportionately affected by OAS changes. To qualify for the guaranteed income supplement that is received by the poorest of the poor, Canada's most vulnerable citizens, one would have to qualify for old age security. Those people will lose about \$30,000 over a two year period.

Now the government is saying that people can work a couple of extra years. Well, that may be fine if one is a politician, journalist, accountant, lawyer or consultant. However, it is a little tougher if one is a pipefitter, welder, carpenter or a woman working in a fish plant in Newfoundland in cold, damp conditions on a concrete floor all day. We have to think of all Canadians. Those who are doing physical labour are some of the most vulnerable.

Government Orders

• (1705)

It is important to realize that with these changes to OAS the government is saying that it is giving advance notice so that people can save a little more. How can families making \$20,000 or \$25,000 be expected to save a little more? I think this shows the degree to which the government is out of touch with the realities of Canada's working poor, and the realities of income inequality in Canada.

Raising OAS is only part of this kitchen sink bill. The reality is that this bill is 421 pages in length, has 753 clauses and amends 70 laws. It includes a complete rewrite of our environmental laws, a unilateral cut of 3% to the provinces for health care funding at a time when our population is growing, the tearing up of 100,000 immigration applications that have been worked on for years, sweeping changes to EI, and the removal of several laws including the Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act, and the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act. It includes the elimination of several government bodies including the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, the First Nations Statistical Institute and the National Council of Welfare.

The bill actually gives the Governor General a salary increase of \$30,000, after taxes. I do not think our Governor General was pining for a pay increase. I am not sure if this kind of salary hike is appropriate at a time when government programs and services are being slashed.

The point is this is a very big piece of legislation. It covers a wide range of issues and areas of public policy. For example, included in the sweeping changes to EI is a change that would allow low-income recipients who find work to keep more of their income. There are some of us who may look at part of that and say, "Okay, that makes some sense." However, we cannot support that when the budget bill also includes measures that would gut old age security for a lot of seniors, preventing them from receiving it at the time when they need it, or that potentially reduces Canada's environmental oversight and regulatory framework.

The Liberal member for York West has been championing, for a long time, changes to protect long-term disability pension plans. There are some of those measures in there. We could, if provided the opportunity, support some of those measures, but we are not given that opportunity because this is an omnibus bill. It forces us to vote for the entire kitchen sink bill and not exercise our responsibilities as parliamentarians to evaluate and support individual measures that may be meritorious while others would not be.

The general direction this legislation would take Canada is not something I would support, but there are measures in this bill that I could support. By bundling these different changes in a single piece of legislation, the Conservatives are denying Parliament the opportunity and the ability to fulfill its responsibilities to provide oversight and clear direction.

I would like to quote Andrew Coyne on this matter:

...the practice has been to throw together all manner of bills involving wholly different responsibilities of government in one all-purpose "budget implementation" bill, and force MPs to vote up or down on the lot. While the 2012 budget implementation bill is hardly the first in this tradition, the scale and scope is on a level not previously seen, or tolerated.... It makes it impossible to know what Parliament really intended by any of it. We've no idea whether MPs supported or

opposed any particular bill in the bunch, only that they voted for the legislation that contained them. There is no common thread that runs between them, no overarching principle; they represent not a single act of policy, but a sort of compulsory buffet.

Over the coming days this House is expected to continue its debate on this legislation. A number of changes in the legislation will be discussed. No doubt a number of changes will fall through the cracks. I expect the Conservatives are counting on this.

Finally, on the issue of income inequality, this was not an ordinary economic downturn. It is not an ordinary recovery. We are part of a global economic restructuring. Canada's recovery is being driven by our natural resource wealth. As such, we are seeing a commensurate higher dollar and a very different effect of the recovery on different parts of the country. We are seeing the crowding out of a lot of traditional high-value manufacturing jobs. We are seeing an increase in the gap between rich and poor.

• (1710)

In several recent polls, Canadians have indicated that the issue of income inequality is one of the most important economic issues facing the country and in some cases the most important. There is nothing in this budget addressing income inequality specifically, but there are measures in this budget that actually make it worse. We believe that income inequality should be on the agenda of the Canadian Parliament and this budget, among other things, denies Parliament the opportunity to have a fulsome debate on one of the issues that is important to Canadians, and that is growing income inequality.

• (1715)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found my colleague's presentation somewhat entertaining because there seemed to be a lack of understanding of what exactly is in the budget implementation act. I would suggest that my hon. colleague perhaps take a second look at it because there are many measures that help to deal with things like inequality. In fact, the best way to fight poverty and to deal with inequality is to ensure that Canadians have jobs, which is the main focus of this budget. It is the main focus because we are addressing jobs, long-term prosperity and, of course, economic growth.

I have before me pages and pages of good quotes from economists across the country and elsewhere who suggest that this budget implementation act is in fact the direction that this government ought to have taken. They applaud the fact that we have taken this direction and they suggest that if we deter from this path it would put our country at significant risk.

Could the member opposite address the fact that there are so many economists who agree with our position? How does he explain the fact that there are literally dozens of them who agree with the direction this government has taken?

Government Orders

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, there are also a lot of economists who believe that income inequality is an important issue and that there are economic costs as well as social costs to ignoring income inequality. A lot of economists, including the Nobel prize winning economist Joe Stiglitz, have said that the economic costs of ignoring income inequality will be significant, that in fact growing income inequality is leading to a gap in equality of opportunity.

I know some rich people who are as concerned about the issue of income inequality as anyone else because they know it is bad for society and, while they believe in a free market economy, they do not believe in a free market society. They know that it is fundamental to social cohesion and to our communities that people have equality of opportunity. The only way this budget addresses income inequality is to make it worse. I am concerned about the growth of inequality of opportunity within Canada, between provinces and between rich neighbourhoods and poor neighbourhoods. It is an issue that we will—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking a lot about what is in the bill and what is not in the bill. One of the things that really caught my eye is this tiny piece in the bill that relates to foreign ownership when it comes to spectrum. The auction the government put out does nothing to address rural areas in Canada. Rural Canadians do not matter to the current government because it is continuing to ignore them when it comes to broadband and wireless technology.

What the government put in here was foreign ownership. A company can come in here and buy any one of our small new entrants as long as they are below 10%. If they are below that 10% they can buy them up, opening up companies like AT&T to come in and maybe buy this and take over. We have seen too many examples of this in the past. In my riding of Sudbury, we had Vale take over Inco.

Has the member considered this? What does he think the implications will be when we have more foreign ownership coming into our country?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to issues of foreign ownership, I am generally quite open to foreign direct investment, with certain caveats.

For instance, when it comes to telecommunication, it is generally thought of by the ideologues that when we deregulate it leaves more competition and more competition leads to lower prices. That is not always the case in telco. When we deregulate telco, quite frequently prices get closer to costs. The reality is that in rural and small town communities the costs of providing telco are often higher because the population being served is smaller and the infrastructure costs are still significantly high. As a result of that, there is a cherry-picking that goes on in the cities where there is a bigger market so there is an opportunity to cut prices. Therefore, a cutting of prices will occur for urban clients but there is often a commensurate jacking up of prices in rural communities. I generally favour rational and, in some cases, lower regulations on some of these services if they lead to more competition. My fear is that on some of these measures we could

actually see an increase of the prices for access to telco in rural communities.

This leads to another fact. The cuts to CAP that the government is implementing will have a terrible effect on a lot of the communities I represent in my rural Nova Scotian riding. There are communities and libraries in my riding where there is a wait to get on a computer. People cannot afford to have their own computer or Internet access so they go and wait for a long time to have access. Those CAP sites are important and should be maintained.

• (1720)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague about some of the comments coming from the government with respect to how in the past the former Liberal government would put a lot of the services down to the provinces when it comes to deficit fighting and cutting down on the deficit, which we did.

However, I would like the member to comment on how raising the age from 65 to 67 for old age security eligibility, as well as the guaranteed income supplement, will be a downloading a lot of responsibilities onto the provinces, certainly when it comes to welfare, housing and a lot of the social services.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with members of provincial governments. In fact, I met with the premier this week. The provinces are not being engaged or consulted on any of these changes. There will be a significant off-loading of social costs with these changes to OAS. This also comes at a time when we have an aging demographic, particularly in Atlantic Canada, which will create a disproportionately high burden on our health care costs.

The other area where there will be an off-loading onto the provinces is in the whole area of costs to operate prisons. The government is proposing to put a lot more Canadians behind bars but is actually cutting Correctional Services of Canada. Therefore, the question that must be asked is: Who will pay for these increased costs?

I do not have time to talk about the illogical and ideological spectacle of government, at a time when we know that these approaches to law and order do not work, spending money on them. The reality is that the provinces will bear a significant amount of expense, so I think they will become more engaged in this debate.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, thank the member for Kings—Hants for his no doubt learned speech. However, there was a moment toward the end of his speech when I think we caught a glimpse of some of the tortuous logic on economic matters that the Liberal Party has fallen victim to. He drew a distinction between a free market economy and a free market society. He likes the free market economy but not the free market society.

We on this side of the House understand that a free market is a free market. If it is managed well, it serves society, creates jobs and creates growth.

If it is not by keeping taxes low, if it is not by investing in the very best human resources and in innovation, and if it is not by encouraging responsible resource development, how else does the hon. member expect to make Canada competitive in the decades and, indeed, the centuries to come?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I should cite for the hon. member one of Canada's former prime ministers who has a close relationship with both the hon. member and myself. He sent me an email on my bill on income inequality congratulating me. He said that this was exactly what the Government of Canada and the Parliament of Canada ought to be engaged in. That was a Progressive Conservative prime minister who knew the difference between a free market society and a free market economy.

I can also tell the hon. member that people who, like me, recognize the importance of a free market economy, we also recognize the importance of a vibrant public education system, ensuring that we invest in equality of opportunity and that we work with the provinces on a national basis to ensure that Canadians do not get left behind. That is what the Conservatives are forgetting. This is a budget that leaves a lot of Canadians behind. We cannot say that it does not address income inequality, it—

• (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The member's time has expired.

BILL C-38—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 29, the Minister of Finance tabled economic action plan 2012, our low tax plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity, which the House voted on and passed on April 4. The budget builds on our successful plan that has already seen nearly 700,000 net new jobs created across Canada since 2009.

On Thursday, April 26, we introduced this bill, Bill C-38, the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act, to implement the budget and the job creating measures it includes, including those measures to ensure that Canada's competitive advantages are harnessed to ensure our prosperity for decades to come. On the same day that the bill was introduced, I informed the House that there would be a vote on the bill on May 14.

In order to keep that commitment to Canadians and the House, I must advise that an agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) concerning the proceedings at second reading of Bill C-38, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at those stages.

For planning purposes, I would like to advise that it is the intention of the government to allow a total of seven days for the second reading debate of Bill C-38. That would allow a vote to take place, as indicated earlier, on May 14.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am sure the House appreciates the new information from the government House leader.

Before I call on the Minister of the Environment to resume debate, I will let him know that I will need to interrupt him in about four minutes, this being the end of government orders for the day.

SECOND READING

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from York Centre.

It is always a pleasure to rise and address the House but today it is an even greater pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to this important budget and our commitment to environmental excellence in Canada.

[*Translation*]

We all know that, thanks to the efforts of this government, Canada has weathered the economic crisis of the past few years and countries around the world have taken notice. Since July 2009, more than 690,000 jobs have been added and the peak achieved before the recession has now been exceeded by 260,000 jobs. That is the highest job growth rate among the G7 countries.

[*English*]

I am proud that our economic action plan has indeed shown itself to be world class, but I am also proud that our environmental actions and our national parks are also meeting world-class standards.

I know that hon. members are particularly interested in the environment, and we are very busy on that front. One example, an important one, is our performance with respect to greenhouse gas emissions.

Just last month I was pleased to announce the results of the national inventory report and the data collected from the greenhouse gas emissions reporting program. Between 2009 and 2010, our emissions remained steady, while thanks to our economic action plan, our economy grew 3.2% during that time.

This is not a blip; this is a continuing trend. Yes, emissions have grown by 17% since 1990, but in the same period, Canada's economy has grown over three times as much, by 60.5%, through a responsible, practical approach to managing both the environment and the economy and with the support and participation of our provincial and territorial partners through new technologies and better practices in our various industrial sectors. Through all of these, we will continue on this path.

Hon. members know that Canada is a world leader in a very competitive global economy, but we cannot remain world class without continually sharpening our skills, focusing on essential activities, increasing productivity and working smarter. This government knows this, and our commitment to Environment Canada is to build on the tradition of excellence in the organization and the extraordinarily talented and committed employees.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let me give just a few examples of the steps we have taken. Even before this budget, we renewed the *Plan Saint-Laurent* and the Atlantic ecosystem initiative. We created a world-class system for monitoring the water, air and biodiversity of the incredibly important oil sands region of Alberta, and I—

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member. He will have six minutes left for his intervention, but it being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-304, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act (protecting freedom), as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no motions at report stage on this bill, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question of the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC) moved that Bill C-304, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act (protecting freedom), as amended, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 9, 2012, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I move that we see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in January 2012 I asked the Prime Minister to apologize for the government's characterization of first nations as adversaries in an internal government document on the oil sands.

My question was, "Will the Prime Minister apologize for this shameful position and affirm today that first nations have constitutional rights that must be recognized and respected when it comes to the development of anything on or affecting their traditional lands?"

Last January, Greenpeace Canada and Climate Action Network released an internal government document entitled "Pan-European Oil Sands Advocacy Strategy", which contained a list that divided stakeholders, according to their positions on the oil sands, as "influencers", "allies" or "adversaries". First nations were appalled when they discovered that the government had labelled them as "adversaries", along with environmental advocates.

I would like to remind the House that when I asked this question on January 31, the Crown-First Nations Gathering had just been held. At the gathering, the Prime Minister declared that the time had come to reset the relationship between the crown and first nations.

However, the gap between the Prime Minister's rhetoric on resetting the relationship and the reality of the government's total disregard for the rights of indigenous people to be fully recognized and respected when it comes to resource development is staggering. Let us not forget that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada has endorsed, obliges Canada to obtain the "free, prior and informed consent" of indigenous peoples.

I cannot think of a term more insulting than "adversaries". I would remind the House that this characterization is entirely consistent with the Conservatives' default position on dealing with those who hold different views, which is that they are either with the government or against it.

It is equally disturbing that this same document characterizes the federal aboriginal affairs department and the National Energy Board, which is supposed to be an independent industry regulator, as "allies".

For anyone who values the independence and impartiality of democratic processes like the NEB hearings, this characterization raises alarm bells about the independence and impartiality of the hearings and leaves little doubt that the government has already determined the outcome of the review.

Adjournment Proceedings

The document goes on to justify the government's defence of the oil sands industry in terms of the creation of jobs and economic prosperity for all Canadians. I would ask an important question: what about the potential risks to first nations who are along the pipeline route?

I have heard from groups like the Yinka Dene Alliance, which opposes the northern gateway pipeline not because it is against development but because it believes this project could be potentially catastrophic. An oil spill in its traditional territories would not only be an environmental nightmare but would also jeopardize jobs that exist today for first nations in the vibrant tourism and fisheries sectors.

Once again, opposition to the gateway pipeline should not be misconstrued as opposition to development writ large. In the case of the Yinka Dene, these first nations are partners in a project to export liquid natural gas from a new terminal in Kitimat, a project that they determined carries low risks to both the economy and the environment.

For the sake of clarity, is the parliamentary secretary willing to clarify the government's position? Is the position of the government to treat the constitutional rights of first nations with the type of disrespect shown in the internal memo?

• (1735)

[Translation]

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, I am pleased to respond to the question asked by the member for St. Paul's.

I would like to assure the hon. member that the Government of Canada is committed to protecting the health and safety of first nations communities and the environmental integrity of reserve lands.

Canada has a legal obligation to consult and accommodate aboriginal peoples in certain situations. Our government takes its duty to consult very seriously and will consult aboriginal groups any time an activity proposed by the federal government could have a negative impact on any ancestral or treaty rights. Consultation with aboriginal groups is a key part of the environmental assessment process and the regulatory approval process in Canada.

In fact, Canada's approach includes new, up-to-date guidelines for federal public servants regarding the duty to consult, and these guidelines include guiding principles and directives regarding consultation. These principles and directives provide federal public servants with clearer and more up-to-date guidance regarding their legal obligation to consult.

Currently, we are working with aboriginal groups, the provinces and the territories to develop a collaborative process for consultation and accommodation that will result in efficient decision-making and reduce or eliminate duplication with other jurisdictions.

I would also like to add that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada coordinates a whole-of-government approach

to consultation by working with other departments to ensure that meaningful consultations are carried out for resource projects and other activities.

Canada seeks to fulfill its legal obligation to consult by undertaking meaningful consultations directly with aboriginal communities to ensure that their opinions are taken into consideration when the time comes to make a decision about an oil sands development project or other projects that could compromise their rights. These meaningful consultations benefit the Canadian economy by moving these projects forward.

By carrying out these meaningful consultations, we support the efforts of aboriginal peoples to improve their social well-being and economic prosperity, to establish healthy and more sustainable communities, and to increase their participation in the political, social and economic development of Canada.

Our government continues to work in concert with aboriginal people on both the development and implementation of strategies to ensure that informed decisions are made to meet today's needs and those of future generations.

• (1740)

[English]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I do not believe that the parliamentary secretary actually heard the question.

The question was this: is the position of the government to treat the constitutional rights of first nations with the type of disrespect shown in that internal memo?

How can we believe that the Conservatives are willing to work in partnership with first nations when they qualify them, in that very document, as "adversaries"—after the Crown-First Nations Gathering, after the timeliness of the budget implementation act debate today, of which the national chief has been so critical?

Again, the government does not seem to understand, in the budget implementation, that it is bound by the Constitution to uphold its duty to consult, which means it cannot unilaterally reduce these duties through changes to existing legislation.

It is extraordinarily important that the treaties be honoured and that the government treat the governments of first nations as government to government.

Will the parliamentary secretary apologize today for the disgraceful words used by his government to characterize first nations as "adversaries"?

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, as I already said, our government takes its duty to consult very seriously. As the member for St. Paul's knows, the Crown has a legal obligation to consult, as needed, and to accommodate aboriginal groups any time a project could compromise ancestral treaty rights. That is precisely what we are doing.

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The health and safety of all Canadians and the environment are top priorities for this government. That is why our government is working with other governments, aboriginal groups, scientists and the industry in order to monitor the cumulative environmental impact of developing the oil sands.

Understanding and minimizing cumulative impacts is a key part of environmental management and the overall governance of Canada's lands and resources. I repeat, meaningful consultation is a priority for our government.

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I asked a question with respect to the F-35 costs back on January 31, and frankly it does seem to be light years away since January 31. We have since had the Auditor General's report, and the PBO is working on some form of attempted reconciliation between what the government chooses to tell us and what the realities are.

Ironically, at this stage, the PBO, the AG, and the cabinet are all roughly in agreement as to what the costs are. Why we have had to go through this horrible exercise of trying to drag out of the government the actual full life cycle costs of this asset, the F-35, is beyond me. There is really no dispute as to what is the way to do full life cycle costing. It is set out in the U.S. congressional handbook, in the U.K. handbook and even in our own handbook.

When the finance committee passed its motion back in 2010, which ultimately led to the dissolution of the previous Parliament and the fall of the government, it was clearly and completely known what the full life cycle costs were. Here we are, just over a year later, still dragging this information out through the nose of the government of the day. We would not be dragging it out through the nose if the government had been upfront with the Canadian people.

The Minister of Defence kind of fell into it this week when he said that the cabinet knew that it would be \$25 billion. The cabinet was not misled. It knew there was this \$10 billion gap between what Canadians and Parliament knew and what the full life cycle costs were, which is in line with what the PBO said. It is clearly in line with what the AG said. Therefore, the AG, cabinet and the PBO all knew what the right figure was. The only people who did not actually know what the correct figure was were the people of Canada and the Parliament of Canada.

We are almost there in agreeing on the actual number. It is a pity that we have to go through this level of confusion and these repetitive questions in question period, the castigating of anyone who actually tries to speak truth to power. I was witness to a shameful exhibition by the Conservative members on the finance committee, ridiculing the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who as we know is more frequently right than he is wrong.

I thought it was kind of ironic yesterday to have the deputy minister of defence actually say, when asked by another member about the two sets of books being run, that the column on the left hand side went to cabinet for decision making. In other words, that is the truthful column, the \$25 billion column. The government decided to communicate the other number, the acquisition costs and

sustainment costs with another number. He went on to say that they worked off the left hand column and that the right hand column was how they responded to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In other words, mislead, mislead, mislead. It is the modus operandi of the government.

• (1745)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, if we are going to have a discussion about confusion and misleading of the Canadian people on this issue, then I really do insist that the member opposite, my colleague, the vice-chair of our standing committee on national defence, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, take some considerable share of the responsibility.

There has not been a true word spoken by any of the members of his party on this issue through the life of this debate. It is now several weeks, and Canadians deserve better.

We had notice that there would be a question from the hon. member opposite about how we should model our selection of an aircraft to replace the CF-18 on India's selection process. Obviously the member has moved on from that to the question of cost and life cycle costs. It has been discussed in various committees. It has been discussed in this place many times now.

Let me try to be absolutely clear for the member and for all of us.

First, full life cycle costs are the only basis on which an acquisition of this aircraft will take place. That was the central conclusion of the Auditor General's spring report, chapter 2, of which we are all seized. That was the focus of the one recommendation in that report. That recommendation, along with the conclusions of the report, and let me repeat, have been accepted by this government.

We are moving to determine what those full life cycle costs are. However, to say that somehow we know them but have not informed Parliament, that they are in this office and not in that office is misleading. They have yet to be determined in the future. We have been extremely clear about that.

No procurement has taken place. Not a penny of Canadian government money, taxpayer money, has been spent on the acquisition of a new aircraft for Canada. We will only be prepared to undertake that acquisition on the basis of full life cycle costs.

Lots of other costs have been put forward, cost projections and cost estimates. The member mentioned some of them. This is the point that is missed. Nothing, absolutely nothing has been hidden. The number that was used on several earlier occasions and discussed in committee was acquisition costs, a one-off cost for new equipment, and the sustainment costs, the setup, the new arrangements that are needed when there is a new piece of equipment.

That was the basis on which the member opposite's party introduced and announced its own procurement of a Maritime helicopter in 2004. There was no mention of full life cycle costs when that party was in power. That basis for an announcement struck that party as adequate at that time. It was not a problem.

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• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Suddenly, they are all upset.

[*English*]

Now it is a problem because we have not met a standard that the Liberals never set for themselves.

Let me reassure the House that we will meet that standard on the basis of the work of the secretariat, on the basis of cost estimates that will be presented to the House, not once but annually until the acquisition takes place, and on the basis of the seven-point plan which has been exhaustively debated in question period and in the public accounts committee, in which many of us have had the pleasure to be recently with deputy ministers and soon with the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

There are concrete steps when the acquisition takes place. This is the point on which opposition members have really not been sound. They have not reminded Canadians that the acquisition has yet to take place, that a contracting arrangement to acquire new aircraft has not yet been entered into. When it takes place, it will be on the basis of full life cycle costs, of that you can rest assured, Madam Speaker.

Hon. John McKay: I am sure you feel greatly comforted by that speech, Madam Speaker.

It is an ironic argument for the government to say that it is all right to lie as long as it does not spend any money. That is the core argument, that it has not actually spent any money. Ironically, before the member came to the House, the government opposite would say that it had a contract, that it was stuck with it and it was our fault, the bad old Liberals. Now the government is changing its tune because it does not actually have a contract and never has had a contract. The ever-shifting sands of excuses and failure to take responsibility get a little tiresome.

I would draw to the hon. member's attention, so that we are all on the same page, and it is difficult to get everyone on the same page, the Costing Handbook, second edition, April 2006, shortly after the Conservatives became the government, which sets out how it is supposed to be done. Six years later and we are still trying to get the Conservatives to do it.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Speaker, once again, the acquisition has not taken place. Funds are frozen pending all of the seven steps that have been identified being passed through and pending the scrutiny of this House of full life-cycle costs. We do not see what more the hon. member could be asking for.

Before harsh language is used about misleading this House, which is really what the hon. member said, could he once again do us all the courtesy of distinguishing apples from oranges.

He said that there was no obligation on the part of Canada when this government took over in 2006, but there was. There was an MOU that a Liberal government had entered into for the development of the F-35. That is a different program. It has generated contracts for Canadians. The Auditor General mentioned it. It has changed the environment in which the replacement of the CF-18s is taking place. The two programs have a relationship. The

member would do well to recognize that the relationship between the two began under his government.

PENSIONS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today as a follow-up to a question I posed in February about the government's decision to raise the age of eligibility for old age security from age 65 to 67.

At the time, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development replied that this was not a problem since the government would be making the change gradually. Since I was unable to immediately inform the government that there was indeed a problem, I requested this adjournment debate.

Many Canadians will remember that today is the one year anniversary of the last federal election. It was one year ago today that Jack Layton's hard work bore so much fruit. New Democrats found their message struck a chord with Canadians who had grown weary of being told what could not be done. More than four and a half million voters rewarded us with their confidence so that we could come to this place and work on what can be done.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

The New Democrats campaigned on a platform of working together to find solutions to our problems. One of the main objectives of that platform was, and still is, to eradicate poverty among seniors. New Democrats see improved public pensions as the cornerstone of a Canada that would provide a better life. That is still possible, despite this government's chronic lack of imagination.

[*English*]

I think it goes without saying that the Conservatives did not run a campaign that showcased most of the divisive actions they have undertaken in the first year of this Parliament. They most certainly did not run on a platform that sought to change the eligibility criteria for old age security. Nor did they run on limiting debate on legislation that crucially impacts our environment, health care system, justice system, finances or even OAS as we saw the government leader do just a few minutes ago. He gave notice on limiting debate on the crucial bill that will see the implementation of the budget.

The Conservatives toss around claims that public pensions are suddenly unsustainable despite evidence that shows this is not the case. We know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer, other economists and pension experts have already stated that OAS is sustainable. Even the OECD agrees that this is the case. It is the Conservatives who stand alone claiming otherwise.

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They tell us that Canadians are living longer, yet ignore statistics showing that this is not universal among our population. They ignore the fact that Canadians with the shortest life expectancy are the same people who will likely require OAS payments to augment any pension they may have earned. These are Canadians who endured long-term unemployment, have a lower proportion of high school and university educations, and come from smaller immigrant populations and larger aboriginal populations. They include Canadians living in rural and remote locations.

I am sure for people who have never worked in manual labour or spent a day in a bush camp or a mine, two extra years may not sound like much, but it is. These changes are not about making professionals retire at age 65. They are about forcing workers to plug away for two more long years before qualifying for the program they rely on to be able to retire.

[Translation]

When will the government show some compassion and reverse the changes to the old age security program that will affect the least fortunate Canadians?

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking for her question.

[English]

She mentioned the anniversary that we are all marking today and also the question of imagination. If she does look back over this government's record over the past year, she will see a lot of imagination in the breadth and the depth of the measures we have taken to ensure that growth, employment, jobs and long-term prosperity remain central to this Parliament's work and central to our government's program. She also seemed to be uncertain as to whether our old age security program was sustainable or unsustainable and she cited the OECD.

The essential point here is that most jurisdictions within the OECD have already acted on this. We in Canada, by taking the measures we are taking, are only recognizing what has been known to responsible stewards of the public trust and of our budgetary future to be necessary for some time.

I will share with the member opposite some of the facts relating to the changes we will be making to OAS.

No current beneficiaries will be affected. People currently receiving old age security will not lose a cent. The changes we are making will begin in 2023, as she knows, and will gradually, over a period of six years, raise eligibility by two years. As announced in Canada's economic action plan, which we are debating in this House this week, we will be discussing the impact of this change on the Canada pension plan, disability and survivor benefits with the provinces and territories as part of the next triennial review. I can also assure the member that the government will make the necessary changes to federal income support programs that provide benefits until age 65, including those offered by Veterans Affairs and Aboriginal Affairs, to ensure they are aligned with changes to OAS. We will also compensate the provinces for the net additional costs

they face resulting from the increase in the age of eligibility for OAS.

Canadians need to know that because of our aging population, because our birthrate is lower than it has been in the past and because life expectancy has gone up, these measures are prudent and necessary. In fact, by 2030, for the first time ever we will have more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 20. The number of seniors will double over the next two decades. This is not unique in the world. The United Nations reports that in 2005 10% of the world's population was 60 years of age or older. By 2050, this number will reach 22%.

• (1800)

[Translation]

If we have fewer workers, we risk being less productive, which could have a negative impact on our economic growth.

[English]

With fewer workers paying taxes, we may face a shortfall in revenue and that is why changes to OAS are needed now. I want to be clear that these changes will not affect CPP. It is funded through premiums paid by employers, employees and the self-employed. It is a contributions-based, earnings-related social insurance program and it is a secure plan. It is regarded internationally as a model, actuarially sound and recently confirmed to be such by the Chief Actuary to be sustainable for the next 75 years.

I will now highlight some of the measures our government has introduced to demonstrate our commitment to supporting people with disabilities. We have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We have created the registered disabilities savings plan to help those with disabilities and their families save for the future. We have also created an enabling accessibility fund that has helped people with disabilities participate more fully in their communities by improving access to facilities, activities and services.

Our government supports the full inclusion of all Canadians in our workplace and our society. We are anxious to see Canadians who are leading longer lives benefiting from these strong social programs, by any international standard, well into the future in the decades and the generations to come.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, the government is missing the point by claiming that people will have time to adapt. The Conservatives do not see that, for the many people who rely on OAS, there is no option to adapt.

[Translation]

If they want to force people to take control of their own future, the Conservatives should do something about the country's employment situation, particularly in northern Canada and in rural areas, so that people at least have the option of helping themselves.

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[English]

The fact is that a high dollar policy that favours the export of raw bitumen from Canada has a strong and negative effect on more traditional employers in Canada. It has savaged what little remains of our manufacturing sectors and other resource sectors, like forestry, have been hit hard by a high dollar.

Certainly if we say something enough times we will start to believe it. That is the basis of cognitive therapy but it does not excuse the wrong-headed premises that lie at the heart of changing the age of eligibility for OAS.

Will the government reconsider this decision and give hard-working Canadians some hope for their future entitlement?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Speaker, I think all of us on this side fail to see how our promotion of the oil sands as one of the keys to Canada's economic future could have anything other than benefit for the ability of this country to support programs like OAS and to support a strong workforce that will continue to support CPP in the decades and generations to come. This is one of the strengths of this country. Anyone in the House who thinks that responsible development of natural resources has not been a feature of this

country's growth, progress and advancement over centuries is misreading the history of this country.

I will make one point clear. We will ensure that Canadians have enough time to adjust their retirement plans so they can adapt to any changes to OAS. We will also work to ensure that federal income support programs aligned to age 65 are changed so that Canadians are not adversely affected. Our government is being responsible by taking into account the reality of an aging population. Ignoring this problem would be a dangerous course of action, putting the retirement benefits of future Canadians at risk. Our government will make the changes necessary to ensure sustainability for the next generation while not affecting current recipients or those close to retirement, and we will do so in a fair manner.

● (1805)

[Translation]

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

(The House adjourned at 6:05 p.m.)

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